

21.02 FALLS CREEK RESORT STRATEGIC STATEMENT

19/01/2006
VC37

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Location

Falls Creek Resort is located on the edge of the Bogong High Plains, approximately 356 kilometres north east of Melbourne and 506 kilometres south west of Canberra. It is accessible from nearby Mount Beauty on the Bogong High Plains Road in both summer and winter. In summer, it is also accessible from Omeo and Bairnsdale.

Situated at an altitude of between 1210-1830 metres, the Resort covers an area of 1535 hectares on the north-facing slope of the Frying Pan Spur. Skiable terrain comprises 670 hectares, or 44% of the total Resort area.

The Resort is bounded on all sides by the Alpine National Park. Rocky Valley Dam storage, part of the Kiewa Hydro Electric Scheme, is situated immediately to the south east of the Resort. The Village sits above Rocky Valley Creek, a tributary of the East Kiewa River.

Regional Context

The Resort is a major tourist destination in north-eastern Victoria. It provides an intensive recreational experience during the winter months, and is increasingly a focus for events and activities during summer. The Resort is a key part of Tourism Victoria's 'Legends, Wine and High Country' tourist region, along with Mt Hotham and Mt Buffalo.

Falls Creek contributes significantly to the economy of the region and the State as a whole. The Resort generates significant seasonal employment, particularly in the nearby towns of Mount Beauty and Bright. It also provides recreational opportunities and environmental values to both the local and wider community.

Nearby towns including Bright, Myrtleford and Mount Beauty/Tawonga gain economic benefit through the provision of goods, services and facilities to businesses operating on the mountain, and visitors to the Resort. During summer Falls Creek provides a key stopover along the Bogong High Plains Road on the touring route between Mt Beauty and Omeo.

Environment

Climatic Conditions

The Falls Creek Alpine Resort rises from an altitude of 1210 metres at the Rocky Valley Creek to 1830 metres at Mt McKay. The alpine village is situated at an altitude of approximately 1500 metres. Annual rainfall is around 1600 mm. During winter (June to September) the predominant winds are from the south-west, bringing in moist cold air which produces snow as the air is uplifted and cooled over the mountains. The warmest month is January, with an average daily temperature range between 10 to 19°C. July is the coldest month with a daily temperature range between 2 to 3°C. The annual extremes in temperature are commonly between 31°C in summer and -12°C in winter.

Flora, fauna and geological resources

The Resort is an integral part of the unique alpine environment that contains a variety of rare fauna, flora and alpine communities. The Resort is characterised by steep valley slopes with generally poorly defined ridges separating numerous gullies flowing into Rocky

Valley Creek. The landscape is formed from highly metamorphosed Palaeozoic granite-like rocks. Major outcrops of gneissic boulders occur across the undulating plateau. The largest of these boulder outcrops provide good Bogong moth habitat.

Falls Creek Village is situated within sub-alpine woodland, dominated by snow gums with a dense shrubby understorey. Other vegetation types include alpine bog and streamside vegetation associated with creeks and ephemeral drainage lines. As the Village has expanded and snow gum woodland reduced, planted exotics have attained a more prominent role in the Village landscape. This has resulted in an increasing weed flora within and around the Village. On ski runs and trails where the original vegetation has been cleared and groomed, grass and short heath has become established.

A number of important flora and fauna species and communities are found within the Falls Creek Resort area. Some of these species are listed as threatened on Schedule 2 of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. Examples include:

- Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burrhamys parvus*)
- Alpine Bog Skink (*Pseudemoia cryodroma*)
- Alpine Water Skink (*Eulamprus kosciuskoi*)
- Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora* subsp. *Hedraia*)
- Bogong Daisy Bush (*Olearia frostii*)
- Alpine Bootlace Bush (*Pimelea axiflora*)
- Silk Daisy (*Celmisia sericophylla*)
- Alpine Snowpatch Community
- Fen (Bog Pool) Community
- Alpine Bog community
- Podocarp Heathland

Tourism and Recreation

Resort Visitation

The Resort has experienced consistent visitation over the winter months in the past decade, averaging 328,000 visitor days per season. The fluctuation in numbers has largely been a result of the differences in quality and length of snow cover at the Resort. Peak seasons have resulted in an increase in visitor numbers, as experienced in 1995 and 2000, with 376, 345 and 385,118 visitor days respectively. The introduction of large scale snow making has increased the quality and length of the snow season. The average length of stay for visitors has remained consistent at 2.2 days.

Tourism and Recreation Activities

The primary focus of Falls Creek at present is as a winter destination for snow sports. The Resort offers both alpine and cross country skiing facilities and opportunities for tobogganing and snow play. There are groomed alpine ski fields of 145 hectares for downhill skiing and snowboarding, serviced by 17 lifts. There are approximately 15 kilometres of groomed cross country ski trails within the Resort, connecting with a 65 kilometre network of trails within the Alpine National Park. During the snow season, a helicopter link operates between the Falls Creek and Mt Hotham Alpine Resorts.

During the summer months, the Resort provides a base for a wide range of activities. These include bushwalking and camping on the Bogong High Plains, mountain bike riding, fishing, tennis and 4WD touring. High altitude training and sports camps make use of

Rocky Valley Dam, walking trails and the cool climate for summer training. The Village also plays host to a number of sporting, cultural and culinary events that attract visitors from across the region and interstate. These include:

- Food, Wine and Wildflower Weekend
- Stanton and Killeen Winemaker Dinner
- Jazz and Blues Weekend
- Classical Music Weekend
- High Country Photography and Art Exhibition
- Mile High Tennis Tournament
- Falls Creek Off-road Triathlon

Settlement

The majority of building development within the Resort area is confined to the Falls Creek Village located on the northern slope of Frying Pan Spur. The Village comprises over 60 lodges, clubs and apartments providing 4677 beds, and a home for 80-100 permanent residents. There are 22 commercial premises throughout the Village including a number of shops, restaurants, bars and day facilities. A day care centre and gymnasium is located close to Halley's Comet lift station, along with a primary school which is operated year round on Slalom Street.

Slalom Plaza contains the police station, supermarket and main ticketing office. Other facilities within the Village include a ticketing office at the Village Bowl, a medical centre at the Gully Portal and day facilities for nordic skiers at Windy Corner. Ski lifts operate from three major nodes, the Gully Portal, Village Bowl and Slalom Plaza.

The Falls Creek Resort area is a unique ski-in/ski-out Resort, in which accommodation is provided within the skiable terrain. This skier access is maintained in winter by limiting vehicular access to over-snow vehicles only in the main Village area. The Village Bowl Precinct provides a unique European style atmosphere with development surrounded by ski runs which lead directly into the Village.

The north facing slopes in the Resort village provide panoramic views of Spion Kopje and the Kiewa Valley, and also provide the opportunity for efficient solar orientation of buildings.

Snow gums dominate the landscape and provide an important backdrop to all development in and around the Resort. Strong development guidelines in recent years have promoted the retention of snow gums within the Resort as well as ensuring that residential development is responsive to the alpine woodland environment.

Heritage

An early study of Aboriginal tribes in south eastern Australia shows that the Falls Creek area fell within the lands of the Ya-itma-thang tribe. It is believed that Aboriginal communities travelled to the mountains on a seasonal basis to harvest the Bogong moths. An equally important purpose of these gatherings was the opportunity to engage in corroboree ceremonies with other tribes in the region.

A small number of artefacts uncovered in the Resort area provide evidence that Aboriginal communities used the area intermittently for access to the mountains and as a source of food, water and shelter.

Falls Creek was first called Horseshoe Creek by the early cattlemen. The Creek was renamed by the Country Roads Board, whilst carrying out a road survey for the State Electricity Commission in 1938. The first building to be erected in the area was a weather

recording hut for the SEC, and in 1949 the first rope tow was built on the site of the current Summit Chair.

In 1948, Skyline Lodge was built, followed by the Bogong Ski Club in 1949. The first chairlift in Australia was built by Mr Bob Hymans in 1957. By 1961 the rope tow and chairlift had become unreliable and Alpine Developments Pty Ltd was formed to continue development of the ski fields. Two lifts were installed, the Summit and Village T-bar. In 1984, Alpine Developments was sold to a new company Falls Creek Ski Lifts Pty Ltd. This company, under various ownership, has been operating ever since.

Movement

Vehicular access to the Resort is via the Bogong High Plains Road from Mount Beauty all year round and from Omeo during the summer months. Entry to the Resort is controlled at Howman's Gap during the snow season.

As a 'ski-in, ski-out' resort, vehicular access through the Village is prohibited during the snow season. Car parking is provided at Gully Portal, Slalom Plaza and Windy Corner. Parking spaces for approximately 1637 cars and 35 buses are available. Over-snow transport is used to transfer visitors to the lodges.

Overnight parking is accommodated within the lower Slalom Plaza car park, and in areas between the Plaza and Windy Corner. Day visitor parking is located at Gully Portal and Slalom Plaza. The Windy Corner car park is used largely by cross country skiers.

An over-snow shuttle service operates throughout the Village to transport people between activities. Limiting vehicle movement on the internal road system greatly enhances the safety of pedestrians and skiers, and creates an attractive Village atmosphere for visitors and residents.

Infrastructure

Falls Creek is currently serviced by reticulated water, sewerage, electricity, gas, waste disposal and communications infrastructure. This infrastructure is designed to service the Resort during peak periods in winter and is under utilised during summer months.

The Village's reticulated water is pumped from Rocky Valley Dam. The Dam is also used by Southern Hydro for the production of electricity. The water is disinfected using an ultra-violet unit and reticulated around the Village from a water tower sited above the race line. Increased development within the Village and ski fields will place greater demands on the water supply to the Resort. Additional demands are also likely to result from the requirements of snow making facilities to optimise snow supply to the ski fields.

The existing sewerage treatment plant is located on the north side of Bogong High Plains Road. The plant has capacity to enable growth of overnight and day visitation. The plant is currently undergoing a three-stage upgrade program. This upgrade will result in a marked improvement in effluent quality, in order to achieve EPA licence limits for current and future loads. Recent upgrading of the facility has included an enhanced ability to remove phosphorus.

Falls Creek Alpine Resort is located at the head of the Kiewa Valley Catchment and therefore it is important to ensure that the quality of runoff from the Resort is high. A Stormwater Management Plan has been developed for the Resort, which aims 'to improve the quality of the Falls Creek Resort's water environments through better environmental management of urban stormwater', through identifying stormwater management practices to suit the specific requirements of Falls Creek.