21.04 ENVIRONMENTAL AND LANDSCAPE VALUES

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This clause provides local content to support Clause 12 (Environmental and landscape values) of the State Planning Policy Framework.

21.04-1 Biodiversity

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Biodiversity is the variety of all life, including the diversity of plants and animals, their genes and ecosystems, and the ecological processes they support. Protection of biodiversity is important and a precautionary approach should be taken in planning decisions.

The Shire has prepared the *State of the Environment Report (2010)*, which describes the condition of the Shire's environment based on a range of indicators. From the time of European settlement until the late 1940s, much of the original native vegetation of the Shire was cleared, initially for mining and later for agriculture. Since the 1940s, there has been almost no net loss in total area of tree cover, although native grasslands have suffered through the introduction of exotic species and nutrients in the soil. Understorey vegetation has been similarly affected. Native vegetation now covers 51 percent of the Shire, including large areas designated for forestry, farming and other land-uses. Scattered native vegetation, notably mature paddock trees and riparian strips, also contribute greatly to ecosystem services and biodiversity.

The Shire contains 23 Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), of which 15 are endangered. Of all the area covered by native vegetation in the Shire, 11 percent has a Bioregional Conservation Status of 'endangered'. Endangered EVCs are located along the Muckleford Valley, around Mount Alexander and to the south of Newstead, as shown in Figure 3. Vegetation in EVCs on more fertile land has suffered disproportionate losses to other areas.

Habitat quality is declining in some areas and improving in other areas. Habitat quality is important as high-quality vegetation offers improved ecosystem services and benefits for surrounding land management, and supports more biodiversity. Figure 4 maps Strategic Biodiversity Scores across the Shire as identified by the NaturePrint process used by the former Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI). Areas with the high scores, indicating high-value biodiversity assets, include a large section in the north-east of the Shire (from Harcourt through Mount Alexander and Sutton Grange), areas west and north of Maldon (Mount Tarrengower and the Nuggetty Ranges), areas south-west of Newstead (including the Joyces Creek valley) and areas south of Castlemaine and Chewton. Some of these high-value biodiversity assets are protected within parks and reserves; others are on private land.

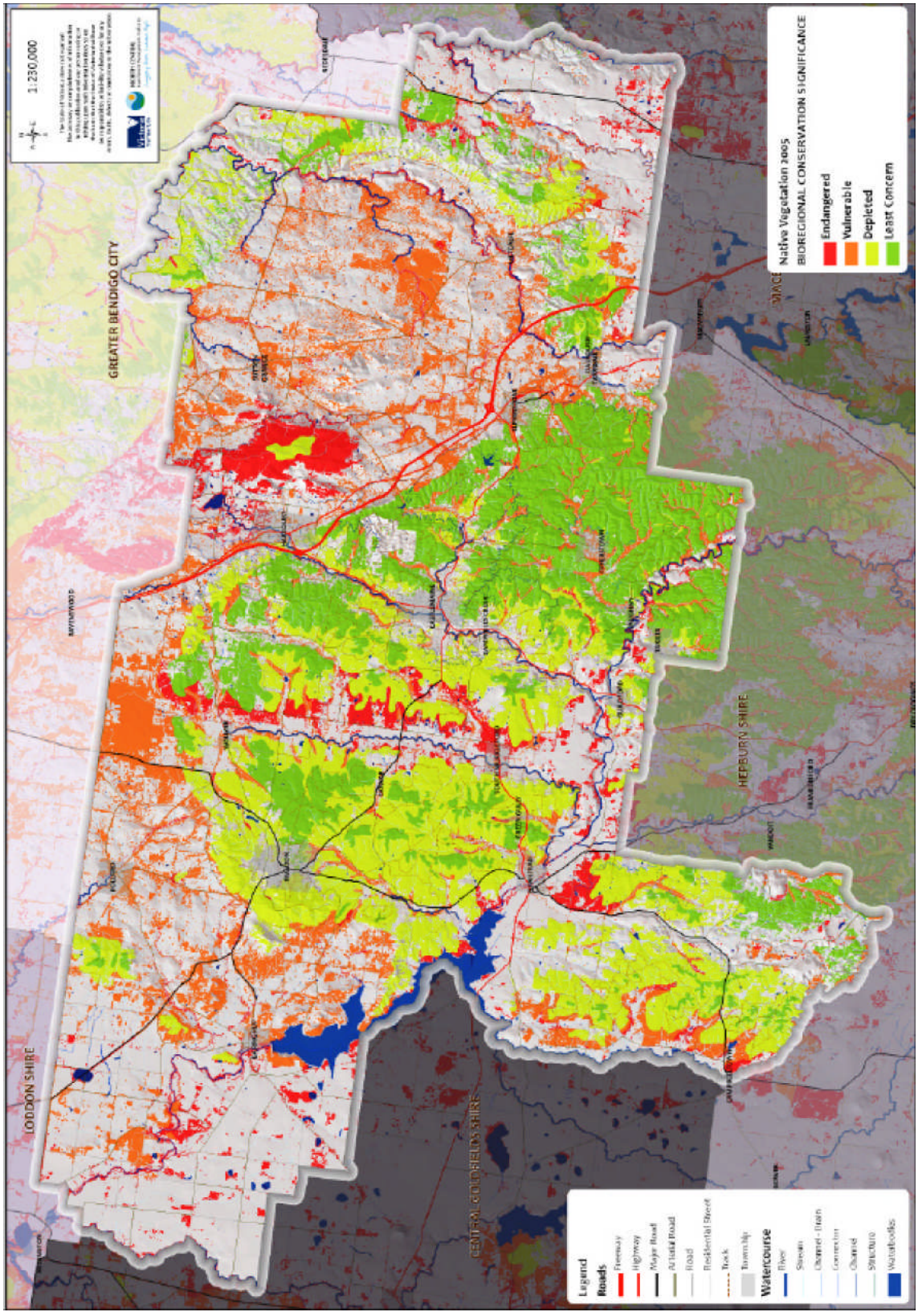
Among the key threats to biodiversity identified in the North Central Regional Catchment Management Strategy 2013-2019, two that are relevant to land use planning are clearing for agriculture, urban or other uses, and habitat fragmentation and isolation. The Shire contains 65 threatened flora species and 54 threatened fauna species. High densities of threatened flora species exist in the areas around Castlemaine and Harcourt. There are also 11 nationally threatened fauna species found within the Shire. Listed as Endangered are the Macquarie Perch, Regent Honeyeater, Southern Brown Bandicoot, Swift Parrot and Trout Cod, and listed as Vulnerable are the Grey-headed Flying-fox, Growling Grass Frog, Murray Cod, Striped Legless Lizard and Superb Parrot. High densities of threatened fauna species exist in the Yandoit Hills and Gower areas.

The road reserves throughout the Shire contain vegetation of important conservation value. These provide habitat and act as linear reserves. The Shire has developed a *Roadside Conservation Management Plan 2012-17* to assist in managing and protecting these areas.

Key issues

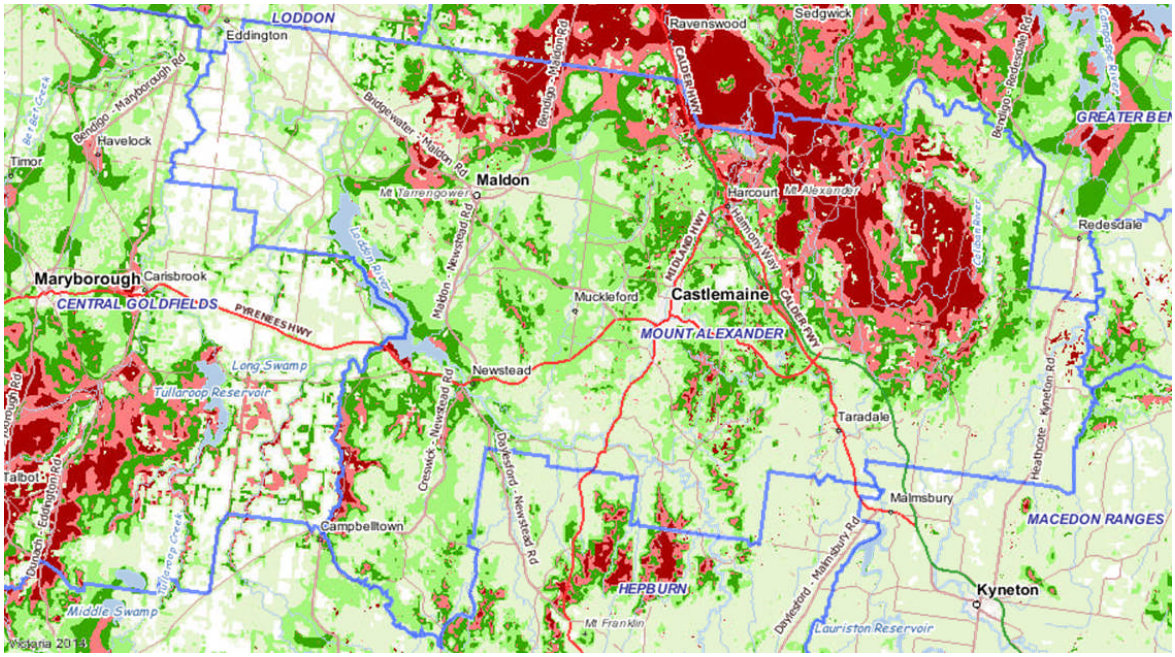
- Balancing the competing interests of protecting existing habitat and facilitating development.
- Arresting the decline in the extent and quality of indigenous vegetation and a consequent decline in native fauna.
- Raising awareness of the value of indigenous vegetation.
- Managing development at the urban-forest interface, which poses a threat to native fauna, increases weed invasion and can increase fire risks.
- Diminishing habitat quality in priority EVCs from bushfire, loss of mature trees, lack of recruitment, weeds and modification around rural dwellings, over-grazing by pests and domestic stock, notably stock on native vegetation pastures and poorly fenced remnants.
- Protecting scattered native vegetation, which has important biodiversity value but is often more difficult to manage and protect than large patches of native vegetation.
- Declining biodiversity values on road reserves through removal of firewood, clearing of land for grazing and planting, and fencing off areas in front of properties.
- Inability for species to adapt to changes in climate, which has the potential to directly threaten biodiversity values.

Figure 3: Ecological Vegetation Classes in Mount Alexander Shire



Source: NCCMA in Rural Land Study, 2014

Figure 4: Strategic Biodiversity Values for Mount Alexander Shire



Legend

Strategic Biodiversity Score
(associated with
Native Vegetation Clearing Regulation)

The NaturePrint Strategic Biodiversity Values dataset is an objective, comprehensive and spatially explicit view of strategic biodiversity values. This is more than just a description of the significant biodiversity characteristics at each site, it identifies the value of a site relative to the value of all other Victorian locations. DEPI's NaturePrint initiative coordinates the development and application of datasets and techniques to enable this view. Ideally, these analyses would be based on complete information on all biodiversity and relevant ecological considerations at all places in Victoria. Given this level of information is not available, the NaturePrint approach relies on robust modelling and extrapolation from available primary data.

- 0.81 - 1.00
- 0.61 - 0.80
- 0.41 - 0.60
- 0.21 - 0.40
- 0.01 - 0.20

Metadata Reference:
NVR2013_SBS_V3

Native Vegetation Regulation 2013 data is produced by:
Arthur Rylah Institute & Environment and
Landscape Performance Division, DEPI, 08 January 2014

Figure 5: Habitat connection zones in Mount Alexander Shire

Source: Connecting Country

Objective 1

To identify and protect remnant native vegetation on privately owned land.

Strategies

Strategy 1.1 Retain, protect and strategically restore native vegetation in urban environments.

Strategy 1.2 Ensure that development at Hundredweight Hill/Moonlight Flat does not impact on habitat within the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

Strategy 1.3 Protect native vegetation in Moonlight Flat and Lady Gully.

Strategy 1.4 Protect the identified environmental values of the Barfold Gorge and Mount Alexander and surrounds.

Objective 2

To protect the biodiversity values of public land including roadsides.

Strategies

Strategy 2.1 Discourage land use activities and development on adjacent private land that could potentially conflict with habitat conservation.

Strategy 2.2 Ensure that new tree and shrub plantings on rural roadsides are indigenous to the area and appropriate to the local Ecological Vegetation Class, unless where exceptional circumstances can be shown to exist.

Objective 3

To identify and protect native fauna and its habitat.

Strategies

Strategy 3.1 Maintain or improve strategic biodiversity values, particularly those areas with the highest scores as shown in Figure 4.

Strategy 3.2 Protect native vegetation in the areas identified in the habitat connection zones in Figure 5 and minimise the impact of development on native vegetation in these areas.

Strategy 3.3 Protect the native habitat of the Brush-tailed Phascogale identified by Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO7).

Strategy 3.4 Protect and retain dead trees for their habitat value.

Objective 4

To improve the conservation status of native fauna and flora in the Shire, especially the most threatened species.

Strategies

Strategy 4.1 Ensure no net loss in habitat extent and quality across the Shire's range of native vegetation communities.

Strategy 4.2 Revegetate the areas identified in the habitat connection zones in Figure 5 and support land management initiatives within these areas.

Strategy 4.3 Before development plans are prepared for proposed new residential development areas, ensure that flora and fauna assessments are conducted, according to current Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning(DELWP) guidelines.

Strategy 4.4 Collaborate with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning(DELWP) and North Central Catchment Management Authority in further strategic work.

Implementation

The strategies in relation to biodiversity will be implemented through the planning scheme by:

Policy guidelines

- Considering any Roadside Conservation Plan / Roadside Management Plan, when deciding on applications to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation within a road reserve, as appropriate.

Application of zones and overlays

- Applying the Rural Conservation Zone to areas of conservation significance and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Applying the Environmental Significance Overlay to areas where there are environmental constraints on development, a range of ecological values exist, and to habitat corridors.
- Applying the Vegetation Protection Overlay to areas with a high strategic biodiversity score and where clearing of vegetation is the main concern.
- Applying the Vegetation Protection Overlay to significant roadside vegetation.

Further strategic work

- Developing the criteria and identifying potential areas for the application of the Rural Conservation Zone in the Shire.
- Conducting further work to expand the application of the Environmental Significance Overlay for biodiversity protection and enhancement.
- Preparing a strategic assessment of biodiversity connectivity in the Shire, including a review of Schedule 5 to the Environmental Significance Overlay.
- Applying appropriate overlays to the known and potential habitat of the Swift Parrot generally in accordance with the area defined in the Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan.
- Monitoring vegetation cover and habitat quality through updates to the State of the Environment Report and submitting data to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.
- Preparing Native Vegetation Precinct Plans for proposed large subdivisions within areas of environmental sensitivity or value.

Reference documents

- Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park Management Plan April 2007

- DEPI Selected Biodiversity Components Map
- DEPI Ecological Vegetation Class Mapping Data
- Environment Conservation Council, Box-Ironbark Forests & Woodlands Investigation, Final Report, 2001
- Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan, Threatened Species Network, 2005
- Mount Alexander Shire Municipal Fire Management Plan 2012-2014
- Mount Alexander Shire Council State of the Environment Report, 2010
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Environment Strategy and Action Plan, 2011-2014
- Mount Alexander Roadside Conservation Management Plan, 2012-2017
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Rural Land Study, 2014
- North Central Regional Catchment Management Strategy 2013-2019

21.04-2 Significant landscapes

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Significant landscapes exist throughout the Shire. These landscapes are important for a range of reasons, including their visual and scenic appeal and social, cultural heritage and environmental values. Often, landscapes have a range of values that need to be recognised and managed.

Areas of high landscape and environmental value have been identified at Mount Alexander and Barfold Gorge. Significant landscapes have also been formally identified in the areas immediately surrounding the townships of Castlemaine and Maldon and in Vaughan and Glenluce. There is an interplay between important townscapes and the landscapes that surround them.

Hilltops and ridgelines are an important element of the Shire's rural character. They are seen in the distance from almost any perspective in the Shire. The visual and environmental implications of development along these natural features need to be carefully considered.

Key issues

- Identifying significant landscapes and their values and establishing appropriate regimes to protect them.
- Recognising that the landscape is an important element in the sustainable development of tourism in the municipality.
- Recognising the contribution of landscapes as the setting for the townships of the Shire.
- Acknowledging that hilltops and ridgelines are particularly vulnerable to inappropriate development.
- Managing pressures to develop land in locations of high scenic value.
- Ensuring that the rural character of the Shire is not eroded by inappropriate development.

Objective 1

To recognise and protect landscapes of environmental, scenic, social and cultural heritage importance from inappropriate development.

Strategies

Strategy 1.1 Discourage development that is not in keeping with the identified environmental objectives of the Environmental Significance Overlay.

Strategy 1.2 Discourage development that is not in keeping with the landscape character objectives of the Significance Landscape Overlay.

Strategy 1.3 Discourage development on, or close to, prominent ridges and hilltops.

Strategy 1.4 Ensure the sensitive siting of buildings and other structures having regard to the protection of prominent ridgelines, significant views and areas of remnant vegetation.

Strategy 1.5 Protect exotic vegetation if it is of heritage, cultural or economic value, or contributes to the character of an area.

Implementation

The strategies in relation to significant landscapes will be implemented through the planning scheme by:

Application of zones and overlays

- Applying the Environmental Significance Overlay or Significant Landscape Overlay to significant landscapes as appropriate, depending on their values.

Further strategic work

- Preparing a Significant Landscape Study for the Shire, which should review the current application of the Significant Landscape Overlay and identify and describe other landscapes of significance.

Reference documents

- Trees & Gardens from the Goldmining Era: A Study of the Maldon Landscape, 1981
- Maldon Historic Reserve Management Plan, 1989
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Rural Land Study, 2014

21.04-3 Rural and landscape character

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The rural appearance and character of the Shire is a strong element of its appeal for residents and visitors. It is the combination of many physical elements that contribute to this character.

Objective 1

To ensure that the use and development of rural land does not detract from the appearance and character of the area.

Strategies

Strategy 1.1 Prevent ribbon-like development along main roads in the Shire.

Strategy 1.2 Discourage buildings close to roads in rural areas that will have a negative visual impact from the public domain unless specific measures to minimise those impacts are proposed.

Strategy 1.3 Require the use of building materials and colours which are in context with the surrounding environment in areas of landscape significance and in rural areas.

Implementation

The strategies in relation to rural and landscape character will be implemented through the planning scheme by:

Policy guidelines

Considering the following as appropriate when deciding on an application for the development of land in a rural zone:

- The effect on views of the road or natural landscape.
- Whether natural topographical features will be used to screen the development.
- Whether the proposed development abuts an existing township.
- The form, height, colours and finishes of the proposed development.
- The setbacks of nearby development.

Considering the following criteria when deciding on an application for a shed or outbuilding in a rural zone:

- Whether the building is located within a defined building envelope.
- The external roof and walls should be finished in paint bonded metal, timber, brick or any other non-reflective and muted colour, except if the site is a heritage place and other treatments would be more appropriate.