River Red Gum Parks Management Plan

Community information combined overview

Introduction

Parks Victoria is developing a management plan for Victoria’s River Red Gum parks and reserves and is seeking your involvement.

In 2009, following an extensive study and consultation carried out by the Victorian Environment and Assessment Council, the Victorian government decided to protect significant areas of River Red Gum habitats along the Murray River and its tributaries in new or expanded national and other parks and reserves. The management plan will be developed during 2016 to guide the care and management of these areas into the future, explore further opportunities for recreation and tourism, and improve their ecological health.

This overview is part of an information package available to the community. It provides summarised information on key topics. Should you wish to explore a topic further, the project website contains Community information sheets which raise some key issues which the management plan will need to explore. The information is provided to help you consider the topics and contribute to the plan. For more information see www.parks.vic.gov.au/redgumplan

Visitors and tourism

Recreational activities enjoyed in River Red Gum parks and reserves include camping, walking, boating, horse riding, driving, fishing, and hunting. These activities appeal to many community members from grey nomads, families, groups of young adults to school groups and sporting clubs. The activities people engage in are guided by the environment, facilities, roads and tracks, proximity to towns, and the range of tourism operators in the area.

The current planning is an opportunity to explore possibilities for new activities, establish connections with community groups and tourism operators, and suggest additions or changes to what is currently on offer.

Recreation and tourism

Recreation and tourism provide social benefits including physical, spiritual and mental health of individuals and the community. Tourism provides important economic opportunities for local and regional economies. The attraction of the Murray River makes the River Red Gum parks and reserves popular summer destinations, and riverside locations are highly sought after.

There are many factors that can influence your experience in a park. Facilities; such as toilets, camping areas, walking tracks and boat ramps; experiences like horse riding and driving and issues such as litter, other visitors’ behaviour, and restrictions on activities can affect how you enjoy your experience.
**Roads and access**

Recreation and tourism activities in the parks are linked and supported through an extensive network of roads and tracks. The extent of roads and tracks is often a legacy of former land use. A sustainable network of roads and tracks in River Red Gum parks and reserves is required to connect people to the parks and rivers, and to allow access essential for delivering park management services and emergency responses. Sometimes roads need to be temporarily closed to allow environmental watering, or to protect them from damage in times of persistent wet weather or natural flood.

Legislation governs the roads and tracks network and prescribes how they are used and managed. How you access the park, and the impacts road proliferations or closures have on you as a visitor, are topics that can be addressed in your contribution to the plan.

For further information on roads and access see Community information sheet: Roads and access.

**Campfires**

Campfires are an important part of the camping experience in the River Red Gum parks and reserves, providing a focal point, warmth, and sometimes a way of cooking. Campfires are permitted in the Victorian River Red Gum planning area all year, except on days of Total Fire Ban. Campfires need to be carefully watched. This is especially critical in narrow riverside camping areas, which are often crowded in summer and have limited points for access and escape should a bushfire occur.

Firewood collection for camping within parks and reserves can remove habitat for a number of species including lizards and insects, causing impacts on the food source of birds and mammals. Campers are encouraged to collect wood from a wider area or to bring in firewood as part of their camping supplies.

**Recreational hunting and firearms**

Recreational hunting is a popular activity on public land. Recreational hunting and firearms are permitted in designated parts of the planning area and prohibited in others. Hunting and the use of firearms is governed by the applicable legislation specific to the park or reserve the land is protected under. Parks Victoria welcomes comments and community feedback on this topic, recognising management approaches may not change because of the legislative restrictions.

The types of permitted hunting, hunting partnerships to conduct specific hunting programs and advice of where hunting is allowed or prohibited, is available in the Community information sheet: Hunting and firearms

**Planning area and uses**

The River Red Gum Parks Management Plan covers parks and reserves managed by Parks Victoria that protect more than 222,000 hectares along Victoria’s Murray River corridor. The parks and reserves contain parts of Australia’s largest River Red Gum forests. They are home to endangered plant and animal species, internationally significant wetlands, thousands of significant cultural heritage places and important recreation and tourism destinations for Victorians and visitors. The
The planning area covers 10 parks managed under the National Parks Act, totalling over 157,000 ha, and over 100 other parks and reserves managed under various other legislation totalling over 65,000 ha.

**Creation of parks and reserves**

The River Red Gum parks and reserves which make up the planning area each have their own particular history. Some were established many years ago. As a result of government decisions on the Victorian Environment Assessments Council’s investigation, a number of existing parks were expanded and new parks established in 2010. This includes some forest areas which were previously used for timber harvesting, for example in Gunbower National Park. Some of these parks have received new visitor facilities to improve community access and enjoyment of the parks.

In addition, the proposed Murray River Park includes long stretches along the Murray River from east of Wodonga to west of Mildura ensuring public access to the majority of the river frontage. Much of the proposed park is less than 100 metres wide. Together with various national and other parks, the proposed Murray River Park provides for public access to most of the river frontage.

For further information on the creation of the parks see Community information sheet: Creation of the parks.

**Planning area and land tenures**

There is a range of different types of parks and reserves within the planning area, each managed according to specific legislation and government decisions that determines allowable activities in the park or reserve. Some of the areas are still to be reserved under the relevant legislation and may presently be managed under the *Land Act 1958* or *Forest Act 1958*. In the meantime, those areas that are still to be reserved are managed in accordance with their intended use as agreed by government.

The different types of parks and reserves include:

- National, State and Other Parks – to be managed under the *National Parks Act*
- Regional Parks – to be managed under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act*
- Nature Conservation Reserves, Historic and Cultural Features Reserves and Natural Features Reserves – to be managed under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act* or the *Wildlife Act*
- State Game Reserves – to be managed under the *Wildlife Act*.

For further information on the planning area and land tenures see Community information sheet: Planning area and land tenures.

**Implementation of existing plans**

Of the parks within the planning area, around 32% have existing management plans. The remaining areas are either new parks and reserves or smaller areas, such as bushland and wildlife reserves. All areas are managed in accordance with the legislation under which the areas are reserved and recommendations from the 2008 Victorian Environmental Assessment Council investigation into River Red Gum forests as approved or varied by government.
Some management strategies noted in existing management plans have been completed. Some have become outdated as government policy and legislation has changed. The River Red Gum Parks Management Plan provides an opportunity to ensure strategies are developed in line with current policy and legislation.

For further information on implementation of existing plans see Community information sheet: Implementation of existing management plans.

Zoning

Management zoning is a tool used to summarise the broad intent of managing particular, defined areas within parks and reserves. A standard zoning scheme provides for the consistent application of particular management regimes to all parks and reserves across the State on the basis of their fragility and remoteness and the significance of their values. The zoning scheme has six primary management zones and a number of overlays including:

- Conservation Zone - Areas of high natural value where the emphasis is on protection of the environment
- Conservation and Recreation Zone - Areas where the management emphasis is on protection of environmental and cultural values while allowing for recreation
- Recreation Development Zone - Small areas with a high level of facility development catering for high numbers of visitors
- Reference Area Zone - Areas proclaimed under the Reference Areas Act 1978 (Vic.)
- Education Zone – Small area for educational study of natural ecosystems
- Overlays - Areas where specified activities or values require additional management

For further information on zoning see Community information sheet: Zoning.

Authorised uses

River Red Gum parks face a number of challenges from their past uses including forestry and grazing. It is recognised that many of these uses have strong social and community value. The 2008 Victorian Environmental Assessment Council investigation into River Red Gum forests, and a subsequent Community Engagement Panel, made a number of recommendations to government. The plan will reflect the government position in managing the following uses:

- Grazing
- Forestry
- Domestic firewood collection
- Apiculture
- Koondrook Mill Residence and Gardens – relates to the use at a specific place
- Mining
- Public Utilities

For further information on authorised uses see Community information sheet: Authorised uses.
Barmah National Park

The plan will not cover Barmah National Park as the long term strategic direction for the park will be determined by the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board. Parks Victoria respects and supports the right of the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board to set the direction for the Barmah National Park, and be actively involved in the management of parks and reserves across Country.

For further information on Barmah National Park see Community information sheet: Barmah National Park.

Environment

The River Red Gum parks and reserves are rich in environmental values and contain a variety of native plants, animals and birds, some nationally or regionally threatened. The parks are set amongst rivers, lakes, floodplains and swamps, making them appealing to visitors seeking a connection to nature, recreation and wellbeing. Improving the health of the environment is critical to the future of River Red Gum parks and reserves, and getting a healthy balance of land and river use and environmental protection is the key.

Ramsar wetland sites and Living Murray environmental sites

The planning area contains wetlands, ecosystems and cultural sites that are internationally significant and the focus of collaborative management programs with other Australian States.

Ramsar wetlands are representative, rare or unique wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity. Four of Victoria’s 11 Ramsar listed wetlands are situated within the River Red Gum planning area; Gunbower Forest, Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes, Kerang Wetlands and Barmah Forest. They are internationally recognised under the Ramsar Convention, a global environmental treaty protecting and maintaining wetland ecosystems.

Four ecological and cultural sites within the planning area are the focus of the Living Murray Program. This federal-state program commenced in 2002 and aims to address the declining health of the Murray-Darling river system. Strategies include recovering water for environmental benefit (also known as environmental watering); building water management structures to help deliver water to the right places, and monitoring the effects of these initiatives on plant and animal communities. The four Living Murray sites within the planning area are Barmah-Millewa Forest, Hattah Lakes, Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands and Gunbower-Koondrook-Perricoota Forest.

For further information on Ramsar wetland sites and Living Murray environmental sites see Community information sheet: Ramsar wetland sites and Living Murray environmental sites.

Ecosystem health and biodiversity

The River Red Gum planning area is a linear oasis connected by water in a dry land. The parks provide diverse, unique, high-quality habitats essential for the recovery of threatened species. The parks and reserves are home to 500 native animal species, including 5 nationally listed as endangered and 11 as vulnerable. There are over 1500 native plant species, including 54 nationally...
listed as endangered and 10 as vulnerable. Of the 144 Ecological Vegetation Communities, 135 are listed as endangered, vulnerable or depleted in the region. Changed water flows (due to irrigation, land clearing and droughts) and invasive weeds are the major threats to biodiversity. Programs to manage these threats and retain the natural values will be addressed within the management plan.

For further information on ecosystem health and biodiversity see Community information sheet: Ecosystem health and biodiversity.

**Waterways Management**

Water is the source of life for the River Red Gum forest. It is intrinsic to successful industry and farming, tourism and recreation, and human life. It is steeped in history and stories of the river and its previous uses give insight into how water, or the lack of it, can propel any venture into success or failure. Neither communities nor parks could survive without water. Significant pressures have been placed on streams, wetlands, aquifers and estuaries in parks, largely as a result of water diversion and regulation.

The Victorian waterways flowing to the Murray River include: the Ovens River, King River, Goulburn River, Broken River, Campaspe River, Loddon River, Little Murray River, Deep Creek, Broken Creek, Barr Creek, Pyramid Creek and Mount Hope Creek. The Murray River and many of these waters spring from catchments in Victoria’s Alpine Region.

River Red Gum parks and reserves support biodiversity and natural processes that purify water while cycling nutrients and sediments. Alteration of habitat in one area can critically affect ecological processes elsewhere. Water may be the single most important factor driving management objectives.

For further information on waterways management see Community information sheet: Waterways Management.

**Climate change**

Climate change has been identified by the Victorian government as a major risk to our environment, our way of life and our economy. The effects of climate change that we have seen over the past decade are more frequent and severe bushfires, storm and flood events which have impacted the environment and community health and prosperity. These events are consistent with scientific projections and are likely to continue and worsen. The predicted effects of climate change are a key consideration looking forward. Bushfires, storms, reduced rainfall, increased moisture stress, spread of invasive species and drying up of wetlands are expected to increase in frequency and severity. Competing demands for water and the impacts of reduced water flows must be considered in planning ahead. Management will need to better deal with these new extremes. But we also need to recognise that the River Red Gum parks and reserves play a vital role in trapping carbon dioxide and in so doing reduce (mitigate) the potential effects of climate change on our world.

For further information on climate change see Community information sheet: Climate change.
The Spectrum of culture and heritage

Various River Red Gum landscapes have been part of different Traditional Owner groups’ homelands for tens of thousands of years. Some of these areas are now parks and reserves, each of which is extremely important to the same Traditional Owner groups in maintaining their cultural connections.

The River Red Gum landscape remains rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage, both material sites and non-material places closely linked to traditional stories and embedded in customary access to and use of Country.

Much more recently, post European contact, exploration and settlement of the land has left its own mark in the form of built structures, diverse past land uses, stories and connections.

Everything that has happened in the past is part of the story of the River Red Gum parks and reserves that continue today. The management plan provides an opportunity for us to recognise and celebrate our Aboriginal and Australian cultural heritage.

Working with Traditional Owners

Across the planning area Traditional Owner groups include: Barenji, Ngintait, Njeri Njeri, Wergaia, Latji Latji, Wadi Wadi, Wemba Wamba, Tati Tati, Wergaia, Barapabarapa, Yorta Yorta, Waywurru, Dudoroa, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Bangerang, Taungurung, and Yaithmathang communities.

Traditional Owners are the custodians of a living cultural heritage. The forest, river, plants and animals are all part of Country and the cultural identity of Traditional Owners.

Protecting, managing and enjoying the land are important parts of this connection and traditional land management techniques can complement the western science techniques currently applied to manage Country.

Parks Victoria is committed to engaging and working with Traditional Owners and providing opportunities to participate in the management of Country. Parks Victoria strives for Traditional Owner inclusion and recognises that culture is integral to the future of the parks and their management. Traditional Owner involvement at all levels of management and in decision making is an important aspiration for the River Red Gum parks and reserves and will bring benefits to both the parks and the wider community.

For further information on Working with Traditional Owners see Community information sheet: Working with Traditional Owners.

Aboriginal culture and living connections

The parks and reserves managed by Parks Victoria across the River Red Gum planning area contain a rich cultural heritage that continues to connect people with this landscape. Heritage is more than objects, sites and buildings, it is also about places, the landscape, associations and experiences. Heritage and culture is at the heart of community identity. It is part of how we define ourselves and our place in the world.
For Traditional Owners, the connection with country has always been strong, holding a deep spiritual connection to the land, its creation and dreaming stories, and their ancestors. Traditional Owners living in the landscape before and since settlement have a story of survival and community strength, and continue to care for Country.

For further information on Culture see Community information sheet: Aboriginal Culture and Living Connections.

**Heritage**

European exploration and settlement of the planning area also has a legacy of historic places, and associations across the landscape representing the rich and diverse past land uses, stories and connections held and appreciated by the community. Communities lived and worked in River Red Gum forests, supporting forestry, livestock grazing and other industries. Historic places include features such as stock yards, timber mills, boat landings, punt/ferry crossings, bridges, water regulation, special/named trees, homesteads and their remains, tobacco kilns and tracks.

For further information on Heritage see Community information sheet: Heritage.

**Fire**

Victorians live in a fire-prone landscape where fire is a complex environmental, cultural, social and economic issue for communities and land managers. Fire is vital to the functioning of many ecosystems across Australia, significantly influencing biodiversity - the composition and distribution of plant and animal communities. Fire is also a threat to communities, heritage and environmental values.

Bushfires are increasing in their frequency and are becoming more severe, as climate change leads to hotter and drier weather. In recent years on average there have been over 600 bushfires on public land (national parks, state forests and reserves) in Victoria every year. About one quarter are caused by lightning, another quarter by arson, around 10% are escapes from burn-offs on private land, 2% from escaped planned burns on public land, 10% from dropped cigarettes, while the causes of some fires remain unknown. Around 10% of bushfires on public land are from campfires not properly extinguished, or allowed to escape.

Fire management programs include planned fire prevention actions and responsive fire suppression actions. These programs aim to protect communities and heritage values, and to promote environmental benefits. It is known that River Red Gum is generally dependent on flooding, rather than fire, for regeneration and that the interaction of fire and flooding regimes is an important aspect of River Red Gum forest ecology.

For further information on Fire see Community information sheet: Fire management.
Help us plan

Vision for the park

A vision statement for River Red Gum parks and reserves will be developed during the drafting of the Management Plan. A vision statement is an aspirational description of what could be achieved or accomplished in the mid-term or long-term future. Consider your vision for River Red Gum parks and reserves, how would you articulate your ideas and hopes for these parks?

How can I contribute?

Community input is an essential part of the planning process and Parks Victoria is seeking the views of the local community, visitors and other interested groups and individuals. Questions to consider:

- What area of park management, in relation to the above topic would you like to see remain the same?
- What area of park management, in relation to the above topic would you like to see managed differently?
- What ideas do you have for the future of these parks?
- What is your vision statement for the parks?
- Other comments

Email your submission to redgumplan@parks.vic.gov.au

More information

For information on other topics, or to make a submission:

Visit www.parks.vic.gov.au/redgumplan

Email: redgumplan@parks.vic.gov.au

Call: 13 1963
List of all Community information sheets

Community information combined Overview (combines all information from the five Overview sheets into one)

Community information sheet Overview: The spectrum of culture and heritage
- Community information sheet: Aboriginal culture and living connections
- Community information sheet: Heritage
- Community information sheet: Working with Traditional Owners

Community information sheet Overview: Visitors and tourism
- Community information sheet: Roads and access
- Community information sheet: Recreational hunting and firearms
- Community information sheet: Recreation and tourism

Community information sheet Overview: Environment
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- Community information sheet: Ramsar wetland sites and the Living Murray environmental sites
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