



Mardan – Mirboo North Landcare Group



**Strategic Plan
2023–2026**

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Cover photo: Aaron Doty.

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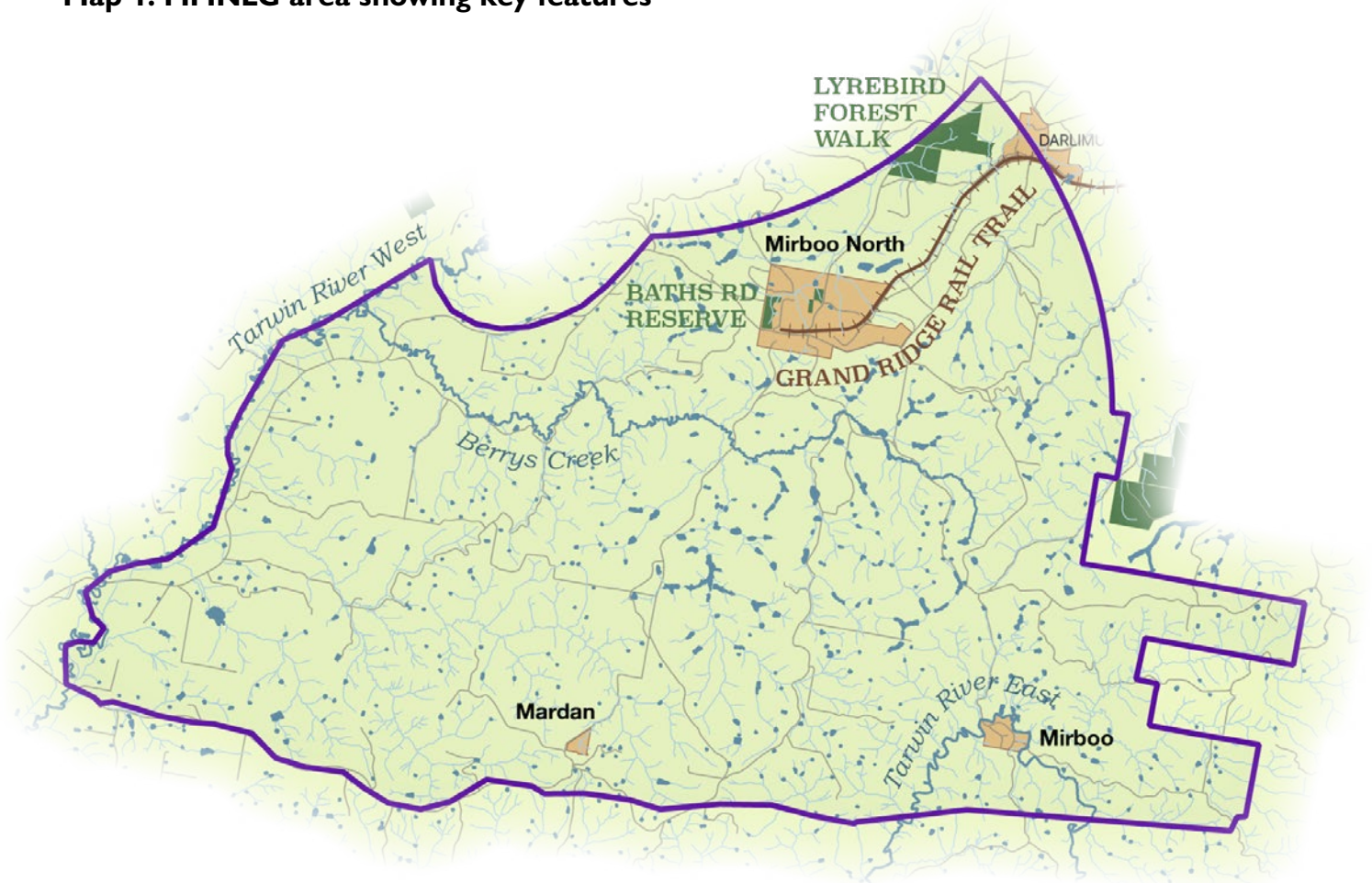
Our Purpose

Protect and enhance the environmental values of the Mardan – Mirboo North Landcare Group (MMNLG) area and strengthen regenerative farming and sustainable land management practice to secure our area's economic and environmental future.

About MMNLG

The MMNLG is part of the South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) and is based around the localities of Mirboo North, Mirboo and Mardan in South Gippsland. The area covered by our group nestles in the foothills of the Strzelecki Ranges between the East and West branches of the Tarwin River, encompassing the Berrys Creek catchment that feeds into the West Branch of the Tarwin. Our area covers nearly 20,000 hectares of mainly pastoral land, with some areas of hardwood plantation. It includes the Lyrebird Forest Walk, Baths Rd Reserve and the Eastern extent of the Grand Ridge Rail Trail (see Map 1).

Map 1: MMNLG area showing key features



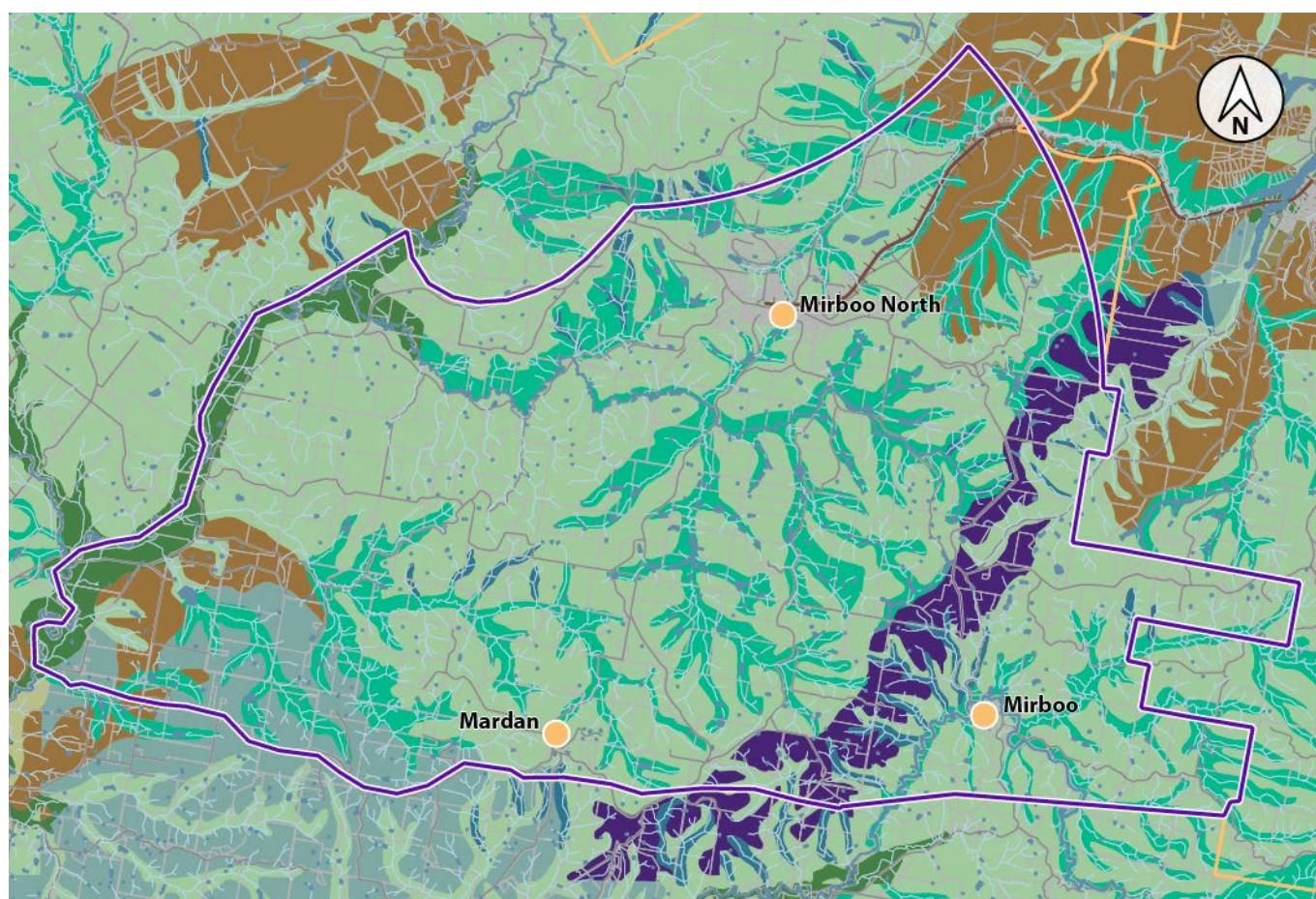
Our area is located within the Strzelecki bioregion, mainly consisting of slopes and gullies originally covered by native wet forest and damp forest plant communities. Most of the area has been cleared, and the remaining native vegetation cover is highly fragmented (PoFSC, 2021). The Mirboo North Immediate Protection Area (IPA) is located just outside our area, to the north. The IPA was declared in 2019 to protect critical habitat for forest-dependent species, including the southern greater glider, Narracan burrowing crayfish, South Gippsland burrowing crayfish, powerful owl, lace monitor and Strzelecki koala (VEAC, 2022).

Ecological character of our area

Our area is predominantly classed as damp forest, with areas of wet forest confined to waterways, and lowland and foothill forest located in the southern part of our area. Map 2 shows the Ecological Vegetation Classes within our area, indicating the zones where particular types of native vegetation would typically be found. In reality, only small patches of remnant native vegetation exist, with most of our area comprising cleared land devoted to dairy and livestock farming. Map 3 shows the approximate extent of treed locations within our area, comprising native and non-native species. Commensurate with its mainly agricultural land use, most of our area has a relatively low assessed level of biodiversity (with strategic biodiversity values mainly in the 25–35 range, where zero means an area has no native flora and fauna and 100 is an area that represents the full range of native vegetation and can provide habitat for threatened species) (DEECA, 2023).

Despite the relatively low biodiversity within our area, the area has environmental values that should be protected and enhanced, including in locations such as the Lyrebird Forest Walk, Baths Road Reserve and Grand Ridge Rail Trail that provide enjoyment to local residents and visitors while preserving the native flora and fauna of the region. These environmental values also extend to South Gippsland’s characteristic rolling green hills, where sustainable agricultural practices are vital to retaining the natural beauty and economic viability of our area’s fertile pasture lands.

Map 2: MMNLG area showing Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs)



Scale

0 2.5 5 km

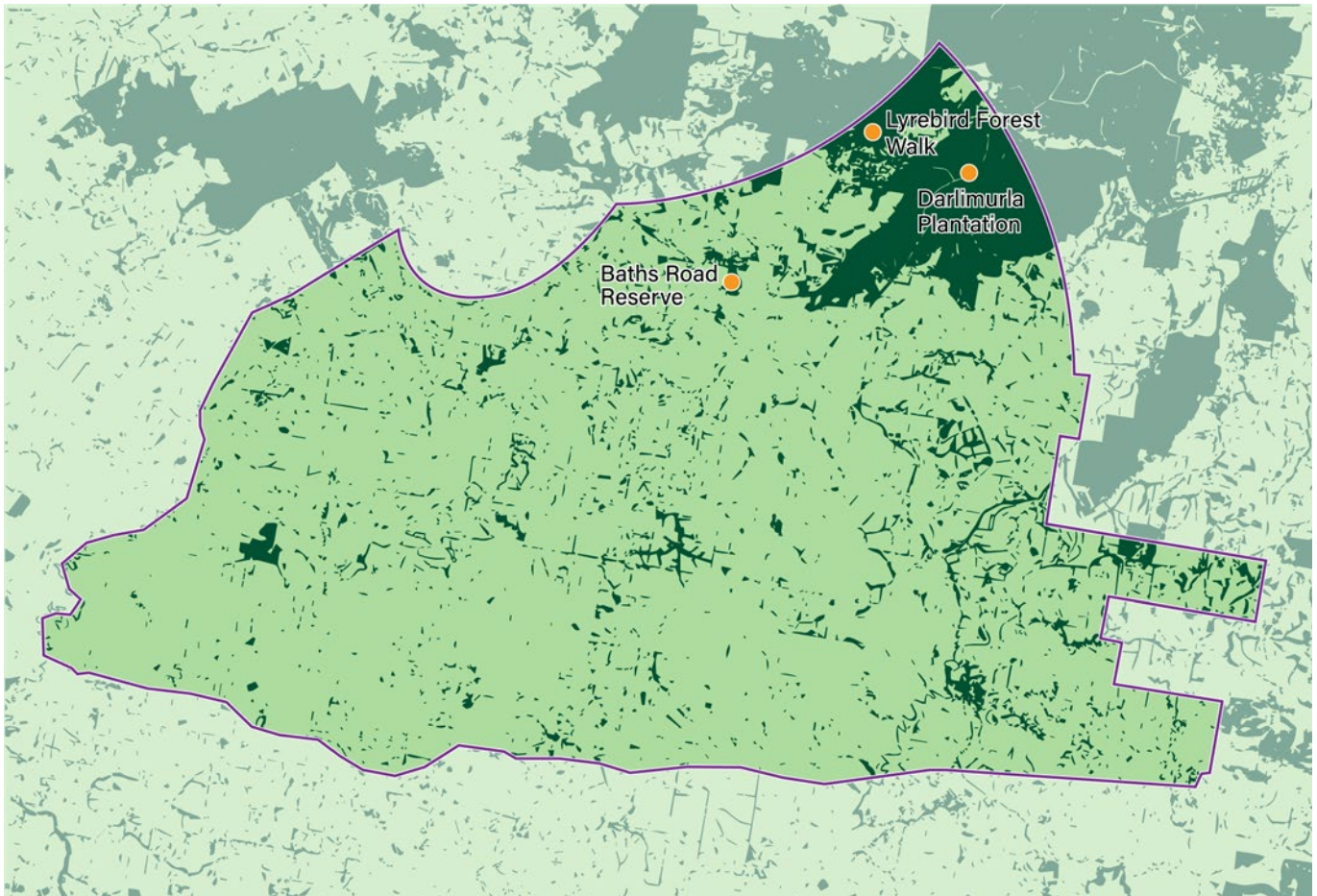
Legend

- ▬ MMNLG area boundary
- ▬ LGA boundary

Ecological Vegetation Classes

- Damp Forest
- Wet Forest
- Herb-rich Foothill Forest
- Lowland Forest
- Shrubby Foothill Forest
- Swampy Riparian Woodland
- Warm Temperate Rainforest

Map 3: MMNLG area showing approximate areas of tree cover



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MMNLG planning context

Our planning is informed by the knowledge that our challenges (including addressing habitat loss, supporting biodiversity and ensuring sustainable land use) are not unique. Similar issues are being faced across South Gippsland, in the wider region, and throughout regional areas of Victoria. It is essential to recognise where our priorities link with the work of others and to maximise opportunities to collaborate or gain support in achieving shared goals.

SGLN

The SGLN is the regional Landcare network within which the MMNLG operates. The SGLN comprises 13 member groups (including MMNLG) mainly within the South Gippsland local government area (although some group boundaries extend into neighbouring Baw Baw, Bass Coast and Cardinia Shires). The SGLN “represents and supports communities working together to increase biodiversity and promote sustainable land management” (SGLN, 2021). SGLN supports projects and knowledge sharing, focusing on meeting the challenges of wetlands protection, erosion, soil regeneration, biolinks and connectivity, weed control, and habitat loss. These challenges are shared at the local level within the MMNLG area.

South Gippsland Shire

The MMNLG area is in the northern part of the South Gippsland local government area (LGA). The South Gippsland Shire Council is an important partner for MMNLG due to its extensive responsibilities in environmental sustainability. The Council’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2021 identifies three areas of focus: climate change, waste management and resource recovery, and sustainable land use and biodiversity. The Council’s work on sustainable land use and biodiversity is particularly relevant to MMNLG. Council’s work in this area includes the management of roadsides, bush reserves and rail trail environs to prevent habitat loss, mainly from invasive weed species (SGSC, 2021).

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) region extends across west, south and central Gippsland. The region includes parts of seven municipalities: Latrobe City; most of South Gippsland, Wellington and Baw Baw shires; and some parts of Bass Coast, Mansfield and East Gippsland shires. MMNLG is in the WGCMA’s southwestern extent, sitting within the South Gippsland rivers basin between the east and west branches of the Tarwin River. Berry’s Creek is within the MMNLG area and flows through agricultural land into the West Tarwin Branch of the Tarwin River.

Most of the MMNLG area is in the Strzelecki local area within the WGCMA region. The WGCMA’s West Gippsland Regional Catchment Management Strategy identifies priorities for the Strzelecki local area within its medium-term outcomes under the themes of biodiversity, climate change, community, land, traditional owners and water (WGCMA, 2023).

Strzelecki-Alpine Biolink

The north-eastern end of our catchment area overlaps with the south-western extent of the Strzelecki-Alpine Biolink, which incorporates the Darlimurla Plantation Forest and the Lyrebird Forest Walk areas within the MMNLG catchment. Its mission is to conserve and restore habitat connections across the Strzelecki-Alpine Biolink to benefit the movement of wildlife (Strzelecki-Alpine Biolink, n.d.).

Victorian Government

MMNLG engages with several key Victorian government agencies, including Parks Victoria, Agriculture Victoria, and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Parks Victoria is responsible for the Mirboo North Regional Park, including the Lyrebird Forest Walk. Agriculture Victoria is an essential partner for MMNLG, as our area consists largely of farming land. Agriculture Victoria released a 10-year strategy in 2020 which includes ensuring that Victorian agriculture can respond to climate change, pests, weeds, disease and increased resource scarcity (AgVic, 2020). DEECA was established at the start of 2023 and includes Agriculture Victoria, as well as responsibility for Victoria's energy and climate change policy, the management of forests, reserves, and water resources, and the protection and preservation of the environment (including through biodiversity programs and the protection and management of native wildlife) (DEECA, 2023).

Traditional Owners

The MMNLG area is partly within the lands of the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLWAC) and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC). The GLWAC and BLCAC aim to preserve and protect the sacred lands and waterways of their ancestors and their places, traditional cultural practices, and stories. GLWAC plays an active role in ensuring the protection, preservation, rehabilitation and sustainable use of Gunaikurnai Country as guided by the Gunaikurnai Whole of Country Plan (GLWAC, 2023). The BLCAC provides advice on cultural heritage and environmental land management within the Bunurong language group area to local government authorities, state government departments, developers, and private landholders (BLCAC, n.d.).

Mirboo North and District Community Foundation

The Mirboo North and District Community Foundation (MND CF) operates a 'future fund' through which it aims to achieve the vision of "a healthy, vibrant and resilient community working together to meet challenges and celebrate success". Its mission includes supporting local people to develop solutions for their community, building capacity and skills and investing in the community through grants. MMNLG shares with the MND CF a strong focus on strengthening our local community. We believe protecting and sustainably managing our local environment and natural resources is vital to ensuring a strong and resilient community.

Other Community Partners

MMNLG works with several other community partners to achieve our goals, including the Friends of Baths Road Reserve (which operates under the auspice of MMNLG to enhance and develop the Baths Road Reserve in Mirboo North) and the Wednesday Warriors (who maintain and improve the local Lyrebird Forest Walk and Grand Ridge Rail Trail). As local residents, landholders and business people, our members are passionate about community building and working with others to ensure a vibrant and sustainable future for the communities within our area.

Our objectives

Our objectives for the 2023–2026 period reflect the challenges of our local area, from the impact of habitat loss and low levels of biodiversity to the need to support sustainable agriculture and long-term economic prosperity. They recognise that the environmental values of our area are also vital to our strong community identity and shared commitment to caring for the land. Finally, they aim to act within our local area on issues of regional and wider significance where there are opportunities to work with key stakeholders to achieve joint outcomes.

The following six objectives will guide our work:

- 1. Tackle erosion**
- 2. Develop wetlands**
- 3. Build biolinks**
- 4. Reverse loss of habitat**
- 5. Improve soil quality**
- 6. Strengthen our community**

Details of these objectives and how we will work to achieve them are set out below in our action plan for the 2023–2026 period.

MMNLG Action Plan 2023–2026

Objective 1: Tackle erosion

We will work with local landowners, regional stakeholders and neighbouring Landcare groups to identify and address erosion risks and help to slow or prevent erosion in priority locations within our area.

Actions

- Engage Agriculture Victoria to increase awareness and educate local landowners to identify erosion risks and the methods and resources available to manage erosion.
- Increase the number of landowners taking action to manage erosion and reduce erosion risk.
- Link with SGLN and other Landcare groups (including Hallston, Arawata, Allambee and Allambee South) to identify joint priorities for tackling erosion.

Case Study: Strzelecki Landslip and Erosion Forum

In February 2023, MMNLG partnered with the Hallston Regenerative Agriculture Group to deliver a community forum on tackling soil erosion and landslip issues in the local area.

Speakers included James Paulet & Kerri Goschnick from Agriculture Victoria, who explained the differences between rill, sheet and gully erosion versus landslides (landslips). They presented a series of case studies to demonstrate that a catchment-scale analysis is usually required to understand the origins of erosion, often stemming from a neighbouring property. Gerhard Grasser from Hallston Regenerative Agriculture Group presented a case study from the Hyland Reservoir, where a major revegetation and soil monitoring project was conducted to address a significant landslip on the banks of a water supply area. He highlighted the role of mycorrhizal fungi in supporting plant growth and helping to hold the soil together via their extensive fibrous network.

The forum also included a site visit to the property of MMNLG member Heather Matthies, who is dealing with several erosion and landslip sites. The group were guided by Kerri Goschnick (Agriculture Victoria), who provided expert advice on prioritising preventive and remedial actions and explained the structural and revegetation works needed to stop active gully erosion.

MMNLG members and forum attendees inspect gully erosion during a site visit to Heather Matthies' property in Mirboo North.

Objective 2: Develop Wetlands

We will identify locations in our area suitable for wetlands development and work with local landowners to develop and improve wetland areas.

Actions

- ☐ Engage with the WGCMA and other key stakeholders to identify opportunities for support and assistance in developing and improving local wetlands.
- ☐ Source and develop resources to help local landowners develop wetlands.
- ☐ Seek funding for wetlands projects in priority areas.

Objective 3: Build biolinks

We will identify where and why biolinks are needed in our area and take action in priority locations to improve biolinks and connectivity for at-risk native fauna.

Actions

- ☐ Use existing resources (including work by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC, 2022) and Preserve our Forests Mirboo North and District Steering Committee (PoFSC, 2021) to identify priority locations for work on the improvement of biolinks and connectivity.
- ☐ Explore opportunities for collaborative work to support the Strzelecki-Alpine Biolink.
- ☐ Work with landowners and funders to scope and establish projects to improve biolinks and connectivity in key locations.



*Koala on roadside, Mirboo North.
(Photo: Aaron Doty)*

Objective 4: Reverse loss of habitat

We will raise local awareness about the impact of habitat loss and undertake projects in priority areas to slow or reverse habitat loss.

Actions

- Work with local and regional stakeholders to develop or promulgate information and resources to increase awareness about the loss of habitat.
- Identify the environmental assets within our area and the critical threats they face, and develop a plan of action to preserve existing assets and reverse the loss of habitat in key locations.
- Work with local landowners and other stakeholders to fund and deliver projects to slow or reverse habitat loss, including strategically planting appropriate native flora species in key locations.

Case Study: Mapping local Ecological Vegetation Classes

MMNLG has developed a resource to assist in planning native flora revegetation in its area. Using information from various sources (including SGLN and DEECA), MMNLG mapped the Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) across its area. EVCs classify locations across Victoria based on the types of native vegetation that predominantly grow in them. The MMNLG area contains only remnant or isolated communities of native flora, with most of our area devoted to agricultural land use.

Understanding the plant communities best suited to specific parts of the MMNLG area is vital to planning revegetation projects and taking action to reverse habitat loss. By mapping the EVCs in our area and pairing this geographical information with data about the native species that usually grow in each EVC, MMNLG has created a high-level resource that can be used for planning revegetation projects and guiding the selection of appropriate nursery and seed stock for planting purposes.



MMNLG's EVCs map and species list resource.

Objective 5: Improve soil quality

We will raise local awareness about risks to soil quality and ways to improve soil quality and work with local landowners to implement soil regeneration projects.

Actions

- ❑ Make available resources and undertake educational / awareness-raising activities to build an understanding of the importance of soil regeneration and the improvement of soil quality.
- ❑ Assist landowners with practical advice and support to build soil regeneration into their land management practice.
- ❑ Work with local and regional stakeholders to identify and fund projects to support soil regeneration work within our area.

Objective 6: Strengthen our community

We will build a strong community with a shared vision for preserving the conservation values of our area, promoting sustainable farming and land management and protecting native flora and fauna.

Actions

- ❑ Build our membership base through visible and positive action to engage and support local landowners and others within our community.
- ❑ Conduct social activities and events that build a sense of community and shared experience between our members.
- ❑ Celebrate and communicate our achievements to increase awareness and build positive momentum for our shared goals.



Reporting

We will review our progress against this plan annually and report on progress at our Annual General Meeting. This will include re-examining our objectives to confirm that they still reflect our shared goals, identifying achievements against our objectives (including any completed actions or projects), and identifying and agreeing on any new actions for the year ahead.

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