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Anglesea Heath

Land Management Summary

The Anglesea Heath (6,501 ha) was incorporated into the Great Otway National Park in January 2018. This provides an opportunity to consider the balance of diverse uses, including conservation and recreation. Parks Victoria has developed a set of complementary proposals to protect and manage important natural and cultural values, while allowing for recreation activities and facilities so that visitors may safely and sustainably enjoy the Anglesea Heath. Community feedback on these proposals is now invited.

Summary

The Great Otway National Park (Anglesea Heath) is an area of natural, cultural and recreational significance. Parks Victoria is committed to protecting its many special values while enabling people to experience this unique place.

All recreation activities must be managed sustainably and conducted in areas set aside for these uses. There are no official bushwalking trails at present in the Anglesea Heath, so finding ways for bushwalkers to appreciate the heathlands is a key priority. Parks Victoria also proposes to assign several trails for mountain biking.

To facilitate these activities, and protect areas of high conservation value, it is proposed that some tracks be closed to public vehicles. There will still be many places where motorbikes and four wheel drive vehicles can access the park. In addition, horse riding opportunities in the Anglesea Heath will be maintained where this activity can be undertaken sensitively and sustainably.

Parks Victoria plans to carry out a suite of projects to conserve natural and cultural values. It also proposes to create suitable facilities so that visitors may enjoy

the area, appreciate the heathland and undertake their favourite activities. The location of new infrastructure will offer the least impact on park values and the greatest benefit to visitors.

This paper provides a strategic overview of land management objectives and proposals for the Anglesea Heath. It covers conservation projects and works, suggestions on a range of recreation activities (bushwalking, mountain biking, horse riding, trail biking and four wheel driving), and potential complementary visitor facilities. Individual Position Papers on all these aspects have been developed which provide additional detail.

Context

Parks Victoria's vision is to be a world-class park service ensuring healthy parks for healthy people. The **Shaping Our Future** strategy is a living document that helps guide the organisation's priorities and engagement with the community.

The strategy recognises the importance of conserving Victoria's special places so that our parks, and the natural assets and cultural heritage they hold, can be

enjoyed both now and in the future. Parks Victoria aims to conserve parks while providing opportunities for all people to experience these special places. New opportunities to appreciate Victoria's natural beauty and cultural heritage will be created by sensitively designed visitor infrastructure and facilities in the locations that are most important to visitor experiences.

The **Great Otway National Park Management Plan** declares the national park will continue to make a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation and also contribute to local lifestyles, nature-based recreation and a vibrant regional tourism industry.

Recognition, respect, understanding and aspirations for cooperative management with the Traditional Owners is a key element of the plan. It further identifies strategic directions which influence how the Anglesea Heath is to be managed, including providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy diverse bushwalking, cycling, nature-based horse riding, trail biking and four wheel driving. Each activity must only be undertaken where it is sustainable and compatible with the protection of park values, and conflicts with other park users are minimised.

The management plan sets the direction for designated visitor sites which provide for sustainable recreation, education and enjoyment of the park. It acknowledges that these sites can also act as places from which visitors can access park features and other recreation areas. Visitors will be encouraged to develop an enhanced appreciation of park values and to expand their awareness of the potential for human impacts on such values.

Management objectives

As well as being aligned to directions within the Parks Victoria's Shaping Our Future and the Great Otway National Park Management Plan, the Anglesea Heath will be managed in accordance with relevant national and state legislation, regulation, policy and guidelines to conserve both natural and cultural values. The protection of Aboriginal places and objects will also be guided by Traditional Owners and other relevant Indigenous people's knowledge and interests in the area and aspirations for Country.

The **Anglesea Futures Land Use Framework** was published by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning in October 2018 and informed by extensive community consultation. The direction determined for the Great Otway National Park area (incorporating the Anglesea Heath) was to prioritise the protection of flora and fauna, with complementary active recreation where this would not detract from the main land use of conservation. Parks Victoria is using the land use directions of this Framework to guide its detailed planning.

Parks Victoria seeks to implement and maintain a diverse range of sustainable recreation opportunities that reflect community aspirations. To achieve this and guide community engagement, it has developed a range of management objectives to direct the integration of the Anglesea Heath into the Great Otway National Park. These are specific to each aspect of land use and can be found in the individual Position Papers. Some of the key objectives that influence multiple aspects of land management are to:

- Reduce vehicle access to areas where bushwalking and mountain biking can be provided (recreational activities that do not currently have designated areas in the Anglesea Heath)
- Develop suitable visitor facilities (e.g. day use areas, picnic facilities, viewing platforms, campground) that support appropriate, sustainable and safe visitor use with minimal impact on park values
- Remediate and revegetate illegal tracks, redundant tracks and disturbed areas where this will improve conservation outcomes for environmental values or cultural heritage
- Support research projects that will inform the management and protection of the Anglesea Heath
- Increase compliance, education and visitor information to improve the protection and appreciation of fragile heathland communities.

The management objectives have been collectively and strategically developed to ensure all land uses (including use of the Anglesea Heath for conservation) can achieve realistic, effective and balanced outcomes. This means that in order to conserve the natural and cultural values, or to encourage a more diverse range of visitors to the Anglesea Heath, some current users may have reduced access for particular activities. It is important that the management objectives recognise both current and future challenges and opportunities, facilitate conservation and enable a sustainable range of nature-based experiences.

What we are seeing

With increased visitor numbers to the Anglesea Heath, there is a growing need to ensure visitor experiences and opportunities are well managed. Community members frequently look for opportunities to enjoy the Anglesea Heath for a range of activities. The current lack of facilities to support these uses means that many people do not visit the area and miss out on experiencing this special place.

Visitors regularly wish to bushwalk in the Anglesea Heath however there are no trails officially identified for this use. There is also strong community demand and interest in mountain biking, with many actively seeking out ways to ride between identified mountain biking areas near the Anglesea Heath. At present, visitors must bushwalk or ride on roads and tracks used by vehicles. This deters bushwalkers and mountain bike riders, creates risks with motor vehicles, and limits opportunities to experience the heathlands.

A large informal track network has also developed and is continuing to grow in the Anglesea Heath due to vehicles (cars and motorbikes), horse riders and mountain bikers illegally diverting from the official road and track network. This degrades and erodes soils, damages native vegetation and habitat and contributes to weed dispersal. In addition to 150 kilometres of official roads and vehicle tracks, over 200 kilometres of track has been created in the Anglesea Heath from illegal trail biking and four wheel driving.

What is proposed?

Parks Victoria is pursuing **a range of conservation projects and works**. This includes Cinnamon Fungus threat mapping, increased compliance programs and activity (with a strong focus on illegal track development and use in fragile heathlands), rehabilitation and revegetation of redundant tracks and sections of the illegal informal track network, plus the strategic control of pest plants. In addition, compliance, education and awareness programs are proposed to encourage appropriate behaviours within the Anglesea Heath, along with improved park and interpretive signage to create awareness on how people can sustainably enjoy the park.

Three sites have been identified for bushwalking.

The main proposal is the Heathland Bushwalking Trail. The majority of this 5 km circuit is dedicated to bushwalkers and it will connect to a viewing platform, providing sweeping views of the heathlands. A longer bushwalk of 8 km is also proposed, to connect to future visitor sites and tracks identified in the Anglesea Futures Land Use Framework. Two other proposals for bushwalking opportunities are the Harrison Track South Shared Use Trail (5 km, shared with mountain biking) and the Haggarts Bushwalking Circuit (10 km, connecting to the former rifle range which is a potential site for visitor facilities).

The Haggarts Bushwalking Circuit and the Heathland Bushwalking Trail are located where bushwalkers can best experience the beautiful and unique heathlands. This will require Haggarts Track and a section of the Alcoa Boundary Track to be closed to public vehicles, which help to protect these fragile areas. Harrison Track South is also proposed for closure to vehicles to allow for bushwalking and mountain biking. In the 110ha of Crown land known as Area 9, Parks Victoria

proposes to close public vehicle access to tracks to facilitate active recreation, including mountain biking, consistent with the Anglesea Futures Land Use Framework.

The **proposed closures and modifications to vehicle access**, outlined above, will affect where trail biking and four wheel driving can be undertaken. This consolidation of the network aims to create a sustainable road and track network for vehicles i.e. one that enhances emergency, visitor and management access plus protects the local environment. Licensed and registered trail bike and four wheel drive enthusiasts will continue to be able to use all open roads and tracks i.e. public roads outside seasonally closed periods.

Horse riding will continue to be permitted on open roads and tracks in the Anglesea Heath. The proposed changes to the road and track network will affect access for horse riders. For access to management vehicle only tracks, horse riders can use the nearby parcel of Great Otway National Park bounded by Forest, Portreath and Gundry's roads. Parks Victoria proposes to work with riders to review the information and educational signage in the Anglesea Heath and on adjacent land managed by Parks Victoria.

All identified **visitor infrastructure will be sensitively designed and, where possible, located on land that is already cleared or disturbed**. The old Geelong Rifle Range on Gum Flats Road is one location that has great potential for community benefit and opportunities include a day use area with toilets and picnic tables, a campground or a place to set off for a bushwalk. In addition to the viewing platform identified for the Heathland Bushwalking Trail, a viewing area is also proposed on an existing cleared area at the corner of Forest Road and Powerline Track. This site is currently within Alcoa's lease area and is subject to planning considerations.

The Anglesea Futures Land Use Framework is an important reference document when planning community facilities in and around Anglesea. Where possible, facilities in the Anglesea Heath have been planned to connect to areas identified for community use and active recreation.

The attached map shows where key proposals are located and the connections between sites.

What's next?

Parks Victoria is seeking community feedback on the proposed use and management of the Anglesea Heath. The information collected from the community engagement process will be used to help plan the most effective balance between recreational opportunities and the protection of the unique and fragile heathland environment. If

significant stakeholder concerns are raised during the community engagement process, Parks Victoria will discuss these further with the relevant groups. Supported projects will be delivered by 2020 and the community will be kept updated on their progress.

What do you think?

- What aspects of Anglesea Heath are attractive to
 - Bushwalkers?
 - Horse riders?
 - Mountain bikers?
 - Four wheel drivers?
 - Trail bikers?
- What do you think of the proposed changes to the road and track network and shared use/bushwalking trails in terms of how you would like to access and use the area?
- Are there other areas in Anglesea Heath where bushwalking, horse riding, mountain biking, four wheel driving or trail biking activities would be suitable without compromising other park values or uses? Where?
- What ideas do you have to achieve a balance between trail biking, four wheel driving and other uses such as bushwalking and conservation?
- What do you think of the proposed visitor facilities?
- What additional visitor facilities would you like to see developed? Where?
- Are there any additional conservation or research projects that should be undertaken? Where?

Have your say on the Great Otway National Park (Anglesea Heath)

Parks Victoria is interested in your thoughts. You can contribute by:

- Visiting the Parks Victoria stand at Anglesea Riverbank Market on Saturday 12 January (5:30-8pm)
- Attending a drop-in session on Wednesday 16 January (5-7:30pm) or Saturday 2 February (11-1:30pm) at Anglesea Hall - 1A McMillan Street, Anglesea
- Completing a survey at engage.vic.gov.au or
- Emailing your comments to Angleseaheath@parks.vic.gov.au

For more information go to www.engage.vic.gov.au

