

**GUNAIKURNAI
AND VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT
JOINT MANAGEMENT PLAN**



**BUCHAN CAVES RESERVE
— KRAUATUNGALUNG COUNTRY**



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this document may contain images, names, quotes and other references to deceased people.

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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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Buchan Caves Reserve — Krauatungalung Country

Buchan Caves were traditionally an important meeting place for our people. The area connects to the high country and was a place of refuge during the seasonal migrations to and from the mountains, where our mob would go to chase the Bogong Moth and other food sources... Although Gunaikurnai people did not traditionally venture very deep into the limestone caves, there is evidence going back more than 18 000 years of the important role they played in the lives of our old people, including burials in the caves and ceremonial rings all through the Buchan area.

— *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, Buchan Caves Reserve 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 Buchan Caves Reserve, the land continues to be managed as a reserve for public purposes and the protection of natural features, under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Vic.).

This Management Plan for Buchan Caves Reserve 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 Crown Land (Reserves) Act and the regulations made under that Act. (Additional legislation and policies which have been considered in the preparation of the Management Plan are listed in Appendix 4 of the Strategic Plan.) It also recognises and is consistent with the Buchan Caves Reserve's listing on the Victorian Heritage Register under the provisions of the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic.) for its aesthetic, scientific and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Because Buchan Caves Reserve is within the area covered by the 2010 Determination and the RSA, the rights of the Gunaikurnai to undertake traditional activities apply to the reserve. Existing rights and interests in the reserve that are held by others are not affected by the RSA, 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 10 Aboriginal Title areas, including Buchan Caves Reserve. 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 plan, GLaWAC and the Victorian Government seek to:

- ensure that Buchan Caves Reserve is well managed, its values and assets are protected and conserved, and the statutory requirements for reserve 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 reserve.

1.2 HOW TO READ THIS PLAN

This plan provides a description of joint management strategies and actions that are specific to Buchan Caves Reserve. The following sections:

- describe values, uses and threats relating to the land, water and heritage of the reserve, and goals and strategies to protect and conserve those values
- describe Traditional Owner, visitor and community connections to the reserve 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 reserve
- 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 Buchan Caves Reserve in this plan, the strategic initiatives for joint management described in the Strategic Plan chapter of the JMP may include actions that relate to Buchan Caves Reserve.

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 RESERVE

Buchan Caves Reserve covers 295 hectares on the Buchan River at the township of Buchan (population approximately 150), 57 kilometres north of Lakes Entrance. Most of the reserve is covered by forest and woodland. Prior to the grant of Aboriginal Title the reserve was set aside for public purposes and the protection of natural features.

Some of the best cave formations in Victoria are found in the Buchan Caves (See Section 4.2). The caves are part of the Buchan–Murrindal cave system, a large outcrop of cave and karst-forming limestones extending beyond the reserve boundary. This is one of the most extensive cave systems in Victoria, containing between four and five kilometres of stream passage cut at several levels and in some places widened into caverns by block collapse.

There is evidence of Gunaikurnai burials dating from the Pleistocene era in some cave entries in the area around Buchan, outside the reserve.

The reserve is also significant for its modern history and the development of cave tourism. It is one of East Gippsland's major tourism attractions, attracting a large number of visitors from interstate and overseas.

2 THE BUCHAN CAVES RESERVE UNDER JOINT MANAGEMENT

The Buchan Caves Reserve is on the Country of the Krauatungalung clan. The Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan (GLaWAC 2015) sets out the following management priorities for the reserve:

- establishing cultural business and training enterprises around tourism and education
- ensuring that all non-Gunaikurnai people working in the Buchan Caves area undertake cultural awareness training
- taking a more active role in the administration of visitation and receiving commensurate income from camping and other fees.

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

Parks Victoria operates well-developed tour and accommodation booking systems and cave guiding services, and also sells food and merchandise.

The main changes that will take place as part of joint management of the reserve will be:

- the establishment of Buchan Caves as a primary training and development location for Gunaikurnai people to acquire and build skills in tourism, hospitality, and commercial business operations
- the development of new programs and activities for visitors that are built on Gunaikurnai cultural heritage themes, as part of ongoing improvements to the visitor services and experiences in the reserve.

The partner agencies will explore how the revenue from these operations can be applied within the overall resourcing of joint management.

3 ZONING

A simple zoning scheme has been developed to provide a geographic framework to manage the reserve. The zones will:

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

The location of the zones is shown on Map 1, and their purposes are described in Table 1. The developed areas of the reserve along Caves Road and the Northern Arm Track are zoned as Recreation Development. This includes the Parks Victoria office, visitor centre, cabins, camping area and Wilderness Camp tents. The areas outside this zone, in the headwaters of Spring Creek, are zoned as Conservation and Recreation.

Table 1: Management zones and overlays, Buchan Caves Reserve.

Zone	Description and purpose
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.
Recreation Development Zone	Small areas with a high level of visitor facility development, catering for a high number of visitors.
Cultural Values Overlay (future)	Areas where the extent, nature or significance of Aboriginal cultural heritage and/or historic heritage is high. Specific protections and restrictions on use and activities may be applied.

Cultural heritage and cultural values in the reserve need to be systematically surveyed and mapped. The zoning scheme therefore includes provision for a future Cultural Values Overlay to be applied if cultural values locations requiring conservation are not within the Conservation and Recreation Zone.

This overlay would be activated by means of a future amendment to the Management Plan. Implementation of this overlay may require amendment of the description or provisions of other zones and overlays, and integration with *Aboriginal Heritage Act* and *Heritage Act* provisions to ensure compatibility.

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 Buchan Caves Reserve is in place. A future agreement may require variation to the zoning scheme and provisions of this management plan.

4 CARING FOR COUNTRY

4.1 GUNAIKURNAI CULTURAL HERITAGE

Buchan Munji, the Buchan Caves area, was used by the Gunaikurnai as a place to camp and meet during seasonal migrations to and from the high country. Although the Gunaikurnai people did not venture far beyond the cave entrances (caves were places thought to be inhabited by wicked creatures such as the Nargun and the Nyols) the caves are of high spiritual significance, which has been maintained through traditional stories.

Archaeological evidence of Gunaikurnai use of the area remains in and around cave entrances, along the Spring Creek valley and in artefact scatters throughout the reserve.

Four quarry sites and three artefact scatter sites have been recorded. Evidence in the broader Buchan region indicates the important role of caves to Gunaikurnai going back thousands of years, including burials inside caves and ceremonial rings.

Gunaikurnai oral history holds that Frank Moon's party, which made the first documented exploration of the caves (see Section 4.3), was guided by local Gunaikurnai people, who were not acknowledged.¹

Today the caves remain important to Gunaikurnai as a meeting place with spiritual significance that holds important stories to be shared with young people.

There are other culturally important cave sites in the vicinity that are not within the reserve. Cloggs Cave, located on private land about four kilometres south-east of Buchan Caves Reserve, was used as a shelter, and contains highly important Gunaikurnai archaeological deposits.

The roof of the rock shelter outside this cave is heavily blackened, evidently from campfires. Some of the artwork is extremely rare, particularly the drawings done in animal fat (GLaWAC 2015).

The cave has an undisturbed cultural sequence recently dated to around 30 000 years, with bone and stone tools being uncovered in excavations. It is closed to the public.

4.2 LAND AND WATER VALUES

The Fairy–Royal–Federal–Dukes cave system within the reserve is approximately one kilometre long and contains spectacular stalactite and stalagmite formations, pillars, shawls, rim pools, cave sediments and a permanent flowing stream (Rosengren and McRae-Williams 1981). It is part of a large outcrop of cave and karst-forming limestones known as the Buchan–Murrindal cave system, which extends beyond the reserve. This is one of the most extensive cave systems in Victoria, containing between four and five kilometres of stream passage, cut at several levels and widened in places into caverns by block collapse.

The limestone rock at Buchan was laid down about 380 million years ago under shallow seas that covered much of East Gippsland. Vertical joint lines across the layers of limestone allowed water to seep through the rock, dissolving the limestone to form the caves. Water dripping from the ceiling of the caves and then evaporating, deposited calcite, forming stalactites and stalagmites. There are numerous fossils in the limestone.

Bats inhabit some caves in the reserve. They are known to use caves in the area for overwintering and roosting, but recent survey and monitoring data is limited.

Cave invertebrates were surveyed in the 1980s (Yen and Milledge 1990), but there is no current data on their presence and condition.

¹ Gunaikurnai Elder Auntie Rita Watkins (deceased)

The reserve includes four Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), the standard categorisation of native vegetation used in Victoria. Around 40% of the reserve is covered by Shrubby Dry Forest, which is relatively common in the East Gippsland uplands bioregion.

Grassy Woodland and Valley Grassy Forest, both of which are depleted in the East Gippsland bioregion, cover approximately half of the Reserve area, and there is a small pocket of endangered Warm Temperate Rainforest on Spring Creek.

The reserve contains a variety of native and introduced vegetation, including several species listed as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (Vic.) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth) such as Limestone Blue Wattle and Leafy Greenhood Orchid.

Buchan Caves Reserve supports significant wildlife, and over 100 species of birds have been recorded there. King Parrots, White-winged Choughs and currawongs are commonly seen in the reserve, along with Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Brush-tailed Possums. Platypuses inhabit the reserve's waterways, particularly at Moon Cave, which is an important breeding location and has management guidelines in place to control disturbance. They are also present in Dukes Cave.

There are records of several species rare or threatened fauna species in the reserve. They include two endangered species (Spot-tailed Quoll and Growling Grass Frog) and three vulnerable species (Australian Grayling, Powerful Owl and Speckled Warbler) and the near-threatened Hooded Robin. However, it is not certain whether these species are still present in the reserve.

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

Table 2: Significant species in Buchan Caves Reserve.

Scientific name	Common name	Conservation status	FFG Action Statement
<i>Prototroctes maraena</i>	Australian Grayling	vulnerable	57
<i>Ninox strenua</i>	Powerful Owl	vulnerable	92
<i>Melanodryas cucullata cucullata</i>	Hooded Robin	near threatened	—
<i>Chthonicola sagittatus</i>	Speckled Warbler	vulnerable	—
<i>Dasyurus maculatus maculatus</i>	Spot-tailed Quoll	endangered	15
<i>Litoria raniformis</i>	Growling Grass Frog	endangered	—
<i>Acacia caerulescens</i>	Limestone Blue Wattle	vulnerable	222

Landscape and catchment context

The reserve lies within the Far East Catchments landscape program of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (EGCMA). The program aims to maintain the condition of significant and relatively undisturbed landscape of these catchments with their large and continuous extent of natural ecosystems, from the mountains to the coast.

The Regional Catchment Strategy (EGCMA 2013) identifies the broad landscape objectives for public land as:

- maintenance and targeted improvement of the condition, security, diversity and integrity of natural ecosystems and the status of threatened species and communities
- maintenance of soil condition and stability on public land.

4.3 HISTORIC HERITAGE

Buchan Caves Reserve is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register under the provisions of the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic.) for the aesthetic, scientific and historical significance, notably the spectacular caves and geological formations that comprise the underground features of the reserve.

The caves were known to the Gunaikurnai for at least 30 000 years. The earliest known post-settlement reference to the caves was in 1840, and the earliest known tourist reference is in a Gippsland Lakes guide from 1886, but the caves were probably a visitor curiosity before then.

The first government reservation was a camping reserve of 19 acres in 1887 along the line of the Buchan–Gelantipy Road, while the caves continued to be used unofficially for picnics and functions.

In 1889 a government party reported on and photographed Duke's Cave, Wilson Cave, Spring Creek Cave, Dickson's Cave, O'Rourke Cave, and Moon Cave. The first regulations for the protection of the caves were promulgated and between 1903 and 1910, when the Shire of Tambo was appointed as Committee of Management.

In 1906 Frank Moon explored Moon's Cave, and Moon was subsequently appointed to officially search for new caves. This led to exploration of Kitson's Cave in 1906 and Fairy Cave in 1907.

By the time of the First World War the area was being promoted by the Victorian Railways and other organisations, and the caves had become a very popular tourist attraction. Infrastructure works in the caves before this time included some lighting and barriers. After the war an electric lighting plant was installed, and a tunnel was dug to link Fairy Cave with Royal Cave.

The Statement of Significance in the Victorian Heritage Register notes a range of elements that contribute to the importance of the reserve:

- The Buchan Caves Reserve, part of the outstanding Buchan–Murrindal cave system, set aside in 1901 for public purposes and the protection of natural features and landscaped in the 1930s, is of State cultural significance:
 - as an example of an early tourist attraction in Victoria based on natural themes; the ongoing use of the caves for tourist purposes is an important aspect of this significance, as is the tradition of guiding and transmission of oral history; early attributes of the reserve include the caves and their entries, caretaker's residence and the landscaping of the 1930s
 - aesthetically and scientifically, for the spectacular caves and geological formations which comprise the underground features of the reserve; these natural features have been exploited by human intervention, especially the use of light and the use of barriers to protect formations; this last attribute is part of the careful work of Frederick Wilson from 1907 onwards and is now rare on a national and even international basis
 - as a mature example of the landscape work of Hugh Linaker, a pioneering designer of public landscapes; the 1930s landscaping at Buchan has been carefully tended and sympathetically augmented in subsequent years and is exemplified by the mature trees in the reserve, the high proportion of deciduous exotic species, the road layout and small rustic rotunda
 - for the manner in which the reserve demonstrates the influence of contemporary 1930s National Parks landscape ideals; here represented by the incorporation of recreational facilities such as the swimming pool and tennis courts and the use of a self-consciously rugged design idiom (such as the bold log structures at the entry gateway, the rugged stone construction of the kitchen and the log construction of the kiosk)
 - for its high aesthetic values, including the exploitation of seasonal contrast by the use of deciduous trees, the contrast between exotic trees with the surrounding landscape, the manner in which the roadway winds up the Spring Creek valley, and for views within and out of the reserve
 - for the manner in which in the Caves Reserve and Buchan township demonstrate the development of tourism within Gippsland, and the demands of that tourism on the natural environment.

4.4 THREATS TO COUNTRY AND HERITAGE

Visitor impacts

Visitor impacts on the cave system can include changes to the physical structure of the cave, water movement, cave hydrology, air movement and microclimate, as well as the effects of artificial light, compaction of floors, changes to cave biota and surface impacts such as erosion and vegetation change. These effects can be independent of one another, cumulative, or synergistic. They can also be related to the number of visitors to the cave at any one time, and the frequency of visits.

A number of tools are available to ensure tourist visits and other uses of the caves are sustainable. These include the *Buchan Caves Guiding Resource Manual*, resources on the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association's website (<http://www.ackma.org>), and *Principles for Guided Cave Interpretation* (Davidson and Black 2007).

Victorian and international management guidelines provide general guidance on management and conservation of karst and caves (Davey and White 1986; IUCN 1997). More detailed management guidance for the substantial cave complex at Buchan Caves is needed in the form of a Cave and Karst Plan, incorporating input by speleological bodies and Parks Victoria's Cave and Karst Advisory Group. This plan should include:

- an inventory of all known caves and other karst features
- information on all natural and cultural values associated with a feature or group of features, including significance levels, condition, threats and visitor use of caves in the reserve
- management regimes for each karst area and cave based upon the establishment of acceptable limits of disturbance
- tailored monitoring regimes to measure disturbance within karst catchments and at individual karst features including caves
- general and feature-specific management responses to disturbance
- environmental management practices that will ensure the ongoing protection of the reserve and its significant karst formations
- records of management works and operations carried out in each karst area and at individual karst features
- cave search and rescue protocols
- a register of karst and karst management specialists
- records of all past and ongoing karst research undertaken in the reserve
- research priorities for individual karst areas and features.

Invasive plants and animals

Weeds have the potential to affect the significant vegetation communities and some of the reserve's important habitats. The challenge is to maintain the relatively intact nature of the vegetation within the reserve and protect it from new introductions.

Browsing and soil disturbance from introduced herbivores such as deer and rabbits has a significant impact on the reserve's plants and animals.

Climate change

Climate change is a potential intensifier of existing and new threats. These include changes to hydrology, increased frequency and severity of extreme events, changes in vegetation arising from rainfall and evaporation changes.

Changes to the hydrology would threaten the karst and those caves and cave biota that have a continuing relationship with water levels or water quality. Changes to the karst system may also have hydrological affects.

Changes such as vegetation alteration are likely to occur gradually, while more extreme events such as storms and floods could occur at any time. Storms increase the risk of inundation and damage to physical assets and public safety. The Reserve has a relatively small catchment, but the

main visitor areas and facilities are in the bottom of the valleys. Flash flooding is an unlikely but high-consequence threat that needs to be considered in access and facility design and emergency preparedness.

Fire management

Parts of the reserve were burnt by a bushfire in 1983 and a small fire in 2014. Planned burning was undertaken in the western part of the reserve in 1992, and in most of the northern section in 2016.

The *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land* (DEPI 2012) provides the framework for public land fire management in Victoria. 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 the reserve.

The detailed 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 that process so that burning and other fuel treatments are prioritised or modified where necessary. In particular, the planned burning strategy for the Reserve needs to be focused on identifying areas that require burning and working with DELWP to prioritise burning in these locations.

4.5 CONSERVATION STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THREATS

The strategies detailed in Table 3 have been developed to protect, conserve and (where relevant) restore the natural and cultural values of the reserve.

Table 3 Land, water and heritage conservation strategies.

Threats	Priorities	Strategy
Cave and karst formations		
Changes in local hydrology	Cave protection and preservation	Develop a Cave and Karst Plan for the reserve (with input from speleological bodies and the PV Cave and Karst Advisory Group) that identifies known caves and karst, and specifies management and monitoring protocols.
Visitor and development impacts: wear, changes on temperature and humidity, vandalism	Cave monitoring program for show cave system and other caves within the Buchan Cave Reserve. Security, access and visitor management procedures.	Implement monitoring system using photo plots within the cave system. Finalise and publish cave access guidelines. Train staff in cave monitoring and impact management. Ensure sustainable use through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education and Interpretation • ensuring guiding standards and delivery are maintained to a high level. Undertake periodic geotechnical assessment of rock stability.
Bats and cave Invertebrates		
Knowledge of condition Human disturbance	Assess temperature and humidity conditions, and bat acclimatisation and roosting Manage caves access	Develop a bat monitoring program for Buchan Caves Reserve Review existing research on the caves’ invertebrate fauna, and consider additional research and monitoring.

Threats	Priorities	Strategy
Other rare or threatened species (presence to be confirmed)		
Various	To be resolved when survey is completed	Implement relevant parts of FFG Action Statements and National Recovery Plans.
Aesthetic, scientific and historical significance of the Caves		
Royal, Fairy and Federal Caves	Cave Restoration Program Schedule of cave cleaning regimes for show cave system	See strategy for Cave and Karst Plan above. Continue to implement the Reserve Conservation Plan.
Gunaikurnai cultural heritage		
Visitor impacts	Burials and ceremonial rings in the vicinity of Fairy Cave and Moon Caves, and other cultural heritage in the reserve	Implement cultural mapping and use the data to inform management actions.
Linaker plantings		
Plant diseases and senescence Dispersal of introduced plants through the reserve	Central reserve area	Ensure the Linaker planting is protected, conserved, and where necessary replaced with reference to the original design.
Historic buildings		
Deterioration	All buildings and structures	Revise the existing 2002 Buchan Caves Reserve Heritage Action Statement.
Reserve vegetation and habitat		
Invasive plants and animals	Eastern Grey Kangaroo abundance	Determine the required fire regime for reserve values. Protect Warm Temperate Rainforest EVC from fire and invasive plants and animals.
Fire outside tolerable fire intervals	Fire regimes	

5 PEOPLE IN THE RESERVE

5.1 TRADITIONAL OWNERS CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY

Cultural values and practices in the present, as well as the past, are fundamental to Gunaikurnai people. The reserve 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 people 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 reserve. As far as possible the Gunaikurnai should be the tellers of their own cultural stories.

GLaWAC Joint Management Rangers undertake conservation and maintenance works in the reserve cooperatively with Parks Victoria, including Greenhood Orchid monitoring and weed control. There is great scope to build capacity and expertise through this program.

Unlike the other nine jointly managed areas, the management of the Buchan Caves Reserve includes significant commercial and hospitality functions, currently delivered by Parks Victoria. These functions are integral to the operation of Buchan Caves Reserve as a major tourism attraction that draws interstate and international visitors. They include tour and accommodation booking processes, cave guiding services, and food and merchandise sales.

Buchan Caves Reserve provides an opportunity to pursue the goals and strategic initiatives set down in the Strategic Plan for capacity-building, economic benefits and employment by functioning as a training and development location for Gunaikurnai people to build skills in tourism, hospitality and commercial business operations.

In addition to taking a greater role in the management and operation of the reserve, Gunaikurnai people will take opportunities to gather in the reserve, pass on lore and cultural knowledge between generations, and undertake traditional practices. A potential Keeping Place would provide a focus for this activity.

5.2 VISITORS TO THE RESERVE

The Buchan Caves system is one of the most extensive and best-decorated cave systems in Australia. They are considered second only to the Jenolan Caves in New South Wales in terms of contemporary popularity, impact on local and regional development, surviving attributes and historical significance. Historically, the limestone show caves in the reserve (Royal and Fairy) have been a major attraction for the Buchan and wider East Gippsland region.

Buchan is located at the gateway to the upper Snowy River National Park and Alpine National Park. The area features spectacular high-country scenery, river gorges, tall forests, rainforest and dry rainshadow woodlands. Popular activities include remote camping, wild caving, bushwalking, rafting and scenic drives. Buchan is also within easy access of the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park, The Lakes National Park, Cape Conran Coastal Park and the tourism destinations of Lakes Entrance, Metung, Paynesville, Marlo and Orbost.

The reserve is an important attraction for visitors to the region and contributes significantly to the local economy. Around 120 000 people visit the reserve annually, and 65 000 take a cave tour. The reserve is used intensively during peak holiday periods and long weekends, and there is little capacity for additional visitor numbers at these times. In summer the caves receive heavy day visitation when wet or cold weather leads holiday-makers around the Gippsland Lakes to seek alternative experiences.

The caves have fewer visitors in the shoulder periods in autumn and spring, despite good conditions for camping and outdoor activities. Commercial cave tours are the most popular

activities in the reserve. Royal Cave and Fairy Cave are the most popular caves, with commercial tours running daily. In recent years Federal Cave has also been developed to allow for guided commercial visits. Current visitor information and education focuses on the spectacular cave formations, but other features, including the reserve's cultural heritage and fossil remains of pre-historic megafauna, could be included in future.

The locations of visitor sites and facilities in the reserve are shown in Map 3. Camping is available in the campground at 40 powered and 19 unpowered sites. Twenty-six of these sites are suitable for caravans. Built accommodation on site includes two cabins and Wilderness Camp (also called Caves Camp), which is a series of elevated weather and insect-proof tents with large sun decks.

Tents sleep up to six people, and an additional tent is fitted out as a kitchen for the camp. The tents have access to shared public amenities and are available for individual hire when not in use as a camp.

Built accommodation consists of Caves House One, which sleeps up to eight people in higher standard accommodation, and Caves House Two, which provides accommodation for up to six in a budget setting.

The Wilderness Camp tents are ageing and have high maintenance costs during winter and early spring in order to prevent mould and deterioration. They need to be replaced by a more effective facility. The cabins receive very high year-round use.

The reserve has a waste water treatment plant to treat wastewater from day and overnight visitors. The management of the plant is licensed by the Environment Protection Authority.

Parks Victoria provides a successful commercial outlet providing visitor merchandise and a small range of packaged food and drinks from the visitor centre. The opportunity to establish a café in the reserve has not been pursued, as part of a deliberate strategy to work in synergy with the local community and the nearby food and beverage outlets in the town.

There is a system of walking tracks through the reserve, ranging in distance from half a kilometre to four kilometres in length. This is reasonably well used but has potential to be better promoted and interpreted. There is also potential to broaden the range of visitor experiences such as night time activities for overnight visitors and canoe trips on the Buchan River.

The entrances to several 'adventure caves' are within the reserve and provide opportunities for recreational cavers. Most of these entrances are gated and locked, and access requires a permit from Parks Victoria. Several speleological groups regularly visit Buchan and explore wild caves, both in the reserve and off reserve within the local area.

5.3 VISITOR STRATEGIES

The goals and strategies for managing visitor experiences and services in the reserve are described in Table 4.

Table 4 Visitor experience goals and strategies.

Royal, Fairy and Federal Caves

Goals

Provide show-cave experiences for a wide range of visitors and abilities, based on high-quality interpretation and education of the natural and cultural values of the caves and broader reserve, and wider caves and karst.

Strategies

Extend training of staff in interpretation, customer service and protection of cave values.

Increase the interpretation of Aboriginal cultural values in the reserve, using Gunaikurnai guides where possible.

Plan and progressively implement maintenance and renewal programs for cave infrastructure including completing the implementation of the existing lighting and access plan.

Maintain cave security and access controls.

Main Reserve

(Includes camping areas, cabins, houses, visitor centre and nearby walks.)

Goals

Provide information, arrival and orientation services for day and overnight visitors.

Provide highly accessible, serviced camping and roofed accommodation for all abilities in a cultural landscape.

Increase the variety of visitor experiences based on cultural activities and education.

Strategies

Improve visitor facilities and experiences within the Recreation Development Zone.

Progressively replace Wilderness Camp tents with cabins or a more appropriate facility to attract high occupancy all year round.

Investigate the development of a cultural hub or keeping place in the area, and increase Gunaikurnai participation in the delivery of commercial operations and interpretation and guiding services.

Maintain a high-quality convenience food service.

Progressively implement maintenance and renewal programs for infrastructure, including road resealing.

Spring Creek – Northern Arm Walking Circuit

(Includes Tea Tree Walk, Kanooka Track, Granite Pools Track, Reserve Track, Northern Arm Track and Moon Hill Walk.)

Goal

Provide short to half-day walks in the quieter area of the reserve for more active visitors.

Strategies

Maintain tracks and signage in good condition.

Increase the promotion of the walking circuit to visitors.

Provide more interpretation of the reserve landscape, plants and animals, bush tucker and cultural materials.

Recreational activities and uses will be managed in accordance with Table 5. This table does not limit the operation or exercising of Native Title or Traditional Owner rights held by the Gunaikurnai people.

Table 5 Recreational activities allowed in the management zones.

Activity	Conservation and Recreation Zone	Recreation Development Zone
Camping — designated areas	No	Yes
Camping — dispersed vehicle-based	No	No
Camping — dispersed other	No	No
Campfires — solid fuel	No	Yes (only in designated campfires where provided and subject to regulations including fire bans)
Campfires — liquid or gas fuel stove	No	Yes
Caving	Yes (subject to permit)	Yes (in designated caves and subject to controls)
Competitive events	Yes (with permit, if activity type is allowed)	Yes (with permit, if activity type is allowed)
Cycling	Yes (on open public roads and Management Vehicle Only roads and tracks; not allowed on walking tracks)	Yes (on open public roads and Management Vehicle Only roads and tracks; not allowed on walking tracks)
Dogs	No	No
Education activities	Yes	Yes
Firearms	No	No
Firewood collection	No	No
Fishing	Yes	Yes
Fossicking/prospecting	No	No
Geocaching	Yes (no excavation allowed)	Yes (no excavation allowed)
Guided Activities	Yes	Yes
Horseriding	No	No
Hunting	No	No
Orienteering and rogaining	Yes (subject to permit)	Yes (subject to permit)
Picnicking	Yes	Yes
Swimming	Yes	Yes
Walking and hiking	Yes	Yes
Vehicle use (two-wheel drive, four-wheel drive and trail bikes)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on Management Vehicle Only roads and tracks)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on Management Vehicle Only roads and tracks)

6 WORKING TOGETHER

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

The reserve is assigned to Parks Victoria to manage as part of Victoria's parks and conservation reserves system. A range of staff make up the Parks Victoria Buchan Caves operations team that is based in the reserve.

GLaWAC joint management rangers also undertake management functions in the reserve. Other regional and state-wide technical staff provide specialist services from other locations in eastern Victoria and Melbourne.

DELWP is responsible for fire management on non-urban public land and provides legislative and policy support to GKTOLMB and Parks Victoria. The GLaWAC Ranger Team has commenced participation in DELWP's fire management program.

The partners 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 several 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.

GKTOLMB provides a central forum for coordinating these partnerships, and provides the strategic management directions for the partnerships through this joint management plan.

6.2 COMMUNITY AND OTHER PARTNERS

Several significant caving stakeholder groups have a strong interest in the reserve. The Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association (ACKMA) is a professional association for those responsible for, or interested in, the planning and management of limestone landscapes and caves in the Australasian region. The Victorian Speleological Association is an organisation of caving enthusiasts who explore and map caves, promote cave conservation and ethical caving, and organise caving trips and activities. These groups provide nominees to Parks Victoria's Cave and Karst Advisory Group.

The Buchan township has a strong social and economic interest in the management of the caves and their successful function as a visitor attraction. Local community members and others constitute the Friends of Buchan Caves and provide volunteer support and knowledge in managing and conserving the reserve. The Buchan Business and Tourism Association represents the interests of the town's commercial sector and has a major stake in the effective operation of the reserve. The Buchan school, kindergarten and local community groups frequently use the reserve.

Other agency partners are important in the management of the reserve. The Country Fire Authority is responsible for fire management on private land surrounding the reserve, and Victoria Police and supporting emergency services are responsible for search and rescue.

Destination Gippsland undertakes marketing and promotion of regional tourism experiences and services. Aboriginal Victoria is the primary government agency responsible for policy and regulation of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority provides significant funding for conservation works on public land in the region and provides strategic coordination of catchment restoration investment. It also provides executive personnel and support to the GKTOLMB.

East Gippsland Shire Council manages road access to the reserve and traffic management, and regulates planning and development in the shire and general municipal services.

6.3 AUTHORISED USES

Many tour operators bring groups to the reserve, frequently as part of wider High Country and Snowy River tours. This includes a large number of coach tour operators. East Gippsland Water maintains an emergency water supply pipeline within the reserve under authorisation from Parks Victoria. A number of cleared areas of the reserve, adjacent to the Buchan township, are leased for grazing.

6.4 RESERVE BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the reserve are clear and effective, and no changes are required.

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 as a whole.

Caring for Country

Goal

The land, water and cultural values of the reserve are protected and cared for using the combined values, knowledge and skills of the Gunaikurnai, Parks Victoria, community and partners.

Land and water

No. Action

- BC1 Apply the zoning set out in Table 1.
- BC2 Protect and conserve the reserve's natural values by implementing the conservation strategies detailed in Table 3, including:
- developing a cave and karst plan for the detailed conservation of the caves
 - implementing standards and procedures for guiding and visitor impact management
 - monitoring and research on bat population and other cave fauna
 - implementing action statements and recovery plans for threatened species.
- BC3 Work with East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, neighbouring landholders and other stakeholders to control pest plants and animals, including foxes, rabbits, deer, cats and environmental weeds, in accordance with the East Gippsland Invasive plants and animals plan.
- BC4 Work with DELWP to protect the area, assets and communities from bushfire through fuel management strategies that do not adversely affect fire-sensitive values of the reserve.
- BC5 Identify areas where planned burning is required to achieve conservation objectives for reserve ecosystems and habitats, and seek to have burns programmed and implemented as part of DELWP's fire operations planning process.
- BC6 Include the area in the development of a comprehensive conservation action plan aligned to the Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan and broader East Gippsland park landscape conservation.
-

Cultural heritage

- BC7
- Protect and conserve the reserve's cultural heritage by implementing the conservation strategies detailed in Table 3, including:
 - conservation of the Linaker planting and historic buildings
 - mapping of Gunaikurnai cultural heritage in the reserve, including burial sites and ceremonial rings.
 - Implement the cultural values overlay as part of the management zoning scheme, based on the results of cultural mapping.
- BC8 Increase the visibility of Gunaikurnai cultural values in the area through *Welcome to Country* and other appropriate signage, based on the Krauatungalung clan at entry points and visitor nodes.
- Consider establishing a totemic plant or animal emblem for the reserve.
- BC9 Seek opportunities to implement traditional cultural burning practices as part of planned burning programs through liaison and partnership with DELWP fire managers.
-

-
- BC10 Incorporate cultural values information into induction processes for contractors and others working in the area.
 - BC11 Ensure Gunaikurnai are included in the assessment and approval of research applications in the area in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.
 - BC12 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 reserve.
-

People in the Reserve

Goals

- Gunaikurnai increase their connection with the reserve through management, operations and the opportunity to undertake cultural practices.
 - Visitor and community enjoyment, experience and understanding of the reserve are enhanced by joint management.
-

No.	Actions
BC13	<p>Manage visitor experiences in the Reserve in accordance with the goals and strategies set out in Table 4, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the variety of day and overnight visitor experiences based on cultural activities and education • increasing Gunaikurnai interpretation and guiding services • progressively renewing cabin accommodation and other facilities • investigating the development of a cultural hub/keeping place open to visitors • increasing promotion and potential guided walks in the western part of the reserve. • finalising the marketing plan for the reserve.
BC14	<p>Manage recreational activities in accordance with Table 5. Generally, maintain existing regulatory settings for activities and uses in the reserve, apart from changes set out in this plan (including approved variations) or changes arising from statutory requirements.</p>
BC15	<p>Develop a business plan to maintain and improve the Buchan Caves Reserve visitor and commercial operations as part of business planning for the joint management parks and reserves as a whole.</p>
BC16	<p>Establish a program for Gunaikurnai training and development in the reserve focusing on commercial operations, visitor services, cave guiding and potential cultural tourism products.</p>
BC17	<p>Increase opportunities for Gunaikurnai community members to visit the reserve and undertake cultural practices and gatherings, using a potential cultural hub/keeping place as a base.</p>
BC18	<p>Support a junior ranger program at Buchan Caves to complement the school's program and to provide a new experience for visitors to the reserve.</p>
BC19	<p>Maintain current public access arrangements on roads and tracks in the reserve.</p> <p>Implement changes to improve road safety, including re-alignment of the road away from the visitor centre entrance.</p>

-
- BC20 Control risks to visitor safety especially in relation to bushfire, flooding and cave rescue.
- BC21 Ensure ongoing management of the wastewater treatment plant and compliance with EPA licence requirements.
- BC22 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.
- BC23 Use education and enforcement under relevant regulations to ensure that cave security, access conditions and other visitor management requirements are complied with.

Seek to have more specific regulations established by Government over the reserve.

Working Together

Goals

- Joint management of the reserve operates as an effective partnership in which Gunaikurnai build their capacity to play a central role.
- Community stakeholders support and contribute to the protection and conservation of the reserve.

No.	Actions
BC24	Implement a structured program to place Gunaikurnai employees in visitor and commercial operations of the reserve to gain experience and development of tourism and business and skills. Complement these placements with parallel tourism and business training through recognised providers.
BC25	Establish Gunaikurnai workshop and storage space in the reserve.
BC26	Collaborate with Destination Gippsland and Buchan tourism and community groups to promote the reserve with a particular focus on improving visitation during non-peak periods.
BC27	Maintain and build strong links with the Buchan community to develop support for reserve management directions and collaboration on projects.
BC28	Provide opportunities for Parks Victoria employees in the area to interact with other parks and partners in the Settlement Area to develop their understanding and knowledge of joint management approaches.
BC29	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 area landscape.
BC30	Ensure that regulations for managing and protecting the reserve are in place and kept current, and that regulatory provisions are harmonised where practical across the Joint Management Area, recognising differences in land status.

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 6 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 6: Data used to track progress in implementing the Joint Management Plan.

Data type	Description	Data source and method
Activities	<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> <p>the activities of each of the strategic initiatives documented in Table 5 in Section 4 of the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>the actions described in this management plan for Buchan Caves Reserve.</p>	<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>
Outcomes	<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 7 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 7: Excerpt of outcomes framework from the Strategic Plan.

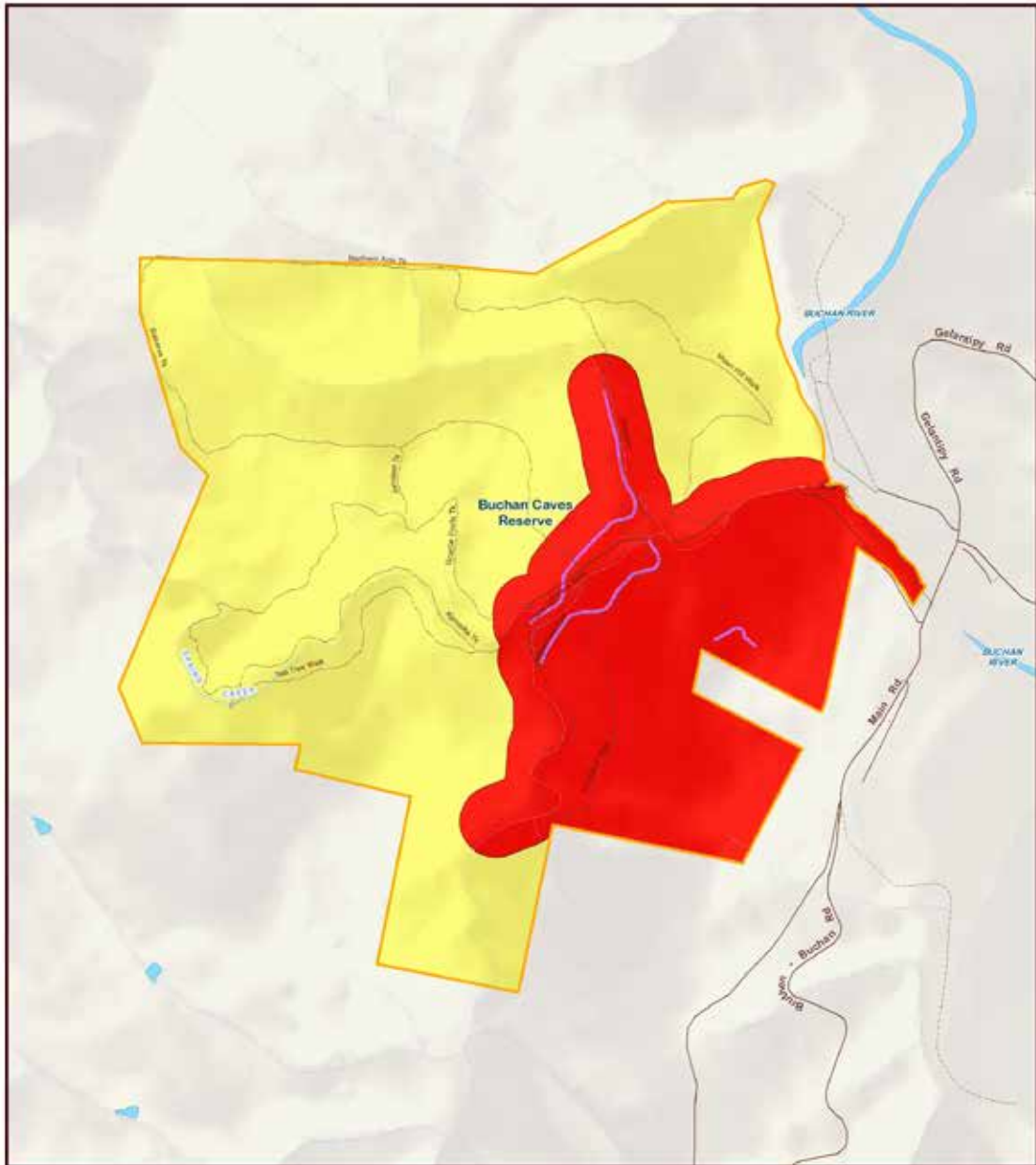
Theme	Example of outcome <i>The desired change</i>	Description <i>Further detail</i>	Indicators and frequency <i>How will the change be assessed?</i>
People	More visitors see, engage with, and learn from Gunaikurnai and non-Gunaikurnai staff on parks.	Gunaikurnai and non-Gunaikurnai rangers and other 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

- EGCMA (2013). *East Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy 2013–2019*. East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority: Bairnsdale.
- GLaWAC (2015). *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan*. Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation: Bairnsdale.
- Yen A.L. and Milledge G.A. (1990). *Invertebrates of the Buchan–Murrindal area cave systems*. Department of Conservation & Environment: East Melbourne.



**Buchan Caves Reserve
Joint Management Plan**

23/05/2018
Coordinate System: GDA 1994 VICGEO94
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



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

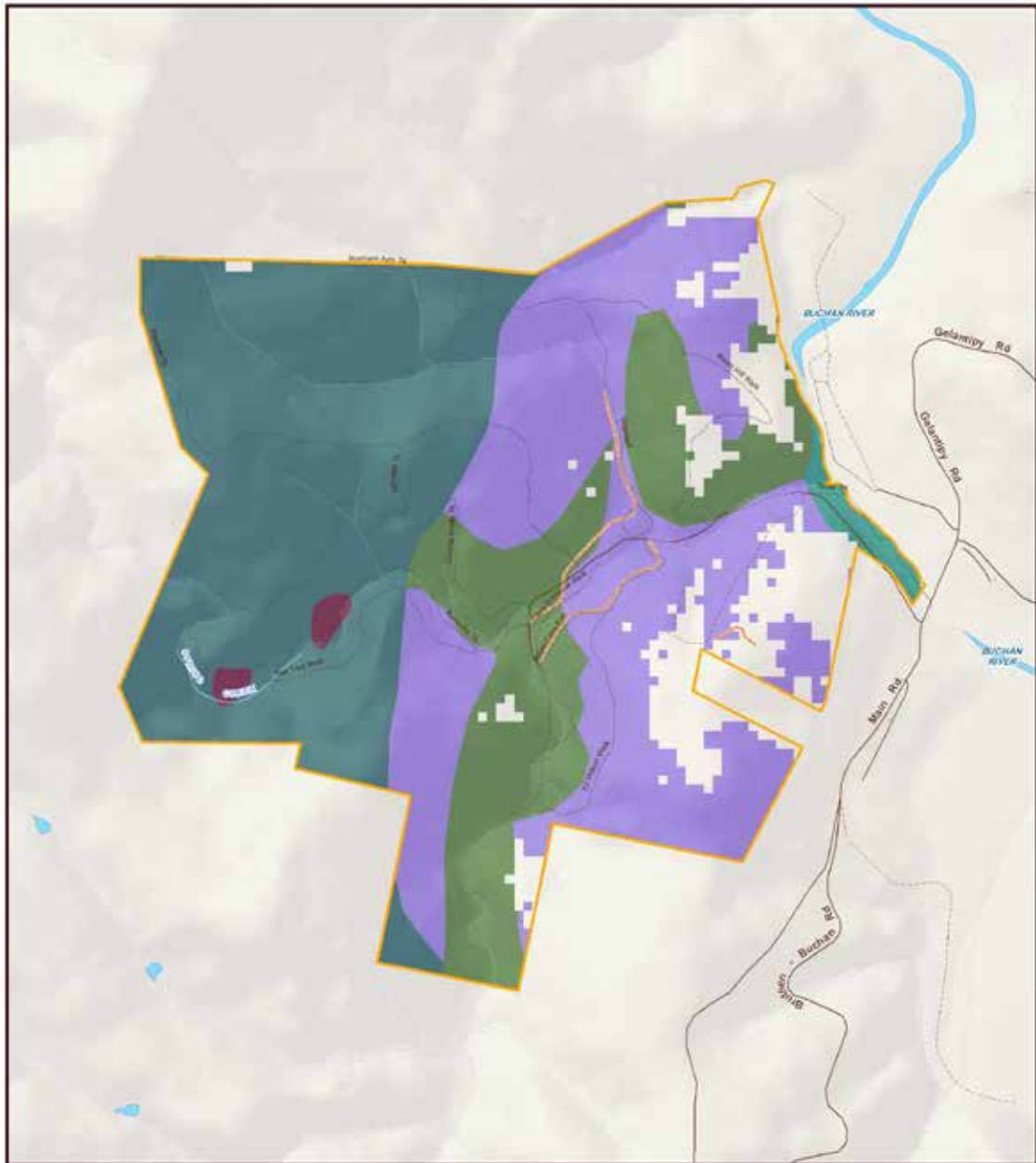
- Joint Management
- Park and Reserve

- Management Zones**
- Conservation & Recreation Zone
 - Recreation Development Zone

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Map 1: Management zones and overlays, Buchan Caves Reserve.



Buchan Caves Reserve
Joint Management Plan

23/05/2018
 Coordinate System: GDA 1994 VICCRD94
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



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

Joint Management

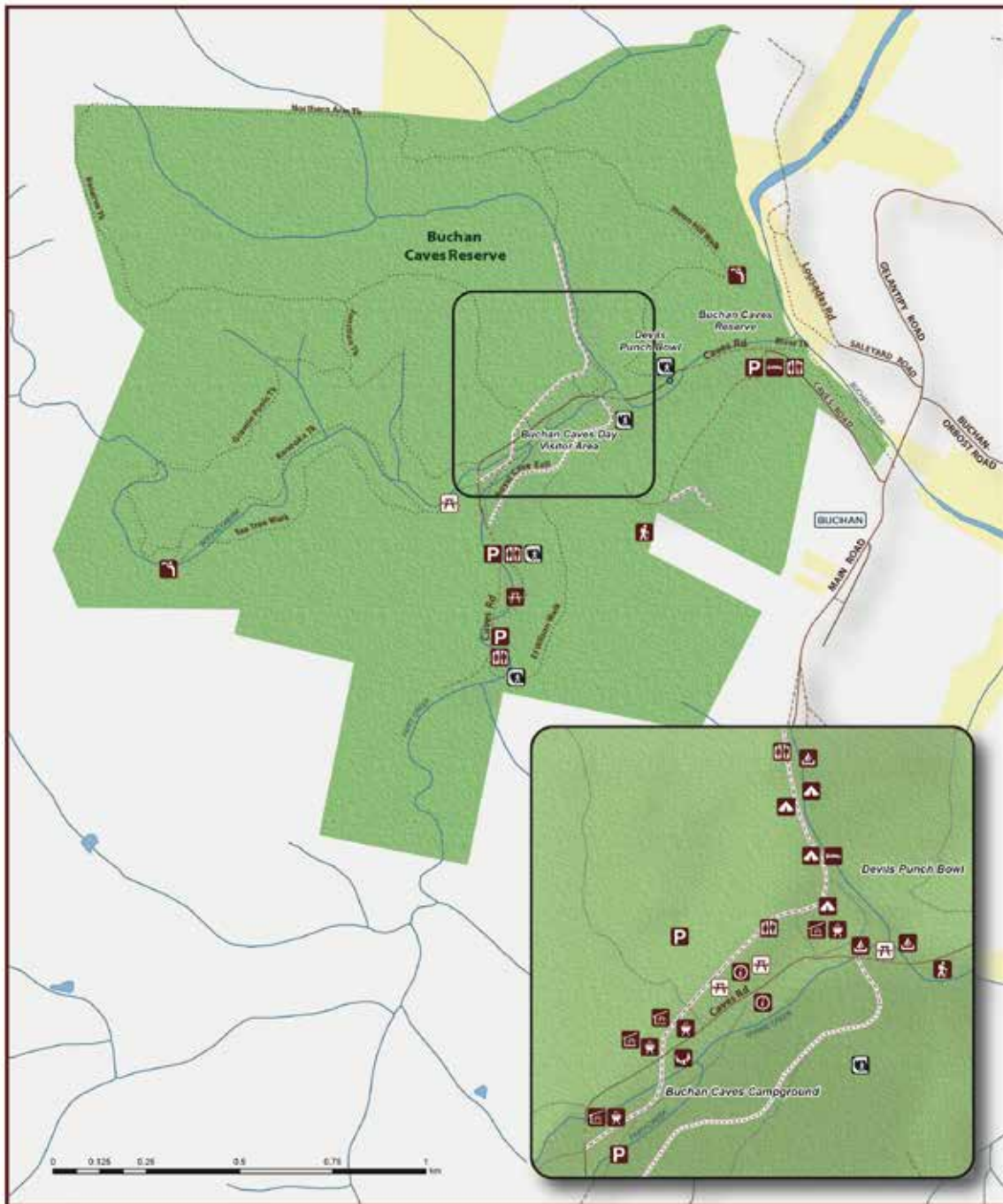
Ecological Vegetation Classes

- Grassy Woodland
- Riparian Forest
- Shrubby Dry Forest
- Valley Grassy Forest
- Warm Temperate Rainforest

Disclaimer: Parks Victoria Australia guarantees that this data is without fault and therefore suitable for use for navigation purposes. This service is not guaranteed to be 100% accurate. The State of Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.



Map 2: Ecological Vegetation Classes, Buchan Caves Reserve.



Buchan Caves Reserve

Joint Management Plan

22/5/2018
 Coordinate System: GDA 1994 VICGRID94
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



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

Visitor Sites & Facilities

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 🏠 Cave | 🍷 BBQ |
| P Gravel Carpark | 🔥 Fireplace |
| 👁️ Natural Lookout | 📄 Information Centre |
| 🍽️ Picnic Area | 🎡 Playground |
| 🏠 Accommodation | 🚶 Trail |
| 🪴 Tables | |
| 🚻 Toilet | |

Disclaimer: These outline does not guarantee that this map is without flaw or that any text and boundary directions are fully within any other text, nor relying on the information. Responsibility for any errors or omissions lies with the user. The State of Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.



Map 3: Visitor sites and facilities, Buchan Caves Reserve.