

# Gunbower Forest lower floodplain

## Water for the Environment

### Winter/spring 2022



## FAQs

### A special place

As an internationally important wetland, Gunbower Forest includes one of the most significant remaining areas of river red gum forest in Australia.

It is a special place for locals, Traditional Owners and visitors and valued for its recreational, social, cultural and environmental benefits.

Despite recent wet conditions, there are areas of the Gunbower Forest floodplain haven't had any water on them for almost four years. Last year's deliveries of water for the environment only targeted key wetlands and their fringes. The 2022 water for the environment delivery will inundate a much broader area of floodplain.



Reedy Lagoon, December 2021

### Why can't Mother Nature take care of the forest?

Murray River regulation and a changing climate are just two examples of what's impacting our natural environment, including the Gunbower Forest floodplain.

Population growth has also resulted in an increased demand on available water and while modernised farming practices have created productive, prosperous, and vibrant farming and

urban communities, the forest hasn't fared as well and needs our help.

### Why is Gunbower Forest floodplain receiving water for the environment?

The forest no longer floods as often or for as long as it used to. For example, without Murray River regulation, rainfall and streamflow records indicate that water would have flowed onto the floodplain from last July 2021 to January this year.

Iconic stands of river red gum are struggling, and the aquatic understorey which makes Gunbower so unique has suffered, waiting for the next flood.

The health of the tree canopy has declined over the past three years since the last flood.

Water for the environment helps build resilience in the Gunbower Forest floodplain by enabling plants and animals to complete their lifecycles and survive in the face of a changing climate.

Water for the environment is doing its bit to give parts of the forest that depend on flooding a much-needed drink, but there are areas that will continue to change and no longer look the way locals will remember them.

### When will the watering start and for how long?

Water for the environment will begin to flow onto the lower floodplain wetlands from late May, with the Hipwell Road regulator operating later in June.

Water will continue to be released through the channel, and through smaller regulators on the lower Gunbower Creek, until early November. If needed, much smaller volumes of water may be delivered to specific wetlands to support waterbird breeding and other ecological values.

Water levels across the forest will gradually recede over late spring and summer.

### How much water will be delivered to the forest?

Up to 74 GL will target the full environmental water footprint. The total volume delivered will depend on how much water for the environment is available once irrigation demand is met over spring.



Regulator at Hipwell Road

About 40 per cent of the water put on the floodplain is expected to flow back out to the Murray River, taking with it some of the best fish food in the Basin.

### Will irrigation supplies be impacted?

Water supply to irrigators accessing Gunbower Creek is a priority and the environmental delivery will not impact this supply. The delivery of water for the environment happens once irrigation orders have been met.

### How much of the forest will be watered?

The flow is targeting about 4,500 hectares, or 23 per cent, of the Gunbower Forest lower floodplain.

**Refer to the map at the back of the FAQ to see proposed watering inundation (Figure 1)**



Aquatic vegetation, Reedy Lagoon, December 2021

### Can I still access the forest during watering?

Yes. There are plenty of accessible places to see the difference water for the environment makes across the watered section that is, at most, 23 per cent of the overall forest.

During the watering some access tracks will be closed to protect the tracks and for visitor safety.

There will be many areas within the forest, along the Murray River and Gunbower Creek, for visitors to enjoy bush walking, kayaking, fishing, camping or bird watching.

### Where can I find information about track access during the watering?

Forest access tracks will be monitored during the watering.



Spring is a great time to visit the forest to enjoy recreational activities like bird watching

Volunteers at the Gateway to Gannawarra Visitor Centre in Cohuna will know about track closures and spots to visit during the watering so forest users can plan their trip as early as possible. Or you can visit:

- DELWP: [www.facebook.com/DELWPLoddonMallee](https://www.facebook.com/DELWPLoddonMallee) or phone 136 186.
- Parks Victoria: [www.parks.vic.gov.au](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au) or call 13 19 63 for information on Gunbower National Park.
- Gateway to Gannawarra Visitor Centre: 90 King George Street, Cohuna, (03) 5456 2047

## For more information

Telephone 03 5448 7124 or visit [www.nccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au)



## Will the watering cause a toxic blackwater event?

Regular water for the environment deliveries helps stop the build-up of leaf litter on a floodplain.

There may be pockets of water on the floodplain that will be dark but not toxic. This carbon-rich water is full of nutrients, vital food for Australia's native fish and will make its way into the Murray River and Gunbower Creek.



Carbon-rich water entering the Murray River at Shillinglaws Regulator

Toxic blackwater is caused when leaf litter is left to build up on a floodplain or riverbank and is flushed into a waterway during a summer storm. The hot weather helps break down the litter and chews up the oxygen in the water. The majority of water for the environment will be delivered in the cooler months of winter and spring to mitigate against the risk of toxic blackwater forming.

CMA staff will monitor dissolved oxygen levels in the outlets and the creek to ensure they remain healthy.

## What happens if a natural flood occurs during the watering?

Flows through the Hipwell Road Channel can be modified or halted to accommodate natural flooding. Inflows through the channel may be used in conjunction with natural inflows to the forest, to extend the duration and increase the size of river floods.

## How is available water shared between users?

Water for the environment is water legally set aside for the environment and used to maintain or improve river and wetland health with as little impact as possible on forest users.

Environmental water entitlements are subject to seasonal allocations just like other users.

Environmental water holders include Victorian, Commonwealth and Living Murray entitlements.



Black Swamp, December 2021

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Figure 1: Map of proposed inundation and track closure

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