

# NEWS FROM THE ALPS

## E-BLAST

THE ALPS PROGRAM. WORKING TOGETHER BEYOND BORDERS.



That's the new Program Manager on the left – Parks Victoria's David Crea being handed the baton of power (aka the Australian Alps travelling thermos) by NSW Parks' Rob Gibbs, the former Program Manager.

## MEET THE NEWEST DOCTOR WHO

**Stop Press.** That 'Doctor Who' moment is again upon us - where The Doctor we all know and love is suddenly regenerated into a new version. In this case Alps Program Manager Rob Gibbs is about to morph into David Crea so if you currently have a connection to the Australian Alps – work, passion or play - you'll want to read this...

Popular cultural reference aside, there are parallels between The Doctors and the Program Managers. Every few years they come and they go, but each new incumbent steps up to carry on the core mission. (For those new to the terms Alps Program and Program Manager, check out *The Alps Program for Dummies* below to get a quick idea of what this mission is.) So as Rob hands over the role, David will carry on the momentum. He will also do what each of his predecessors have done – he'll add his own take on it. So who is David Crea and what is *his* slant on the gig?

It's a neat retrofit to link Dave's younger years with where he sits now. "I grew up in Sydney, riding my BMX out in Garigal National Park; I had a father who'd been born in northern Italy who'd take us bushwalking up in the Blue Mountains; and with restricted TV access, one of my idols became David Attenborough."

An Arts Degree followed. "I wanted to work in what was then known as Aboriginal Affairs, so I moved to Canberra where I worked in Indigenous Programs and Policies. The next move, to a role in Darwin, let me combine my two interests – environment and indigenous issues – and I took the same role with me when I later moved to Cairns." This was all about working with Aboriginal men and women in communities, developing indigenous ranger teams and putting programs in place dealing with endangered species, pests, fire management, and protection of culturally significant sites. Alongside this, David added a post grad degree in natural resource management.

"And then my partner and I did something we'd talked about for years – we bought a farm... in Victoria. I began working as a project officer with Parks Victoria in flood recovery which was followed by a role in pest management."

For someone relatively new to the Australian Alps, let alone the Alps Program, David has had a fast-tracked ride re many things Alps and Program related having worked most recently with three Alps Program Managers – Andy Nixon (Parks Vic), John McRae (ACT Parks) and Rob Gibbs (NSW Parks). Given it's a known fact that being a Program Manager ratchets a love for the Australian Alps into a passion, it's no surprise that having been surrounded by all that shared passion, Dave applied for the Program Manager role and in his words, "I did my best in the interview and the rest is history."

So what will July 1st look like when Dave's off and running? The Program will continue to be delivered as planned and like everyone before him, he will do it with a personalised emphasis. "Given COVID stopped us meeting for a time, I'm keen to re-invigorate the face-to-face peer knowledge exchange: "I believe land managers, from whatever agency or organisation, directly sharing their wisdom and experience with each other empowers us to do a better job."

Next on his list is a plan to hook in those who are new to the Alps - fresh in their careers - to give them useful 'tools' so they can swiftly and effectively address stresses and threats to the Alps in this era of Climate Change. And talking Climate Change, David's focus throughout the next three years will be to consistently (and relentlessly) encourage integration of Climate Change into the day to day: think routine management; special projects; programs; planning; everything. As we welcome David, let's follow the Program on Facebook, and check out the resources on the Alps Program webpage to keep in the Alps-loop and be inspired.

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## AS ROB WALKS OUT THE DOOR...

Rob Gibbs has been Program Manager over the last action-packed four years. And before he walks out the door, he's paused mid step to put what went down into valuable context...

"When I kicked off in July 2019 we were in prolonged drought across much of SE Australia. I didn't expect that by September I'd be assisting with bushfire operations in northern NSW, then to slowly move south to be involved in the local bushfire campaign back home across the Alps. These fires, which staff were fully committed to until the end of February 2020, affected 18 million hectares nationally. In terms of the Alps, a confronting 500,000 ha or 31% of the Australian Alps National Parks and Reserves were directly impacted.

El Nino then moved to La Nina, and fire was closely followed by heavy rains, storms, flash-flooding and wide-spread damage in many areas across the Alps. Who'd have thought that we'd experience a triple dip La Nina or three consecutive wet years? Great for recharging

groundwater and alpine and sub-alpine bogs but it presented a new set of access challenges for park managers across the Australian Alps.

The drought, fires and floods combo had a significant direct impact on the Alps' environment, its flora, fauna and landscapes: this impact directing the spotlight onto the very real threats of climate change. Australian scientific organisations, including the CSIRO, clearly acknowledged the role of climate change and record drought in the unprecedented bushfire season. The Australian Academy of Science stated, "The scientific evidence base shows that as the world warms due to human induced climate change, we experience an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events."

And then the COVID-19 Pandemic arrived in Australia and by March/ April 2020 we'd been dropped into a new unexpected life with mandatory face masks, social distancing, working from home and limitations on travel across state/territory and local government borders. Restrictions on face-to-face gatherings had a brutal impact on the Australian Alps Program which has traditionally relied on bringing people together for meetings, field work, workshops, training and conferences. But we adapted and online conferencing and meetings became the norm. The Alps Program worked to keep staff connected through our e-newsletters, social media and website.

During lockdown, the pandemic helped emphasise the importance of our national parks and conservation reserves. The community had a reflective moment to value the landscapes in the Australian Alps as spaces where they could find space and recreate. With a greater general community interest, parks staff have for much of the last three years been working on fire, storm and pandemic recovery, helping the environment, infrastructure and the Alps communities bounce back and prepare for the challenges ahead.



**A classic example of people working together to protect the Australian Alps: in this case it's the Alps Program's Liaison Committee at Charlotte Pass, being updated by NSW NPWS Ranger Tim Greville on the track and restoration works in the Kosciuszko Main Range Area.**

There are some clear highlights I've experienced over this time in this role. The first was working on diverse collection of interesting issues affecting the Alps, for example: learning more about Snow Gum Dieback; co-operatively protecting threatened sub-alpine plants; interpreting heritage huts with the latest technology; connecting with Aboriginal Traditional Owners and volunteers. The second highlight, when the pandemic restrictions allowed, was the chance to visit areas of the Australian Alps I'd never been, confirming that the Australian

Alps is certainly a very unique and diverse bioregion. It's not just about snow and the top of Mt Kosciuszko.

The third highlight was working with the passionate and dedicated park management staff from across the four Alps Program partner agencies, as well as the many other government and non-government organisations, volunteers, researchers and community members. It was a privilege to be amongst these people, all united in a common love for the Alps and the desire to protect its unique landscape and its special values.

During my time as Program Manager it's been sad to see the passing of some the champions of the Alps: Dr Alec Costin; Dr Graeme Worboys; some of our Aboriginal Traditional Owner Elders. This along with the retirement of many long-term and experienced Alps agency staff sees a great loss in experience and knowledge, but it has been equally heartening to see many new and young staff coming through the ranks and taking up the baton and meeting the challenge and dedicating themselves to that the Australian Alps is a *'place worth protecting'*.

*“Mountains, their environments including the people who live and work in them, are funny things - they can be extremely delicate, fragile and beautiful but at the same time they can also be harsh, unforgiving but also resilient given a bit of understanding, time and nurturing.” – Rob Gibbs*

These years have also firmed up my understanding of the Alps Program, and the unique role it plays in helping to facilitate connection: day-to-day between park managers, rangers and field staff: with researchers, scientists, subject specialists; Traditional Owners; volunteers; visitors and the community. Everyone learns from and supports each other in their common love for the Alps and the desire to protect its unique landscapes and its special values. The last four years has confirmed for me that communication, connection across borders and jurisdictional boundaries and sharing knowledge and experience is critical to good conservation land management. The Alps Program helps achieve that. That despite being a diverse bunch with differing roles and responsibilities, and sometimes differing views and approaches, together we're crucial members of a team – *'people working together'* – toward a common goal of protecting the important natural, cultural and community values of the Australian Alps national parks.

It's worth pointing out that the Alps Program has achieved a lot over its 37 years, often punching well above its weight in outcomes considering the limited funding and resourcing it operates with. This is mainly through the dedication of staff, community members and volunteers that get involved, often going above and beyond to achieve outcomes. It has been an honour and privilege to be part of that. Yes there are threats and challenges ahead for the Australian Alps, but I feel positive about the future given the Park management staff and Alps community that is dedicated to their care. I look forward to where the Alps Program will be at for its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2026 as the next Alps Program Manager, Dave Crea and the team from Parks Victoria take on the hosting and stewardship of the Program. I know it is in good hands. Over to you Dave.”

# THE ALPS PROGRAM FOR DUMMIES



The Alps Program's Liaison Committee routinely gets together: here at the most recent gathering, they took a look at the solid organic waste composting facilities at Sawpit creek. This is where solid sewer sludge and organic wastes from the Perisher Range Ski resorts is now turned into compost and soil conditioner, used in parks rehab projects.

It's called the Alps Program by everyone who wants to keep things simple. But when it was first created back in 1986 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding, it was officially named the Australian Alps national parks Co-operative Management Program. Moving past the name – it's a mouthful – the Alps Program was something of a miracle – created in a moment when the governments of Victoria, New South Wales, the ACT and the Commonwealth Government were completely in environmental sync. They all stepped behind what was a simple, great idea - to ignore the state boundaries and get everyone – agency staff, community, volunteers, researchers and visitors – working together to look after the Alps. That's twelve national parks and protected areas covering 1.6 million hectares.

Over the forty-odd years since, the Program's been flat out supporting people who protect and care for our Alps. And for anyone who's just now picking up that the Program exists, know that the Program has a Liaison Committee with representatives from all the agencies – together driving the focus. And reporting to that cross-border-co-operative gang of four is the Program's Manager – the role that Rob Gibbs has just given more than three years of his life to (thanks to COVID), as he hands over to David Crea. Just as Rob did, David will be taking the Alps Program's mission statement and making it happen out there on the ground, around the Australian Alps and across the parks agencies. Look over your shoulder because if you're working in the Alps, the Alps Program is probably working alongside you.



More sight-seeing and Australian Alps info gathering by the Liaison Committee: here on a field inspection of a new section of the Thredbo ValleyTrack.

**TELL US YOUR STORY:** We are always looking for stories to include in this newsletter. What's happening in your part of the Alps? If you've built a new bridge, cleared a track, managed pests, done vegetation restoration works or worked on threatened species recovery, why not send Rob Gibbs a photo and a quick line and he'll take care of the rest. Maybe you just went for a particularly fabulous walk and would like to share your experience. We're always happy to hear from agency staff members, volunteers and members of the general community.

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