

Parks Victoria Shaping Our Future



*Healthy Parks
Healthy People®*





A time of great opportunity

Parks Victoria was established in 1996, for the protection and enhancement of Victoria's parks and waterways. Over time, we have developed many wonderful and enduring partnerships with organisations, communities, volunteers and individuals who have greatly assisted us to protect and enhance more than four million hectares of Victoria's parks, which have increased from 16 to 18 per cent of the state.

It is now time for Parks Victoria to build on these experiences and plot the course for our future. We will adapt and change, just as the parks that we care for adapt and change. With our partners and the community, we will identify the key trends and challenges and maximise our opportunities over the next decade and beyond. We will continue to care for our heritage and to plan and manage the day-to-day activities. We will work to ensure that the millions of park visitors enjoy their experiences and that communities benefit from Victoria's extraordinary network of parks. We will ensure that parks remain a stronghold for conservation that nurtures healthy ecosystems.

We make a commitment of personal leadership on delivering this strategy, and invite all staff, friends, partners and everyone who loves Victoria's parks to participate in the evolution of Parks Victoria. We are afforded a great opportunity at this point in Parks Victoria's young life. We can craft the future that we desire.

This strategy will enable us to actively work with the community and our partners to consider, plan and implement our road map for the future and that is why we have called this strategy *Parks Victoria: Shaping Our Future*.

Andrew Fairley
Chairman

Bill Jackson
Chief Executive



Victoria's parks

Parks play a pivotal role in a future that is sustainable and liveable.

Millions of years of geological and evolutionary processes created the unique and beautiful natural environment that we now call Victoria. For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have been custodians of the land and water; shaping habitats and species, and being sustained and enriched by them.

Since the late 1800s, the Victorian park system has been created progressively through the foresight and actions of governments and the dedicated contributions of many organisations, volunteers and individuals. Parks Victoria now manages more than four million hectares of outstanding parks on behalf of the Victorian Government for all people.

Victoria's network of parks includes areas of isolated natural beauty, sites of outstanding cultural heritage, green and blue urban oases and reminders of events and industries that shaped our history, including gold mining and forestry. These priceless assets include over 100 national parks, wilderness areas, state and metropolitan parks, thousands of Aboriginal and post-European settlement cultural and heritage sites, several local ports and major rivers, and around 70 per cent of Victoria's coastline. This system of terrestrial and marine national parks, metropolitan and regional parks, reserves, sanctuaries, bays, waterways and sites are referred to collectively in this document as parks.

Victoria's parks are home to more than 4,300 native plants and around 1,000 native animal species. Some plants and animals are unique to Victoria. The park system protects these native species and the habitats they live in. In addition to providing the foundation for conserving biodiversity, parks offer the opportunity to access and enjoy nature and to be active and healthy. Our task is to conserve parks while providing opportunities for all people to enjoy these special places that offer so much.

Parks are great places for a wide range of activities including walking, picnicking, bike riding, fishing, boating, canoeing, bird-watching, climbing, horse-riding, four-wheel driving and camping. All these and many other activities can be enjoyed while ensuring that the natural and cultural values of parks are sustained for the future.

New opportunities for enjoying and understanding Victoria's natural beauty and cultural heritage continue to be created through the establishment of new parks and through improved access provided by long-distance walking trails, facilities and equipment and other environmentally sensitive initiatives.

A growing body of research tells us that time spent in nature improves people's health, reduces stress and promotes physical wellbeing. Parks Victoria developed and named this approach: *Healthy Parks Healthy People*. It is encouraging to see the expansion of *Healthy Parks Healthy People* world-wide with more people getting more active and benefiting from a daily dose of nature in parks.

The *Healthy Parks Healthy People* philosophy underpins Parks Victoria's important and enduring relationships with:

- the Victorian community, including our many volunteer and friends' groups
- local communities through responses to, and rebuilding efforts following, bushfires and floods
- Aboriginal communities, working together for our shared future
- Traditional Owners in joint and co-management of parks
- tourism organisations to highlight nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities for all
- peak bodies and recreational groups
- public health organisations to realise the contribution parks make to our health and wellbeing.

Victoria's magnificent parks make our state a great place to live, work, invest and visit. Parks improve our quality of life. They cleanse the air we breathe and the water we drink. They reduce our stress levels. They encourage social connections, while people get out and get active and healthy in nature. Parks play a pivotal role in a future that is sustainable and liveable.

History is a wonderful teacher, but there are challenges and opportunities today that could not have been foreseen when Parks Victoria was established. Parks Victoria will continue to adapt based on sound evidence, identifying trends, listening to the community, and capturing the benefits of technology for the benefit of Victoria's parks.

Parks Victoria will build on its experience and plot the course for a successful future. *Shaping Our Future* sets out Parks Victoria's vision for the next decade and beyond.



Looking to the future

Victoria's parks provide the foundations to conserving our biodiversity and cultural heritage.

It is an exciting time as we look to the future.

Our vision is: Parks Victoria is a world-class parks service ensuring healthy parks for healthy people.

We pioneered the philosophy of *Healthy Parks Healthy People*, which is encapsulated in four key principles:

- the wellbeing of all societies depends on healthy ecosystems
- parks nurture healthy ecosystems
- contact with nature is essential for improving emotional, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing
- parks are fundamental to economic growth and to vibrant and healthy communities.

The *Healthy Parks Healthy People* approach applies the concept of ecologically sustainable development to parks. This concept is about conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained; and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased.

In delivering our vision, Parks Victoria will focus on the following themes:

Connecting people and parks – We will forge strong partnerships with people to conserve Victoria's special places and to make them accessible to all. Partnerships are essential for making best use of resources, fostering innovation, gathering knowledge and helping us to deliver better outcomes for parks and people. Parks Victoria openly embraces the opportunity to work collaboratively with the community, businesses and partners. We will use the power of partnerships to expand the contribution of parks to creating and enhancing cohesive, vibrant and prosperous Victorian communities.

Parks have always been valued places of enjoyment, learning and wellbeing for Victorians and visitors. With enthusiasm and passion, we will welcome more people into parks by offering enjoyable, diverse programs and destinations. We will work to improve park access for all while ensuring park values are sustained. We will strengthen local efforts to conserve natural and cultural values within parks through partnerships with organisations, groups and individuals.

Conserving Victoria's special places – We will ensure that our valued parks, and the natural assets and cultural heritage they hold, can be enjoyed now, and by future generations. The work of Parks Victoria to conserve our parks is fundamental to realising this vision. We will raise awareness of the unique natural assets and cultural heritage of our parks.

Victoria's parks provide the foundations to conserving our biodiversity and cultural heritage. The emergence of a wide range of threats to the natural and cultural values we seek to protect demands innovative and broad-scale solutions that engage a wide range of partners and capture the benefits of technology. To ensure this, we will provide an approach to managing parks that is world-class and applies leading edge technology, is evidence-based and enables Parks Victoria to focus on both state wide and regional priorities.

Providing benefits beyond park boundaries – Parks offer many benefits beyond their boundaries. These include greater human wellbeing, economic prosperity and liveability. Parks also deliver a range of valuable ecosystem services such as biodiversity, clean air and water. Parks create direct and indirect employment and economic opportunities in urban and regional areas through tourism and recreation activities.

Our staff are highly trained and make significant contributions to responses to fires, floods and other emergencies. We will be with you and your community when responding to bushfires and other natural disasters, and to threats from invasive plants and animals.

Parks contribute to local and regional economies and to community wellbeing. We will work with the community, businesses and partners, under government guidance, to plan and collectively achieve great outcomes for Victoria's parks and the landscapes they are located within.

Enhancing organisational excellence – We will constantly strive to be an innovative, world-class parks service. Over the next decade and beyond, we will continue to undertake new research, anticipate change and be responsive to change, and seek out advances in technology that allow us to plan, deliver and perform to a world-class standard.

We are an organisation with a clear sense of purpose, a keen desire to achieve excellence in all that we do and a strong service culture. We are recognised as an employer of choice in the parks industry. Our service culture requires us to combine our passion with consummate professionalism and accountability. We offer stimulating and safe workplaces for our people, supported by contemporary business practices that support and encourage high performance, diversity, learning, innovation, teamwork, excellence, accountability and adaptation.



Our path to action

Victoria's parks will be healthy and resilient.

Parks Victoria openly embraces the opportunity to work collaboratively with the community, businesses and partners.

Shaping Our Future sets out strategies for achieving the four broad themes identified previously. Each is supported by a set of goals and associated actions.

By successfully delivering our vision, we believe that Victoria's parks will be healthy and resilient, fundamental to the daily lives of Victorians, and treasured as places of enjoyment, learning and inspiration. Spending time in nature will enhance people's emotional, physical and spiritual health. Parks will continue to be vital to environmental, economic, social and cultural wellbeing. We can be judged on how well we perform against these criteria in the coming years.



1. Connecting people and parks

To connect people and parks, Parks Victoria will:

1. Encourage more people, to be more active, more often in parks through offering activities and experiences that improve people's physical, emotional and social wellbeing
2. Provide contemporary facilities and information to encourage park experiences and tourism
3. Unlock the energy of partnerships and park volunteers
4. Promote parks as inspirational settings for learning and education.

To achieve these goals, we will:

1. Healthy in parks

Create opportunities for more people, to get more active in parks, more often.

To do this, we will:

- promote the *Healthy Parks Healthy People* philosophy, working in partnership with the health sector to engage the community
- work with partners to provide facilities, community programs and information that makes getting active in urban parks easy, safe and fun
- ensure that future contracts for food provision in parks require a variety of healthy, locally produced, and reasonably priced food options
- promote opportunities for adventure experiences in parks via organised providers, such as clubs, groups and licensed tour operators.

2. Urban park gateway

Build community desire to enjoy and explore the diversity of Victorian parks, starting with urban parks and moving, over time, to national parks.

To do this, we will:

- connect visitors to urban parks and encourage their enjoyment and confidence through relevant park information, facilities and experiences, including utilising new technologies
- undertake well-considered park planning with the community to ensure the best use of Victoria's open spaces.

3. Out on the water

Encourage visitors to enjoy the bays and waterways, through boating and yachting, fishing, sight-seeing and marine park discovery.

To do this, we will:

- work with partners to promote safe, water-based activities.

4. Parks for people

Promote park volunteering by engaging people of different ages in natural and cultural conservation efforts.

To do this, we will:

- focus on supporting diverse volunteer programs that bring benefits to people and parks.

5. Thriving people and parks

Maximise the contribution that communities can make to parks.

To do this, we will:

- explore innovative ways to tap into community skills, knowledge and enthusiasm
- establish new community-based partnerships that benefit people and parks.

6. Inspiring experiences

Provide enjoyable nature-based experiences in parks that inspire people and complement park settings.

To do this, we will:

- encourage sensible and sensitive private sector investment in nature-based tourism facilities in parks
- focus on providing contemporary park facilities in locations that are the most important to visitor experiences.

7. Cultural connections

Bring heritage to life through encouraging community use and understanding of culturally significant places.

To do this, we will:

- support the appropriate use of heritage places for community celebrations and events
- share culturally significant stories including through the use of contemporary communication techniques.

8. Adapting to extremes

Mitigate the impact of extreme weather events on park visitor facilities.

To do this, we will:

- use the latest technology, methods and materials when designing, building, rebuilding, relocating or repairing visitor facilities.

9. Virtually there

Reach new audiences and encourage open conversation by upgrading Parks Victoria's digital resources.

To do this, we will:

- develop a new, accessible and engaging interactive web platform which supports social media, advanced applications and community-generated content
- work with partners to profile fascinating species and places using electronic media and through community participation.

10. Arts in parks

Expand the attraction of parks to new visitors through social media, the arts, including music, visual arts, dance, drama and writing.

To do this, we will:

- support initiatives by partners that involve the youth, newly arrived Victorians and under-represented groups to create and share new expressions of the park experience.

11. In my backyard

Welcome newly arrived Victorians to their local park through enjoyable, interactive experiences that encourage regular park visits.

To do this, we will:

- work with partners to deliver welcome days and establish a number of ongoing park activities to foster community and reduce barriers for migrant children and their families, such as community gardens, bush tucker days and urban camping experiences.

12. Kids connect

Create life-long connections between children, nature and parks by providing multiple ways for children to learn and be inspired by nature and to create living classrooms in our parks.

To do this, we will:

- partner with local schools and kindergartens in priority parks and offer fun and engaging activities
- progress partnerships that connect families to the outdoors and engage children, through the Ranger Roo and Junior Ranger Programs
- work in partnership with the education sector and others
- offer ranger-led activities in priority parks
- design priority park locations to encourage use by schools
- provide online information about natural and cultural values and resources relevant to schools.





2. Conserving Victoria's special places

To conserve Victoria's special places, Parks Victoria will:

1. Manage the natural and cultural values of parks to increase resilience in the face of climate change and other stressors
2. Adapt park management based on evidence from science and traditional knowledge
3. Work collaboratively with Traditional Owners and other land managers to conserve natural and cultural park values.

To achieve these goals, we will:

1. Conservation in a changing world

Make priority park habitats more resilient and improve biodiversity values.

To do this, we will:

- conserve and restore habitats and ecological processes, such as fire and flood regimes, in priority landscapes
- co-operate with other land and water managers and the community in creating continuous corridors in priority landscapes
- reduce threats to park values related to over-abundant and invasive plant and animal species.

2. Adapting to the future

Manage parks in response to climate change, particularly focusing on parks that face the greatest challenges.

To do this, we will:

- use a risk assessment approach to adapt park management, particularly to the impacts of extreme weather events and the changing threats posed by invasive species
- take a leadership role in communicating the impacts of climate change on the park system and assist the broader community to understand and adapt to climate change impacts
- undertake park planning in partnership with the Department of Environment and Primary Industries

- support government-led initiatives to address climate change risks to natural and cultural values in parks.

3. **Creatures great and small**

Increase the resilience of threatened species in priority habitats.

To do this, we will:

- lead the conservation and restoration of priority park habitats for threatened species
- support the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Zoos Victoria and private sector conservation organisations to manage key species and their habitats in the landscape.

4. **Underwater wonders**

Raise public awareness and understanding of Victoria's unique underwater species and ecosystems.

To do this, we will:

- work with partners to showcase the rich diversity in Victorian seascapes, including through the use of electronic media, new technologies and community engagement.

5. **Learning approach to action**

Improve the effectiveness of park management through an adaptive and evidence-based approach.

To do this, we will:

- be a world leader in park condition reporting through further developing our *State of the Parks Report*, which captures ecological, social and economic information
- communicate the condition, values and benefits of parks
- collaborate with other parks agencies nationally and internationally to improve park management services
- collaborate with specialist partners including Traditional Owners, government agencies and institutions, and private sector conservation organisations
- unlock the potential of citizen science through e-technology.

6. **Caring for Country**

Work with Traditional Owners to care for parks.

To do this, we will:

- collaborate with Traditional Owners in park management, adopting free, prior and informed consent¹, and applying traditional land management practices

¹ Free, prior and informed consent affirms that Indigenous peoples have the right to effective participation in the decisions, policies and initiatives that affect them.

- acknowledge that in joint management settings, Traditional Owners are the owners of the land on which we work and that parks are part of the cultural landscapes of Traditional Owners
- sensitively manage cultural places and respectfully support return of artefacts and skeletal remains to Country
- support Aboriginal communities to share stories of cultural connections to Country.

7. Respecting and restoring our heritage

Demonstrate how important built heritage sites and cultural landscapes can be conserved and used for public enjoyment now and for future generations.

To do this, we will:

- work in partnership with local communities and others to conserve important built heritage and landscapes of cultural significance
- promote re-use of the most important post-European heritage sites by encouraging private investment that respects cultural heritage values and encourages access by the public.





3. Providing benefits beyond park boundaries

To provide benefits beyond park boundaries, Parks Victoria will:

1. Play a major role in making communities safer
2. Work with Aboriginal communities to achieve shared objectives
3. Manage parks to contribute to productive, healthy and prosperous Victorian agricultural and rural communities.

To achieve these goals, we will:

1. Keeping Victorians safe

Respond to fire, floods and other emergencies by supporting the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, and other agencies.

To do this, we will:

- help reduce the risk of bushfires by supporting planned burns
- respond to and recover from bushfires and other natural disasters such as floods
- support responses to emergency events including search and rescue.

2. Work with Aboriginal communities

Ensure that park management contributes to broader whole-of-government and community-led directions in Victorian Aboriginal communities.

To do this, we will:

- collaborate with Traditional Owners in park management in ways that contribute to Aboriginal community wellbeing, the maintenance of cultural traditions and the passing on of knowledge across generations
- advance our contribution to the broader Aboriginal community through employment and other opportunities, as available to Parks Victoria.

3. Foundations for liveability

Share the benefits of parks through supporting regional economies and communities, and enhancing the liveability of Victoria.

To do this, we will:

- support Tourism Victoria, regional tourism bodies and local governments to promote Victoria's parks as tourism destinations of choice and contribute to regional economies
- encourage staff to live in and contribute to local communities to help regional Victoria prosper
- contribute to community understanding of climate change by communicating park conditions and landscape changes.

4. Work with our neighbours

Work cooperatively with park neighbours.

To do this, we will:

- further develop partnerships to manage invasive plants and animals
- contribute to maintaining and improving catchment values by collaborating with catchment and water managers.





4. Enhancing organisational excellence

To enhance organisational excellence, Parks Victoria will:

1. Continue to value the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff, volunteers and contractors as our highest priority
2. Build a strong service culture that fosters all-round high performance, learning, innovation, team work, excellence, accountability and adaptability
3. Create a more resilient Parks Victoria that anticipates and adapts to economic, social and environmental trends.

To achieve these goals, we will:

1. Safe and safer

Ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, volunteers and contractors.

To do this, we will:

- build on a safety-first culture and show industry and community leadership in training, mentoring, planning and work practices
- develop health and wellbeing initiatives and promote healthy lifestyle choices.

2. Resilient future

Be a strong and effective organisation and an employer of choice.

To do this, we will:

- enhance governance through efficient and contemporary business systems and processes
- harness technology to improve delivery and performance
- attract and retain people who share our values and enable Parks Victoria to be a world-class parks service
- build brand awareness and promote the expertise and passion of our organisation to all Victorians and visitors

- build the capability of our people through on-the-job learning, mentoring and formal training
- provide family-friendly and flexible work arrangements, and provide diverse career opportunities and pathways.

3. Diverse and inclusive

Nurture and retain a diverse and equitable workforce.

To do this, we will:

- constantly monitor and review societal and environmental trends that may influence customer needs and future service delivery
- recruit for diversity and use that diversity to add depth to our business.

4. Funds for the future

Manage costs and secure revenue streams to deliver on current needs, allow for planned growth or changing priorities and achieve our long-term vision.

To do this, we will:

- develop a long-term and sustainable funding model by sourcing diverse revenue sources such as private investment, government and fee-for-service
- build relationships with sponsors and philanthropical organisations
- manage finances responsibly, efficiently and effectively
- create more flexible cost structures that can respond to changing levels of funding.

5. Enhanced communication

Boost the efficiency and clarity of internal communication with staff.

To do this, we will:

- expand the use of new technology, digital and social media.

6. Go greener

Deeply embed environmental sustainability into our organisation and become a leader in sustainable practices.

To do this, we will work to:

- reduce energy, water consumption and waste
- apply sustainability principles in purchasing, leasing and operations.



About this document

Shaping Our Future outlines our vision for the next decade and beyond. We wish to inspire everyone who is committed to contributing to, and participating in, our vision. To prepare this narrative, we have drawn on the experience and knowledge of our people and our partners, local, national and international.

Long-term action plans and measures will be developed and periodically reviewed to enable us to adapt to changing circumstances while remaining true to our vision. The actions will create opportunities to evaluate and prioritise on areas of highest value. Further details on funding and key activities to deliver on this plan will be published in our corporate and business plans.

Shaping Our Future does not cover all the day-to-day work undertaken by Parks Victoria, our volunteers and partners. We will continue the great work already underway while adapting to the future.

Parks Victoria manages many sites such as piers, waterways, ports, bays, historic buildings, trails, urban parks, conservation reserves and national and state parks. For the sake of brevity these are collectively described as 'parks' in this document, unless a specific type of site is stated.

Parks Victoria wishes to acknowledge that this strategy has been developed with close consideration of the United States National Parks Service's inspiring *Call to Action*.

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www.parks.vic.gov.au
Phone 13 1963

Acknowledgement of Country

Aboriginal people, through their rich culture, have been connected to the land and sea including the area now known as Victoria, for tens of thousands of years.

Parks Victoria respectfully acknowledges Traditional Owners, their cultures, knowledge and their continuing connection to and cultural obligations to care for their Country.



