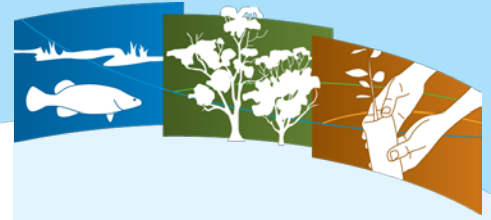


# GUNBOWER FOREST KEY ASSET PROTECTION PROJECT



## PROTECTING THE BEST

The Gunbower Forest Ramsar site includes Gunbower Forest, associated water bodies and Gunbower Creek. The site is located on the Murray River floodplain between Torrumbarry and Koondrook in north-western Victoria.

The Gunbower Forest site covers 19,900 ha dominated by River Red Gum open forest and woodland.

## NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Gunbower Forest is the second largest River Red Gum Forest on Earth. During flood periods, the forest becomes a breeding, feeding and resting ground for large colonial waterbird species.

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

In 2010, Gunbower National Park was created; this reserve occupies about half of the public land, with most of the bushland upstream of Cohuna within the National Park. However there is still a large area of State Forest available for logging at the lower end of the forest close to Barham/Koondrook.

## ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

The Gunbower Forest is also a wetland of international significance and listed as part of the Ramsar Convention, the JAMBA (Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement) and the CAMBA (China-

Australia Migratory Bird Agreement). It is an important breeding ground for a number of birds, including Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Nankeen Night Heron, Royal Spoonbill, Intermediate Egret, Great Egret and Australian White Ibis.



*Great Egret, Gunbower Forest*

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project is to improve the overall condition of the ecological character and maintain the extent of the Federal and State listed threatened flora and fauna species within the defined biodiversity hotspots of the Gunbower Forest.

The project also aims to minimise the risk of reinfestation of pest plants with some ongoing management of weeds along major tributaries and tracks in the forest

## KEY ACTIONS ACHIEVED:

- Over 5 km fencing which will protect vegetation from grazing pressures.
- 14.6 ha of revegetation, including planting of endangered species such as the Winged Peppercreese.
- 6 ha of rabbit management works to reduce grazing pressures
- Reducing the impact of foxes on our freshwater turtle populations with 1,354 ha of fox management works.
- 1,600 ha of weed removal including Blackberry, Willow and Pale Yellow Water Lily.
- Have ran many successful events with over 380 participants, including bird workshops, catch a carp day and welcoming the waders.
- Worked with Turtles Australia and the University of Western Sydney to trial a number of aversion methods to decrease the numbers of turtle nests being raided.



*Before and after treatment of Broom at McLure's Bend, Gunbower Forest*

# KEY ASSET PROTECTION PROJECT

## SOCIAL & ECONOMICAL VALUES

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



*Participants during a bird watching event.*

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

On ground activities are planned to address critical issues/threats that are impacting on the ecological character of the Gunbower Forest Ramsar site.

## THREATS AND IMPACTS

Regulation of the Murray River since 1934 has reduced the frequency, intensity and duration of flooding in Gunbower Forest, which has implications for River Red Gum and other species whose survival is flood dependent. Timber harvesting and silvicultural practices have altered the age structure of Red Gum stands and may have reduced the number of nest hollows available to wildlife.

Critical threats to biodiversity exist at the site, including: weeds, pest animal damage and stock grazing. In particular, the site is subject to rabbit and fox infestation, Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and other invasive plants which threaten the ecological character of the forest and wetlands.



*Fox predated turtle egg found in Gunbower Forest.*

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Gunbower Forest Ramsar site contains a cultural landscape that reflects both Aboriginal and European activities. The Gunbower Forest contains many sites of cultural significance to the Aboriginal people.

There have been over 142 archaeological sites of significance identified in the forest. Sites identified include scarred trees, mounds and shell middens.

## RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONALLY THREATENED WETLAND FLORA

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



*Winged Peppergrass (*Lepidium monoplocoides*).*

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

Enhancing threatened species populations within the Gunbower Forest will provide opportunity for each species to re-colonise higher quality habitat than where they are currently found and land management activities will ensure viable populations are protected into the future.

## PROJECT FUNDING

Funding for this project is provided through the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme until 2018.

## OUR VALUED PARTNERS

This project is undertaken in partnership with The Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP), Parks Victoria, Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW), The Gunbower Island Community Reference Group and the Gannawarra Shire Council.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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