

# GUNAIKURNAI AND VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT JOINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

MITCHELL RIVER NATIONAL PARK  
— BRABRALUNG COUNTRY



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Quotations included in this plan are reproduced verbatim, including spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. These may differ from the style adopted in this plan.

### ***Parks Victoria Act 2018***

References to Parks Victoria in this plan should be read in the following context:

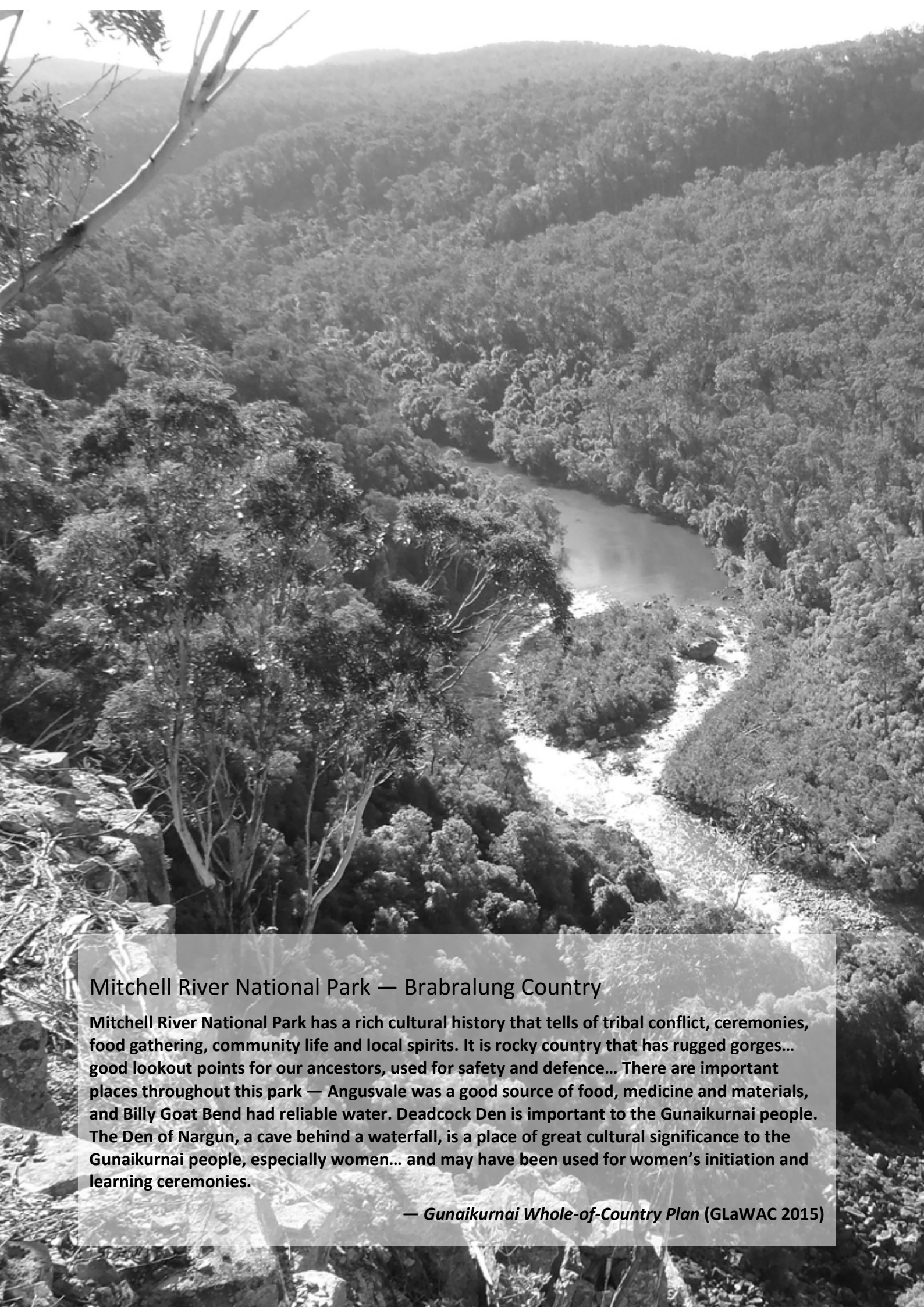
The *Parks Victoria Act 2018* (Vic.) will commence later in 2018. Under this Act, Parks Victoria will change from being an authority providing park management services by agreement to being an authority with park and reserve management responsibilities in its own right. It will continue to be a Committee of Management of particular reserves under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Vic.).

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## Mitchell River National Park — Brabralung Country

Mitchell River National Park has a rich cultural history that tells of tribal conflict, ceremonies, food gathering, community life and local spirits. It is rocky country that has rugged gorges... good lookout points for our ancestors, used for safety and defence... There are important places throughout this park — Angusvale was a good source of food, medicine and materials, and Billy Goat Bend had reliable water. Deadcock Den is important to the Gunaikurnai people. The Den of Nargun, a cave behind a waterfall, is a place of great cultural significance to the Gunaikurnai people, especially women... and may have been used for women's initiation and learning ceremonies.

— *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan (GLaWAC 2015)*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BASIS OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

In a 2010 Native Title Determination, the Federal Court recognised that the Gunaikurnai hold native title rights over much of Gippsland.

At the same time, the Victorian Government took additional steps to recognise Gunaikurnai peoples' traditional rights and ownership and entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic.) with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation. The Recognition Statement from the RSA is reproduced in full in the Introduction to the Joint Management Plan (JMP).

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) is the 'traditional owner group entity' for the purposes of the RSA. GLaWAC is also the Prescribed Body Corporate for the purposes of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) and the Registered Aboriginal Party for the area for the purposes of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic.).

As part of the RSA, Mitchell River National Park has been granted to the Gunaikurnai as Aboriginal Title by the Victorian Government and will be managed jointly by Gunaikurnai and the Victorian Government. The Aboriginal Title grant is subject to the Gunaikurnai giving the State the right to occupy, use, control and manage the land for the same purpose as applied immediately before the grant. In the case of Mitchell River National Park, the land continues to be managed as a national park under the *National Parks Act 1975* (Vic.).

This management plan for Mitchell River National Park has been prepared under Section 82 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* (Vic.) and the provisions of the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement 2010. It is consistent with the objects and requirements of the National Parks Act and the requirements of the regulations made under that Act. (Additional legislation and policies that have been considered in the preparation of the Management Plan are listed in Appendix 4 of the Strategic Plan.) This plan replaces the previous management plan for the park (Parks Victoria 1998).

Because Mitchell River National Park is within the area covered by the 2010 Determination and the Recognition and Settlement Agreement, the rights of the Gunaikurnai to undertake traditional activities apply to the park. Existing rights and interests in the park, held by others, are not affected by the Agreement, but remain subject to management policies and regulation.

The Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board (GKTOLMB) was established in accordance with the Recognition and Settlement Agreement between GLaWAC and the State of Victoria, with the statutory objective of enabling the knowledge and culture of the Gunaikurnai to be recognised in the management of the 10 Aboriginal Title areas, including Mitchell River National Park. The Board was responsible for preparing this management plan jointly with GLaWAC, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

There have been few opportunities in the past for Gunaikurnai to participate in the decision-making and management of public land. Through this management plan, GLaWAC and the Victorian Government seek to:

- ensure that Mitchell River National Park is well managed, its values and assets are protected and conserved, and the statutory requirements for park management are fulfilled, through an equitable partnership between the Victorian Government and GLAWAC
- increase opportunities for Gunaikurnai people to connect with country, foster employment and economic development opportunities and build their capacity and skills to take a central role in joint management with the other management partners
- benefit the Gunaikurnai and the State, by recognising, valuing, promoting and incorporating Gunaikurnai culture, knowledge, skills and decision-making into the park.

## 1.2 HOW TO READ THE PLAN

This Plan provides a description of joint management strategies and actions that are specific to Mitchell River National Park. The following sections:

- describe values, uses and threats relating to the land, water and heritage of the park, and goals and strategies to protect and conserve those values
- describe Traditional Owner, visitor and community connections to the park and their uses and activities, and the goals and strategies for managing and enhancing those connections and uses
- identify government and community relationships and partnerships that are key to managing the park
- state the actions that will be undertaken over the next 10 years to achieve the goals and implement the strategies described in the plan.

In addition to the specific actions for Mitchell River National Park in this plan, the strategic Initiatives for joint management described in the Strategic Plan may include actions that relate to Mitchell River National Park.

The *Parks Victoria Act 2018* (Vic.) will commence later in 2018. Under this Act, Parks Victoria will change from being an authority providing park management services by agreement to being an authority with park and reserve management responsibilities in its own right. It will continue to be a Committee of Management of particular reserves under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Vic.).

## 1.3 THE PARK

Mitchell River National Park covers 14 394 ha of land surrounding the Mitchell River Gorge. It was declared in 1986 under Schedule Two of the National Parks Act by amalgamating the former Glenaladale National Park with other areas of public land. Additions of 2350 ha were proclaimed in 2002, including land on the eastern side of the Mitchell River north of Hortons Track, and the purchased Mitchelldale property north of Angusvale. A further acquisition of 145 ha near Mitchelldale was incorporated into the park in 2012.

The park is listed in Category II (National Parks) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature protected area categories and the United Nations' List of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves. Category II areas are large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.

The Mitchell River is protected as a Heritage River under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* (Vic.) in recognition of its high conservation value, the naturalness of its flows, the relative intactness of the entire river system, and its significance for the Gippsland Lakes. It is the largest free-flowing river in Victoria in terms of annual flow, and is free of water diversions and barriers that affect the movement of native fish. The Mitchell River is an important example of the large-scale river systems that were once widespread in south-eastern Australia (LCC 1991).

The park consists of rugged, moderately elevated terrain that is mostly forested. It occupies an intermediate position between the Victorian Alps and the Gippsland Lakes and coastal plains. Lowland Forest predominates in the southern part of the park and Shrubby Dry Forest covers most of the northern section.

The deeply incised Mitchell River Gorge is a spectacular landscape, and the topography includes narrow sheltered gullies supporting rare vegetation types such as dry rainforest, warm temperate rainforest and gallery rainforest.

The park and gorge was a stopping-off point for Gunaikurnai travelling to the high country. Today it provides an easily accessible entry into the fringes of the Victorian Alps and a sense of remoteness from the plains due to the enclosed gorge and valleys.

The park is used by outdoor education groups and tour operators for overnight rafting and walking through the Mitchell River Gorge. The open valleys in the north of the park provide excellent vehicle-based bush camping and are heavily used in peak periods. The lack of river crossing points in the park creates a geographical east–west divide that influences visitor access and usage patterns as well as park management operations.

## 2 MITCHELL RIVER NATIONAL PARK UNDER JOINT MANAGEMENT

Mitchell River National Park is on the Country of the Brabralung clan. The creation of the national park in 1986, and the designation of the Mitchell River as a Heritage River in 1992, formalised Government policy decisions to give the area greater protection, and ended periodic proposals to dam and regulate the river.

The park has been managed since 1998 in accordance with the previous management plan (Parks Victoria 1998). However, recovery from large-scale bushfires in the alpine area north of the park and in East Gippsland, and environmental pressures and recreational demands in the Gippsland Lakes, have influenced regional park management priorities and resourcing in the region over the last decade or more.

Joint management provides a new impetus to enhance the management of Mitchell River National Park. The concept of 'Caring for Country', by managing natural, cultural and social uses of the park in a more integrated way, provides the basis for this enhancement. The health and condition of the park is stable or improving following the incorporation of recent additions and inliers, but faces several threats, especially from Sambar Deer and the stresses of climate change.

Highly significant rainforest remnants are at risk. Cultural sites need to be mapped and defined to protect them and avoid impacts from visitors. Access and facilities for campers in the north of the park can be improved. Camping in the Mitchell River Gorge needs to be monitored, and management of waste, fires and other issues is needed in partnership with river users to protect water quality, vegetation and cultural sites.

The Gunaikurnai have a deep spiritual connection with the Mitchell River landscape through ceremony, songs and dreaming. For Gunaikurnai many spirits still live in the landscape, their signs in the rocky outcrops and other features. Rock art, rock shelters, canoe trees, surface scatters, men's and women's sites, camp sites, massacre sites, burials and many sacred places occur in the park. However, Gunaikurnai cultural values have not been systematically inventoried and were not incorporated in the zoning scheme of the previous park management plan. The zoning in this new management plan redresses that shortcoming. The *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan* (GLaWAC 2015) sets out the following management priorities for the park:

- restricting where camping can occur to protect significant cultural sites
- restricting four-wheel drive access in sensitive areas
- ensuring the Gunaikurnai are consulted on any new walking tracks or roads that are being built, to make sure cultural values are protected
- giving Gunaikurnai first preference for all future and renegotiated tourism operations in the National Park.

While recognising these priorities, this joint management plan sets out actions that are consistent with and limited to the terms of the 2010 Recognition and Settlement Agreement.

The Den of Nargun is one of the most conspicuous examples of Gunaikurnai cultural heritage in the parks and reserves in the RSA area. However, the cultural significance of the broader park has not been presented or promoted well to the wider community.

Overnight walking and rafting trips through the Mitchell River Gorge are among Victoria's best adventure recreation and environmental education experiences, but cultural heritage forms little or no part of that experience. There is an opportunity to add cultural education to those experiences, initially through better information and progressively through the active participation of Gunaikurnai interpreters and guides, both inside the park and during pre-visit phases.

In the northern valleys the historic homestead sites at Angusvale and Mitchelldale can be managed and presented to campers and others in a way that makes clearer the full richness of the occupation and settlement of the Mitchell River Country.



## 3 ZONING

A zoning scheme has been developed to provide a geographic framework to manage the park.

These zones will:

- communicate to the community and stakeholders which management aims have priority in different parts of the park
- indicate the types and levels of use allowed in the park
- assist in minimising conflicts between uses, or between those and the protection of park values
- provide a basis for assessing the suitability of future activities and development proposals.

Two management zones apply to the park: a Conservation Zone, and a Conservation and Recreation zone.

The scheme includes four overlays. Zones describe the primary management priority for a designated part of the park. Overlays provide additional management direction where a specific value needs to be protected and conserved, or a variation is required to the activities that are allowed in the zone.

The description and purpose of each zone and overlay is given in Table 1 and the locations are shown on Map 1. The zones and overlays are similar to those applied by the previous 1998 management plan except that a Special Protection Overlay has been applied to areas of Dry Rainforest, Warm Temperate Rainforest and Gallery Rainforest in the Mitchell River Gorge and tributary gullies, and areas of old growth Grassy Woodland in the Mitchelldale area.

A future Cultural Values Overlay has also been proposed that will protect Gunaikurnai cultural heritage values. These values are in the process of being systematically surveyed and mapped and it is proposed that the location of the overlay will be amended in future to reflect the results of that mapping through a formal variation to this Plan. Implementation of this overlay may require amendment of the description or provisions of other zones and overlays, and integration with the Aboriginal Heritage Act and *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic.) provisions to ensure compatibility. Two historic heritage sites previously designated as special protection areas will be incorporated into the proposed overlay.

Under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic.), natural resource agreements can authorise activities such as hunting wildlife and game, fishing, and gathering flora and forest produce. No agreement over Mitchell River National Park is in place. A future agreement may require variation to the zoning scheme and provisions of this management plan.

**Table 1: Management zones and overlays.**

Zone	Description and purpose
Conservation Zone	Areas of high natural value including land, water and ecological values. Recreation and nature-based tourism are allowed subject to close management to ensure minimal impact and disturbance of natural values. Low-impact recreation activities are allowed; limited visitor facilities are provided, and are dispersed and small-scale.
Conservation and Recreation Zone	Areas where the management emphasis is on protection of land, water, ecological and cultural values while encouraging dispersed recreation and nature-based tourism. Low-impact recreation activities are allowed; dispersed, small-scale facilities are provided, without significant impact on natural processes and landscape character.
Heritage River Overlay	<p>The area scheduled as the Mitchell River Heritage River Area under the Heritage Rivers Act. The aims of the overlay are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that the significant nature conservation, recreation, scenic or cultural heritage attributes of the area are protected</li> <li>• provide opportunities for other recreational activities, landscape appreciation and education within the area</li> <li>• ensure that that part of the river which is in the area is maintained without further interference with its free-flowing state.</li> </ul>
Special Protection Overlay	Areas, generally small in extent, of threatened or highly significant native vegetation or wildlife populations that require special protection. Access and activities by visitors and others are not allowed or subject to conditions. Management aims to control the introduction and spread of pest plants and animals, and pathogens, minimise human impacts and increase habitat resilience.
Hunting (Deer) Overlay	Area where the use of firearms for the purpose of seasonal deer hunting by stalking is authorised by the National Parks Act.
Cultural Values Overlay (future)	Areas where the extent, nature or significance of Gunaikurnai cultural heritage and/or historic heritage is high. Specific protections and restrictions on use and activities may be applied.

## 4 CARING FOR COUNTRY

### 4.1 GUNAIKURNAI CULTURAL HERITAGE

The area in and around the Mitchell River Gorge was a major stopping-off point for Gunaikurnai travelling between the high country and the lowlands. The rocky terrain, steep drop-offs and lookout points provided excellent vantage points for safety and defence. It was, at one time, proposed as the site of a mission but it was found to be too cold in winter so Lake Tyers was chosen instead.

Caves and shelters used by Gunaikurnai, and a known burial, occur within the park. The Den of Nargun on Woolshed Creek, a small tributary of the Mitchell River, is of great cultural significance and is known as a women's place. According to Gunaikurnai lore the Nargun is a large female creature who lives in a cave behind the waterfall. Stories were told around campfires about how the Nargun would abduct children who wandered off on their own. The Nargun could not be harmed with boomerangs or spears. These stories served the dual purpose of keeping children close to the campsite and ensuring that people stayed away from the sacred cave. It is a place of women's initiation and learning ceremonies, and traditionally Gunaikurnai men are not allowed to enter the area of the Den of Nargun and the Woolshed Creek valley.

The Den of Nargun is part of the Bataluk Cultural Trail, which follows significant traditional routes used by the Gunaikurnai for over 30 000 years. Deadcock Den, also on Woolshed Creek, is also culturally important as a place frequented only by Gunaikurnai women.

More than 50 Gunaikurnai cultural heritage sites, mostly artefact scatter sites, have been recorded in the park. Scarred trees and rock art sites have also been recorded.

Plants were important for their practical uses and cultural identity. A number of plant species are known to be culturally important for the Gunaikurnai in the region (Oates and Frood 2017). These include:

- Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) — moeyang; used for food, medicine, fibre and implements
- Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*) – ballee, ballart; used for medicine and implements
- Austral Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*)
- Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*) – used for food and fibre
- Lilly Pilly (*Acmena smithii*).

### 4.2 LAND AND WATER VALUES

The landscape of the park is shaped by the river, which is characterised by a network of valleys, steep cliffs and gorges that create a spectacular landscape.

The Mitchell River Gorge, Sandy Creek, and Tabberabbera are of state geological and geomorphological significance. Undisturbed forests and catchments of high conservation significance make up approximately 65% of the park.

The park contains a range of significant vegetation communities, many of which are rare, vulnerable or endangered including gallery rainforest, dry rainforest, warm temperate rainforest, plains grassy forest, dry grassy woodland, dry valley forest, and riverine escarpment scrub. The southernmost occurrence of endangered dry rainforest, dominated by Kurrajong, is on the rocky slopes of the Mitchell River Gorge. These stands are at the westernmost limit of their distribution in Victoria. Silvertop Ash dominates the open forest community on the broad, flat ridge tops, while gum and stringybark species are prevalent on sheltered slopes and drainage lines.

Giant Kanookas grow along the river banks amid a tangle of vines and ferns in the well-developed stands of warm temperate rainforest. Sweet Pittosporum, Lilly Pilly and Yellow-wood grow in the moist gullies of the park. A drier forest of wattle and eucalypt predominates on the ridges above the river.

Some of the land incorporated into the park in 2002 (known as the Trevertons, Sinnotts and Wentworth blocks) had been cleared for farming, but is being restored with native vegetation.

The standard categorisation of vegetation communities in Victoria is ecological vegetation classes (EVCs). The predominant EVCs in the park are Shrubby Dry Forest (43% of the park area), Lowland Forest (16%) and Shrubby Damp Forest (8%). Small areas of rare or endangered rainforest are a feature of the park. Table 2 describes significant ecological vegetation classes in the park.

**Table 2: Significant Ecological Vegetation Classes in Mitchell National Park.**

Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)	Description	Bioregional conservation status	Character species	High-impact weed species
Gallery Rainforest (0.1% of park area)	Closed forest to 20 m tall on the fringes of substantial streams that periodically flood. The understorey is willowy shrubs that can withstand flooding. Mature woody vines are generally absent.	endangered	Lilly Pilly ( <i>Acmena smithii</i> ) Blackwood ( <i>Acacia melanoxylon</i> )	Blackberry ( <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> spp. agg.) Spear Thistle ( <i>Cirsium vulgare</i> )
Dry Rainforest (1.1% of park area)	Open to closed non-eucalypt forest to 15 m tall. Occurs in areas of relatively low rainfall (750–900 mm per annum) and primarily confined to topographic fire refuges with cliffs, gorges and rock screes on north and west aspects.	endangered	Blanket-leaf ( <i>Bedfordia arborescens</i> ) Banyalla ( <i>Pittosporum bicolor</i> )	Spear Thistle
Plains Grassy Forest (0.2% of the park area)	Open forest to 20 m tall often above a heathy shrub layer and a diverse grassy, sedgy and herbaceous ground layer. Occurs on lowland plains and old river terraces made up of gravelly sandy clays.	endangered	Red Box ( <i>Eucalyptus polyanthemos</i> ) Yellow Stringybark ( <i>E. muelleriana</i> ) Red Stringybark ( <i>E. macrorhyncha</i> )	Cat's Ear ( <i>Hypochaeris radicata</i> )
Dry Valley Forest (1.0% of the park area)	Open eucalypt forest to 20 m tall occurring along minor gullies, ephemeral streams and river flats. The overstorey may contain a range of eucalypts typical of drier environments over an understorey of scattered shrubs and a notably mossy herb-rich ground cover.	vulnerable	Yellow Box ( <i>Eucalyptus melliodora</i> ) White Stringybark ( <i>E. globoidea</i> ) Yellow Stringybark ( <i>E. muelleriana</i> ) Red Box ( <i>E. polyanthemos</i> )	Cat's Ear Common Mouse-ear Chickweed ( <i>Cerastium glomeratum</i> s.l.)
Warm Temperate Rainforest (1.5% of park area)	Closed forest to 20 m tall occurring along small streams. Dominated by a range of non-eucalypt canopy species above an understorey of smaller trees and shrubs and usually visually dominated by ferns and climbers.	rare	Lilly Pilly ( <i>Acmena smithii</i> ) Numerous ferns and epiphytes	Variable
Blackthorn Scrub (4.4% of park area)	Only on north and west slopes. Small tree or tall shrub layer to 6 m tall is a dominant feature, often forming even-aged stands of uniform height. Ground layer generally sparse and species-poor due to low site quality and the density of the overstorey. Vines can be conspicuous in the understorey.	rare	Red Wattle ( <i>Acacia silvestris</i> ) Cherry Ballart ( <i>Exocarpos cupressiformis</i> )	Variable



Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)	Description	Bioregional conservation status	Character species	High-impact weed species
Valley Slopes Dry Forest (0.6% of park area)	Open eucalypt forest to 20 m tall on steep, eroding slopes in dry country above the Mitchell River. River fogs and river margins provide increased moisture and hence the understorey consists of a mix of species common to both drier and wetter sites that do not usually occur together.	rare	Red Box ( <i>Eucalyptus polyanthemus</i> ) Yellow Box ( <i>E. melliodora</i> ) River Peppermint ( <i>E. elata</i> )	Blackberry ( <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> spp. agg.)
Riverine Escarpment Scrub (7.1% of the park area)	Occurs on shallow colluvial soils along rocky cliffs and slopes associated with rivers and creeks and may extend onto alluvial terraces. Characterised by a small tree or large shrub layer to 10 m tall over a dense medium shrub layer and a ground layer, which can range from low to high diversity and consist of a variety of graminoids, grasses and herbs. Ferns can often be a major component of the ground stratum and emergent eucalypts may be present.	rare	Blackwood ( <i>Acacia melanoxylon</i> ) Hazel Pomaderris ( <i>Pomaderris aspera</i> ) Kanooka ( <i>Tristaniopsis laurina</i> ) Black Wattle ( <i>Acacia mearnsii</i> )	Blackberry ( <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> spp. agg.) Spear Thistle ( <i>Cirsium vulgare</i> ) Yorkshire Fog ( <i>Holcus lanatus</i> )
Riparian Shrubland (1.1% of the park area)	Diverse, medium to tall shrubland to 8 m tall occurring on rocky substrates of major streams and banks and channels of rocky creeks and along perennial streams in gorge tracts. Able to withstand frequent flooding or regenerate rapidly after such disturbance and often forming dense thickets along the stream's edge during long periods without flooding. Trees irregularly scattered but tend to be restricted to the banks of the rivers and creeks. Sedges and rushes dominate the understorey as well as an array of herbs and grasses including ephemeral species on bare sands or in rock crevice.	rare	Large-leaf Hickory-wattle ( <i>Acacia falciformis</i> ) Hazel Pomaderris ( <i>Pomaderris aspera</i> ) Black Wattle ( <i>Acacia mearnsii</i> )	Blackberry ( <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> spp. agg.) Hemlock ( <i>Conium maculatum</i> )

### Rare or threatened species

Nineteen plant species and ten animal species in the park are listed as rare or threatened, including the endangered Spot-tailed Quoll and Lace Monitor. The park contains two known breeding sites for the Peregrine Falcon and supports populations of Swift Parrots, Grey Goshawks, White-bellied Sea-Eagles, Powerful Owls, Sooty Owls, Diamond Firetails, Spot-tailed Quolls and Eastern Pygmy-possums. The threatened Australian Grayling inhabits the rivers and streams of the park. The park also once supported Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies.

DELWP's NatureKit biodiversity data products provide important information for conserving flora and fauna in the park.

**Table 3: Significant species of fauna in Mitchell River National Park.**

Scientific Name	Common Name	Conservation Status	FFG Action Statement
<i>Dasyurus viverrinus</i>	Eastern Quoll	regionally extinct	14
<i>Dasyurus maculatus maculatus</i>	Spot-tailed Quoll	endangered	15
<i>Varanus varius</i>	Lace Monitor	endangered	—
<i>Accipiter novaehollandiae</i>	Grey Goshawk	vulnerable	—
<i>Galaxias rostratus</i>	Flat-headed Galaxias	vulnerable	—
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	White-bellied Sea-Eagle	vulnerable	60
<i>Heleioporus australiacus</i>	Giant Burrowing Frog	vulnerable	61
<i>Ninox strenua</i>	Powerful Owl	vulnerable	92
<i>Prototroctes maraena</i>	Australian Grayling	vulnerable	257
<i>Tyto tenebricosa</i>	Sooty Owl	vulnerable	unnumbered
<i>Cercartetus nanus</i>	Eastern Pygmy-possum	near threatened	—
<i>Stagonopleura guttata</i>	Diamond Firetail	near threatened	—

### Landscape and catchment context

Apart from small areas of cleared land immediately north of the park and along the Dargo and Wonnangatta Rivers, the catchment is predominantly forested public land and includes sections of the Alpine National Park.

The Mitchell River and its upper catchment area that is protected by the park are very important for the environment and land use of the Gippsland Lakes and surrounding plains. The Mitchell River is joined by the Wentworth River at Tabberabbera, north-west of the park, and enters the floodplain south of the park. Sediment deposits have made this a fertile area for intensive agriculture.

The Mitchell River has a long estuary reach which extends from the old barrier upstream from Bairnsdale township to where the river enters the Gippsland Lakes at Lake King via the internationally significant silt jetties. There are important wetlands on both sides of the river, including Macleod Morass, Jones Bay and the Lake King Wetlands at Eagle Point. These wetlands are part of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site, which is listed as internationally important under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

As a major tourist and recreational destination, the lakes play a vital role in supporting the regional economy.

The priority of the East Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy for the Upper Mitchell River, including the park, is to improve condition through partnerships with landholders, stock exclusion, revegetation and invasive plant and animal programs of surveillance, monitoring and treatment (EGCMA 2013).

## 4.3 HISTORIC HERITAGE

The English name for the Mitchell River dates from 1840 and commemorates Major Mitchell, the Surveyor-General of New South Wales.

The park contains evidence of early European exploration, settlement, gold sluicing and farming. Grazing runs were established between 1845 and 1847, and in 1857 gold was discovered in alluvial fields along the Mitchell River and its tributaries.

Reef mining began in the area in the 1860s. From the 1870s until early this century the Mitchell River Gorge was spasmodically worked for gold. The water-race of the Mitchell River Sluicing Company, which operated near Angusvale, is still apparent.

Various four-wheel drive clubs assist with the volunteer maintenance of heritage assets including Mitchelldale Hut. The ruins of the Glenaladale Weir (old Mitchell River Weir), constructed in 1881, are located at the junction of Stony Creek and the Mitchell River.

The Glenaladale Weir was constructed with stone quarried from the western side of the river, and views of the ruins are the focus of a popular short walk. Between 1891 and 1894 the weir was substantially damaged by floods and was never repaired.

The Honey House, a stone relic of the Rising Sun Apiary (1923), is made from natural stone bonded with clay and pointed with mortar on the exterior. The chimney is unusual as the external wall of the chimney does not break the external line of the house.

The park is also notable for numerous plans in the 1970s to dam the river above and below the gorge and counter campaigns to maintain its free-flowing condition. These episodes typified a larger historical debate in Victoria about Victorian water resources policy and river conservation.

## 4.4 THREATS TO COUNTRY AND HERITAGE

### Invasive plants and animals

Weed invasion and pest animals pose a continuing threat to the condition of the park. The diversity and cover of ground flora has declined in the northern part of the park and pest plants are increasingly prevalent in the rainforest communities and riparian zones of the Mitchell River and streams in the park.

The primary weed threats are Blackberry, Blue Periwinkle, Wandering Creeper, Ragwort, Boxthorn and Cape Ivy, especially in the rainforest and riparian areas of the park, and Cape Broom in the Wentworth River area.

Areas of closed scrub are subject to encroachments of Burgan and Silver Wattle as a result of past clearing and bushfire. Significant numbers of foxes, wild dogs and feral cats occur in the park and a remnant population of feral cattle occupy the Mitchelldale–Angusvale area. There is a risk that goats, previously present in the park, may re-emerge as a threat to vegetation and soils.

Sambar deer are increasingly evident in the rainforest communities and riparian zones of the park, trampling ground vegetation, damaging bogs and soils, and browsing trees and shrubs, especially seedlings.

### Fire management

The Great Divide bushfires of 2006–07 burned large areas of public land to the north and west but did not enter the park. Substantial parts of Cobbannah Creek catchment in the park were burned by bushfire in 1978, and smaller fires occurred in other parts of the park during the 1980s and 1990s.

Planned burns, mainly for fuel management, have been undertaken since 2009 in the western part of the park along the Mitchell Road and in the eastern part of the park around Calvi Track.

Some areas of the park, such as the rainforest communities, are highly sensitive to fire and are likely to have their essential composition and structure altered or fragmented if burnt, or become vulnerable to invasive plants and animals.

Other vegetation communities require periodic burning to maintain a diversity of vegetation growth stages and wildlife habitats or to suppress invasive plants. As a result of the recent bushfire and planned burn history, much of the park has not been burned for long periods, with potential effects on its ecological character and diversity.

The *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land* (DEPI 2012) provides the framework for public land fire management across the State. Fire management on public land in non-urban areas is the responsibility of DELWP.

The *Alpine – Greater Gippsland Strategic Bushfire Management Plan* (DELWP 2015) sets the direction for fire management in and around Mitchell River National Park.

The treatment of fuel risks and ecological fire requirements are considered in DELWP's Fire Operations Plan process. The natural, cultural and recreational values identified and prioritised in this plan will inform the Fire Operations Plan process so that burning and other fuel treatments are modified where necessary.

In broad terms the park requires fire management strategies that minimise the likelihood of fire entering fire-sensitive communities and culturally sensitive areas and provide adequate planned burning of areas that require fire at a particular interval to maintain or restore habitat structure and plant composition, and/or suppress invasive species.

### Climate change

Climate change is a potential intensifier of existing and new threats. These include changes to hydrology, increased frequency and/or severity of extreme events, changes in vegetation arising from rainfall and evaporation changes. Changes such as vegetation alteration are likely to occur slowly, but more extreme events such as storms and floods can occur at any time. Rainforest areas are particularly vulnerable to progressive drying conditions and the increased frequency or severity of drought. Storm events increase the risk of inundation and threats to physical assets and public safety. Flooding is a natural phenomenon in the Mitchell River and its tributaries. Flash flooding poses a low-probability but high-consequence threat that needs to be considered in access and facility design and emergency preparedness.

### Threats to cultural heritage

Extreme events including bushfire and floods pose a threat to cultural heritage and historic heritage across the park. More localised threats arise from disturbance of sites by human activity including visitor use, and management operations and development.

The park contains well-documented Gunaikurnai cultural heritage sites such as the Den of Nargun and Deadcock Den as well as large areas in which Gunaikurnai cultural values have not been systematically surveyed and recorded. Threats to the Den of Nargun and Deadcock Den include weed invasion, erosion caused by uncontrolled visitor access, and damage to the Den areas themselves by visitors, including graffiti.

The key conservation strategies for these locations are to:

- monitor condition of the sites
- control weeds in the area of the Dens
- monitor and manage visitor access through site design, education and enforcement.

The key conservation strategy for Gunaikurnai cultural values in the other areas of the park is to systematically survey, record and map values and sites in the park including intangible cultural heritage. GKTOLMB is undertaking this work across each of the 10 jointly managed parks and reserves. Once this work is completed, protection and conservation strategies need to be developed that are relevant to the values that are identified.

Historic sites in the park are relatively well known and mapped. They include sites with substantial structural remains, such as Mitchelldale Homestead, the Glenaladale Weir and Honey House, that need to be monitored and actively conserved.

For sites such as the Angusvale Hotel site that have little surviving structural remains, the key conservation strategy is to identify and protect the sites from erosion, visitor impacts and other localised disturbances.



## Other threats

Illegal hunting (particularly deer hunting using hounds) occurs in the park, and is associated with off-road driving impacts and disturbance of wildlife.

The park soils are susceptible to tunnel erosion, particularly on slopes where vegetation cover has been lost.

## 4.5 CONSERVATION STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THREATS

Table 4 describes the key land, water and heritage values and the relevant threats and conservation strategies to address them.

Land and water values are identified primarily at the level of EVCs and threatened species, using state-wide datasets. However, it is often more practical and effective to take conservation action by targeting assets at an intermediate level; for example, by controlling weeds or undertaking planned burning to improve the health of an assemblage of ground-cover plants in a particular EVC or part of the park, rather than throughout the EVC as a whole or for a single threatened species.

An intensive conservation action planning process is required to identify the most critical assets given the present condition of the park and the ecological processes, such as predation or weed invasion, that are operating within it.

The strategies in Table 4 should therefore be further evaluated through a conservation planning process that takes into account their feasibility, impact and priority in the broader landscape.

Management priorities for Gunaikurnai cultural heritage values are very dependent on completing current cultural mapping work to systematically identify the nature, extent and types of sites requiring protection and conservation.

**Table 4: Land, water and cultural heritage conservation strategies.**

Threat	Priorities	Strategy
<b>Heritage River character and condition</b>		
Impeded flows, riparian weed invasion, water contamination, visual impacts	Weed control and camper waste management	Minimise disturbance on banks and crossings. Work with CMA and landholders on upstream weed control. Control Blackberry and Willow. Monitor and minimise waste generated by rafting and walking groups.
<b>Gallery Rainforest, Dry Rainforest and Warm Temperate Rainforest EVCs</b>		
Bushfire	Minimisation of fire	Work with DELWP Forest Fire Management to ensure adequate risk reduction on surrounding areas using burning and other measures. Exclude fire from these EVCs. Prevent fires starting in the park through visitor education and regulatory enforcement.
Invasive plants and animals	Blackberry, Blue Periwinkle, Wandering Creeper, Sambar Deer, Feral Goats	Undertake intensive weed control. Increase control programs for Sambar Deer. Monitor Feral Goat numbers to ensure population does not re-establish. Implement relevant actions in FFG Action Statement No. 238.
<b>Dry Valley Forest, Valley Slopes Dry Forest, Grassy Dry Forest, Grassy Woodland, Blackthorn Scrub EVCs</b>		
Weed invasion, fire regime outside tolerable intervals/severity	Blue Periwinkle, Wandering Creeper, Ragwort, Cape Ivy, Cape Broom; fire regimes	Increase weed control. Undertake monitoring to assess growth stages/fire history of areas of EVC occurrence to determine any burning or restoration requirements. Implement required fire regime through DELWP fire planning process and undertake other restoration as needed.
<b>Rare or threatened species</b>		
Lack of knowledge of current condition and conservation requirements	To be determined	Implement relevant Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Action Statements. Determine priorities and undertake targeted research and monitoring with research partners, including updating of Victorian Biodiversity Atlas dataset.
<b>Gunaikurnai cultural heritage values</b>		
Cultural sites and intangible heritage have only been partially surveyed and recorded	Cultural survey and mapping	Complete the current GKTOLMB cultural mapping project for the ten Joint Managed Parks and Reserves. Determine required management actions including implementation of a Cultural Values Overlay.
<b>Culturally important plants and animals</b>		
Lack of knowledge of species conservation requirements	Cultural knowledge and current conservation status	Obtain knowledge through Joint Management Plan strategic Initiatives.
<b>Historic heritage</b>		
Deterioration of sites due to weather or vandalism.	Mitchelldale Homestead, Honey House and weir	Develop a conservation plan for historic sites identifying monitoring, required conservation works and interpretation opportunities.
<b>All EVCs</b>		
Predation of wildlife by invasive animals.	Moderate	Maintain fox and wild dog control programs.
Grazing and erosion caused by cattle, deer and rabbits.	High	Eradicate cattle from the park. Implement rabbit control programs. Increase targeted deer control programs.

## 5 PEOPLE IN THE PARK

### 5.1 TRADITIONAL OWNERS CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY

Cultural values and practices in the present, as well as the past, are fundamental to Gunaikurnai. The park provides opportunities for the Gunaikurnai to increase and strengthen their connection to country in an inspiring landscape, characteristic of Country in its original and traditional condition.

Joint management provides a renewed opportunity for Gunaikurnai to hold community gatherings on Country, share lore, pass cultural skills and knowledge between generations, and meet cultural obligations to care for Country through conservation and restoration work in the park.

Joint Management Rangers undertake conservation and maintenance works in the park in cooperation with Parks Victoria, and there is great scope to build capacity and expertise through this program.

As far as possible the Gunaikurnai should be the tellers of their own cultural stories, and will work with tour operators and the tourism industry to ensure that the promotion of the Gunaikurnai cultural heritage of the park to tourists and the public is accurate and rich.

In addition to taking a greater role in the management and conservation of the park, Gunaikurnai people will take opportunities to gather in the park, pass on lore and cultural knowledge between generations and undertake traditional practices. Areas such as Mitchelldale provide a suitable opportunity for this type of activity.

### 5.2 VISITORS TO THE PARK

The spectacular scenery and remote character of the park provide opportunities for self-reliant recreation. The park offers opportunities for picnicking, bushwalking, camping, rafting and canoeing, four-wheel driving, rock climbing and abseiling and bike riding. Commercial tour operators provide river rafting and canoeing trips for visitors. It is estimated that approximately 40 000 visits are made to the park each year.

The Den of Nargun and the associated Loop Walk is the most popular day visit site in the park. There are four camping areas: Angusvale and Billy Goat Bend, which are used by vehicle-based campers, and Rock Creek and Woolshed Creek, which are largely used by canoeists, rafters and bushwalkers. The section of the Mitchell River through the Gorge is considered one of the best white-water rafting and canoeing experiences in Victoria.

The Mitchell River Track provides a two-day walk of 18 kilometres one-way that is suitable for relatively inexperienced overnight walkers and is popular with school groups and outdoor education providers. Subject to investigation, there is an opportunity to extend the walking track to the southern end of the park to provide an iconic walking experience along more of the river. Roaring Mag Falls is a feature of significant interest in the eastern section of the park, but the only access is along footpads that have been created through informal use.

There are instances of inappropriate use of the park for vehicle access to freehold land where alternative on-title alignments exist.

The western and eastern boundaries abut public land, with links to roads and tracks in State forest. The northern and southern boundaries abut freehold land.

Mitchell River is one of several Victorian national parks where deer-stalking is permitted in part of the park. This activity is limited to the hunting of deer in the eastern area of the park, south of Hortons Track, between 15 February and 15 December.

### 5.3 VISITOR STRATEGIES

The strategies for managing visitor opportunities and activity focus on four main experience areas: the Den of Nargun and Billy Goat Bend, the Angusvale and Mitchelldale areas, the Mitchell River Gorge and the eastern area of the park used for seasonal deer stalking.

Walking, riding and driving on roads and tracks in the remainder of the park makes up a fifth area of visitor activity and experience. The goals and strategies for the management of visitor experiences in these areas are detailed in Table 5.

Four-wheel driving is popular in the park, particularly with people accessing the Angusvale area. The natural east–west barrier created by the Mitchell River Gorge limits the opportunity for circuit drives. The 1998 park management plan proposed the upgrading of the Mitchell Road to provide a circuit route on the western side of the park. However, a landslip closed this road, and substantial engineering works are needed to repair the road. The 1998 plan also identified the need to review public access to Rock Creek Track between Angusvale and Rock Creek camping area because of its susceptibility to flooding. As a result of flood damage in 2007, this track has been closed to the public since 2008 and is used only infrequently by management vehicles.

Milton Park Lane (also known as Old Weir Track No. 2) provides access to the significant Glenaladale Weir site. The road is in poor condition and is currently a ‘management vehicle only’ track, although often used illegally by visitors in vehicles. Although structurally difficult to repair, its upgrading and opening to the public would improve visitor access to that part of the park.

The plan does not make any change to the area available for recreational deer stalking. Recreational hunting can contribute to the removal of deer but needs to be part of systematic management control programs to achieve effective control overall (State of Victoria 2017). Supervised deer control operations are conducted by park managers in collaboration with deer hunting groups as part of revegetation programs in the extension areas, to prevent browsing of seedlings. These programs will increase (see Table 4). The contribution of recreational hunting to overall deer control would be improved by encouraging hunters to be less selective in terms of the individual animals they target (e.g. mature stags). The current controls only allow hunting of Sambar Deer, although other deer species are known to be present. Expanding the range of species that can be hunted would improve the recreational opportunity for hunters and may assist with deer control in general.

Horse riding is permitted in the park on roads and vehicle tracks open to the public. The 1998 park management plan identified the opportunity to develop a horse riders’ camp at Angusvale. The demand for overnight horse camping does not appear to warrant specific facility provision.



**Table 5: Visitor experience goals and strategies.**

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### **Den of Nargun loop walk area and Billy Goat Bend**

#### **Goal**

Provide accessible day visit and overnight camping experiences (Billy Goat Bend) consisting of short walks, Gorge lookouts, cultural interpretation, picnicking and sightseeing.

#### **Strategies**

Strengthen cultural interpretation of the park; improve walking track condition. Protect the cultural values, control weeds, and restore the land and water environment of the Den of Nargun area, seek and promote visitor respect for Gunaikurnai access traditions.

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### **Angusvale and Mitchelldale**

#### **Goal**

Provide for remote mountain valley camping experiences.

#### **Strategies**

Define and improve the layout of camping locations, shade, vehicle circulation, and interpretation; improve visitor facilities; provide a greater range of activities such as short to half day walks and short canoeing/rafting opportunities. Manage Mitchelldale homestead area for bookable access by Gunaikurnai and recreation groups for camping, and ensure conservation and protection of cultural values and restoration of land and water values. Investigate opportunity to develop walking track access between Angusvale and Mitchelldale, considering permit arrangements for camping.

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### **Mitchell River Gorge**

#### **Goal**

Provide for iconic overnight rafting, canoeing and bushwalking experiences, with opportunities for cultural and environmental education and interpretation.

#### **Strategies**

Broaden the canoeing, rafting and bushwalking experience of the Mitchell River Gorge to become a recognised cultural heritage experience as well as a recreation and environmental education experience. Ensure visitor impacts on the land, water quality and cultural values at Rock Creek and Woolshed Creek camping areas and elsewhere in the Gorge are minimised through monitoring and collaboration with river users. Investigate re-instatement of toilet at Woolshed Creek considering constraints and servicing capacity. Consider need for designated camping areas in the Gorge. Investigate development of an iconic multi-day walk by extending the Mitchell River Walking Track, including extension north in the Angusvale area, and to Findlay-Alexanders Road at the southern end of the park.

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### **Wentworth River – Trevertons Area**

#### **Goal**

Provide for low-impact access and recreation.

#### **Strategies**

Progressively re-establish native vegetation on cleared areas previously used for farming. Use grazing as an interim management measure but investigate Traditional burning as an option. Consider the need for any additional vehicle access or walking tracks.

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## Dispersed recreational activity areas

### Goals

Continue to provide opportunities for seasonal deer hunting in the park east of Mitchell River and south of Hortons Track (see Hunting (Deer) Overlay in 'Zoning'). Allow hunting of a wider range of deer species in this area.

Maintain provision for recreational vehicle use, walking and horse riding on roads, vehicle tracks and walking tracks open to the public.

### Strategies

Undertake compliance and enforcement actions to minimise illegal hunting especially with hounds. Maintain provision for walkers to use walking tracks and management vehicle only tracks except where specifically closed for safety, conservation or other reasons. Improve access to the Glenaladale Weir Site and control off-road impacts. Investigate and if feasible, formalise walking track access to Roaring Mag Falls viewing point.

Specific recreational activities and uses will be managed in accordance with Table 6. This table does not limit the operation or exercising of Native Title or Traditional Owner rights held by the Gunaikurnai people.

**Table 6: Recreational activities allowed in management zones.**

Activity	Conservation Zone	Conservation and Recreation Zone	Special Protection Overlay	Hunting (Deer) Overlay
Abseiling and rock climbing	No	Yes (at sites adjacent to Angusvale and Hutchings Tracks)	No	N/A
Boating – rafting, canoeing, kayaking	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
Camping — designated sites	No	Yes (at Angusvale, Rock Creek, Billy Goat Bend and Woolshed Creek at least 20 metres from any stream, and at Mitchelldale by permit)	No	Yes
Camping — dispersed vehicle-based	Yes (not within 200 metres of designated camping or picnic areas, or 20 metres of waterways or waterbodies)	Yes (not within 200 metres of designated camping or picnic areas, or 20 metres of waterways or waterbodies)	No	Yes
Camping — dispersed other	Yes (not within 200 metres of designated camping or picnic areas, or 20 metres of waterways or waterbodies)	Yes (not within 200 metres of designated camping or picnic areas, or 20 metres of waterways or waterbodies)	No	Yes

Activity	Conservation Zone	Conservation and Recreation Zone	Special Protection Overlay	Hunting (Deer) Overlay
Campfires — solid fuel	Yes (except in Special Protection Overlay areas; must be in designated campfires if provided and subject to regulations including fire bans)	Yes (except in Special Protection Overlay areas; must be in designated campfires if provided and subject to regulations including fire bans)	No	Yes,
Campfires – liquid or gas-fuel stoves	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Competitive recreational events	Yes (with permit, if activity type is allowed)	Yes (with permit, if activity type is allowed)	No (except on open public roads and MVO tracks; not allowed on walking tracks)	N/A
Cycling	Yes (on open public roads and MVO tracks; not allowed on walking tracks)	Yes (on open public roads and MVO tracks; not allowed on walking tracks)	Yes (on open public roads and MVO tracks; not allowed on walking tracks)	N/A
Dogs	No	No	No	No
Firearms	No (except in transit for the purposes of deer stalking during open season in Hunting (Deer) Overlay area)	No (except in transit for the purposes of deer stalking during open season in Hunting (Deer) Overlay area)	No	Yes (for deer stalking for authorised species during open season)
Firewood collection	Yes Collection from the ground by visitors for use within areas of the park where campfires are allowed. Not allowed for commercial or domestic use.	Yes Collection from the ground by visitors for use within areas of the park where campfires are allowed. Not allowed for commercial or domestic use.	No	Yes Collection from the ground by visitors for use within areas of the park where campfires are allowed. Not allowed for commercial or domestic use.
Fishing	Yes (subject to regulations)	Yes (subject to regulations)	No	Yes (subject to regulations)
Geocaching	Yes (no excavation allowed)	Yes (no excavation allowed)	No	

Activity	Conservation Zone	Conservation and Recreation Zone	Special Protection Overlay	Hunting (Deer) Overlay
Guided activities	Yes	Yes	Yes (subject to permit)	Yes
Walking and hiking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Horse riding	Yes (on open public roads and MVO tracks)	Yes (on open public roads and MVO tracks)	No	Yes (on open public roads and MVO tracks)
Hunting – deer stalking	No	No	No	Yes (deer stalking for authorised species during open season)
Hunting — deer hunting with the aid of gun dogs or scent-trailing hounds	No	No	No	No
Hunting — species other than deer	No	No	No	No
Orienteering or rogaining	Yes, with permit	Yes, with permit	No	Yes
Rafting, canoeing and kayaking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vehicle use (including two-wheel driving, four-wheel driving and trail bikes)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on MVO roads and tracks)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on MVO roads and tracks)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on MVO roads and tracks)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on MVO roads and tracks)

## 6 WORKING TOGETHER

### 6.1 THE JOINT MANAGEMENT DELIVERY PARTNERS — GLaWAC, PARKS VICTORIA, DELWP, GKTOLMB

The park is assigned to Parks Victoria to manage as part of Victoria's parks and conservation reserves system. Parks Victoria rangers operate from Bairnsdale.

Regional and state-wide technical specialist staff provide environmental, cultural and visitor expertise and services to manage the park from other locations in eastern Victoria and Melbourne.

Parks Victoria and GLaWAC have an agreement for GLaWAC to undertake works in Mitchell River National Park, and other jointly managed areas, that has been operating since 2013.

DELWP is responsible for fire management on non-urban public land and provides legislative and policy support to the GKTOLMB and Parks Victoria.

The GLaWAC ranger team has recently commenced participation in DELWP's fire management program.

The GKTOLMB, Parks Victoria, GLaWAC and DELWP have identified the potential for these partnerships to expand and evolve significantly over time through mentoring, training, information sharing and employment and contractual opportunities.

This process should operate in multiple directions with expertise and knowledge of park and public land management being shared by Parks Victoria and DELWP, and cultural and local knowledge and expertise being shared by GLaWAC. The GKTOLMB provides a central forum for coordinating these partnerships, and provides the strategic park management directions for the partnerships through this plan.

### 6.2 COMMUNITY AND OTHER PARTNERS

There are a number of private landholders adjacent to the park who have a direct interest and influence on park operations and values.

Deer hunting groups have a very significant interest in the park. The Sporting Shooters Association Australia and the Australian Deer Association provide volunteers to assist with deer and invasive animal control programs. Schools and outdoor education/tour operators are frequent users of the park with an important stake in access to, and the sustainability of, the park.

Other agency partners are important in the management of the park. The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority provides significant funding for conservation works on public land in the region and provides strategic co-ordination of catchment restoration investment. It also provides executive personnel and support to the GKTOLMB.

Much of the land surrounding the park is State forest managed by DELWP. VicForests manages logging in some areas of State forest including current harvesting operations near the eastern boundary of the park.

The park is in the Shire of East Gippsland, which is responsible for local planning regulation, road maintenance and traffic management around the park, as well as other municipal responsibilities.

The Destination Gippsland tourism region covers the park, and Destination Gippsland is an important partner in marketing of the park and its location on regional tourism routes.

### 6.3 AUTHORISED USES

A number of licensed tour operators operate in the park. A trigonometric station on Calvi Hill is occasionally used by the Office of the Surveyor-General, and sight lines to other peaks are regularly cleared of regrowth.

East Gippsland Water operates a pumping station at the southern end of the park. This station diverts water from the Mitchell River for urban water supply.

An overhead power line supplying electricity to Dargo and the surrounding area runs along the western boundary of the park.

The park is used regularly by the Australian Defence Force for field training.

### 6.4 PARK BOUNDARIES

The park boundaries have been largely regularised by acquisitions and additions over the last decade. However, there are still some areas where park access track alignments and practical access to private land are affected by the position of the park boundary. Opportunities to create more effective boundaries or to negotiate improved access through acquisitions or agreements with landholders should be evaluated as they arise.



## 7 GOALS AND ACTIONS

The following goals and actions should be read in conjunction with the goals and strategic initiatives set out in the Strategic Plan for the Joint Management Area a whole.

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### Caring for Country

#### Goal

The land, water and cultural heritage of Mitchell River National Park are protected and cared for using the combined values, knowledge and skills of the Gunaikurnai, Parks Victoria, community and partners.

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#### Land and water

No.	Action
MR1	Apply the zoning set out in Table 1.
MR2	Protect and restore the park by implementing the land and water conservation strategies detailed in Table 4.
MR3	Implement relevant Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act action statements for threatened and endangered species in the park as detailed in Table 3.
MR4	Work with DELWP to protect the park, assets and communities from bushfire through fuel management strategies that do not adversely affect the rainforest communities and other fire-sensitive values.
MR5	Identify areas where planned burning is required to achieve conservation objectives for park ecosystems and habitats and seek burns to be programmed and implemented as part of DELWP's fire operations planning process.
MR6	Seek opportunities to implement traditional cultural burning practices as part of planned burning through liaison and partnership with DELWP fire managers.
MR7	Increase compliance and enforcement activity to deal with illegal hunting and off-road vehicle use.
MR8	Work with East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to control pest plants and animals consistent with the East Gippsland Invasive Plants and Animals Plan.
MR9	Develop a comprehensive conservation action plan for the park aligned to the Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan and broader East Gippsland park landscape.
MR10	Maintain revegetation programs and deer control in the areas added to the park north of Hortons Track.
MR11	Undertake revegetation and soil stabilisation in other cleared areas of the park, especially where there is a risk of tunnel erosion.
MR12	Work with adjoining property owners to ensure adequate fencing and other measures to prevent entry of stock into the park. Eradicate the feral cattle population in the park.

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#### Cultural heritage

MR13	Increase the visibility of Gunaikurnai cultural values in the park through <i>Welcome to Country</i> and other appropriate signage, based on the Brabralung clan at entry points and visitor nodes. Consider establishing a totemic plant or animal emblem for the park.
MR14	Rename places in the park such as picnic grounds and walking tracks in traditional language.
MR15	Implement the cultural heritage conservation strategies in Table 4 including mapping and survey of Gunaikurnai cultural values and sites in the park. Build

	knowledge and undertake surveys and mapping of plants and animals in the park of cultural importance to the Gunaikurnai. Implement a Cultural Values Overlay based on the outcomes of cultural mapping.
MR16	Create opportunities for greater Gunaikurnai connection through visiting the park and undertaking community cultural activities and events.
MR17	Increase the level of cultural heritage interpretation and education provided to outdoor education groups and other visitors using the park and the Mitchell River Gorge through provision of visitor information and face-to-face interaction and interpretation with visitors by Gunaikurnai rangers and community members (see People in the Park).
MR18	Incorporate cultural values information into induction processes for contractors and others working in the park.
MR19	Implement cultural heritage management procedures for the park as agreed between the partners, including incorporation of Aboriginal Heritage Act provisions and any Natural Resource Agreement that may be established for the park under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act.
MR20	Ensure Gunaikurnai are included in the assessment and approval of research applications in the park in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act.
MR21	Implement the existing provisions of the Native Title Act, and any future Land Use Activity Agreement that is established under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act, relating to Gunaikurnai rights to negotiate long-term and high-impact leases and comment on lower impact authorisations in the park.
MR22	Implement the historic heritage conservation strategies in Table 4 including the development of a plan for monitoring, conservation and interpretation of historic sites in the park.

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## People in the Park

### Goals

Gunaikurnai increase their connection with the park through management, operations and the opportunity to undertake cultural practices.

Visitor and community enjoyment, experience and understanding of the park are enhanced by joint management.

No.	Actions
MR23	Manage visitor experiences in the park consistent with the goals and strategies in Table 5 with priority given to improving camping and recreational experiences at Angusvale and Mitchelldale, minimising the impacts of river users and walkers in the Gorge, and enhancing visitor appreciation and respect for cultural values at the Den of Nargun.
MR24	Manage recreational activities in accordance with Table 6. Generally, maintain existing regulatory settings for activities and uses in the park, apart from changes set out in this plan (including approved variations) or changes arising from statutory requirements.
MR25	Broaden promotion of the park to education groups and tour operators as a cultural education destination as well as an adventure and environmental education destination. Increase the level of cultural heritage interpretation and education provided in visitor information and face-to-face interaction with education and tour groups by Gunaikurnai rangers and community members. Pursue opportunities to link educational visits to the park with cultural hubs in the region.
MR26	Maintain the existing access arrangements for the park's road and track network including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintaining the closure of Rock Creek Track to public vehicles due to its susceptibility to flooding</li> <li>• maintaining the Mitchelldale Track as 'management vehicles only' except for access by permit</li> <li>• upgrading the safe trafficability of Hortons Track crossing on the Mitchell River without impairing river flow.</li> </ul>

Investigate the upgrading and opening to the public of Milton Park Lane/Old Weir Track No. 2. Liaise with the Shire of East Gippsland and DELWP on the management of roads through and adjacent to the park.

Relocate vehicle access to freehold land from informal alignments in the park to on-title alignments as development applications are made, or in response to changes in park facilities or requirements.

- MR27 Ensure all tour operators undertake cultural awareness training conducted by Gunaikurnai, to enhance knowledge and protection of cultural heritage, and to improve interpretation of Gunaikurnai culture to visitors.
- MR28 Establish Gunaikurnai interpretative information for visitors along park tracks about culturally important plants, animals and features.
- MR29 Develop access arrangements for group camping and use of Mitchelldale by Gunaikurnai and others.
- MR30 Develop programs through which Gunaikurnai female rangers working with Elders can take a principal role in the management of the park and in particular the Den of Nargun and other women's places.

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## Working Together

### Goals

Joint management of Mitchell River National Park operates as an effective partnership in which Gunaikurnai build their capacity to play a central role.

Community and stakeholders support and contribute to the care and management of the park.

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No.	Actions
MR31	Promote the opportunities for the Gunaikurnai, Parks Victoria rangers, tour operators and community groups to share knowledge about the park and its management.
MR32	Increase participation and input of Gunaikurnai in DELWP fire management programs in and around the park.
MR33	Provide opportunities for Parks Victoria rangers in the park to interact with other parks and partners in the Settlement Area to develop their understanding and knowledge of joint management approaches.
MR34	Maintain close collaboration with the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and DELWP biodiversity and fire staff in relation to management programs and priorities in and around the park landscape.
MR35	Regularly liaise with community and stakeholder groups with an interest in the park including neighbours, bushwalking, conservation, tourism and historical groups and develop opportunities for volunteer programs and events.
MR36	Collaborate with Destination Gippsland and the tourism industry to promote the park to visitors, particularly in broadening the current adventure and outdoor recreation position of the park.
MR37	Initiate discussions with school groups in Greater Gippsland to offer a program of cultural awareness and guided activities.
MR38	Establish a Gunaikurnai junior ranger program in the park for schools in the Gippsland area.
MR39	Pursue opportunities to create more effective boundaries and relocate vehicle access to freehold land from informal alignments on the park to on-title alignments, as development applications are made.

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## 8 PLAN MONITORING AND REVIEW

An annual rolling plan will be used to implement the actions in Section 7. The progress and effectiveness in implementing these actions will be tracked by collecting two types of data:

- data on activities — what is being done under joint management
- data on outcomes — what changes are occurring as a result of what is being done.

Table 7 provides further detail on both types of data, and describes how they will be collected.

To minimise the burden of additional data collection processes, the methodology outlined below builds on existing project management processes and data wherever possible. Progress on actions that apply to more than one of the joint managed parks (for example, Gunaikurnai capacity building) will be reported under the Strategic Plan actions while tracking the initiatives in specific parks that contribute to that broader action.

**Table 7: Data used to track progress in implementing the Joint Management Plan.**

Data type	Description	Data source and method
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Activities are the things we are doing under joint management.</p> <p>Tracking activities is important for understanding whether the planned projects and activities are being implemented successfully. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the activities of each of the strategic initiatives documented in Table 5 in Section 4 of the Strategic Plan.</li> <li>• the actions described in this management plan for Mitchell River National Park.</li> </ul>	<p>Tracking the activities outlined in the Introduction and Strategic Plan of the JMP will be based on the project management tools that the partners use to guide implementation.</p> <p>Existing project management tools should provide sufficient evidence and information on how implementation is progressing, what has been completed, any bottlenecks or issues to be addressed, and the staff responsible.</p>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>Outcomes are the changes that occur as a result of what is being done.</p> <p>Tracking outcomes is important for understanding whether the intended changes are being achieved, and therefore whether the goals for the first five-year period are being achieved. Outcomes are documented in Tables 3 and 4 of the Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>Some outcomes identified for the five-year goals can be tracked using existing project management tools, while others will require additional data collection.</p> <p>Appendix 2 of the Strategic Plan specifies potential indicators and timings for outcomes.</p>

Table 8 provides an example of the data that will be collected on the outcomes of joint management. It is an excerpt from the complete outcomes framework, which is contained in Appendix 2 of the Strategic Plan.

**Table 8: Excerpt of outcomes framework from the Strategic Plan.**

Theme	Example of outcome <i>The desired change</i>	Description <i>Further detail</i>	Indicators and frequency <i>How will the change be assessed?</i>
People	More visitors see, engage with, and learn from Gunaikurnai and non-Gunaikurnai staff on parks.	Gunaikurnai and non-Gunaikurnai rangers and other management staff will be more visible in parks, engaging with visitors and educating them about park values and Gunaikurnai heritage.	Number of rangers and other staff working in roles such as guides and educators.  Detail on programs implemented to build capacity of rangers and staff as guides and educators (e.g. number of participants).  <i>Annual</i>
Culture	Protections are in place for all identified cultural sites	Measures will be put in place to protect all culturally important sites from erosion, park use and other threats.	Percentage of identified cultural sites that have protections in place.  <i>Annual</i>
Country	Rangers and management staff have the knowledge, skills and resources to implement sustainable, integrated land management practices.	Partners aim to continue capacity-building and training programs for rangers and other management staff in sustainable land management practices that integrate Gunaikurnai traditional practices with modern conventional practices.	Details on program (e.g. content, forms of capacity building implemented, number of rangers completing capacity building initiatives).  <i>Annual</i>
Working Together	Decision-making processes are embedded.	The JMP specifies the decision-making processes in the governance structure. Partners will embed these by demonstrating they have put them into practice and are using them to make decisions.	Reflection on how decision-making processes and governance arrangements have been followed and complied with in the previous 12-month period, and lessons for the future.  <i>Annual</i>

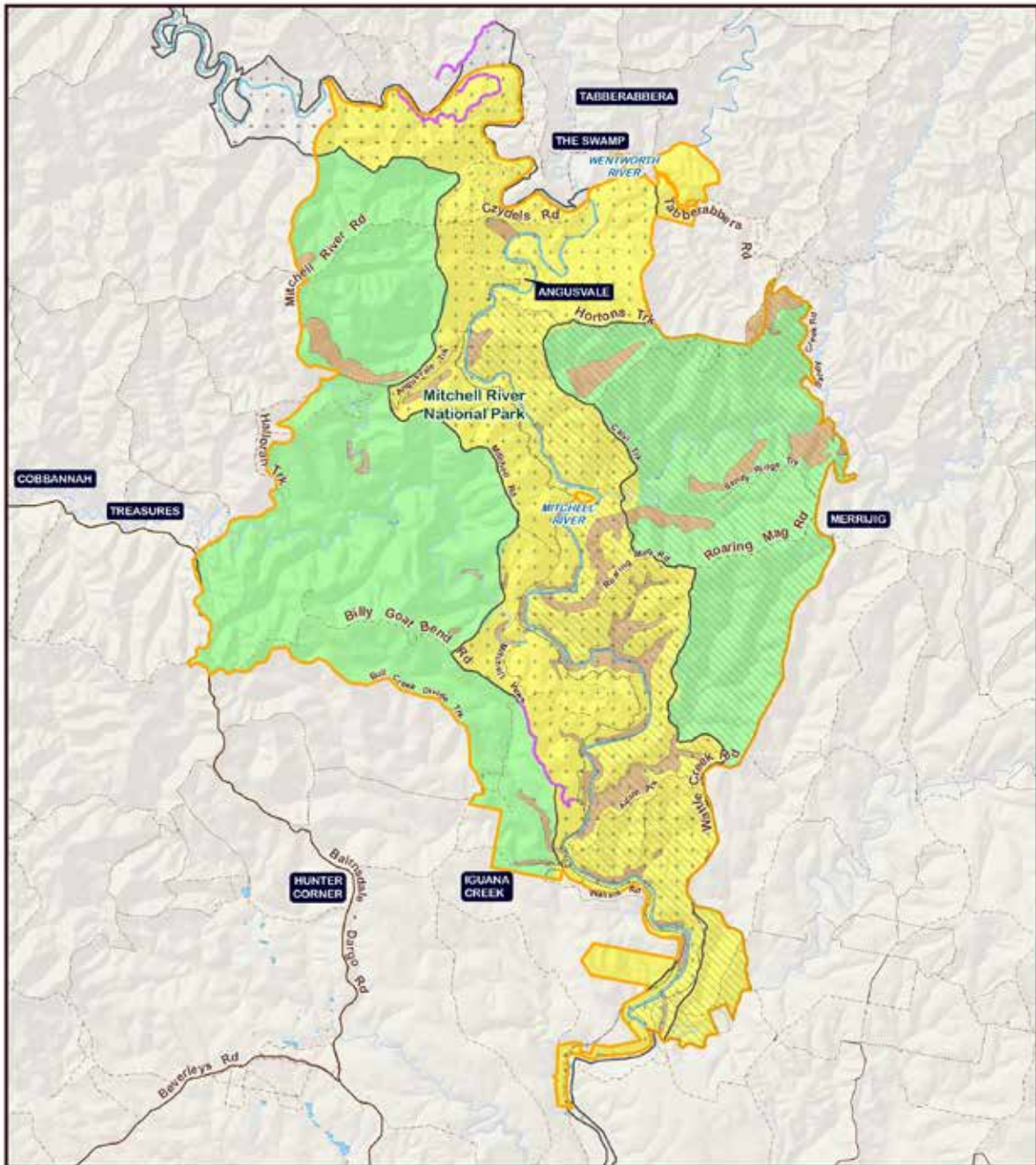
The monitoring regime, especially for Caring for Country and People in the Parks actions, will use measures and data specified in regional Conservation Action Plans and state-wide monitoring programs conducted across the broader park and reserve estate, including the *State of the Parks* and *State of the Forests*. This will be particularly important for monitoring outcomes, which are often complex and can only be monitored efficiently at selected locations rather than in every park.

This management plan has effect for 10 years and will be formally reviewed and renewed at the end of that period. After the five-year review of the Strategic Plan, any consequential variations to this management plan will be made at that time through a consultative process.

## REFERENCES

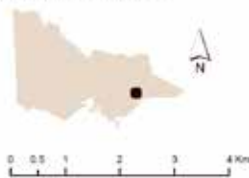
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### Mitchell River National Park Joint Management Plan

23/05/2018  
Coordinate System: GDA 1994 VICGRID94  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



- Walking track
- 4WD
- Unsealed road
- Sealed road
- Arterial road
- Management Vehicles Only

- Joint Management
- Park and Reserve

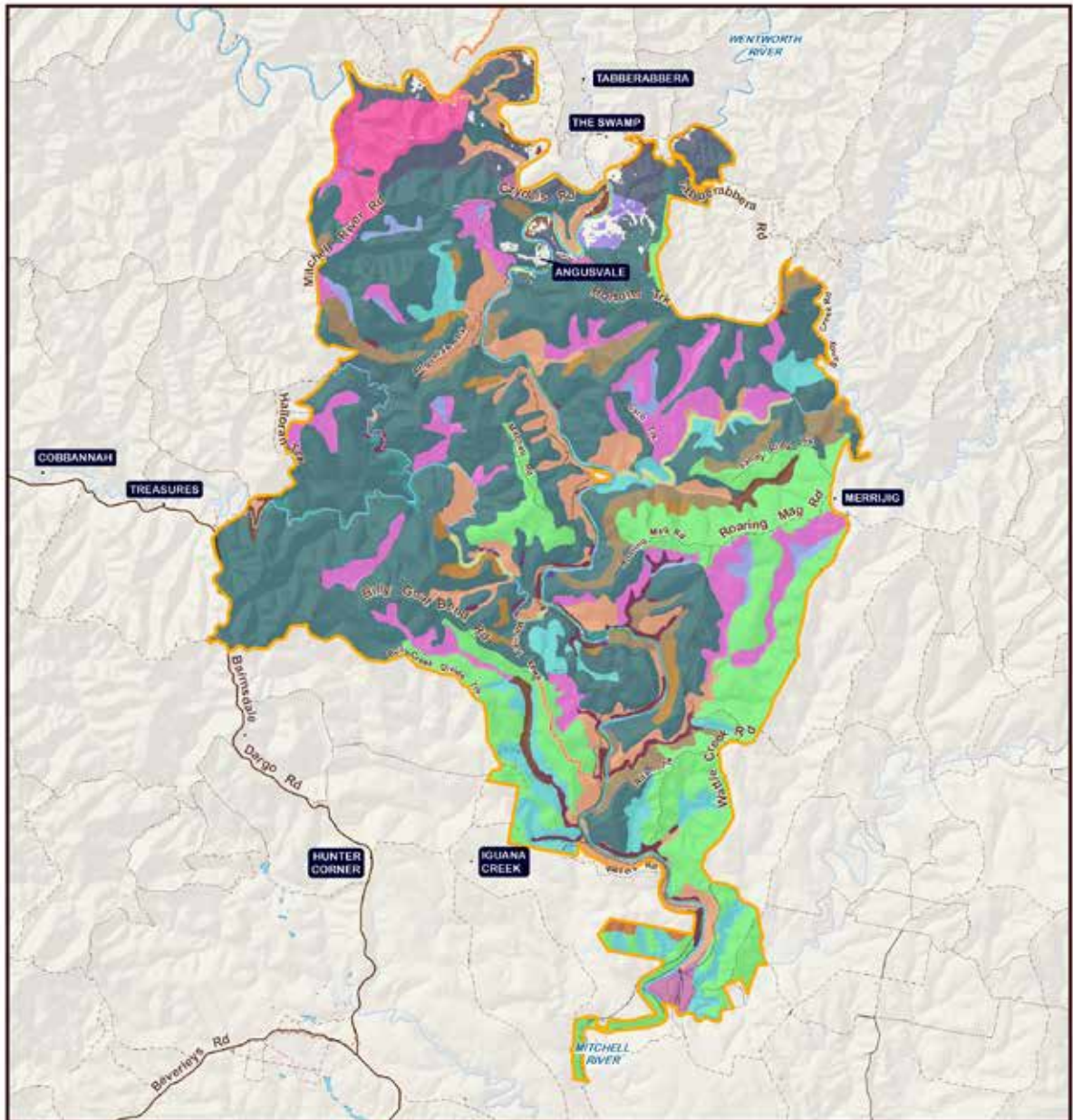
#### Management Zones and Overlays

- Conservation Zone
- Conservation & Recreation Zone
- Special Protection Overlay
- Heritage River Overlay
- Hunting (Deer) Overlay

Disclaimer: Parks Victoria does not guarantee that this data is without error. If any land and/or resource is affected, all liability will be that of the user. This plan is for information only. It does not constitute an offer of any financial product. The State of Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.



Map 1: Management zones and overlays, Mitchell River National Park.



**Mitchell River National Park**  
**Joint Management Plan**  
 26/09/2018  
 Coordinate System: GDA 1994 VICGRID94  
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



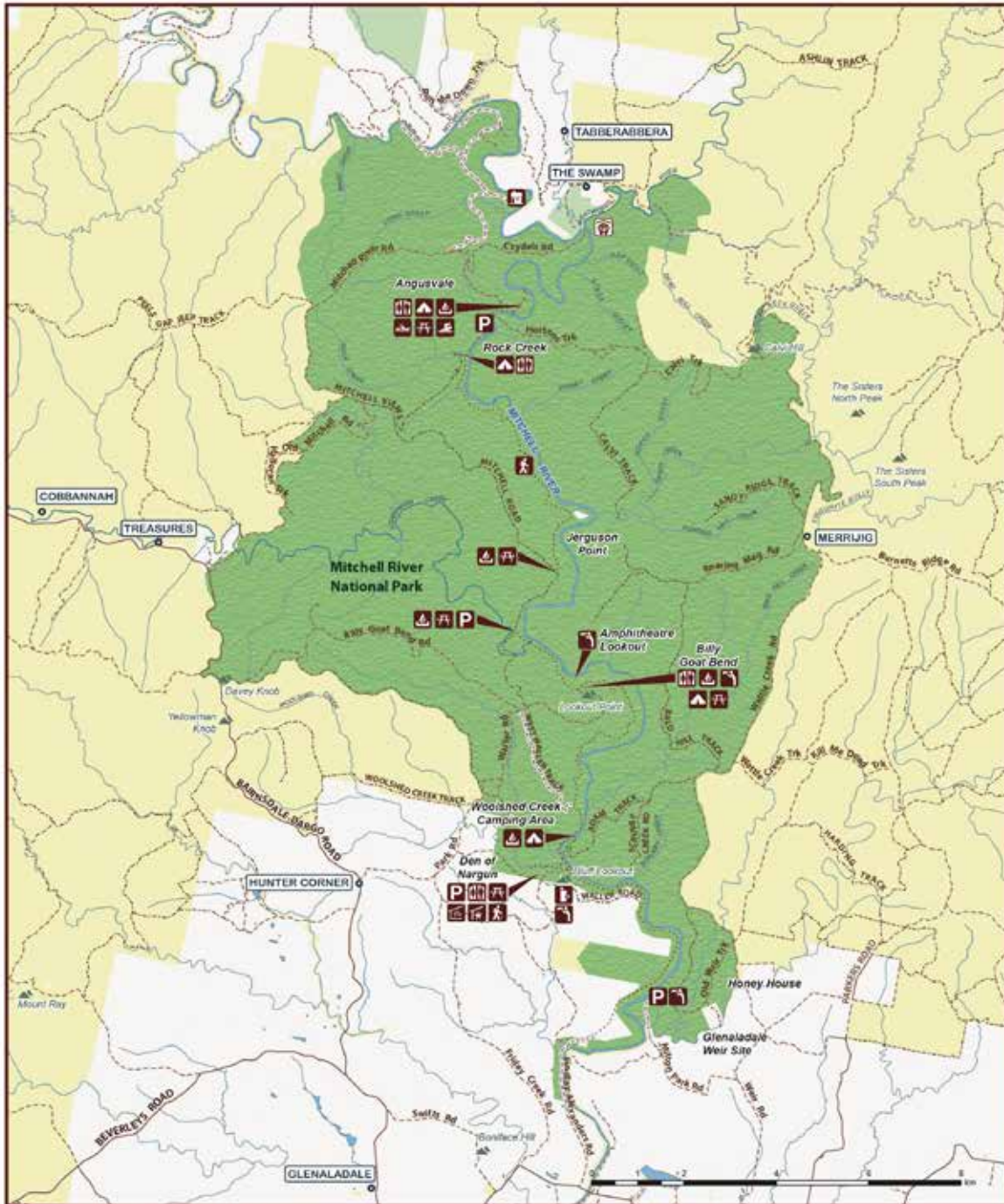
- Walking track
- 4WD
- Unsealed road
- Sealed road
- Arterial road
- Management Vehicles Only
- Joint Management

**Ecological Vegetation Classes**

Dry Rainforest - Warm Temperate	Grassy Dry Forest	Riverine Escarpment Scrub
Rainforest - Gallery	Grassy Woodland	Rocky Outcrop Shrubland - Rocky Outcrop Heathland Mosaic
Riparian Shrubland - Riverine	Heathy Dry Forest	Shrubby Damp Forest
Escarpment Scrub - Blackthorn Scrub Complex	Lowland Forest	Shrubby Dry Forest
Blackthorn Scrub	Lowland Herb-rich Forest	Valley Slopes Dry Forest
Damp Forest	Prairie Grassy Forest	Warm Temperate Rainforest
Dry Rainforest	Riparian Forest	
Dry Valley Forest	Riparian Shrubland	
Gallery Rainforest		

Map 2: Ecological Vegetation Classes, Mitchell River National Park.





### Mitchell River National Park Joint Management Plan

30/4/2018  
Coordinate System: GDA 1994 UTM80S4  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



- |                            |                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| — Arterial Roads           | ■ Joint Management |
| — Sealed Roads             | ■ Park and Reserve |
| --- Unsealed Roads         | ■ Public Land      |
| ... Walking Tracks         |                    |
| ... 4WD                    |                    |
| — Management Vehicles Only |                    |

#### Visitor Sites & Facilities

- |                         |                 |               |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>P</b> Gravel Carpark | Sheltered BBQ   | Historic Hut  |
| Fireplace               | Natural Lookout | Shearing Shed |
| Picnic area             | Swimming        |               |
| Sheltered Picnic Area   | Abseiling Rock  |               |
| Toilet                  | Trail           |               |
| Camping                 | Canoeing        |               |

Disclaimer: Parks Victoria does not guarantee that this map is without error. Use of any product based on this map is at your own risk. For more information, please contact Parks Victoria on 136 369.



Map 3: Visitor sites and facilities, Mitchell River National Park.