

Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group Inc.

2020 Strategic Plan.



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CONTEXT: THE UPPER OVENS VALLEY

COMMUNITY

The picturesque Upper Ovens Valley is situated in North east Victoria within the Alpine Shire. It includes the townships of Bright, Porepunkah, Ovens, Wandiligong and Harrietville and districts of Eurobin, Buckland Valley, Freeburg, Germantown and Smoko areas largely confined to the river valley floors. The surrounding ranges are heavily forested rising up to high treeless alpine peaks.

These landscapes are highly valued in the community for their biodiversity and opportunities for recreation and tourism. The Upper Ovens Valley economy is heavily focussed on tourism. The Gross Regional Product (GRP) of the Alpine Shire in 2014 was \$706M with 24% coming from tourism, much of it based around Bright and surrounds. Accommodation and food related occupations account for 14% of employment in the Alpine Shire through 772 jobs, the highest of all occupations, the next being retail and health care both at 11% and agriculture at 10%.

The relationship between natural and healthy landscapes and a healthy economy is key to the communities of the Upper Ovens Valley.

CATCHMENT

The catchment includes the upper reaches of the Ovens and Buckland Rivers. Most of the upper catchment is forested with cleared land largely restricted to the Valley floors. The Ovens River is the least modified catchment in the Murray Darling Basin and contributes approximately 14% of the average total flow of the entire Murray Darling Basin. It is the only free flowing major river in North east Victoria. The Upper Ovens Catchment provides important unregulated stream flow to the Lower Ovens and Murray Rivers.

LAND USE

The Upper Ovens Valley is comprised of 92% of public land and 8% of private land. Public land includes significant parts of the Mt Buffalo and Alpine National Parks and large areas of State Forest. Extensive Pine plantations were established on public land in the foothills around Bright in the 1930's and are now managed on freehold land.

The Upper Ovens Catchment has been turned upside down by past gold mining, which has created a legacy of environmental issues especially loss of topsoil and weed invasion and sand and gravel from dredging continues to fill the river's deep water holes causing disruption to wildlife habitat. Tobacco farming was present for many decades however that industry ceased in the early 1990's but has left behind residual chemical issues in the soil.

Rural private land use currently includes primary production of grapes, hops, apples, nuts, chestnuts as well as cattle and sheep grazing and some deer production. Agri-tourism is an important and growing industry in the area, such as wineries and other value adding enterprises. There are also many "lifestyle" land owners and hobby farmers on small properties.

BIODIVERSITY

The Upper Ovens Valley Catchment contains important native fish populations, important wetlands, important vegetation communities, environmentally significant fresh water meadows and shallow fresh water marshes and a wide variety of threatened remnant Environmental Vegetation Classes linked to the river and the flood plain. The catchment Flora contains 800 native and 360 exotic plant species, which includes 18 species of national significance and 62 species significant to Victoria.

A diverse range of vegetation communities represent a wide range of altitudes from the valley floors at around 300 MASL to over 1900 in elevation, the lowest area being around the Ovens township to highest area being around Mount Feathertop. The Riparian Forests are dominated by Manna Gum and Mountain Swamp Gums with Red Gum woodlands in the lower reaches. The extensive foothills are characterised by Peppermint Gum and Stringybark Forests with Candlebark and Brittle Gum. Alpine Ash Forests dominate areas above 900 MASL with Montane forests of Mountain Gum and Snow Gum above. At the higher elevations the tree line is reached, above which alpine herbfields, grasslands, heathlands and peatlands occur.

The Upper Ovens Valley contains fresh water meadows and shallow fresh water marshes and peatlands

The Upper Ovens Catchment fauna is also diverse and contains 190 native bird species, 47 native mammal species and 12 native frog species. Endangered animal and bird species include the Grey Goshawk, Platypus and Water Rat populations, and fish species of conservation significance including Mountain Galaxias, Trout Cod and Murray Cod.

PRIORITY ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Main threats to the biodiversity of the Upper Ovens Valley include;

- Invasive plants: Many weeds are a challenge to public and private land, but some of the main ones include woody weeds; Blackberry, Willows, Broom and Hawthorn.
- Invasive Animals: Deer: Mainly Sambar and Fallow. Foxes, wild dogs and cats
- Cattle grazing in riparian areas.
- River and floodplain erosion.
- Fire: too frequent and intense fire.
- Loss of connectivity for wildlife.
- Water quality.
- River barriers to fish migration.
- Lack of knowledge of values and threats.
- Loss of high quality habitat.
- Residual effect of past agricultural chemical misuse.

Environmental matters include:

- Weed and Invasive animal management.
- Re-instating stream habitat.
- Creating natural corridors to connect biodiversity.
- Riparian and floodplain flood mitigation.
- Protection of waterways and riverbanks from erosion.

- Protecting and conserving threatened, depleted and endangered Ecological Vegetation Communities and species.
- Limiting damage from stock to riparian areas.
- Barriers to the migration of fish and other aquatic life.
- Having a knowledge and evidence based environmental strategy.
- Mapping extent and assessing the condition of river and biodiversity health.
- Community awareness of environmental matters

UPPER OVENS VALLEY LANDCARE GROUP

The Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group (UOVLG) began in 1997 with approximately 20 members rising to over 180 members in 2012. Membership has stabilised at about 80 members.

The UOVLG is in the Ovens Landcare Network, with support currently from the Kiewa Catchment & Upper Ovens Landcare Facilitator. The group has had a part time coordinator and a project officer from time to time, subject to project funding.

In the past, the focus of activities have included a Community Weed Initiative, weed control and revegetation, particularly on the Ovens River frontage, and water quality measurement and given support to walking tracks and the Rail Trail. The UOVLG holds a stall at the Bright Make it, Bake it, Grow it Market to promote activities and the Friends of Germantown Streamside Reserve and the Bright Community Garden are key projects of the UOVLG.

The Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group has a committee comprising:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Committee member representing the Friends of Germantown Streamside Reserve
- Committee member representing the Bright Community Garden
- Committee Member (s) as determined at the AGM

The Committee administers an account to run the activities of the Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group to carry out projects and manage the business of the UOVLG.

VISION

The broad community collectively appreciates, conserves and enhances the natural and rural environment of the Upper Ovens Valley.

MISSION

To work with the whole community, including landowners, to protect, sustain and enhance our healthy environment in the Upper Ovens Valley.

OBJECTIVES

1. **Caring for the land:** To stimulate and enhance understanding of the local environment to encourage land management practices that conserve and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services and promote sustainable agriculture with landholders.
2. **Membership:** To build and engage UOVLG membership by providing quality experiences, a personal sense of achievement, incentives for landowners and by providing opportunities to develop skills and resources to become good environmental stewards.
3. **Promotion:** To promote the natural values and the opportunities and achievements of UOVLG and its auspiced groups to the members, community and partners to increase awareness and participation in activities that aims to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services.
4. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** To have strategic and effective outcomes by partnering and collaborating with community, government agencies and organisations, including developing sponsorship opportunities for local businesses and organisations to contribute to UOVLG activities.
5. **Projects:** To use knowledge and evidence based decision making to identify priorities for seeking funding for multidisciplinary projects to care for public and private land and develop capacity within the committee and membership to apply for successful funding and manage projects.
6. **Governance:** To have an inclusive, skilled committee that is clear on its role, provides effective decision making and strategic direction on behalf of its members and manages the business of the UOVLG and administration of the Upper Ovens Valley Landcare account in accordance with good governance principles and the Constitution.

KEY RESULT AREAS

1. Community Awareness
2. Biodiversity Enhancements
3. Germantown Streamside Reserve
4. Bright Community Garden
5. Governance

KEY PRIORITY AREAS OF WORK

- Areas previously treated and revegetated by UOVLG until they are naturally sustaining or actively managed by the landowner.
- The Ovens River and major tributaries Reserve and frontage including and the Germantown Streamside Reserve.
- Knowledge and understanding of the areas values, risks and opportunities.
- Engaging the community, particularly increasing landowner involvement.
- Education and awareness, including urban sustainability.
- Knowledge and understanding of sustainable gardening through the Bright Community Garden.

KEY PARTNERS

- Alpine Shire; Provides local government services.
- DELWP; Manage State Forest and fire on public land.
- HVP: Manages the softwood plantations.
- North East Catchment Management Authority: The caretaker of river health in the Ovens Basin and is responsible for the integrated management of the land and water resources.
- Parks Victoria: manages National Parks and Reserves.

TIME FRAME

The plan will guide the activities of the Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group for 4 years from 2016 – 2020 at which time it will be reviewed. The implementation of the Plan will be reported at the AGM and progress tracked at selected Committee meetings.

2016-2020 STRATEGIC PLAN: SUMMARY OF DIRECTIONS

KRA	Objective	Actions	Performance measure Outcome
Biodiversity Enhancements	1	Identify high value natural assets on private land in the Upper Ovens Valley.	Environmental plan and map
Biodiversity Enhancements	1	Identify high value assets on public land that are at risk and have no identified action in place to ameliorate threats.	Environmental plan and map
Biodiversity Enhancements	2	Encourage public land managers to mitigate risk to natural values where there is no identified action in place.	Main environmental risks on public land are being addressed
Community Awareness	1, 2 & 3	Facilitate activities in the Upper Ovens Valley to communicate special values and threats and promote Landcare principles and activity.	Community knowledge and appreciation increases. Participation in Landcare increases.
Biodiversity Enhancements	2 & 4 & 5	Seek funding and support to carry out environmental improvement projects targeting high value natural assets that are at risk.	Environmental improvement projects identified, funded and in progress
Biodiversity Enhancements & Community Awareness	2	Work with and assist landowners identify and manage in good condition high value natural assets.	Landcare working actively with Private land owners.
Biodiversity Enhancements & Community Awareness	2, 3 & 4	Discuss with Hancock Victoria Plantations potential mutual benefits from being involved with Racecourse Plantation and to promote Landcare principles.	If feasible, MoU in place and implemented
Biodiversity Enhancements	2 & 4	Continue to maintain and improve Ovens River rehabilitation works.	Number of planting days and % of surviving plants
Germantown Streamside Reserve (See Appendix 1)	2	Continue to work on public land with Parks Victoria and DELWP to help maintain the natural values and visitor experience at Germantown Stream reserve to a high standard.	Landcare grants successful; Green Army assistance. Reduction in weed infestation and increase in native vegetation regeneration.
Bright Community Garden	2	To provide the Bright community with an asset where principles of sustainable gardening can be practiced. Engage a broad group of community members, helping them to connect people to where their food comes from and acknowledging the importance of Landcare within urban landscapes.	Community garden established, productive and running.
Governance	5	Have in place a Strategic Plan which has the support of members to guide the activity of the UOVLG.	Approved Strategic Plan

KRA	Objective	Actions	Performance measure Outcome
Governance	5	Maintain good records of works done including effective mapping for recording and planning.	All works recorded and mapped and acquittals done on time.
Governance	5	Succession plan experience moving into leadership position	Executive positions filled by experienced members.

2016-2017 ACTION PLAN

KRA	Activity	Funding	How/progress
Community Awareness	Run a bus tour in Spring 2016 to focus community awareness on a range of biodiversity issues in the UOV and Landcare activities. Include new UOVLG brochure.	VLG – Upper Ovens River Grant	Committee organised; completed. Brochure produced.
Community Awareness	Provide Landcare information booth at Bright MBGIT monthly market.	Nil	Rob Duncan facilitating with Committee support
Community Awareness	Enlist Volunteers to carry out water watch activities and report on water quality	GSR Maintenance Grant	Peter Stokie; 2 new members, 8 newly trained.
Community Awareness	Provide the opportunity for members to regularly engage and contribute to Landcare by inviting all members to UOVLG Committee meetings and provide interesting and relevant speakers from time to time.	Nil	Peter Stokie
Biodiversity Enhancements & Community Awareness	Investigate an MOU (or similar) with HVP for the mutual benefit of improving the condition of a Riparian section of the Racecourse Plantation and for UOVLG to have a demonstration area for managing Ovens River Riparian disturbed areas.	Nil, seek funding support form HVP	On hold; benefits and value not clear and HPV not responding any further; No action at this stage.
Biodiversity Enhancements & Community Awareness	Improve the communities understanding of biodiversity values and risks to their condition by seeking funding to carry out an audit of biodiversity values and threats of the Upper Ovens Valley.	Seek grant opportunities. \$2000 provided by Alpine shire Community Grants	Produced a GIS based dataset of values and threats; maps produced and banner produced for markets and events. Working with NECMA on progressing Environmental Mgt Plan.
Biodiversity Enhancements & Community Awareness	Produce an Environmental Management Plan to identify priorities for UOVLG programs.	Seek funding from Landcare Grants. Seek support form NECMA	Data set of values produced. NECMA assistance sought to provide mapping training and access data.

KRA	Activity	Funding	How/progress
Biodiversity Enhancements	Carry out environmental improvement works to Riparian areas, both areas treated in the past and new projects.	Seek funding from Landcare Grants. Seek support from NECMA	Applications made and successful for two Riparian areas at GSR. Project team in place to commence. Grant application lodged for "Biodiversity on ground works" program for Ovens/Buckland Junction.
Biodiversity Enhancements	Improve Wandiligong Alpine Park area through weed control and replanting works	Landcare Community Grant	Peter O'Donnell facilitating directly with NECMA. Weed control and planting completed. Grant acquitted.
Biodiversity Enhancements	Work with NECMA to achieve desired outcomes from the Green Army program	National Landcare Program	Peter Stokie and Rob Duncan meet with NECMA and Green Army regularly. Works completed on Ovens River and Alpine Park. Green Army finishes in April 2017.
Biodiversity Enhancements	Access through NECMA and/or Creek-link a mapping program to effectively record past works, condition and plan future works.	Nil	Peter Stokie with support from Peter Jacobs; Mapping training arranged with NECMA
Biodiversity Enhancements	Maintain areas and audit condition of the Ovens River sites where weed control and rehabilitation work has been carried out by UOVLG	VLG	Rob Duncan with support from Committee; Revisit sites.
Germantown Streamside Reserve (See Appendix 1)	Install and maintain new signage.	Alpine Shire Grant	Paul Hellier facilitating with GSR support. Completed.
Germantown Streamside Reserve (See Appendix 1)	Install and maintain a short boardwalk to improve visitor access.	Alpine Shire Grant	Paul Hellier facilitating with GSR support. Completed.
Germantown Streamside Reserve (See Appendix 1)	Work with DELWP to determine authority to engage on work on the left bank.	Nil	Paul Hellier facilitating with GSR support. Initial meetings held.
Germantown Streamside Reserve (See Appendix 1)	Continue blackberry control and plantings.	UOVLG Landcare Riparian Incentive Grants	Applications made and successful for two Riparian areas at GSR. Project team in place to commence.

KRA	Activity	Funding	How/progress
Bright Community Garden	Install water capture, storage and reticulation infrastructure.	Alpine Shire and "Into Our Hands" Grants	Kristie May facilitating with BCGC support. Completed
Bright Community Garden	Built a series of swales and planted over 30 food trees for the first stage of a food forest.	Alpine Shire Grant	Kristie May facilitating with BCGC support. Completed.
Bright Community Garden	Increase community engagement through hosting workshops and events	Nil	BGCG facilitating with volunteers
Bright Community Garden	Construct central gathering space within the garden.	Nil (Gazebo donated)	BCGC facilitating with volunteers
Bright Community Garden	Continue to grow and develop the garden and Food Forest to increase food production and supply for the community	Nil	BCGC facilitating with volunteers
Governance	Prepare a strategic plan in collaboration and consultation with members, the community and stakeholders to guide the activities of the UOVLG to 2020.	Nil	Peter Jacobs with support of the Committee. Draft completed awaiting committee approval.

PLAN APPROVAL

This plan is approved by the Executive of Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Committee.

President: Peter Jacobs

Vice President; Rob Duncan

Secretary: Peter Stokie

Treasurer: Peter O'Donnell

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This plan was developed by a sub-committee of the Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group led by Peter Jacobs with Peter Stokie, Kate Farrell and Megan Hughes.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

UOVLG: Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Group

DELWP: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

MASL; Metres above sea level.

NECMA; North-east Catchment Management Authority

GSR: Germantown Streamside Reserve

HVP: Hancock's Victoria Plantations

The following plan is based on a vision to maintain and improve bio-diversity within the Reserve, and to build and maintain infrastructure that provides accessibility for the broader community in an environmentally sensitive manner.

1. IMPROVING BIO-DIVERSITY

A. NATIVE REVEGETATION RHB-

There is a significant section of depleted native canopy in the southern sector downstream from existing original native plantation.

Strategy- Several community based planting days utilising UOVLG grant money.

B. WEED MANAGEMENT-

Blackberry infestation is occurring within the northern sector of the Reserve. It is particularly severe in the vicinity of the side track located in this area.

Strategy- UOVLG grant applications.

C. REMOVAL OF GARBAGE WASTE- SOUTHERN SECTION RHB-

Recent examples of illegal garbage disposal are evident within the southern sector from the main walking track.

Strategy- Utilise the following groups- Land mates and Green Army.

2. DEVELOPING INFRASTRUCTURE

A. WALKING TRACK MAINTENANCE-

Walking tracks become overgrown at key times during the year. Track borders and marker boards scattered throughout the Reserve can also be undermined or damaged.

Strategy- Utilise the use of volunteers, Land mates and Green Army

B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PICNIC GROUND-

Currently there are no clearly marked designated parking areas and only minimal outdated seating facilities for visitors. 4XD vehicles have free access to the river.

Strategy- Reconfigure the picnic ground so that there are clearly defined spaces for vehicle parking, the information shelter and seating areas. Separate vehicles from the river bank.

C. INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE-

The Reserve has a number of historical goldmining features in the vicinity of the walking tracks. These include water channels, and the possible site of a water mill.

Strategy- Develop interpretive signs along the walking tracks highlighting the historical remains from the goldmining era.

3. COMPLETING THE WALKING TRACK ON THE LHB OF THE RESERVE-

The aim is to complete the final section of the walking track to the camping ground southern section of the Reserve LHB of the Ovens River.