

# OUR PROJECTS



**NORTH CENTRAL**  
Catchment Management Authority  
*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*

## ENHANCING THE VALUES OF THE GUNBOWER RAMSAR SITE

### PROTECTING THE BEST

The Gunbower Forest Ramsar site includes Gunbower Forest, associated water bodies, and Gunbower Creek. The site is located on the Murray River floodplain between Torrumbarry and Koondrook in north-western Victoria. The Gunbower Forest site covers 19,450 ha dominated by River Red Gum open forest and woodland. The forest wetlands are important breeding places for waterbirds and native fish.

The North Central CMA is the lead agency in North Central Victoria coordinating and monitoring natural resource management programs for the region.

### SITE OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Gunbower Forest is the second largest River Red Gum Forest in Victoria. During flood periods this area becomes a breeding, feeding and resting ground for large colonial waterbird species.

The Forest includes many rare wetland habitat types, and supports a range of nationally significant species. More than 210 species of indigenous flora and 143 species of indigenous fauna have been recorded. Three of these flora species and one fauna species are considered to be nationally threatened under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

In 2010 Gunbower National Park was created, this reserve occupies about half of the public land with most of the bushland upstream of Cohuna in the national park. However there is still a large area of State Forest available for logging, especially near Barham-Koondrook.

### ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

The Living Murray initiative lists this forest as one of six icon sites in the Murray-Darling Basin to be protected for their ecological significance.

The Gunbower Forest is also a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, JAMBA (Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement) and CAMBA (China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement). It is an important breeding ground for a number of birds, including Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Nankeen Night Heron, Royal Spoonbill, Intermediate Egret, Great Egret and Australian White Ibis.

The Forest provides habitat for numerous threatened plant and animal species, including birds, fish and reptiles, and supports colonies of breeding waterbirds during appropriate seasonal conditions.



**Gunbower Creek**

*Photo: Courtesy David Kleinert Photography*

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project is to enhance the biodiversity values of the Gunbower Forest and Wetlands through reducing the impact of threatening pests on specific conservation values and biological assets, irrespective of whether they are on private or public land. While Gunbower Island is a Living Murray Icon Site, The Living Murray program does not include funding beyond environmental water delivery. Consequently, the extensive threats posed by pest plant and animals are not currently being managed to a satisfactory level. Therefore, this project complements existing Government expenditure, by building on the benefits provided by environmental flows

### PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Strategic weed control focusing on Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and those impacting on the ecological character of the Ramsar site
- Controlling rabbit populations to reduce grazing pressure
- Fox baiting to reduce impacts on native fauna
- Fencing and revegetation of some areas to exclude grazing by livestock and increase the capacity of treated sites to regenerate
- Establishment of four populations of threatened species of wetland flora to maximise population viability Platypus and Turtle monitoring

### SOCIAL & ECONOMICAL VALUES

*"The Forest with its many wetlands, creeks and effluents provides excellent recreation opportunities, and is popular for fishing and camping. The convoluted course of the Murray River provides many fishing spots. Wildlife, particularly waterfowl are plentiful."*

TRENT GIBSON – Project Manager

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## IMPACTS

Regulation of the Murray River since 1934 has reduced the frequency, intensity and duration of flooding in Gunbower Forest, which has implications for River Red Gum and other species whose survival is flood dependent. Timber harvesting and silvicultural practices have altered the age structure of Red Gum stands and may have reduced the number of nest hollows available to wildlife. Critical threats to biodiversity exist at the site, including: weeds, pest animal damage, and stock grazing. In particular, the site is subject to rabbit and fox infestation, Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and other invasive plants which threaten the ecological character of the Forest and wetlands.

## RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONALLY THREATENED WETLAND FAUNA

As part of this project, a dedicated field officer will work to enhance the survival of four nationally threatened species by establishing viable populations in suitable habitat in Gunbower Forest. These species are recognised as threatened due to their small population sizes and the significant reduction of wetland habitats through draining, and more recently the extended drought conditions across south east Australia.

- *Myriophyllum porcatum* - **annual aquatic herb of ephemeral wetlands**
- *Lepidium monoplocoides* - **annual herb of riparian woodland**
- *Senecio behrianus* - **extensively rhizomatous perennial of winter-wet soil**
- *Callitriche cyclocarpa* - **aquatic or amphibious herb of wetlands**

The creation of new and additional populations within the Gunbower Forest will provide opportunity for each species to re-colonise higher quality habitat than where they are currently found. Current management is constrained by the poor quality of habitat at some known sites.

## PROJECT FUNDING

Funding for this project has been provided from Federal and State governments under the Caring for our Country (CfoC) and Natural Resource Investment Program (NRIP) - 91 Healthy Waterway programs.

## OUR VALUED PARTNERS

This project has been undertaken in partnership with The Department of Primary Industries (DPI), the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Parks Victoria, Goulburn-Murray Water (G-MW), Gannawarra Shire Council and the Campaspe Shire Council.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Gunbower Forest Ramsar site contains a cultural landscape that reflects both Aboriginal and European activities. The Gunbower Forest Ramsar contains many sites of cultural significance to the Aboriginal people. A survey of approximately 10 per cent of the total Forest area by Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) in conjunction with the Echuca Aboriginal Co-operative identified 142 archaeological sites of significance. Sites identified include scarred trees, mounds and shell middens. The area has not been adequately surveyed, so it is likely that more archaeological sites will be discovered.

## IN OUR COMMUNITY

### MEET: Leeza Axton

*Leeza Axton is a ranger who has lived and worked in the Kerang / Cohuna area since 2002 following her appointment to the position in late 2001. Originally from Melbourne, Leeza says that one of the best things about a position in a regional area are the opportunities and variety offered to staff.*



Leeza Axton  
Photo: Courtesy Parks Victoria

*"I'm looking forward to being involved in the management of a national park from its inception. We're already starting to look into making plans for new and improved visitor opportunities in the national park."*

*Along with management of the new Gunbower National park, Leeza is responsible for Leaghur State Park, the Koorangie Marshes and up to 200 other reserves around Cohuna and Kerang.*

For further information visit: [www.nccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au)



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