

## Continuing partnership between SSAA and Parks Victoria

For nearly two decades, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) and Parks Victoria have worked together to achieve shared conservation and pest management outcomes through volunteering.

This partnership has taken many different forms, most recently through a Letter of Collaboration, to ensure a mutually beneficial and effective relationship for both organisations. The Victorian Government has recently committed \$1 million to continue this partnership over the next four years.

Successful programs stemming from this partnership include the protection of heritage trees from possum damage at Werribee Park, reducing grazing damage in the Mallee by removing goats from across the landscape and controlling deer in the Yarra Ranges. The thorough training and accreditation for SSAA volunteers means that safety and professionalism are demonstrated in every partnership program.



With over 300 accredited SSAA Victoria members state-wide covering 12 different regions, it has been a fantastic opportunity for shooters to utilise their specialist skill sets to achieve positive environmental outcomes.

Many non-shooters are surprised to learn that shooters, and hunters in particular, have strong conservation motivations. In fact, long before 'conservation' became a popular concept, it was hunters in the 1950s and 1960s who were instrumental in the establishment of Victoria's State Game Reserve system to protect diminishing native wildlife habitat.



The SSAA Victoria conservation and pest management (CPM) members are all experienced hunters who want to actively contribute to conserve, protect and enhance environmental and cultural assets in Victoria.

As volunteers, they are not reimbursed, but are professional in every other sense. They hold appropriate firearm licences and are willing to undergo additional training and accreditation in the areas of firearm safety, marksmanship and animal welfare. They also train for field operations with an emphasis on bush safety, navigation and teamwork.

David Laird, SSAA Victoria Hunting Development Manager, says the program is a great way to break down negative stereotypes and build productive partnerships.

*“Initially, some Parks Victoria staff expressed doubts about the appropriateness of shooters operating in parks.*

*As the program and the relationships have developed over many years, so too has the level of trust and understanding.*

*Parks Victoria Rangers who are involved with these programs can appreciate how accredited volunteers provide a very positive contribution to achieving land management objectives.”*



Parks Victoria’s conservation and pest management programs aim to reduce threats and improve the health of Victoria’s parks network. A variety of tools are used to protect nature, and volunteer programs are one of these tools. Parks Victoria takes a tailored approach to pest management in each of the state’s parks – carefully planning which tools are best for individual park needs.

Working with SSAA volunteers enables Parks Victoria to design programs in the best way to maximise biodiversity, control conservation threats and uphold good neighbour relationships.

Kylie Trott, Parks Victoria Executive Director Operations, says that in addition to volunteers contributing to conservation programs, Parks Victoria staff learn from volunteers’ experience and expertise.

*“From Gippsland to the Mallee, we have shared knowledge and expertise and achieved some great outcomes for nature.*

*We’re really pleased to get the benefit of their great experience and shared learnings support the integrated approach we take to controlling deer and feral animals in our parks.*

*Where a partnership began, great relationships have followed.*

Parks Victoria and SSAA look forward to continuing to work together towards a successful volunteering future. Stay tuned for programs and opportunities to get involved in the coming months.