

What are the dates of the wetland flow?

Water will flow to the wetlands from early July to November 2025. Inflows will continue throughout winter and spring with the end date dependant on a range of environmental and delivery variables such as irrigation demand, flow rates, unregulated flows, and land manager requirements such as track access.

What are the reasons for the flow?

Delivering a wetland watering via the Hipwell Road channel will inundate 80 per cent of the forest's high-priority wetlands, some of which would have had water in them nine out of every 10 years before river regulation. The wetland watering will provide a diverse range of wetland plants with the ideal conditions to germinate and grow over spring. Gunbower Forest's wetlands provide feeding, foraging, and refuge habitat for a raft of water-dependant animals such as native fish, turtles, frogs, waterbirds and rakali. The wetland watering will also help the wetlands maintain their resilience as they face the challenges of climate change.

Is this a full forest environmental flow?

No. The flow is designed to connect and fill the floodplain's wetland complexes. Some water will spill into parts of the forest adjacent to wetlands, but it will be mostly contained within the connecting creeks and wetlands.

How will water be delivered?

Water will begin to be delivered via the Hipwell Road regulator and channel off Gunbower Creek. Once irrigation season begins, environmental water regulators in the lower part of the forest, such as Yarran Creek and Little Gunbower regulators, may be operated to ensure wetlands lower in the forest receive the right amount of water.

Why water the wetlands via the Hipwell Road channel?

Using Hipwell Road for a wetland-focussed flow allows for an efficient and effective water delivery. The Hipwell Road channel delivers water directly into Spur Creek. Spur Creek is a natural distributary channel in the forest that enables water to be delivered into the most high-priority wetlands. The size of the Hipwell Road channel also enables larger volumes to be delivered outside of irrigation season, ensuring both the wetlands and the farmers get the water they need.

Is the forest accessible during the flow.

Yes, Gunbower Forest is open for business and spring is a great time to visit. This wetland flow will make the forest an amazing place to visit in spring and summer.

As water moves from one wetland to another via the natural connecting creeks, some access tracks may be temporarily closed to protect the tracks and for visitor safety.

The forest's main tracks such as River Track and Koondrook track are not expected to be impacted. There will be many areas within the forest, along the Murray River and Gunbower Creek, for visitors to enjoy bush walking, kayaking, fishing, camping or bird watching.

Up-to-date information about all Gunbower Forest tracks is available at www.ffm.vic.gov.au/permits-and-regulations/closures-of-parks-and-forests

Why water when it's dry?

Gunbower Forest relies on regular water to remain healthy and support the forest's many plants and animals. Over time, river regulation and climate change has substantially reduced the frequency and duration of natural flooding in the forest. Before river regulation, even during dry times, small rises in the Murray River would occur nearly every year, delivering water to the wetlands. This wetland flow aims to replicate these small unregulated wetland top-ups that have been missing since the creation of dams and weirs.

What if there is a natural flood?

If the Murray River rises, and there are significant unregulated flows into the forest, the environmental flow will be managed and adapted to maximise ecological outcomes.

Will this flow impact irrigation delivery?

No. In Gunbower Creek irrigation delivery maintains priority above delivery of water for the environment.

Why water so soon after recent large floods?

The 2022 and 2023 floods provided the Gunbower Forest's trees and understorey with the long drink they needed. However, compared to other years, the wetland plants didn't respond as well. Unregulated flooding filled the wetlands and held them full for two consecutive years, preventing the usual – and significantly beneficial – wetting and drying regime.

The prolonged inundation reduced the establishment of wetland aquatic plants. This wetland flow will provide the right depth and duration of inundation to support the wetland plants to germinate, flower and set seed. Past managed environmental water deliveries after a drying phase have been shown to be an effective strategy to support wetland vegetation recovery after prolonged unregulated flooding.

Significant numbers of waterbirds bred during the recent floods. All waterbirds, but particularly juveniles, require a diversity of wetland habitat for feeding, foraging, and refuge to ensure they survive to become adults. Studies have shown that despite strong breeding events during large floods, waterbird numbers across the Murray Darling Basin continue to decline. Observations by CSIRO indicate that the waterbird life cycle stages where survival is most under threat are the juvenile/sub-adult stage. Providing feeding and foraging habitat for waterbirds in Gunbower Forest through winter, spring, and summer will support the waterbird population. Gunbower Forest wetlands will be a great place to do some bird watching this year.

What wetlands are there in Gunbower Forest?

There are about 20 wetlands spread out over multiple wetland complexes on the upper, middle and lower sections of the forest floodplain. They include permanent priority wetlands such as Reedy Lagoon and Barapa Swamp. Wetland complexes include the Little Reedy Complex and Little Gunbower Complex. They are connected by creeks and natural flood runners.

How are Traditional Owners involved in the wetland flow?

Gunbower Forest is recognised as the traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta First Nations People in the upper area, and the Barapa Barapa First Nations People in the middle and lower areas. North Central CMA supports self-determined involvement in environmental water planning and delivery. Both Traditional Owner groups will continue to work in partnership with the North Central CMA to deliver monitoring of the wetland flow and other cultural heritage projects at Gunbower Forest.

What monitoring will be undertaken?

The North Central CMA will coordinate a monitoring program to capture the forest's immediate and long-term responses to the watering. Monitoring will include:

- Response of wetland vegetation
- Response of fish in the wetlands and Gunbower Creek
- Water quality monitoring
- Water depth monitoring
- Area of forest flooded
- Waterbird breeding
- Response of river red gums.

The information collected from this monitoring will be used to improve the forest's ongoing environmental watering program.

Is the community involved in decision making?

When it comes to water for the environment projects, community members are included every step of the way. A number of locals are very hands-on with their feedback, making up the Enhancing Northern Waterways Advisory Group. Seasonal Watering Proposals, which outline the annual watering priorities, include input from a range of community members and stakeholders.

What is environmental water and where does it come from?

Environmental water is water legally set aside for the environment. This water is used to maintain or improve river and wetland health. Environmental water includes Victorian, Commonwealth and Living Murray entitlements. Like irrigation water, these entitlements are subject to seasonal allocations.

Find out more about the benefits of water for environment, where it comes from, how it is managed, and how it is monitored at www.vewh.vic.gov.au