

Stirling Alpine Link

A vision to link Mt Stirling with the Alpine National Park



Mt Stirling is a unique natural landscape with dramatic vistas of Victoria's alpine area.

Adjacent to Mt Buller it is popular with cross-country skiers, bushwalkers, campers and school groups, it is also home to many threatened plant and animal species.

The Victorian National Parks Association has launched a push for the Mt Stirling area to be managed as a national park by linking it to the Alpine National Park and handing its management to Parks Victoria.

It can then be managed as an integral part of Victoria's largest national park, improving ecological management, recreation experiences and the overall integrity of our alpine region.



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A cross-country skier admires the view from the top of Howqua Gap Track.

Connecting Mt Stirling to the Alpine National Park

About 2500ha of spectacular alpine country around Mt Stirling (1749m) is currently managed by the Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board.

Over the years, the natural values of Mt Stirling and surrounding state forest have been damaged by logging, fires, cattle grazing and recreational vehicles, and threatened by proposals for inappropriate commercial developments, such as ski lifts in the 1990s.

Mt Stirling has never fitted the economic model of an Alpine Resort. A 2008 review of Alpine Resort areas by the State Services Authority (SSA), the body responsible for reviewing the functionality of state government departments, recognised this, recommending de-coupling management of Mt Stirling from Mt Buller and managing Mt Stirling for its natural values.

According to the review, Mt Stirling is “more akin to a national park and should be positioned and managed as such”, and only “the Parks Victoria management option offers any practical improvement over the status quo”.

The SSA recommended that “the Minister for Environment and Climate Change ... provide for the management



Skiers congregate around the Stirling Mountain Centre in a photo taken in 1995. Skiable snow in this area is becoming increasingly rare as global warming bites.

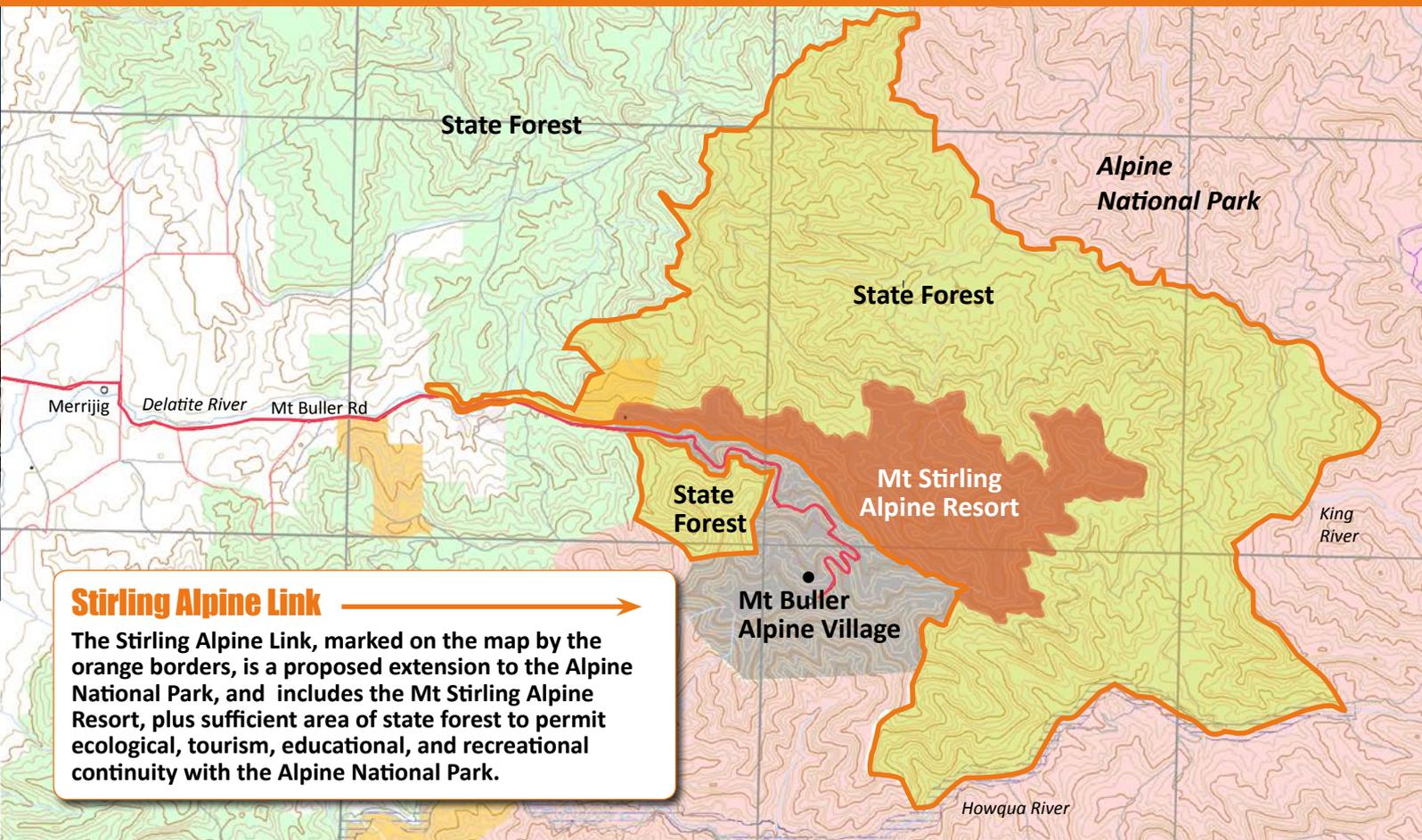
of Lake Mountain and Mt Stirling by Parks Victoria from 2010”. The VNPA seeks additional funding for Parks Victoria so that it can manage these mountains with the care they deserve.

The VNPA agrees with the vision for Mt Stirling as stated within the Victorian Planning Scheme that “Mt Stirling Alpine Resort is an all season nature based tourist, recreational and educational resource. Mt Stirling is not an option for downhill skiing. Mt Stirling offers a unique nature based experience with

limited options for commercial activities in accordance with the Assessment and Panel Report on the Environment Effects Statement, February 1997.”

In addition, Mt Stirling is currently separated from the Alpine National Park by an area of around 10,000ha of state forest.

The VNPA proposes that the best way of protecting the whole area would be by including a suitable section of state forest within Mt Stirling in a seamless extension to the Alpine National Park.



Stirling Alpine Link

The Stirling Alpine Link, marked on the map by the orange borders, is a proposed extension to the Alpine National Park, and includes the Mt Stirling Alpine Resort, plus sufficient area of state forest to permit ecological, tourism, educational, and recreational continuity with the Alpine National Park.

Special features of the Stirling Alpine Link

The valley floors and mountain sides of the Stirling Alpine Link are home to many forest types, including drier montane woodlands, moister Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) forests, and Snow Gum woodlands (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) above 1400m.

Higher up, above the 1650m mark, the landscape changes dramatically, and is covered in grasslands and shrubs.

There is also a variety of grassland, herbfield and shrub habitats, with and without trees, below 1650m.

Twelve vegetation types are represented within the boundaries of the proposed Stirling Alpine Link, including some small areas of depleted, rare or vulnerable vegetation types (total 60ha).

The largest “Ecological Vegetation Classes” are Herb-rich Foothill Forest, Montane Damp Forest, Montane Dry Woodland and Sub-alpine Woodland.

Home for threatened species

A number of areas of state significance and higher regional significance are also found within the Mt Stirling Alpine Resort area.

State and nationally significant species include the Sooty Owl, Spotted Tree Frog

and Barred Galaxias.

At least 22 threatened fauna species occur in other North East forest areas with similar habitats, and the *Atlas of Australian Birds* records more than 180 species of birds in the region.



Spotted Tree Frog

Waterways

There are eight designated creeks and smaller tributaries, and three significant rivers – the King, and two designated Heritage Rivers, the Howqua and Delatite – found in the Stirling Alpine Link area.

Current infrastructure

Many kilometres of walking trails, 4WD tracks and cross-country ski trails already exist within the Stirling Alpine Link, as well as four historic huts, toilets and picnic areas.

Huts within the Mt Stirling Alpine Resort:

- Howqua Gap Huts.
- Bluff Spur Memorial Hut.
- GGS Hut.

Huts in the state forest components:

- Craigs Hut.
- Mount No 3 Refuge Hut.
- Razorback Hut.

There is no urban development or skiing infrastructure other than snow poles.

Logging activity

There are several scheduled logging coupes within the Stirling Alpine Link. Some have been harvested and others are fire affected, making them less suitable for logging.

Current protection

Some 2573 hectares of state forest has been designated as Special Protection and other dedicated management zones, protecting values such as old-growth forests for a number of vegetation types, Spotted Tree Frog and Sooty Owl habitat, riparian forest and Craigs Hut (famous movie prop from the film *The Man from Snowy River*).

The area of the Mt Stirling ‘resort’ is about 2579ha, and of state forest 10,796ha.

The total extension to the proposed Alpine National Park would be 13,374ha.

The Stirling Alpine Link: A better future for the Victorian Alps

The declaration of the Stirling Alpine Link will create seamless ecological connectivity between Mt Stirling and the Alpine National Park, enhancing natural values, helping with management and increasing the ecological resilience of both Mt Stirling and the national park, all of which will ensure a better future for the Victorian alps.

What needs to be done?

The VNPA is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Convert the Mt Stirling Alpine Resort into a national park, giving it the level of protection it deserves.
- Join Mt Stirling to the Alpine National Park by adding the adjacent area of state forest to the national park.

What you can do to help

SPREAD THE WORD, ask two friends to read this brochure.

TELL DECISION-MAKERS and your elected state politician you want Mt Stirling connected to the Alpine National Park.

Use the information in this brochure and write a letter or send an email to the Premier of Victoria **AND** your local politician. Go to yourmps.vnpa.org.au for tips on how to find your electorate and local state politician.

Get active for nature!

Join the VNPA as a member or sign up your friends!

Membership brings many benefits including access to our great bushwalking and activities program, our quarterly colour magazine *Park Watch* and regular ebulletins. You will also be supporting our nature conservation work and the protection of Mt Stirling.

Subscribe to our free ebulletin, *Nature's Voice*, by emailing vnpa@vnpa.org.au or visit www.vnpa.org.au.



Wildflowers in bloom at Mt Stirling.

