

Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Appointed Land



The Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board (DDLMB) is developing the Joint Management Plan for six parks that make up the Dja Dja Wurrung Appointed Land, held under Aboriginal Title by the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.

This Paper summarises information from current Management Plans by Parks Victoria (PV) and the Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan by the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DDWCAC), about the key goals and issues facing park managers.

Nine groups of assets are considered:

1. Peoples of the Parks and Surrounding Landscapes
2. Recreation, Cultural Practices and Customs
3. Cultural Heritage
4. Plants and Animals
5. Rivers and Waterways
6. Land and Climate
7. Self-determination of Dja Dja Wurrung People
8. Enterprises
9. Joint Management



PEOPLE OF THE PARKS AND SURROUNDING LANDSCAPES

People are at the centre of future visions for these parks:

The aim of the Joint Management Plan is to ensure that Dja Dja Wurrung culture and traditional practices, and the unique relationship of Dja Dja Wurrung People to their traditional Country, can be recognised, strengthened, protected and promoted, for the benefit of all Victorians now and into the future. Graham Atkinson, Board Chairperson¹.

The Victorian Government aims to deliver enduring benefits to park users and the community through expert stewardship of Victoria's terrestrial and marine parks estate. Parks Victoria (2013)².

Community views, values and cultures need to be respected, engaged and reflected in decision-making to put these visions into reality. Meaningful partnerships offer new opportunities for enjoying and understand the natural beauty and cultural heritage of these parks². For Dja Dja Wurrung People, longstanding inequity in law, policy and governance has left disadvantages in education, health, housing, employment that highlight the importance of opportunities from working together for a shared future².

RECREATION, CULTURAL PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS

Dja Dja Wurrung People's goal is for their customs and practices to be alive and respected—keeping connections to their past, present and future. They find that past histories of injustice and contemporary demands of work and life make it difficult to regularly practice culture, and to re-invigorate aspects such as language and knowledge.

The parks cater for a wide range of recreational activities including car touring, four wheel driving, bushwalking, camping, horse-riding and orienteering. All these activities have potential and real impacts on the natural and cultural assets of the parks (Table 1). Effective park management will enable all these and many other activities to be enjoyed while ensuring that the natural and cultural values of parks are sustained for the future. A growing body of research tells us that time spent in nature improves people's health, reduces stress and promotes physical wellbeing².

¹ <http://www.dhelkunyadja.org.au/>. Accessed 28 June 2017

² Parks Victoria. 2013. 'Parks Victoria Shaping Our Future 1'. Melbourne, Australia. Online: http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/629712/shaping-our-future.pdf. Accessed 31 July 2017

Table 1 Recreational activities and challenges for park management

Recreational activities	Challenges for park management
Car and 4WD touring, trail bike riding	Damage to vegetation and soil, causing habitat fragmentation, soil erosion and compaction, and contamination of waterways. Degradation of heritage values.
Bushwalking and jogging	Disturbance to plants and animals, vegetation and soil damage, leading to fragmentation of habitat and erosion.
Visitor site activities	Vandalism of facilities, use of inappropriate construction materials in past construction of facilities.
Camping	Collection of firewood leading to depletion of animal habitat. Compacting of soil, damage to ground-layer vegetation and inappropriate waste disposal.
Fishing	Over-harvesting of fish and crustaceans and pollution with fishing debris (e.g. hooks).
Bicycle riding	Potential conflicts with walkers. Disturbance of cultural heritage, and damage to vegetation and soil resulting in fragmentation of habitat and erosion
Dog walking	Dog droppings can spread disease to humans and animals within the park. Dogs can disturb and damage native animals.
Horse riding	Erosion (trampling by horse hooves), introduction of weeds (manure), and damage to vegetation and cultural heritage. Conflict with the amenity of other visitors.
Orienteering and rock-climbing	Some disturbance of vegetation, fauna, soils and cultural resources e.g. disturbance of Peregrine Falcon nests, removal of mosses and installation of anchoring points.
Prospecting	Disturbance to soils, vegetation (e.g. orchid tubers), cultural heritage places and objects.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Dja Dja Wurrung People seek to have cultural heritage recognised and protected as a celebration of their identity and community. Problems include wilful and accidental damage, vandalism, accelerated erosion, recreational and management activities (e.g. road maintenance).



Effective management strengthens local efforts to conserve cultural values within parks through partnerships with organisations, groups and individuals. Protection of historic heritage and Dja Dja Wurrung cultural heritage through respectful partnerships with Traditional Owners and others is a key goal across all the parks.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Parks Victoria sets out to manage the natural values of parks to increase resilience in the face of climate change and other stressors². Dja Dja Wurrung People seek to ensure that their Country continues to nourish them by providing bush tucker and medicine. Stressors on the Dja Dja Wurrung parks include European farming techniques, inappropriate fire regimes, overfishing, pests, diseases and some over-abundance of native (e.g. kangaroo) and other animals increasing the demand on already limited food resources.

Protection and restoration of native plants and animals, and showcasing the rich diversity of ecosystems and landscapes, is a central purpose of managing the stressors in the parks² (Table 2).

Table 2 Impacts on plants and animals and challenges for park management

Impact from	Challenges for park management
Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation	Box–Ironbark forests and woodlands have been extensively cleared and fragmented for agriculture, gold mining, urban development and wood products. The remaining habitat is depleted of foraging, breeding and roosting sites.
Exotic animals	Direct predation on native animals and competition for feeding, breeding and roosting sites.
Weed invasion	Lowers habitat value for some native animals, prevents growth of native vegetation, harbours pest animals, degrades landscape values and increases fire fuel loads.
Over-browsing by animals	Grazing of wallaby and kangaroos, and non-native animals such as goats, diminishes plants, particularly in Grassy Woodland.
Repeated cycles of timber harvesting	Vegetation is mainly large numbers of small, multi-stemmed trees, without the hollow bearing trees, stumps and logs necessary for many rare animals.
Firewood production	Thinning operations in some areas have produced a variety of tree sizes, age classes and spacing that more closely reflects a natural vegetation structure.

Impact from	Challenges for park management
Soil disturbance	Soil disturbance spreads weeds and reduces the diversity and abundance of shrub and ground layer vegetation.
Changes to fire regimes	The long absence of fire in some areas contributes to loss of plants in the ground layer. In other places, wildfires have removed remaining hollow-bearing trees.
Fire control	Construction of control lines and the use of phosphate-based fire retardants, may result in the fragmentation, modification or loss of native plant and animal habitat.
Loss of pollination services	Direct competition between native and introduced species for nectar, and reduced population sizes of native pollinators through competition or predation.
Loss of wood on forest floor	Lack of coarse woody debris on the ground depletes the habitat for insects, spiders, birds, small mammals and makes them more prone to predation.
Climate change and drought	Less favourable conditions for current plant and animal communities, leading to increased vulnerability. Plants and animals of cultural importance may disappear.
Lack of knowledge	Specific knowledge is lacking about many impacts and how to counter them, and promote plants and animals. Dja Dja Wurrung knowledge is poorly documented.

RIVERS AND WATERWAYS

Parks improve our quality of life through cleansing the water we drink². Dja Dja Wurrung People aim for their rivers and waterways to be healthy and meet the needs of their people and land. However, waterways are currently sick, a legacy of past and current land management causing erosion, weed and pest issues, dams and diversions, pollution from farm chemicals and mining contaminants.

Protection and improvement of streams and catchments values relies on collaborating with catchment and water managers to respond to challenges (Table 3).



Table 3 Impacts on waterways and challenges for park management

Impacts from	Challenges for park management
Dams and diversions	Changes to water flows of the streams, reducing their value as animal habitat. Unknown extent of water harvesting.
Salinization	Rising groundwater levels (irrigation, tree loss) and salinization.
Stream and water quality	Changes to the course of many streams, and greatly increased sediment and nutrient loads.

LAND

Dja Dja Wurrung People aim for their “upside down” Country (land affected by mining) to be healthy again. Zoning currently manages diverse land uses in the parks. Reference Area and Conservation Zones prioritise protection, whereas Conservation and Recreation Zones provide for recreational activities. Special overlays show land for uses like prospecting, research and other management purposes. Adaptive management, based on sound evidence, identifying trends, listening to the community, and capturing the benefits of technology will ensure effective responses to the management challenges posed by these valued and important activities (Table 4).

Table 4 Impacts on land and challenges for park management

Impacts on	Challenges for park management
Landscape character	Loss of views of connected vegetation. Inappropriate designs, materials and siting of developments within and adjacent to the parks.
Landform	Past activities such as gold mining, settlement and timber harvesting have modified the natural landforms (e.g. tailings, mullock heaps, shafts).
Soils	Many of the soils of the parks are susceptible to erosion, with poor soil structure, low permeability and high levels of salt. Past and present land uses cause soil erosion.
Pollution	Inappropriately located structures, road works, quarries, agricultural activities lead to run-off, air and water pollution. Illegal and toxic dumping occurs frequently.

SELF-DETERMINATION OF DJA DJA WURRUNG PEOPLE

Dja Dja Wurrung People aim, as their Country’s first people, to have an established place in society and be empowered to manage their own affairs. Respect for Indigenous knowledge relating to Country and appropriate reflection of the Traditional Owners’ views, interests, rights and aspirations are key goals in current management by Parks Victoria. Both Dja Dja Wurrung People and current park managers recognise that the Traditional Owners are not yet centrally involved in park management. Implementing Joint Management requires a step-wise shift towards empowerment of Dja Dja Wurrung People.

ENTERPRISES

Parks create direct and indirect employment and economic opportunities in urban and regional areas through tourism, recreation and other activities². Dja Dja Wurrung People aim for a strong and diverse economic base to provide for their health and wellbeing, and strengthen their living culture. Many enterprises are currently underway in the parks including tourism; linear public infrastructure (e.g. power, pipelines); eucalyptus oil harvesting; special events; bee-keeping; and some mining. All bring benefits, impacts and challenges for park management (Tables 1-4). Systemic barriers such as weak commercial rights, unclear policy, lack of cultural recognition and over allocation of natural resources create difficulties for Dja Dja Wurrung People in benefitting from enterprises in the parks.

JOINT MANAGEMENT

The objective of joint management is to establish an equitable partnership between the State and the Dja Dja Wurrung to ensure innovation and excellence in Joint Management. The *Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement* (between the State and Dja Dja Wurrung People) sets out six principles to guide their Joint Management, summarised as: (i) recognising, respecting and incorporating Dja Dja Wurrung culture; (ii) utilising the combined expertise of both the State and the Dja Dja Wurrung; (iii) providing quality experiences for all park visitors; (iv) conserving natural and cultural values; (v) ensuring institutional support for the Dja Dja Wurrung; and (vi) building relationships between the Djelkunya Dja Land Management Board and other land managers. Dja Dja Wurrung People’s long-term goal is for all Crown land on Dja Dja Wurrung Country to be Aboriginal Title of which they are the sole managers.

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