MOUNT STIRLING 2030

A CONTEMPORARY VISION

MtStirling

Mount Stirling 2030 is approved for implementation. A long-term vision, its purpose is to direct all aspects of future planning for the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort until the document is reviewed.

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As part of a community consultation program, *Mount Stirling 2030* was on public display between Monday 18 December 2017 and Sunday 21 January 2018, a period of 34 days. A total of 26 complete responses were received from an online feedback survey. All submissions were carefully considered in preparing *Mount Stirling 2030*.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in *Mount Stirling 2030* is accurate. Mt Buller Mt Stirling Resort Management does not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence that may arise from you relying on any information in the publication.

Document control

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Mt Stirling Stakeholder Group

Mount Stirling 2030 was developed by the Mt Stirling Stakeholder Group, facilitated by Mt Buller Mt Stirling Resort Management. Formed in 2016, the Group comprises representatives from recognised user groups with active links to the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort. The Group provides the platform for ongoing stakeholder engagement relating to Mount Stirling Alpine Resort.

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Mount Stirling 2030 Vision

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort provides year-round opportunities that engage visitors with the mountain's core principles of environment, heritage and climate adaptation. Sound environmental management, appropriate services and infrastructure uphold the mountain's natural and social values.

Key themes and objectives

Supporting the Vision are three key themes: Core Principles, Opportunities and Implementation. Objectives and strategies of each key theme enable the achievement of the Vision.

Drawn from a strong legislative base, Core Principles objectives form the basis for management of the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort including: environment, heritage and climate adaptation.

Tourism and Recreation and Education and Research Opportunities support the visitor experience and integrity of Mount Stirling being nature-based, affordable and accessible.

Implementation objectives support Opportunities and Core Principles including: Infrastructure and Services; Natural Resource Management and Environmental risk; Partnerships; and Access and Transport.

Purpose

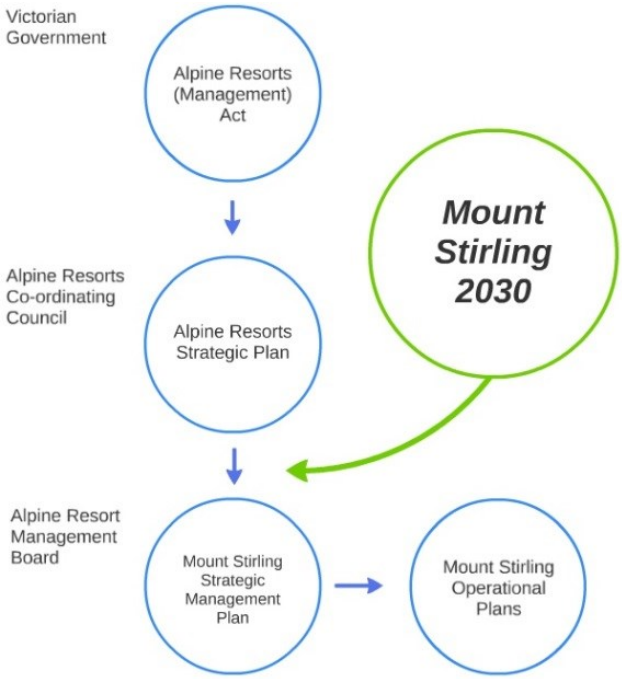
Mount Stirling 2030 provides the framework for sustainable development and operation of the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort as a significant nature-based asset for the State of Victoria. *Mount Stirling 2030* presents a contemporary vision that reflects community and stakeholder aspirations, celebrating the social and environmental values of the mountain and addressing challenges of climate change. *Mount Stirling 2030* identifies clear stakeholder and community direction for contemporary future management of the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort.

Mount Stirling 2030 has been developed with extensive stakeholder input and engagement. Through collaboration of the Mount Stirling Stakeholder Group and wider community consultation, it was clear the core principles of the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort – being nature based, all season, affordable and educational – continue to be conserved and enhanced. Operations and management of the Resort need to continue to maintain strong community connections with winter and summer recreation, tourism and education offerings.

Mount Stirling 2030 will be monitored and reviewed periodically by the Mt Stirling Stakeholder Group facilitated by Mt Buller Mt Stirling Resort Management to ensure it is meeting its objectives and remains current and relevant. Any review will provide opportunity for public consultation and an appropriate document inspection period.

Mount Stirling 2030 - governance framework

Mount Stirling 2030 has strong connection with the Environmental Effects Statement (1996), planning framework and legislation. *Mount Stirling 2030* guides strategic direction, development, planning, and effective management of the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort in partnership with stakeholders, industry associations and government bodies. The vision, objectives and strategies presented provide direction for the development of Strategic Management Plans and Operational Plans developed by Mt Buller Mt Stirling Resort Management.



Background

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is located 230 kilometres from Melbourne and is the only Victorian Alpine Resort with an unspoiled true alpine summit, offering accessible semi-wilderness experiences for visitors. At 1749 meters above sea level, the summit offers 360-degree panoramic views of the high country landscape. A majestic 500-year-old Snow Gum stands alone on the summit of Mount Stirling, known as the 'Stirling Tree'.

There are more than 68 km of maintained trails, 35 km of which are groomed for winter activities. Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is the only alpine destination where trails pass through towering forests of Alpine Ash on the lower slopes and rise through Snow Gum forests to the open treeless area of the summit. The Resort provides access to the Greater Alpine National Park, and Mansfield State Forest that contains the iconic tourist destination Craig's Hut - of both international and domestic appeal.

Public facilities at the Resort are located at Telephone Box Junction (1234 m elevation), with a visitor centre offering a cafe, ski hire, ski school and Resort Management office/Ski Patrol available during winter. Year-round facilities include car parking, public shelters and toilets at Telephone Box Junction, Cricket Pitch, King Saddle, Machinery Shed, King Spur Hut, Bluff Spur Memorial Hut, Howqua Gap Hut and at Geelong Grammar School Hut. Power is supplied by a micro-hydroelectric system, gas via tanks and sewerage treatment via a septic system (at Telephone Box Junction) or pump out tanks (at remote facilities).

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort has strong indigenous and post-contact social and cultural connections. In the traditional lands of the Taungurung language group, the area appears to have been occupied by the Yowung-illam balung clan. Post-contact history of the area includes timber, mining and grazing activities. High country timber harvesters and graziers constructed a number of alpine huts for shelter and refuge, some of which still exist within the Resort today.

The Resort supports a unique assemblage of plants and animals characteristic of alpine and sub-alpine environments. Specialised alpine species found within the Resort include the threatened Broad-toothed Rat, Stirling Stonefly and Alpine Marsh Marigold. Ecologically, the Mount Stirling area provides refugia for many species and communities, critical to support of regional biodiversity.

The Visitor Experience

"Escape to Mount Stirling for authentic alpine adventures.
Engage with rich heritage and the healthy natural environment"

The vision, objectives and strategies within *Mount Stirling 2030*, strive to maintain and improve visitor experiences that reflect the integrity of Mount Stirling being nature-based, affordable and accessible. Mount Stirling Alpine Resort offers unique nature based experiences with limited options for commercial activities in accordance with the Assessment and Panel Report on the Environment Effects Statement, February 1997. The Resort is highly valued for the year-round nature based recreational and interpretive experiences offered, including cross-country and backcountry skiing, snowboarding, snow-camping and snowshoeing in the winter and camping, bush walking, four wheel driving, horse riding, mountain biking and outdoor education at other times of the year.

Operations Timeline

Operations of Mount Stirling Alpine Resort are year-round. It is the only Victorian Alpine Resort with higher visitation in the non-winter period; with much of the summer visitation comprising camps and schools participating in outdoor education programs.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Summer activities; café and resort information available weekends and holidays

Environmental rest and preparation for oncoming winter/summer

Winter shoulder, market to snow conditions, Resort services operational, opportunities for niche activities and events

Core winter activities, all Resort services and commercial services operational

Winter and summer markets

Anticipated highly variable and low snow conditions require that the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort focuses on core and emerging markets to 2030. These include outdoor education groups/schools, alpine tourers, snow campers, snowshoers, and split boarders – who can be serviced well and whose experience is less affected in low snow/variable snow conditions. Traditional cross country skiers and families looking for tobogganing and snow play experiences can be intensively sought when weather conditions deliver snow to Telephone Box Junction.

During the summer months, horse riders, mountain bikers, four wheel drivers and hikers/campers are the core and growing markets. The mountain already services these groups very well; however the challenges to 2030 will include capacity management, user conflicts via shared trail use, and risks from extreme weather events.

Core Principles

Environment, Heritage, Climate Adaptation

Objective 1 - Environment

Best practice environmental management protects and enhances natural features and processes

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort has significant conservation, scenic, heritage, education, recreation and tourism values. The alpine and sub-alpine environment as a whole is a valuable resource forming an important part of the Australian landscape. By 2030, sustainable use and development will complement natural assets that are the primary focus for visitation. Best practice environmental management limits disturbance and potential adverse environmental impacts.

Strategies	1.1 Ensure that the present diversity and viability of species and ecological communities within the Resort are maintained or improved.
	1.2 Continue to identify areas of the Resort that contain threatened species, habitat and communities and ensure that development and use does not detrimentally impact upon these.
	1.3 Establish and implement periodical monitoring and evaluation of key indicators of environmental features of the Resort and report findings every five years.
	1.4 Implement an environmental management plan or identify other relevant systems that incorporate and deliver best-practice and adaptive management.

Objective 2 - Heritage

Cultural heritage is preserved and celebrated

The Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is an area rich in both pre- and post-contact cultural heritage. There are significant opportunities to educate visitors and the community of the rich history of the Resort and to enhance and grow the interpretive, recreational and tourism experiences derived from this heritage. Active management of culturally historic places, identification of sites of significance, and improving awareness and interpretation of the Resort's cultural heritage are essential.

Strategies	2.1 Ensure that future use and development respects the pre- and post-contact historical features of the Resort including sites of major cultural and scientific significance.
	2.2 Continue to acknowledge and respect the Taungurung Clans as the traditional people of Mount Stirling, support Taungurung culture and traditions and encourage greater participation in decision-making processes.
	2.3 Continue to work with indigenous custodians to identify, acknowledge and celebrate sites and artefacts of significance.
	2.4 Investigate and increase awareness of the cultural history of the Resort including traditional custodians, pioneering heritage, and the present and link this information with educational and research activities.
	2.5 Continue to provide suitable education, interpretation and signage targeting visitors transiting through the Resort (e.g. through to Craig's Hut) in partnership with neighbouring land managers.

Objective 3 - Climate Adaptation

Operations and the mountain community are resilient and adaptive

The physical impacts of climate change are predicted to impact socio-cultural factors, which will require adaptive management and operational responses. More broadly, the impact on biodiversity will vary, with some ecological communities including upland wetlands and snow patch communities, montane forests and alpine fauna more susceptible to impacts of climate change. Decreased persistence of snow and increased fire frequency will be key vectors of change.

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is uniquely positioned to respond positively to impacts of climate change and support social changes through adaptation and educational capabilities. Operations of the Resort are inherently highly adaptable and impacts of climate change will likely compound the need for further innovation and adaptation in management and operations.

Strategies	3.1 Partner with other agencies and communities in responding to impacts of climate change.
	3.2 Identify, monitor and manage climate change risks and potential impacts on the environment, operations and communities through adaptive management and operations.
	3.3 Support landscape and physical functions to provide flora and fauna the ability to respond to current and future impacts of climate change.
	3.4 Resort development and activities support socio-cultural changes in the community and tourism sector that arise from climate change.
	3.5 Continue to promote and facilitate year-round use through improved amenities and access that supports suitable activities and events that uphold the Resort's natural and social values.
	3.6 Whilst maintaining environmental values, adaptively plan to improve winter experiences to mitigate the potential impacts of climate change on winter visitation.
	3.7 Investigate the feasibility of snowmaking within the Resort as an adaptive management tool for environmental assets only.
	3.8 Power requirements of the Resort are achieved through appropriate renewable energy sources.
	3.9 Facilitate a reduction in emissions arising from management and operations including through use of innovative technologies.

Opportunities

Tourism and Recreation, Education and Research

Objective 4 - Tourism and Recreation

Affordable nature based adventures to support sustainable increases in visitation year-round

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort supports year-round tourism and recreation offerings that are nature-based, affordable and equitable. Delivered through a sustainable trail network, opportunities for Ecotourism are promoted where they support the Resort's Core Principles. Interpretive functions support tourism and recreation offerings, incorporating education into all experiences.

Strategies	4.1 Maintain the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort as a nature based educational, tourism and recreational resource.
	4.2 Facilitate passive and active recreational activities in balance with the conservation and protection of the natural environment of the Resort.
	4.3 Continue to maintain and enhance a track and trail network that provides for year-round tourism and recreation, in such a manner that environmental impacts are minimised and quality of experience is maintained or improved.
	4.4 Ensure that any further design and development of trail infrastructure and/or ski field terrain is undertaken in a manner that minimizes impacts to the natural environment.
	4.5 Investigate and collate data to understand and engage the needs of user-groups.
	4.6 Continue to provide and enhance educational and interpretive signage/campaigns/information that support visitor experiences and promote values of the Resort.
	4.7 Continue to maintain a schedule of approved tracks and trails that supports visitor experiences (zones and activities) and maintains environmental values.
	4.8 Plan and create zones for, and maintain a schedule of, approved recreational uses/activities and investigate technologies for promoting these.

Objective 5 - Education and Research

Learning experiences that create social and environmental benefit

The Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is a mountain for learning. The Resort provides a safe and affordable destination for outdoor education and school groups. Opportunities exist to increase educational experiences, working with education institutions and communicate research findings. Strong relationships with research bodies and evidence-based research are critical to inform adaptive management practices essential for the Resort's future.

Strategies	5.1 Partner with educational and research institutions, agencies and community to engage students and visitors in learning and research.
	5.2 Enhance interpretive functions – including behaviour change – that promote environmental, heritage or sustainability values.
	5.3 Partner with Taungurung Clans to identify and promote awareness of Traditional burning and landscape management tasks as they relate to Mount Stirling, including post-fire surveys (where possible).
	5.4 Continue to share and develop knowledge with community, agencies and institutions that further promote the environmental, socio-cultural and land management values of the Resort.
	5.5 Support research into management techniques that safeguard environmental quality.
	5.6 Continue to support research into species ecology and monitoring of flora, fauna and communities, including exotic species.
	5.7 Partner with educational and research institutions, agencies and community to educate visitors and community of the regional and national significance of the Australian Alps.
	5.8 Maintain and promote an online publically accessible repository of research conducted at the Resort.

Implementation

Infrastructure and Services, NRM and Environmental Risk, Partnerships, Access and Transport

Objective 6 - Infrastructure and Services

Functional and appropriate infrastructure and services support efficient, safe and positive visitor experiences

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort – currently and into the future – does not provide for permanent on-mountain visitor accommodation other than camping, refuge huts and shelters and a commercial seasonal alpine camp located in vicinity of the Cricket Pitch. Functional and appropriate physical infrastructure and services are crucial to the efficient and safe operation of the Resort and a positive visitor experience. Ski-lift infrastructure is not provided. The design and construction of new infrastructure will be sympathetic to Core Principles, minimize impacts on the surrounding natural environment, and better facilitate safe year-round use of the Resort.

Strategies	6.1 Infrastructure and services are designed and located to minimize their environmental and visual impact.
	6.2 Improve and enhance the existing network of public facilities using innovative environmental technologies where possible.
	6.3 Cost-effective infrastructure, services and commercial developments are related to the Resorts function and core principles.
	6.4 Infrastructure is powered by renewable energy.
	6.5 Continue to provide essential services (power, water, waste management, ski patrol, communications) in line with best practice.
	6.6 In collaboration with other agencies, provide other emergency services that cater for the Resort year-round.
	6.7 In consultation and collaboration with user groups and neighbouring land managers, maintain and enhance existing user group infrastructure.
	6.8 Ensure infrastructure is maintained and provided in a way that continues to facilitate year-round use of the Resort and meets best practice requirements in relation to safety.

Objective 7 – Natural resource management and Environmental risk
High quality, safe and sustainable natural resources

Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is located within the Upper Goulburn catchment and declared a Special Water Supply Catchment area. Geotechnical stability of the Resort is an important environmental and safety issue. The location, siting and management of infrastructure and services must have regard to surface drainage and groundwater to minimize risks associated with ground stability within the Resort and to minimise risks to water catchments, quality and supply. Risks associated with climate change – including bushfire – and associated impacts must be planned for and adaptively managed to ensure safety year-round.

Strategies	7.1 Continue to maintain and regularly review the Risk Register, with particular focus on natural resource and environmental risks for the Resort.
	7.2 Continue to implement the Emergency Management Plan (includes the Bushfire Management Plan).
	7.3 Mitigate social, economic and environmental impacts from bushfire through appropriate fire management strategies.
	7.4 Identify, monitor and manage sites in the Resort that may be susceptible to geotechnical risk.
	7.5 Manage drainage on roads, tracks and trails to minimize erosion and sedimentation and implement rapid rehabilitation programs on exposed sites.
	7.6 Continue to implement best practice waste minimisation and management programs including management of effluent from Resort infrastructure and services according to legislative requirements.
	7.7 Continue to monitor and manage pest plants and animals through integrated and innovative programs.

Objective 8 – Partnerships

Strong relationships and engagement enhance the Resort's community and environment

Partnerships are essential to success in all areas of the Resort's future. The Resort borders Mansfield State Forest and the Alpine National Park. Effective management, particularly regarding tourism and environment, requires strong relationships and collaboration between land managers, traditional owners, agencies and communities. Particularly as use capacity issues arise, the large number of stakeholders and diversity of users of the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort will require strong engagement and collaboration.

Strategies	8.1 Continue facilitation and engagement of the Mount Stirling Stakeholder Group to improve consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders.
	8.2 Build and strengthen relationships with relevant agencies and stakeholders, to achieve complementary land management objectives, including addressing potential use capacity issues in the future.
	8.3 Continue to strengthen and expand collaborative relationships and partnerships with educational and research institutions.
	8.4 Continue to investigate opportunities to engage volunteer support across a range of activities.
	8.5 Develop partnerships with neighbouring communities to improve connections with off-mountain accommodation, tourism and recreation opportunities.
	8.6 Actively encourage growth in community engagement and involvement with the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort through use of targeted media and communications.

Objective 9 - Access and Transport

An equitable, safe, and easy gateway

Accessibility of Mount Stirling Alpine Resort is essential for positive visitor experiences and safety year-round. Seasonal closures are in place to protect environmental values and permit safe operations during the declared snow season. Management of roads and tracks provide for a positive visitor experience whilst minimizing impacts to the natural environment. Key management issues include access to the snowline in low snow conditions; minimizing user conflict and equitable access for all visitors.

Strategies	9.1 Using existing infrastructure, continue to enhance the equity of accessibility to and within the Resort, and between Mount Buller and Mount Stirling, having regard to the maintenance of environmental values, visual amenity and experience.
	9.2 Continue to manage roads, carparks, tracks and trails to improve drainage and minimize erosion, sedimentation and geotechnical risk.
	9.3 Investigate options for improved management of impacts relating to the use of the tracks within the treeless area of the summit.
	9.4 Continue compliance operations and visitor education in partnership with neighbouring land managers to reduce environmental impacts and negative visitor experiences.
	9.5 Engage with VicRoads (the responsible authority) to improve surfacing of the Mount Stirling Road from Mirimbah to Telephone Box Junction.
	9.6 Investigate and implement suitable transport options from Mirimbah to Telephone Box Junction and to strategic on-mountain locations to access the snowline, excluding ski-lift infrastructure and snow mobile tours.
	9.7 Continue to provide access opportunities including recreational links with the Mansfield State Forest and the Greater Alpine National Park.
	9.8 Continue to permit over-snow vehicles for operational and safety purposes only.
	9.9 Continue to implement seasonal road and track/trail closures to protect areas of high environmental value and permit safe operations during the declared snow season in collaboration with neighbouring land managers.
	9.10 In consultation with user groups and neighbouring land managers, investigate and implement recreational zoning and permitted activities areas/tracks/trails to minimize user conflict and manage capacity issues.

Relevant documents

Alpine Resort (Management) Regulations 2009.

Alpine Resorts (Management) (Amendment) Act 2004.

Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997.

Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme – Mt Stirling Local Planning Policy, Local Planning Policies – Clause 21.07 – Mt Stirling, 17 June 2004.

Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme - Mt Stirling Strategic Statement, Strategic Statements – Clause 21.07 – Mt Stirling, 31 May 2012.

Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan 2012.

Climate Change Adaptation in the Australian Alps: Impacts, Strategies, Limits and Management, NCARFF 2011.

Greater Alpine National Park Management Plan 2015.

Mount Stirling Environmental Effects Statement. Victoria. Dept. of Infrastructure. May 1996.

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Mt Buller Mt Stirling Strategic Plan 2013.

Mt Stirling Alpine Resort – Assessment and Panel Report on the Environmental Effects Statement, Department of Infrastructure. February 1997.

Mt Stirling Development Taskforce Position Statement.

Mt Stirling Stakeholder Group Terms of Reference, February 2017.

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036.

'Resort Master Plan' and 'Strategic Management Plan' prepared by the Friends of Mount Stirling.

Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation Strategic Plan 2016.

The Potential Impacts of Climate Change on Victorian Alpine Resorts 2016.

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