

GUNAIKURNAI AND VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT JOINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

NEW GUINEA CAVES
— KRAUATUNGALUNG COUNTRY



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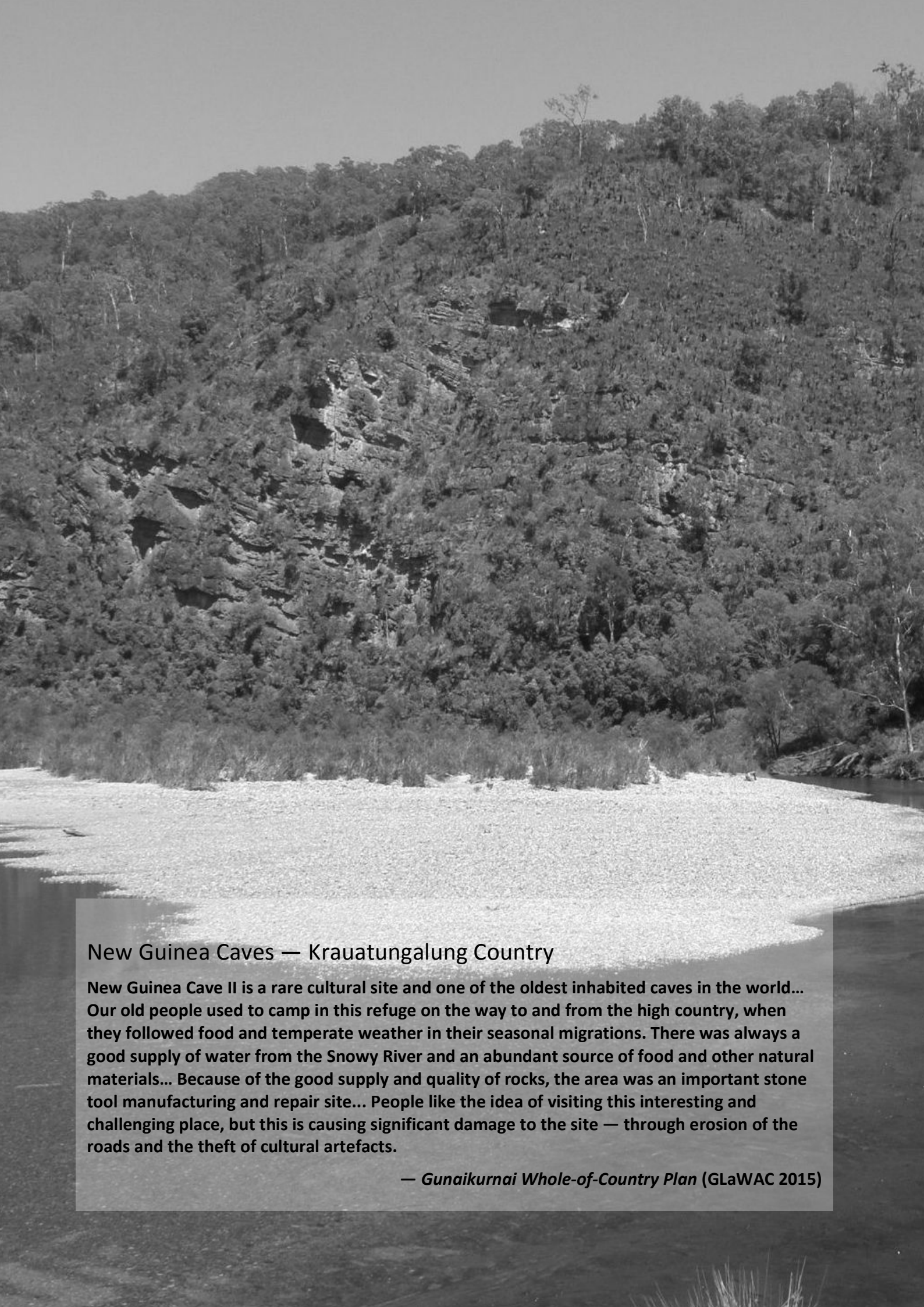
References to Parks Victoria in this plan should be read in the following context:

The *Parks Victoria Act 2018* (Vic.) will commence later in 2018. Under this Act, Parks Victoria will change from being an authority providing park management services by agreement to being an authority with park and reserve management responsibilities in its own right. It will continue to be a Committee of Management of particular reserves under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Vic.).

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New Guinea Caves — Krauatungalung Country

New Guinea Cave II is a rare cultural site and one of the oldest inhabited caves in the world... Our old people used to camp in this refuge on the way to and from the high country, when they followed food and temperate weather in their seasonal migrations. There was always a good supply of water from the Snowy River and an abundant source of food and other natural materials... Because of the good supply and quality of rocks, the area was an important stone tool manufacturing and repair site... People like the idea of visiting this interesting and challenging place, but this is causing significant damage to the site — through erosion of the roads and the theft of cultural artefacts.

— *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan (GLaWAC 2015)*

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BASIS OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

In a 2010 Native Title Determination, the Federal Court recognised that the Gunaikurnai hold native title rights over much of Gippsland.

At the same time, the Victorian Government took additional steps to recognise Gunaikurnai peoples' traditional rights and ownership and entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic.) with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation. The Recognition Statement from the RSA is reproduced in full in the Introduction to the Joint Management Plan (JMP).

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) is the 'traditional owner group entity' for the purposes of the RSA. GLaWAC is also the Prescribed Body Corporate for the purposes of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) and the Registered Aboriginal Party for the area for the purposes of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic.).

As part of the RSA, the New Guinea Caves area has been granted to the Gunaikurnai as Aboriginal Title by the Victorian Government and will be managed jointly by Gunaikurnai and the Victorian Government. The Aboriginal Title grant is subject to the Gunaikurnai giving the State the right to occupy, use, control and manage the land for the same purpose as applied immediately before the grant. In the case of the New Guinea Caves area, the land continues to be managed as part of the Snowy River National Park under the *National Parks Act 1975* (Vic.).

This management plan for the New Guinea Caves area of the Snowy River National Park is prepared under Section 82 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* (Vic.) and the provisions of the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement 2010. It is consistent with the objects and requirements of the *National Parks Act 1975* and the requirements of regulations made under that Act. (Additional legislation and policies which have been considered in the preparation of the Management Plan are listed in Appendix 4 of the Strategic Plan.)

This plan sets out directions for the management of the New Guinea Caves area held under Aboriginal Title. The Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan sets out the directions for management of the surrounding areas of the Snowy River National Park. Its provisions relating to the New Guinea Caves area are replaced by this plan. The Greater Alpine National Parks Plan will be amended following approval of this plan.

As these Aboriginal Title areas are within the area covered by the 2010 Determination and the RSA, the rights of the Gunaikurnai to undertake traditional activities apply to the New Guinea Caves area and the other nine Joint Management parks and reserves. Existing rights and interests in the New Guinea Caves area, held by others, are not affected by the Agreement, but remain subject to management policies and regulation.

The Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board (GKTOLMB) has been established in accordance with the RSA between GLaWAC and the State with the statutory objective of enabling the knowledge and culture of the Gunaikurnai to be recognised in the management of the 10 Aboriginal Title areas, including the New Guinea Caves area. The Board was responsible for preparing this management plan jointly with GLaWAC, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

There have been few opportunities in the past for Gunaikurnai to participate in the decision-making and management of public land. Through this management plan, GLaWAC and the Victorian Government seek to:

- ensure that the nationally significant cultural heritage, geological and geomorphological values of the New Guinea Caves area are protected and conserved and the statutory requirements for park management are fulfilled through an equitable partnership between the State and the GLaWAC

- increase opportunities for Gunaikurnai people to connect with country, foster employment and economic development opportunities and build their capacity and skills to take a central role in joint management with the other management partners
- benefit the Gunaikurnai and the State, by recognising, valuing, promoting and incorporating Gunaikurnai culture, knowledge, skills and decision-making into the area; and
- increase the role of Gunaikurnai people in determining future management of the area, conservation of the Caves and management of the cultural material associated with the occupation of the Caves.

1.2 HOW TO READ THE PLAN

This plan provides a description of joint management strategies and actions that are specific to the New Guinea Caves area. The following sections provide:

- a description of values, uses and threats relating to the land, water and heritage of the area, and goals and strategies to protect and conserve those values
- a description of Traditional Owner, visitor and community connections to the area and their uses and activities; and goals and strategies for managing and enhancing those connections and uses
- identification of government and community relationships and partnerships that are key to managing the area
- an integrated statement of the actions that will be undertaken over the next 10 years to achieve the goals and implement the strategies described in the plan.

In addition to the specific actions for the New Guinea Caves area in this plan, the strategic initiatives for joint management described in the Strategic Plan may include actions that relate to New Guinea Caves.

The *Parks Victoria Act 2018* (Vic.) will commence later in 2018. Under this Act, Parks Victoria will change from being an authority providing park management services by agreement to being an authority with park and reserve management responsibilities in its own right. It will continue to be a Committee of Management of particular reserves under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Vic.).

1.3 THE NEW GUINEA CAVES AREA

The New Guinea Caves area covers 1153 hectares of land in the Snowy River National Park, north-east of Buchan.

The area consists of steep, forested ridges on the western side of the Snowy River Valley, with small pockets of woodland and rainforest.

The origin of the 'New Guinea' name for the area is unclear. An account of modern cave exploration suggests it may derive from the appearance of the area with its rugged terrain and relict rainforest patches (Frank & Davey 1976).

It includes six known caves located on the New Guinea Ridge. Of these, New Guinea Cave 2 is the most significant. The limestone cave and overhanging rock provided shelter for Gunaikurnai people during migration to and from the high country and was used intermittently by hunters.

The site is highly significant because of its rock art, stone tools and other artefacts. New Guinea Cave 2 is included on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register and is identified as an area of cultural sensitivity under the provisions of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.¹

The surrounding Snowy River National Park covers more than 114 600 hectares and was initially proclaimed in 1979. The area containing the New Guinea Caves was added in 1987.

¹ Registration VAHR 8523-0012.

The Snowy River and a corridor of adjacent land is protected under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* (Vic.) in recognition of its high geomorphological, botanical and faunal values, its cultural heritage including the New Guinea Caves, and recreational and scenic values (LCC 1991).

The area is remote but is visited by rafters and canoeists as well as cavers. Several steep four-wheel-drive tracks, which are seasonally closed, descend the ridges from the Tulloch Ard State Forest to the west.

2 NEW GUINEA CAVES UNDER JOINT MANAGEMENT

The New Guinea Caves area is on the Country of the Krauatungalung clan. Since the 1990s the area has been managed under a conservation and recreation zoning, with a Special Protection Zone applied to the cave sites and their immediate surrounds.

Vehicular access tracks have been seasonally closed, and public access to New Guinea Cave 2 was physically barred. The effectiveness of this management regime to protect the Caves from illegal entry and suspected removal of cultural artefacts needs to be carefully monitored.

The Gunaikurnai *Whole of Country Plan* sets out the following management priorities for the New Guinea Caves area:

- preventing public access and establishing an effective enforcement regime
- clean up and removal of debris from past floods
- putting strategies in place that minimise damage from future floods
- looking at options for sole management of New Guinea Cave 2, including adequate resourcing.

While recognising these priorities, this plan sets out actions that are consistent with and limited to the terms of the 2010 Recognition and Settlement Agreement.

Under this joint management plan the primary objective will be the protection and conservation of the nationally significant cultural values of New Guinea Cave 2 and the other caves, and their associated natural values.

Increased protection measures will be implemented at New Guinea Cave 2 to stabilise the geological formation, prevent illegal entry, control public safety risks and remove rubbish from previous archaeological work.

Powers to protect the cave will be strengthened by seeking the relevant protection declaration under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic.).

Vehicular access on Betts Creek Track will be restricted year-round, and subject to access by permit for purposes consistent with the management objective including Gunaikurnai cultural access, access by recognised groups for research, speleology, outdoor education, rafting entry and exit from the Snowy River, and other purposes.

Information and interpretation for visitors to the area will be improved at Ash Saddle and New Guinea Gap, and vehicular access to the area will be restricted by means of a permit system.

3 ZONING

A zoning scheme has been developed to provide a geographic framework to manage the area. These zones will:

- communicate to the community and stakeholders which management aims have priority in different parts of the area;
- indicate the types and levels of use allowed;
- assist in minimising conflicts between uses, or between those and the protection of conservation values;
- provide a basis for assessing the suitability of future activities and use proposals.

Previous zoning

The 1995 management plan for the Snowy River National Park (National Parks Service 1995) zoned most of the New Guinea Caves area as 'Conservation and Recreation' with a special protection zoning applied to the caves and their immediate surrounds.

The entrance to New Guinea Cave 2 was barred and locked, and entry was subject to permit from the former Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (now Aboriginal Victoria).

Vehicle access on Betts Track has been seasonally closed from approximately 1 June to 1 December, in line with the closure of other tracks in the area for safety and environmental impact reasons and to prevent disturbance of the Common Bent-wing Bat population that occupies the Cave during winter.

The 2016 Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan (Parks Victoria 2016) provisionally zoned most of the Aboriginal Title area as 'Conservation' and a small area at the river end of Betts Track as 'Conservation and Recreation', subject to the preparation of this Joint Management Plan.

Both the 2016 plan and the 1995 plan zoning schemes recognised the inclusion of a small part of the New Guinea Caves area in the Snowy River Wilderness Zone, and the whole of the area as part of the Snowy River Heritage River.

Zoning applied in this plan

Most of the New Guinea Caves area is designated as Conservation Zone. Part of the Conservation Zone is covered by a Special Protection Overlay, under which stricter controls on public access will be applied to protect New Guinea Cave 2 and its surrounds. In addition to the zoning an Ongoing Protection Declaration under Section 103 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* will be sought for New Guinea Cave 2 in order to strengthen the statutory powers available for protection and enforcement.

A Conservation and Recreation Zone covers an area of land adjacent to the river end of Betts Creek Track to provide for recreational access to and from the river for rafting and kayaking. Low-impact recreational access and use are allowed within the Conservation and Recreation Zone. Betts Creek Track and New Guinea Track will continue to be open for public access, except during the seasonal road closure period in winter and spring. Visitors to the New Guinea Caves area will be informed by pre-visit information, signs and other means of the access restrictions to the Special Protection Overlay.

The zoning in this plan incorporates the legislated Wilderness Zone and Heritage River Overlay (Table 1 and Map 1).

The zoning scheme may be reviewed as a result of cultural mapping of the New Guinea Caves area currently being undertaken by GKTOLMB. The area covered by the Special Protection Overlay and retention of track access arrangements will be subject to regular monitoring and review in light of any sign of damage or heightened risk to cultural values, or increased risk to public safety, in which case a variation to the plan may be sought.

Under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic.) natural resource agreements can authorise activities such as hunting wildlife and game, fishing, and gathering flora and forest produce.

No agreement over the New Guinea Caves area is currently in place. Any future agreement may require variation to the zoning scheme and provisions of this plan.

Table 1: Management zones and overlays.

Zone	Description and purpose
Conservation Zone	Areas of high natural value including land, water and ecological values. Recreation and nature-based tourism are allowed subject to close management to ensure minimal impact and disturbance of natural values. Low-impact recreation activities are allowed; limited visitor facilities are provided, and are dispersed and small-scale.
Conservation and Recreation Zone	Areas where the management emphasis is on protection of land, water, ecological and cultural values while encouraging recreation and nature-based tourism. Low-impact recreation activities are allowed; designated camping and small-scale facilities are provided.
Wilderness Zone	The area scheduled under Part 15 of Schedule 5 of the National Parks Act as the Snowy River Wilderness Zone. The zone provides for self-reliant recreation and solitude in the absence of facilities, structures and public roads, the development of which is prohibited. The use of any form of motorised or mechanical transport, and the use of non-indigenous animals is prohibited, except where essential for the responsible management of the zone.
Special Protection Overlay	Area in which special controls apply, additional to the underlying Conservation Zone provisions, to protect caves and their surrounds.
Heritage River Overlay	The area scheduled as the Snowy River Heritage River Area under the Heritage Rivers Act. The aims of the overlay are to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that the significant nature conservation, recreation, scenic or cultural heritage attributes of the area are protected; • provide opportunities for other recreational activities, landscape appreciation and education within the area; • ensure that that part of the river which is in the area is maintained without further interference with its free-flowing state.

4 CARING FOR COUNTRY

4.1 GUNAIKURNAI CULTURAL HERITAGE

Six caves have been identified on the New Guinea Ridge. Three of these caves are substantial, and New Guinea Cave 2 has extensive evidence of cultural heritage and artefacts.

Archaeological investigations of Cave 2 between 1980 and 1985 by several Victorian archaeological institutions identified and recorded a number of stone artefacts and cultural material, as well as rock art in the cave (Ossa et al. 1995). These investigations established a date of occupation extending back almost 21 000 years to the Pleistocene epoch. Significantly, the investigation found bone artefacts including skeletal remains of Tasmanian Tigers, Tasmanian Devils, quolls and other species.

Large pits dug during the 1980s excavations in New Guinea Cave 2 created major impacts in the cave and were not re-instated. Some cultural material was removed for archaeological analysis of the assemblage.

Steel barriers and gates installed at the entry points to Cave 2 have been only partially successful in securing the caves from unauthorised entry, and have a negative impact on the sense of place and cultural integrity of the site.

Cultural mapping, three-dimensional cave modelling and geotechnical assessments of New Guinea Cave 2 will further clarify the extent of cultural heritage. The cultural mapping project will consider the potential repatriation of previously excavated cultural material.

The cultural importance of the New Guinea Caves area for the Gunaikurnai is not limited to the physical cave structures and artefacts; it also resides in the significance of the surrounding land as a place of resort and shelter during travels and movements along the Snowy River Valley.

4.2 HISTORIC HERITAGE

The New Guinea Caves area was leased to farmers by the Crown for grazing in the early 20th century. Graffiti in New Guinea Cave 1 includes dates between 1906 and 1920 (Frank & Davey 1976). There is a brief but significant history associated with the exploration and mapping of New Guinea Cave 2 and the other five caves in the area by speleological groups, commencing in the 1960s.

4.3 LAND AND WATER VALUES

In addition to their cultural values the caves are nationally significant geological and geomorphological sites (Rosengren et al. 1981).

The caves are also an important shelter for the Eastern Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus megaphyllus*), the Common Bent-wing Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*), and potentially other species. New Guinea Cave 2 is regarded as one of the few caves in the area used by pregnant female bats for acclimatisation prior to the birth season (Hamilton-Smith 1965). As a bat habitat, the cave and its immediate surrounds are very sensitive to flood and fire impacts.

The area consists of rugged, timbered country with some warm temperate rainforest. Stands of grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea* spp.) are also present. Table 2 describes significant ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) — the standard categorisation of vegetation communities in Victoria — in the area. Their distributions are shown in Map 2.

The predominant EVCs are Shrubby Dry Forest (54% of the area), Damp Forest (23%) and Grassy Woodland (8%). There are also small areas of rare Warm Temperate Rainforest and Riparian Shrubland.

Table 2: Significant Ecological Vegetation Classes in the New Guinea Caves area.

Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)	Description	Bioregional conservation status	Character species	High-impact weed species
Warm Temperate Rainforest (1.0% of area)	Closed forest to 20 m tall occurring along small streams. Dominated by a range of non-eucalypt canopy species above an understorey of smaller trees and shrubs and usually visually dominated by ferns and climbers.	rare	Lilly Pilly (<i>Acmena smithii</i>)	various
Riparian Shrubland (1.1% of area)	Diverse, medium to tall shrubland to 8 m tall occurring on rocky substrates of major streams and banks and channels of rocky creeks and along perennial streams in gorge tracts. Sedges and rushes common to riparian environments dominate the understorey as well as an array of herbs and grasses.	rare	Black Wattle (<i>Acacia mearnsii</i>) Large-leaf Hickory-wattle (<i>Acacia falciformis</i>) Hazel Pomaderris (<i>Pomaderris aspera</i>)	various
Valley Grassy Forest (4.8% of area)	Open forest to 25 m tall may carry a variety of eucalypts, usually species which prefer moister or more fertile conditions over a sparse shrub cover. In season, a rich array of herbs, lilies, grasses and sedges dominate the ground layer.	depleted	Manna Gum (<i>Eucalyptus viminalis</i>) Red Box (<i>Eucalyptus polyanthemos</i>) White Stringybark (<i>Eucalyptus globoidea</i>)	Blackberry (<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> spp. agg.) Spear Thistle (<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>)

Rare or threatened species

The caves are an important winter shelter for the Common Bent-wing Bat, which is listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (Vic). Several significant plants occur in the area (Table 3). There are no published action statements or recovery plans for these species.

DELWP's NatureKit biodiversity data products provide important information for conserving flora and fauna in the area.

Table 3: Significant species in the New Guinea Caves Area.

Scientific name	Common name	Conservation status
<i>Acacia subtilinervis</i>	Net-veined Wattle	vulnerable
<i>Rhinolophus megaphyllus</i>	Eastern Horseshoe Bat	vulnerable
<i>Brachyscome riparia</i>	Snowy River Daisy	rare
<i>Gahnia microstachya</i>	Slender Saw-sedge	rare
<i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i>	Common Bent-wing Bat	rare
<i>Prostanthera walteri</i>	Monkey Mint-bush	rare

Landscape and catchment context

The New Guinea Caves area lies within the Far East Catchments landscape program of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. This program is focused on maintaining the condition of the significant and relatively undisturbed landscape of these catchments, with their large and continuous extent of natural ecosystems, from the mountains to the coast.

The Regional Catchment Strategy (EGCMA 2013) identifies the broad landscape objective for public land as:

- maintenance and targeted improvement of the condition, security, diversity and integrity of natural ecosystems and the status of threatened species and communities
- maintenance of soil condition and stability on public land.

4.4 THREATS TO LAND AND WATER

Invasive plants and animals

The primary weed threat is blackberry, especially in rainforest and riparian areas. Goats occupy rocky and open areas of the Snowy River Valley and adjacent gullies, but their numbers have been reduced by control programs in recent years. Pigs are present in the upstream section of the Snowy River valley, and there is a risk of potential movement into the caves area.

Fire management

Much of the New Guinea Caves area was burnt by bushfire in 2014. Planned burning was previously undertaken in 1990 in the area and in 2001 on the ridges on the eastern side of the Snowy River, immediately adjacent to the caves area.

A helipad at the end of New Guinea Track is important for fire suppression and needs to be maintained. The small area of rainforest in the area is highly sensitive to fire. If burnt it is likely to have its essential composition and structure altered or fragmented, and would be vulnerable to invasive plants and animals.

Other vegetation communities require periodic burning to maintain a diversity of vegetation growth stages and wildlife habitats or to suppress invasive plants. Vigorous regrowth after the 2014 bushfire is threatening the significant grass-tree community of the area. The *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land* (DEPI 2012) provides the framework for public land fire management across Victoria. Fire management on public land in non-urban areas is the responsibility of DELWP.

The *Alpine – Greater Gippsland Strategic Bushfire Management Plan* (DELWP 2015) sets the direction for fire management in and around the New Guinea Caves area. Treatment of fuel risks and ecological fire requirements are considered in DELWP's fire operations plan process.

The cultural, natural and recreational values identified and prioritised in this plan will inform the fire operations plan process so that burning and other fuel treatments are prioritised or modified where necessary.

The extremely high cultural importance of the New Guinea Caves to the Gunaikurnai resides in the overall integrity and health of the place and is not limited to the physical cave structures and artefacts. Fire management and other land management activities need to be undertaken in ways that use sensitive, low-impact risk reduction measures.

In broad terms, the area requires fire management strategies that control risks through careful fuel management, minimise the likelihood of bushfire around the caves and their culturally sensitive areas, and provide adequate planned burning of areas that require fire at a particular interval to maintain or restore the health of Country, including its habitat structure and plant composition, and to suppress invasive species.

Climate change

Climate change is a potential intensifier of existing and new threats. These include changes to hydrology, increased frequency or severity of extreme events, and changes in vegetation arising from rainfall and evaporation changes. Changes such as vegetation alteration are likely to occur slowly, while extreme events such as storms and floods could occur at any time. Storms increase the risk of inundation, and the threats to physical assets and public safety. Flooding is a natural phenomenon in the Snowy River and its tributaries. However, high flood levels could threaten New Guinea Cave 2 and damage cultural heritage and artefacts.

4.5 CONSERVATION STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THREATS

Management measures and procedures are needed to ensure that operations, works and visitor use of the New Guinea Caves area do not cause significant disturbance or damage.

Active programs to maintain or restore land and water values, such as invasive plant and animal control programs, need to be undertaken within the broader directions and programs for the surrounding Snowy River National Park in order to be efficient and effective. Conservation strategies to deal with the key land, water and heritage values identified above are shown in Table 4.

Values are identified primarily at the level of EVCs and threatened species, using state-wide datasets. However, it is often more practical and effective to take conservation action by targeting values at an intermediate level, for example by controlling weeds or undertaking planned burning to improve the health of an assemblage of ground-cover plants in a particular EVC or part of the area, rather than the EVC as a whole or a single threatened plant species.

Intensive conservation action planning is required to identify the most critical values, because of the present condition of the area and the ecological processes, such as predation or weed invasion, that are operating within it. The strategies in Table 4 should therefore be evaluated further through a conservation planning process that takes into account the broader landscape.

Table 4: Land, water and heritage conservation strategies.

Threat	Priorities	Strategy
Caves		
Damage from illegal activity and visitor disturbance	Preventing unauthorised access	Complete the current cave protection project and implement actions.
Flooding		
Heritage river character and condition		
Impeded flows, riparian weed invasion, water contamination, view shed impacts	Weed control and camper waste management	Minimise disturbance on banks and crossings. Control Blackberry, Willow and other weeds. Monitor and minimise waste generated by rafting groups and other users.
Warm Temperate Rainforest EVC		
Bushfire	Minimisation of fire	Work with DELWP Forest Fire Management to ensure adequate risk reduction on surrounding areas using burning and other measures. Minimise burning in EVCs. Prevent fires starting inside the area through visitor education and regulatory enforcement.
Invasive plants and animals	Blackberry, Sambar Deer, Feral Goats	Undertake intensive weed control. Maintain Feral Goat control. Maintain Feral Pig control upstream of the area. Implement relevant actions in FFG Action Statement No. 238 (DSE 2009).
Rare or threatened species		
Lack of knowledge of current condition and conservation requirements	Common Bent-wing Bat	Minimise disturbance to the caves and prevent entry during winter when bats are in occupation.
Culturally important plants and animals		
Lack of knowledge of species and conservation requirements	Cultural knowledge and current status	Obtain knowledge through Joint Management Plan strategic initiatives.

5 PEOPLE IN THE AREA

5.1 TRADITIONAL OWNERS CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY

Cultural values and practices in the present, as well as the past, are fundamental to Gunaikurnai people. The area provides opportunities for the Gunaikurnai to increase and strengthen their connection to country in an inspiring landscape that is characteristic of Country in its original and traditional condition.

Joint management provides a renewed opportunity for Gunaikurnai People to hold community gatherings on country, pass cultural skills and knowledge between generations, and meet cultural obligations to care for country through conservation and restoration work in the area.

GLaWAC joint management rangers undertake conservation and maintenance works in the area, in cooperation with Parks Victoria, and there is great scope to build capacity and expertise through this program. As far as possible the Gunaikurnai should be the tellers of their own cultural stories.

In addition to taking a greater role in the management and conservation of the area, Gunaikurnai people will take opportunities to gather in the area, pass on cultural knowledge between generations, and undertake traditional practices.

5.2 VISITORS TO THE AREA

The area is difficult to reach by road because of the steep terrain. Vehicular access is via Betts Creek Track, which ends next to the Snowy River. New Guinea Track ends a short distance above the river near a helipad and is therefore not critical for rafting access, but it is used by cavers. Both tracks are suitable only for four-wheel drive vehicles in dry weather and are seasonally closed during winter and early spring for safety and environment impact reasons.

Rafters and canoeists pull in or camp on the river at the eastern end of Betts Track and regularly use this as an exit point from the River, below Tulloch Ard Gorge.

The significant cultural importance of New Guinea Cave 2 makes it unsuitable for general public visitor access because of the risk of damage to the cave formation and cultural artefacts.

The entrance to New Guinea Cave 2 is gated and locked, and has been damaged by people cutting the lock to access the cave. Unstable rocks above the cave entrance and archaeological excavation pits inside the cave, dating from the 1980s, pose a risk to visitor safety.

Organised speleological groups, with authorised access, have explored and mapped the known caves in the area and provide knowledge about the structure and values of the caves that is important for management and conservation.

Some unofficial sources of caving information that promote recreational caving opportunities give little recognition to the cultural and natural values and their sensitivity. Parks Victoria is currently developing a state-wide cave access procedure to manage access to caves and human impacts.

Although the New Guinea Caves area is important as an access point for recreational river users and for cavers, the primary management priority is the protection of the caves from further damage. Illegal access and damage is likely to be reduced if vehicle access is better controlled so that legitimate recreational and educational users can access the river but informal access is restricted.

5.3 VISITOR STRATEGIES

Visitor access, experiences and activities will be managed in accordance with the goals and strategies set out in Table 5.

Table 5: Visitor experience and management goal and strategies.

Goals
Increase protection for the caves by managing vehicle access while providing for legitimate recreational and educational use.
Interpret the important cultural values of the New Guinea Caves for visitors.
Strategies
Maintain public vehicle access on Betts Creek Track and New Guinea Track.
Seasonally close Betts Creek Track and New Guinea Tracks to all vehicular use during winter and spring (approximately June to November).
Regularly monitor and review the Special Protection Overlay area and retention of track access arrangements in light of any sign of damage or heightened risk to cultural values, or increased risk to public safety, in which case a variation to the plan may be sought.
Investigate options for relocating the camping area on the southwest end of Betts Creek Track to the Conservation and Recreation Zone.
Allow for non-vehicular access to the Conservation and Recreation Zone by the general public for day visit and camping use.
Work with recognised speleological, education and recreation bodies to achieve responsible access and use.
Establish and implement a Caves Access Procedure for public access to caves in the area, with access to New Guinea Cave 2 limited to management and research purposes only.
Provide Gunaikurnai-approved visitor information and interpretation of the caves, their significance and joint management at Ash Saddle.
Ensure vehicular access and any facility development does not occur in the Wilderness Zone.

Specific recreational activities and uses will be managed in accordance with Table 6. This table does not limit the operation or exercising of Native Title or Traditional Owner rights held by the Gunaikurnai people.

Table 6: Recreational activities allowed in management zones.

Activity	Conservation Zone	Conservation and Recreation Zone	Special Protection Overlay	Wilderness Zone
Abseiling and rock climbing	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Boating — rafting, canoeing, kayaking	N/A	Yes	No	Yes
Camping — designated areas	No	Yes	No	No
Camping — dispersed vehicle-based	N/A	No	No	No
Camping — dispersed other	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Activity	Conservation Zone	Conservation and Recreation Zone	Special Protection Overlay	Wilderness Zone
Caving	Yes (1 December – 30 May by recognised speleological and caving organisations under permit)	Yes (1 December – 30 May by recognised speleological and caving organisations under permit)	No (except as part of authorised management or research programs)	Yes (1 December – 30 May by recognised speleological and caving organisations under permit)
Competitive recreational events	No	No	No	No
Cycling	No	Yes (on open public roads.; not permitted on walking tracks)	No	No
Dogs	No	No	No	No
Education activities	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Campfires — solid fuel	Yes (only in designated campfires where provided and subject to regulations including fire bans)	Yes (only in designated campfires where provided and subject to regulations including fire bans)	No	Yes (subject to regulations including fire bans)
Campfires — liquid or gas fuel stoves	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Firewood collection	Yes (for visitor use in the area where fires are allowed; not allowed for commercial or domestic use)	Yes (for visitor use in the area where fires are allowed; not allowed for commercial or domestic use)	No	Yes (for visitor use in the area where fires are allowed; not allowed for commercial or domestic use)
Fishing	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Geocaching	Yes (no excavation allowed)	Yes (no excavation allowed)	No	No
Guided activities	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Horseriding	No	No	No	No
Hunting	No	No	No	No
Orienteering and rogaining	No	No	No	No
Vehicle use (two wheel drives, four wheel drives and trail bikes)	N/A	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on MVO roads)	Yes (on open public roads; not allowed on MVO roads)	No
Walking and hiking	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

6 WORKING TOGETHER

6.1 THE JOINT MANAGEMENT DELIVERY PARTNERS – GLAWAC, PARKS VICTORIA, DELWP, GKTOLMB

The area is assigned to Parks Victoria to manage as part of Victoria's parks and conservation reserves system. Parks Victoria rangers operate from Buchan and Bairnsdale, and regional and state-wide technical specialist staff provide environmental, cultural and visitor expertise and services to manage the area from other locations in eastern Victoria and Melbourne.

Parks Victoria and GLaWAC have an agreement for GLaWAC to undertake works in the New Guinea Caves area, and other jointly managed areas, that has been operating since 2013.

DELWP is responsible for fire management on non-urban public land and provides legislative and policy support to the GKTOLMB and Parks Victoria. The GLaWAC ranger team has recently commenced participation in DELWP's fire management program.

The GKTOLMB, Parks Victoria, GLaWAC and DELWP have identified the potential for these partnerships to expand and evolve significantly over time through mentoring, training, information sharing and employment and contractual opportunities.

This process should involve a sharing of expertise and knowledge of park and public land management by Parks Victoria and DELWP, and cultural and local knowledge and expertise by GLaWAC. The GKTOLMB provides a central forum for coordinating these partnerships, and provides the strategic management directions for the partnerships through this joint management plan.

6.2 COMMUNITY AND OTHER PARTNERS

A number of private landholders adjacent to the area have a direct interest and influence on park operations and values.

Schools, outdoor education providers and tour operators are frequent users of the area and have an important stake in access and the sustainability of the area.

The owners of Karoonda Park (a farm property) at Gelantipy conduct a large outdoor education program, including rafting and other activities that currently use Betts Track to access the river.

The Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association Inc. (ACKMA) is a professional association for those responsible for, or interested in, planning and management of limestone landscapes and caves in the Australasian region.

The Victorian Speleological Association is an organisation of caving enthusiasts that explores and maps caves, promotes cave conservation and ethical caving, and organises caving trips and activities.

The Sporting Shooters Association Australia and the Australian Deer Association provide volunteers to assist with deer and invasive animal control programs in the joint managed parks and reserves.

Other agency partners are important in the management of the New Guinea Caves area. Aboriginal Victoria is the primary Government agency responsible for policy and regulation of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council has a central role in the protection and management of Aboriginal heritage. The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority provides significant funding for conservation works on public land in the region and provides strategic co-ordination of catchment restoration investment. It also provides executive personnel and support to the GKTOLMB.

Land to the west of the caves area is State forest managed by DELWP. VicForests manages logging in some areas of State forest. The area is within the Shire of East Gippsland, which is responsible or

local planning regulation, road maintenance and traffic management around the area, as well as other municipal responsibilities.

6.3 AUTHORISED USES

Licensed tour operators and educational providers use the area to camp and to access and exit the Snowy River for rafting, canoeing and kayaking.

6.4 AREA BOUNDARIES

The area boundaries are clear and no clarifications or boundary amendments are required.

7 GOALS AND ACTIONS

The following goals and actions should be read in conjunction with goals and strategic initiatives for the Joint management area as a whole.

Caring for Country

Goal

The cultural heritage, land and water of the New Guinea Caves area are protected and cared for using the combined values, knowledge and skills of the Gunaikurnai, Parks Victoria, community and partners.

Cultural heritage

No.	Action
NG1	Increase the visibility of Gunaikurnai cultural values in the area through Welcome to country and other appropriate signage, based on the Krauatungalung clan at entry points and visitor nodes. Consider renaming the area with a Gunaikurnai place name.
NG2	Undertake mapping and survey of Gunaikurnai cultural values in the caves, particularly New Guinea Cave 2, including 3D modelling.
NG3	Assess the threat to New Guinea Cave 2 posed by direct or indirect flooding and determine what practical risk controls can be implemented.
NG4	Seek an ongoing protection declaration under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 for New Guinea Cave 2 to provide adequate powers to protect and conserve the cave.
NG5	Support and assist GLaWAC and Gunaikurnai Elders in determining the need for repatriation of archaeological material when cultural survey of New Guinea Cave 2 is completed.
NG6	Build knowledge and undertake surveys and mapping of plants and animals in the area, of cultural importance to the Gunaikurnai.
NG7	Create opportunities for greater Gunaikurnai connection through visiting the area and undertaking community cultural activities.
NG8	Increase the level of cultural heritage information and interpretation provided to visitors at Ash Saddle.
NG9	Implement cultural heritage management procedures for the area as agreed between the partners, including incorporation of Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 provisions and any Natural Resource Agreement that may be established for the area under the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987.
NG10	Ensure Gunaikurnai are included in the assessment and approval of applications to undertake research in the area in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.
NG11	Implement the entitlements or obligations under the Native Title Act 1993, and any future Land Use Activity Agreement that is established under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010, relating to Gunaikurnai rights to negotiate long-term and high-impact leases and comment on lower impact authorisations in the area.

Land and water

- NG12 Apply the zoning set out in Table 1.
- NG13 Regularly monitor and review the coverage of the Special Protection Overlay and retention of track access arrangements in light of any sign of damage or heightened risk to cultural values. Consider whether a variation to the plan may be appropriate.
- NG14 Protect and restore the area by implementing the land and water conservation strategies detailed in Table 4.
- NG15 Implement strategies for threatened and endangered species in the area as detailed in Table 3.
- NG16 Work with DELWP to protect the area from bushfire through fuel management strategies that do not adversely affect the caves, rainforest and other fire-sensitive values. Maintain the helipad at the river end of New Guinea Track.
- NG17 Identify areas where planned burning is required to achieve conservation objectives for park ecosystems and habitats and seek burns to be programmed and implemented as part of DELWP's fire operations planning process.
- NG18 Seek opportunities to implement traditional cultural burning practices as part of planned burning through liaison and partnership with DELWP fire managers.
- NG19 Increase compliance and enforcement activity to ensure that access and activity provisions and restrictions are observed.
- NG20 Work with East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to control pest plants and animals consistent with the East Gippsland Invasive Plants and Animals Plan.
- NG21 Include the area in the development of a comprehensive conservation action plan for the Snowy River National Park aligned to the Gunaikurnai Whole of Country Plan and broader East Gippsland park landscape conservation.

People in the Area

Goals

Gunaikurnai increase their connection with the area through management, operations and the opportunity to undertake cultural practices.

Visitors understand and appreciate the important cultural values of the New Guinea Caves and visit the area respectfully and sustainably.

-
- | No. | Actions |
|------|---|
| NG22 | Manage visitor access and activities in the area consistent with the goal and strategy in tables 5 and 6. |
| NG23 | Ensure all tour operators undertake cultural awareness training conducted by Gunaikurnai, to enhance knowledge and protection of cultural heritage, and to improve interpretation of Gunaikurnai culture to visitors. |
| NG24 | Establish Gunaikurnai interpretative information for visitors along park tracks about culturally important plants, animals and features. |
-

Working Together

Goals

Joint management of the New Guinea Caves area operates as an effective partnership in which Gunaikurnai build their capacity to play a central role.

Community stakeholders support and contribute to the protection and conservation of the area.

No.	Actions
NG25	Amend the Greater Alpine National Parks management plan to reflect the provisions of the approved Joint Management Plan for the New Guinea Caves area.
NG26	Promote the opportunities for the Gunaikurnai, Parks Victoria Rangers, the Australian Caves and Karst Management Association, and speleological groups to share knowledge about the area and its management.
NG27	Liaise with speleological and caving groups to achieve compliance with cave access procedures, and accurate and respectful public information about the caves and their values.
NG28	Increase participation and input of Gunaikurnai in DELWP's fire management programs in and around the area.
NG29	Provide opportunities for Parks Victoria rangers in the area to interact with other parks and partners in the Settlement Area to develop their understanding and knowledge of joint management approaches.
NG30	Maintain close collaboration with the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and DELWP biodiversity and fire staff in relation to management programs and priorities in and around the area landscape.

8 PLAN MONITORING AND REVIEW

An annual rolling plan will be used to implement the actions in Section 7. The progress and effectiveness in implementing these actions will be tracked by collecting two types of data:

- data on *activities* — what is being done under joint management
- data on *outcomes* — what changes are occurring as a result of what is being done.

Table 7 provides further detail on both types of data, and describes how they will be collected.

To minimise the burden of additional data collection processes, the methodology outlined below builds on existing project management processes and data wherever possible. Progress on actions that apply to more than one of the joint managed parks (for example, Gunaikurnai capacity building) will be reported under the Strategic Plan actions while tracking the initiatives in specific parks that contribute to that broader action.

Table 7: Data used to track progress in implementing the Joint Management Plan.

Data type	Description	Data source and method
Activities	<p>Activities are the things we are doing under joint management.</p> <p>Tracking activities is important for understanding whether the planned projects and activities are being implemented successfully. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the activities of each of the strategic initiatives documented in Table 5 in Section 4 of the Strategic Plan. • the actions described in this management plan for New Guinea Caves. 	<p>Tracking the activities outlined in the Introduction and Strategic Plan will be based on the project management tools that the partners use to guide implementation.</p> <p>Existing project management tools should provide sufficient evidence and information on how implementation is progressing, what has been completed, any bottlenecks or issues to be addressed, and the staff responsible.</p>
Outcomes	<p>Outcomes are the changes that occur as a result of what is being done.</p> <p>Tracking outcomes is important for understanding whether the intended changes are being achieved, and therefore whether the goals for the first five-year period are being achieved. Outcomes are documented in Tables 3 and 4 of the Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>Some outcomes identified for the five-year goals can be tracked using existing project management tools, while others will require additional data collection.</p> <p>Appendix 2 of the Strategic Plan specifies potential indicators and timings for outcomes.</p>

Table 8 provides an example of the data that will be collected on the outcomes of joint management. It is an excerpt from the complete outcomes framework, which is contained in Appendix 2 of the Strategic Plan.

Table 8: Excerpt of outcomes framework from the Strategic Plan.

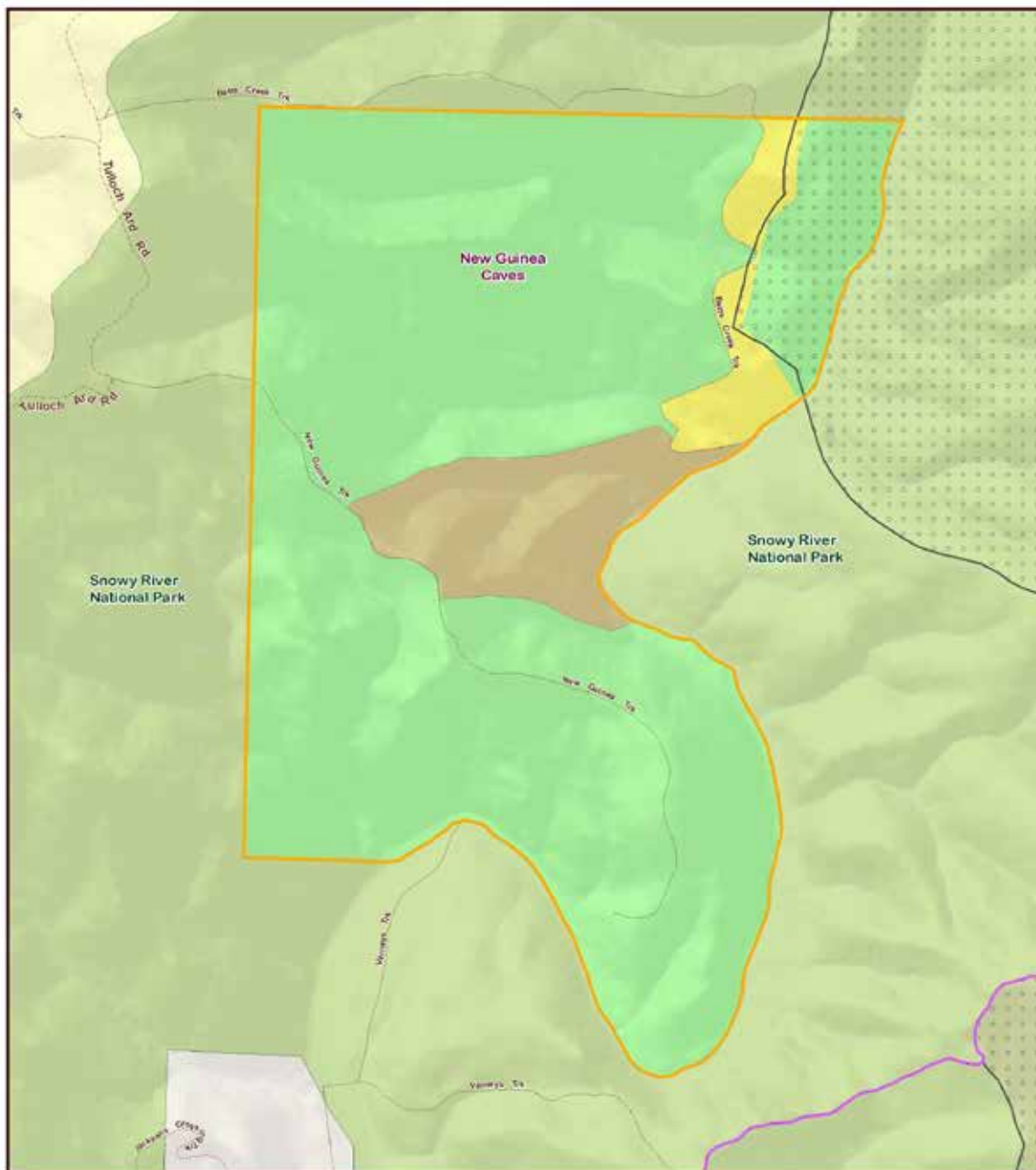
Theme	Example of outcome <i>The desired change</i>	Description <i>Further detail</i>	Indicators and frequency <i>How will the change be assessed?</i>
People	More visitors see, engage with, and learn from Gunaikurnai and non-Gunaikurnai staff on parks.	Gunaikurnai and non-Gunaikurnai rangers and other management staff will be more visible in parks, engaging with visitors and educating them about park values and Gunaikurnai heritage.	Number of rangers and other staff working in roles such as guides and educators. Detail on programs implemented to build capacity of rangers and staff as guides and educators (e.g. number of participants). <i>Annual</i>
Culture	Protections are in place for all identified cultural sites	Measures will be put in place to protect all culturally important sites from erosion, park use and other threats.	Percentage of identified cultural sites that have protections in place. <i>Annual</i>
Country	Rangers and management staff have the knowledge, skills and resources to implement sustainable, integrated land management practices.	Partners aim to continue capacity-building and training programs for rangers and other management staff in sustainable land management practices that integrate Gunaikurnai traditional practices with modern conventional practices.	Details on program (e.g. content, forms of capacity building implemented, number of rangers completing capacity building initiatives). <i>Annual</i>
Working Together	Decision-making processes are embedded.	The JMP specifies the decision-making processes in the governance structure. Partners will embed these by demonstrating they have put them into practice and are using them to make decisions.	Reflection on how decision-making processes and governance arrangements have been followed and complied with in the previous 12-month period, and lessons for the future. <i>Annual</i>

The monitoring regime, especially for Caring for Country and People in the Parks actions, will use measures and data specified in regional Conservation Action Plans and state-wide monitoring programs conducted across the broader park and reserve estate, including the *State of the Parks* and *State of the Forests*. This will be particularly important for monitoring outcomes, which are often complex and can only be monitored efficiently at selected locations rather than in every park.

This management plan has effect for 10 years and will be formally reviewed and renewed at the end of that period. After the five-year review of the Strategic Plan, any consequential variations to this management plan will be made at that time through a consultative process.

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New Guinea Caves Joint Management Plan

24/05/2018

Coordinate System: GDA 1994 VICGRID94
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic



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- Walking track
- 4WD
- Unsealed road
- Management Vehicles Only

- Joint Management - New Guinea Caves
- Public Land
- Park and Reserve

Note: Heritage River Overlay applies to whole of Joint Management Area.

Management Zones and Overlays

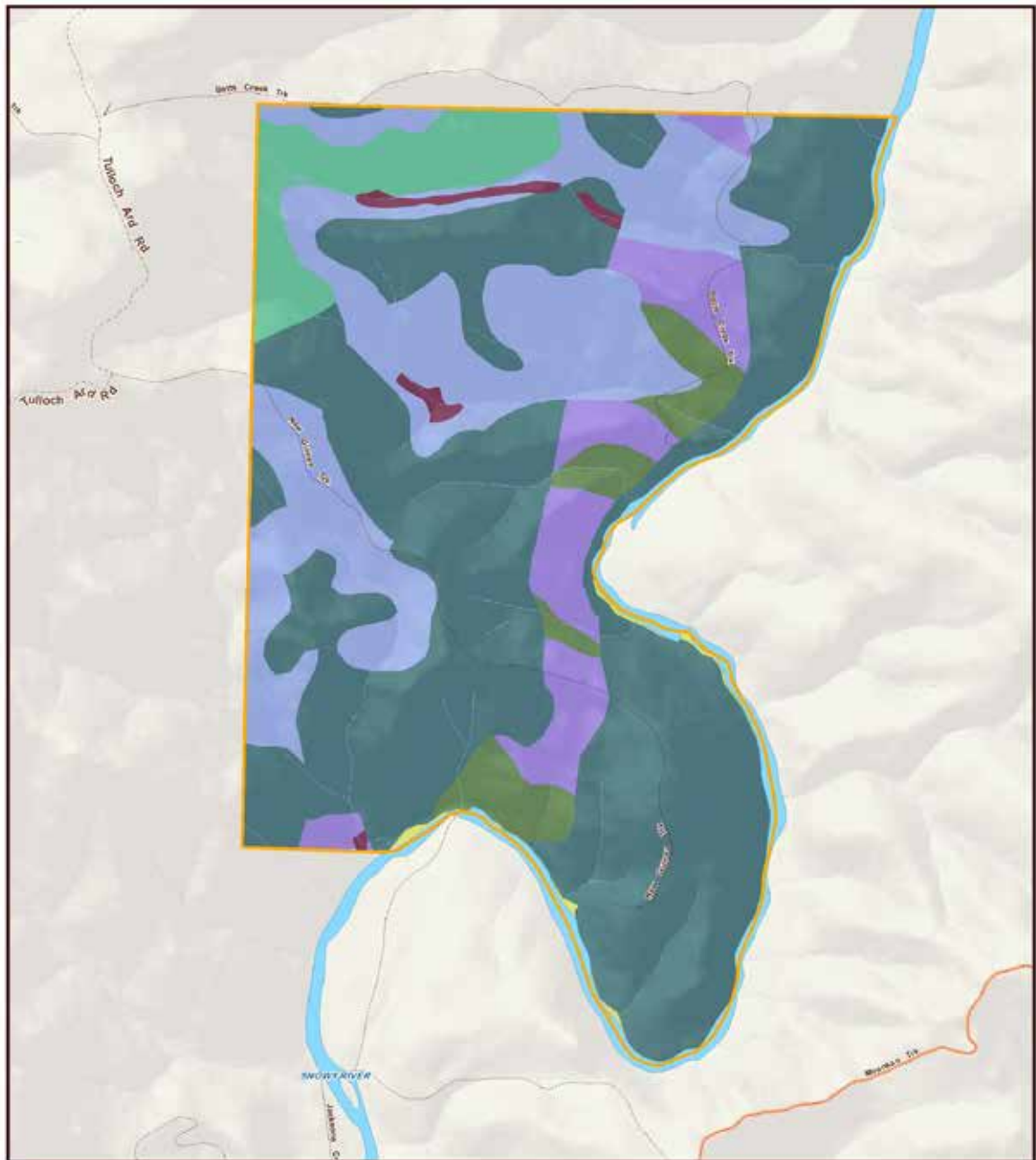
- Conservation & Recreation Zone
- Conservation Zone
- Special Protection Overlay
- Natural Catchment Area
- Wilderness Zone



Healthy Parks
Healthy People



Map 1: Management zones and overlays, New Guinea Caves.



New Guinea Caves Joint Management Plan

23/05/2018

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- Walking track
- 4WD
- Unsealed road
- MVO

Joint Management

Ecological Vegetation Classes

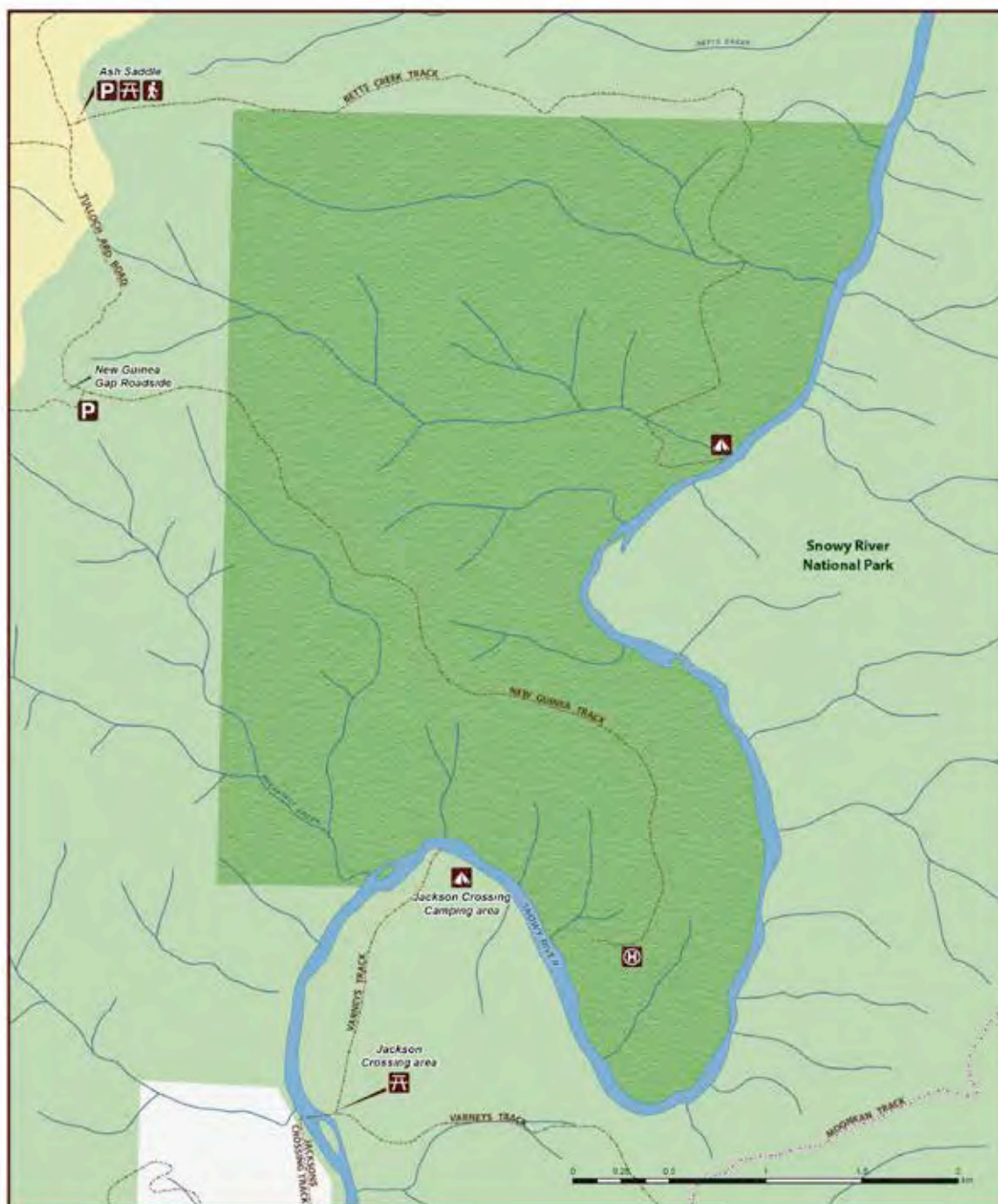
- Damp Forest
- Grassy Woodland
- Riparian Shrubland
- Shrubby Dry Forest
- Valley Grassy Forest
- Warm Temperate Rainforest
- Wet Forest



Healthy Parks
Healthy People



Map 2: Ecological Vegetation Classes, New Guinea Caves.



New Guinea Caves Joint Management Plan

23/5/2018
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- Arterial Roads
- Sealed Roads
- - - Unsealed Roads
- ... Walking Tracks
- 4WD
- Management Vehicles Only

- Joint Management
- Park and Reserve
- Public Land

Visitor Sites & Facilities

- P Parking
- Trail
- Picnic area
- Camping Area
- Helipad

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Map 3: Visitor Sites and Facilities, New Guinea Caves.