

Western Plains and Wetlands Conservation Action Plan

Overview



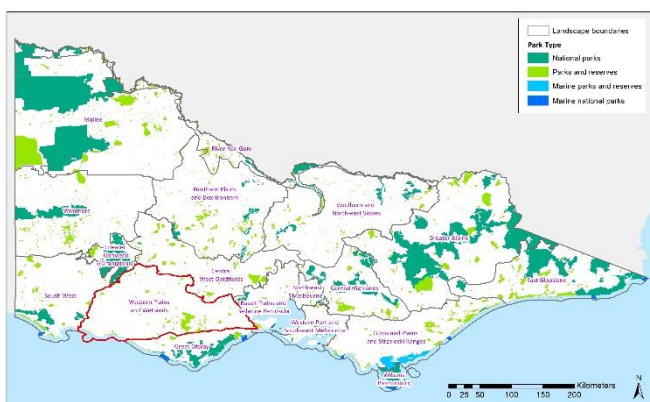
Achieving our vision to:

Increase the resilience of natural assets in the Western Plains and Wetlands Parks Landscape and maintain ecosystem services in the face of climate change and other stressors.

The Western Plains and Wetlands Parks Landscape encompasses endangered grasslands and woodlands, internationally significant lakes and wetlands and important coastal and marine communities.

Parks and reserves include:

- Illabarook Grassland Flora Reserve
- Inverleigh Flora Reserve
- Lake Beeac Wildlife Reserve
- Cobra Killuc Wildlife Reserve
- Blacks Creek Nature Conservation Reserve
- Lake Corangamite Lake Reserve
- Merri Marine Sanctuary



The Western Plains and Wetlands Parks Landscape

Conservation Assets

Five ecosystems have been identified as conservation assets in the Western Plains and Wetlands Parks Landscape. Within each of these assets a range of nested assets have also been identified, including threatened species and important ecological assemblages.

Condition

The plan identifies a range of key ecological attributes (components that are believed to best reflect the health of the asset). The plan describes their current condition (very good, good, fair, poor) and the trend (improving, stable, declining), and establishes a target for future condition of each key ecological attribute. These measures allow the condition of each asset to be assessed.

- **Merri Marine Sanctuary** is in good condition
- **Lakes and Wetlands, Grassland, and Coastal and Estuarine** are in fair condition
- **Dry Forest and Woodland** is in poor condition

Threats

Seven priority threats to the conservation assets in the Parks Landscape have been identified:

- Terrestrial predation by cats and foxes
- Weed invasion
- Grazing and browsing by introduced herbivores
- Inappropriate fire regimes
- Altered water regimes and poor water quality
- Habitat degradation caused by visitor impacts and illegal activities
- Invasive or overabundant marine species



Conservation strategies

The following conservation strategies will be undertaken to tackle these threats. They have been selected for their impact, feasibility and cost in achieving the desired conservation outcomes.

- **Fire management for ecological health** — develop ecological fire strategies with partners so that planned burns are conducted within an appropriate fire regime, improving habitat condition, increasing old and mid growth vegetation and protecting high value assets and areas from damage.
- **Supporting partnerships to address hydrological threats to water-dependent assets** – work with partners to reduce human impacts on water quality and hydrology to reduce pollutant input and improve flows to marine, saline and freshwater ecosystems.
- **Environmental weed control using a biosecurity approach** - manage weeds to reduce their spread, establishment and impact with a focus on species that have or are likely to have significant impacts on the health of conservation assets, prioritising high risk species in high value locations.
- **Terrestrial herbivore management** - implement targeted control of rabbits, pigs, cattle and deer at priority sites for threatened vegetation, integrating available methods of control to achieve acceptable densities.
- **Control and monitoring of introduced terrestrial predators to support resilient native fauna populations** - implement targeted control of foxes and cats at priority and potential future sites for threatened and migratory fauna.
- **Integrated management of grassy ecosystems** - manage grasslands and grassland components of grassy woodlands to maintain their ecological condition, provide habitat for component species and promote recovery of threatened species through managing biomass and reducing the impacts of invasive plants and other threats.
- **Managing marine pests for healthy marine protected areas** - implement targeted marine pest

monitoring to prevent incursions and seek to control new incursions as soon as they occur.

- **Reducing the impacts of recreation, illegal activities and resource extraction on natural values** - undertake communication and compliance activities to protect sensitive habitats and species and promote sustainable resource extraction.

Global practice

Conservation action planning is an internationally recognised process developed by The Nature Conservancy, and used by many conservation managers around Australia. Adaptive management is a critical component of the model. The Plan provides directions for environmental conservation management for the next 15 years. After 5 years, the plan will be reviewed, and progress will be evaluated against outcomes identified for conservation.

Performance measurement

For each strategy, component actions and monitoring indicators have been developed. These will be used to track the achievement of threat mitigation objectives and conservation outcomes defined for each of the assets.

Implementing the plan

The Conservation Action Plan will be implemented by the regional parks team in partnership with Traditional Owners, and with detailed planning and design often assisted by restoration partners, researchers, other agencies, Friends groups, special interest groups, and volunteers.

10 step process

Parks Victoria uses a ten-step process for conservation action planning: the Plan covers the first seven steps in the process.

