

- 2026 ELECTION PRIORITY -

Public land management to support tourism, farmers and the environment

Public land that is well managed with a local workforce can deliver environmental values that maintain and improve the natural habitat, support threatened species, reduce pest plant and animal challenges for adjoining landholders, and enhance tourism and economic outcomes.

Why public land must be managed better

East Gippsland's scale, biodiversity and landscape connectivity make it one of Victoria's most significant and most challenging regions for public land management. Sensitive ecosystems, waterways and biodiversity corridors face growing pressure from invasive species, climate change and historic underinvestment. Coordinated investment is needed to protect these values while supporting clean water, erosion control, fire resilience and community wellbeing.

Poorly managed public land, ageing infrastructure, pest species and climate impacts are harming agriculture, tourism, and the natural environment. In a shire that is 83% public land, these impacts are magnified.

Pest animal populations are rising across eastern Victoria, putting pressure on agricultural productivity, regional livelihoods and community wellbeing. Local workforces are best placed to deliver timely, consistent pest management that meets community expectations and protects public and private land values.

Ongoing investment in basic land management tracks, toilets, signage, pest and weed control, and visitor infrastructure is needed to keep public land safe, accessible and fit for growing visitor numbers. Long-term underinvestment has weakened environmental health and the visitor experience, limiting tourism growth.

Greater transparency and a local delivery focus will help ensure public investment leads to measurable on-ground outcomes, including stronger protection for threatened species and habitats, local employment and community benefit.

Prioritising environmental health in public land management will deliver broad benefits for communities, industries and the regional economy. Targeted investment in habitat protection and land management can support local jobs, strengthen nature-based tourism, and sustain the natural assets that underpin small community economies.



- 2026 ELECTION PRIORITY -

Our community is asking for

- Clear public reporting from DEECA on outcomes, job creation and environmental performance from public land management programs.
- A localised implementation plan for East Gippsland, including the Healthy Forest pilot program (Orbost and Noojee), with timelines, partners and expected outcomes.
- Improved coordination with councils and landowners on priority interface issues such as weed and pest management.
- Investment in improving outcomes for threatened species - flora and fauna, tracks and trails and other infrastructure, that will lead to better protections of the natural environment with a localised delivery focus to support small communities.

Targeted funding through the Great Outdoors program, to ensure better access and experiences at campgrounds and across walking trails, 4WD tracks and visitor facilities across East Gippsland parks and state forests to support the visitor economy and increased local spend, including:

- Enabling and streamlining sustainable tourism investment on public land
- Targeted tourism
- Reinvesting in the condition, access and visitor readiness of public land assets
- Partnering with regions and Traditional Owners to activate place based tourism opportunities

Locally led pest animal management, including:

- Maintenance of the dingo unprotection order and eastern buffer zone.
- Reinstatement or replacement of effective wild dog bounty program.
- Investment in consistent population monitoring and shared data systems.
- Assessment and consideration of economic and social impacts in policy and investment decisions.
- A coordinated, cross-border and cross-tenure management framework.
- Strategic, long-term state and national funding for ethical pest animal control.
- Recognition of mental health impacts and support services for affected communities.
- Improved regulatory pathways to enable venison to enter the red meat supply chain.
- Alignment of pest animal management with national food security objectives.

Background

To support access and experiences on public land, there are opportunities to simplify planning, leasing and approval pathways for low impact, high-value tourism uses, with clear and transparent guidelines.

Targeted tourism can unlock private and community investment, create ecotourism hubs,



- 2026 ELECTION PRIORITY -

and generate revenue that can be reinvested into managing and maintaining the wider public estate.

Support for locally driven, place based activation of public land - particularly First Peoples-led, nature-based and cultural tourism – through coordinated planning, funding and governance.

This includes backing master planned destinations, improving cross agency coordination, and supporting local jobs, skills and stewardship tied directly to public land tourism outcomes.

The Victorian Government has committed \$30 million to implement the Great Outdoors Taskforce recommendations, including \$4 million for a Healthy Forest pilot in Orbost and Noojee. There is limited visibility at a local level on how this funding is being deployed, what outcomes are being achieved, and how communities are benefiting.

A \$2.75 million investment in feral pig control activities on public land was announced in March 2026 and is a welcome investment in pest animal species. Council's Pest Animal position, developed by the Agriculture Advisory Committee, informs the significant challenges of pest species such as deer, wild dogs and feral pigs.

Transparency and delivery of public land management programs, ensuring investment translates into real on-the-ground outcomes in East Gippsland.

More information

- Chief Executive Officer Fiona Weigall
 - 03 5153 9500 / 0427 539 509 fionaw@egipps.vic.gov.au
- Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth
 - 03 5153 9500 / 0428 778 168 Cr.ashworth@egipps.vic.gov.au