

Mountain Biking



Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park
and Garawarra State Conservation Area

Mountain Biking – Discussion Paper
Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area

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Introduction

A new plan of management is being prepared by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area.

Discussion papers have been prepared to describe and explore challenging issues that need to be addressed in the new plan. These papers are designed to help people understand each issue and generate discussion and ideas. Community feedback will help to inform the development of the new plan of management.

This paper should be read in conjunction with the discussion paper on [recreational activities](#).

Purpose of this paper

This paper considers the future management of mountain biking in Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area. Road cycling, which is also popular on roads passing through Royal National Park, is not covered in this paper.

Mountain biking in national parks

Mountain biking is a great way to experience and enjoy our national parks. NPWS is committed to providing a range of environmentally sustainable mountain biking opportunities across New South Wales (see the [NPWS Sustainable Mountain Biking Strategy](#)).

NPWS recognises that planning for sustainable mountain biking experiences needs to ensure sites are appropriate, supports the protection of natural and cultural heritage, is balanced with the needs and safety of other visitors, and is consistent with available resources and other park management priorities.

The challenge

The challenge is to establish a sustainable network of mountain bike tracks for these parks that:

- support the protection of park values, including the natural environment, cultural heritage and public enjoyment of the parks
- provide a safe and engaging experience for the growing numbers of mountain bike riders
- provide opportunities to experience and appreciate the parks
- reduce the impact of unauthorised track construction and conflict with other park users
- provide certainty about where mountain biking is and isn't permitted.

Factors affecting NPWS management of mountain biking

Factors that affect the management of mountain biking in the parks include:

- Royal National Park is one of the most visited national parks in New South Wales. The number of visitors will continue to grow given future population growth in the region.
- Mountain biking is increasing in popularity across New South Wales and the Sydney metropolitan area, generating increased demand for access to public open space for this activity.
- Proximity to residential populations and ease of access by car or public transport from Sydney and the Illawarra make Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area appealing destinations for mountain biking.
- The current plan of management for these parks (adopted in 2000) pre-dates the rise in popularity of mountain biking. It does not provide sufficient strategic direction, assessment of opportunities or regulation of this activity.
- The soil types in these parks have a high potential for erosion (Sydney sandstone). However, the western flank of Royal National Park has an overlay of shales and clayey soils that are relatively more resilient, and may be more conducive to activities such as mountain biking.
- A wide range of visitor activities occur in these parks including walking, mountain biking, running and horse riding. Interactions between users can be managed through careful track design, clear signposting and education. A mix of multi-use tracks, preferred-use tracks, single-use tracks and one-way systems could also be implemented to address visitor safety risks and optimise the experience for all visitors.
- Cycling on management trails (unsealed roads that support park management operations) is currently permitted in these parks. While management trails can provide useful connections and less challenging terrain for beginners and families, they are designed primarily for vehicles and often do not provide a good quality mountain biking experience. For this reason, there is increasing interest from mountain bikers for access to single-width tracks.
- There has been a proliferation of unauthorised mountain bike track construction in recent years. These tracks are illegal and are having a detrimental effect on park values, including loss of native vegetation and increased erosion risk.
- Developing and maintaining a sustainable mountain bike track network is expensive, and needs to be balanced against other conservation and park management priorities. Improving mountain bike tracks will need to be progressively staged and implemented according to available resources and other priorities.

Planning for the future

Developing a long-term, strategic approach to mountain biking is an important aspect of developing the new plan of management for these parks. As the interest and popularity of mountain biking in these parks has increased over time, the need to undertake more detailed analysis and planning has become apparent.

NPWS has been working with the community to understand the issues, challenges and potential opportunities for the future management of mountain biking in these parks. In 2015,

NPWS commissioned an independent audit of track locations and use – view the [DirtArt Trail Audit Report for Royal National Park](#).

Together with considering environmental sustainability, protection of native plants, animals and heritage, and provision of safe and enjoyable access for park visitors, the results of this audit have informed strategic thinking on mountain biking. NPWS has also been examining ways to improve access points to the park, including partnering with adjoining land managers, and provision of shared facilities such as parking and amenities.

As part of this planning process, a set of guiding principles for mountain biking in these parks has been prepared.

Proposed guiding principles for mountain biking

The following guiding principles are proposed for mountain biking in Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area:

- Mountain biking opportunities may be provided where they protect the values of the parks, are safe, support a range of riding abilities, and provide an engaging experience for park visitors.
- The western flank of Royal National Park and targeted areas in Garawarra State Conservation Area and Heathcote National Park appear to provide the most appropriate locations for mountain biking. These areas have good accessibility and generally have landscapes and soils that are more resistant to erosion and other adverse environmental impacts when compared to those along the coastal side of Royal National Park.
- Mountain biking in Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area will be limited to tracks constructed or approved by NPWS. Use of illegally constructed or unapproved tracks has high environmental impact and safety risks.
- No new tracks will be created without appropriate environmental assessment, consultation and approval. Unauthorised tracks will be closed and rehabilitated as soon as possible.
- A published mountain bike track network map, appropriate signage, and educational information will provide certainty to all park users, including mountain bikers, about where mountain biking is and isn't permitted.
- There will be active enforcement of the rules about the use of mountain bike tracks and illegal track construction.
- The network will be designed to provide opportunities for safe skills progression for beginners to intermediate riders and a variety of riding options suitable for most skill levels.
- The network will not be designed to provide opportunities for highly technical riders, all-mountain or downhill riding.
- All tracks will have a defined use, indicated by track head signs. Whether a track is for single use or shared use will depend on the particular circumstances of that track, and take account of internationally recognised track categorisation standards.
- Mountain biking will not be permitted on the Royal Coast Track given the risks associated with interactions with other park visitors and potential soil erosion.

- The track network may need to be adapted over time in response to emerging information and environmental conditions. That may include track closure, realignment or rehabilitation where there are adverse impacts or where an alternative would provide a better result for visitors or the environment.
- Night riding may be permitted on some specific tracks in the periphery of the parks. This will be considered for locations where there is good access, and after further assessment of the environmental conditions in these areas.
- Opportunities to involve the mountain bike community in the development, management and maintenance of the track network will continue to be actively explored.
- Partnerships with other land managers (e.g. local councils and Crown land managers) and local communities will be pursued to create links with riding opportunities outside the parks and share associated facilities such as car parks.
- Tracks that are not required as part of a future network will be progressively closed and rehabilitated.

These proposed guiding principles have informed the development of a proposed mountain bike track network for the parks.

Proposed mountain bike track network

A proposed track network has been prepared based on the guiding principles (above), the planning investigations and community discussions to date.

- An [Overview map](#) identifies three key zones for mountain biking in Royal National Park: Temptation Creek, East Heathcote and Helensburgh.
- A separate larger scale map has also been developed for each zone:
 - [Temptation Creek Zone](#)
 - [East Heathcote Zone](#)
 - [Helensburgh Zone](#).

Connections between these zones could enhance the mountain biking experience, improve accessibility and reduce risk of overuse in some areas. Some links already exist in some locations via management trails. Opportunities for high quality, sustainable linkages will be explored in developing the plan of management.

Opportunities to link the mountain bike network to visitor facilities and precincts will be explored. For example, re-opening the historic Zig Zag track to Audley could be explored as a safe way of connecting cyclists to the Audley precinct.

A mix of multi-use tracks, preferred-use tracks, one-way and single-use tracks could be used to address visitor safety concerns and provide opportunities for an enjoyable experience for all visitors. At this stage, tracks in the proposed network have not yet been assigned to any particular use. Community feedback on the proposed network and types of uses will help to inform further decisions.

The construction of the track network will be progressively staged according to available resources and other park management priorities. In addition, all relevant environmental impact assessment and approval requirements will be met.

What do you think?

Your thoughts, ideas and comments on this discussion paper and the proposed mountain bike track network are now invited and can be provided using [an online submission form](#), by email to royal.plan@environment.nsw.gov.au or by writing to The Planner, NPWS, PO Box 144, Sutherland NSW 1499.

All input will inform the development of a new plan of management for Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area.

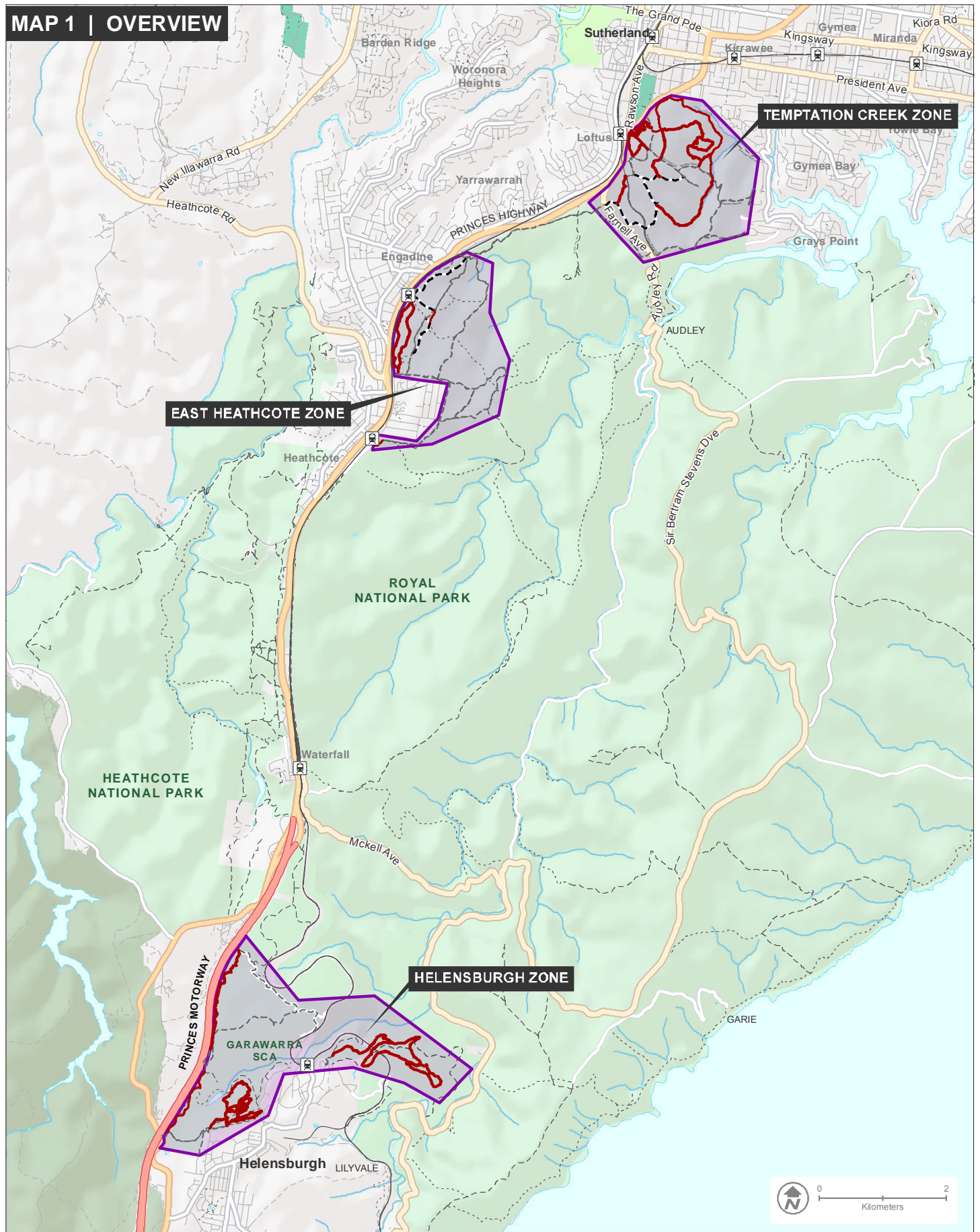
There will be another opportunity to have your say when the draft plan is completed and put on public exhibition. If you would like to be notified when the draft plan is available, please [register your details](#).



Proposed Mountain Bike Network

Royal NP, Heathcote NP & Garawarra SCA

MAP 1 | OVERVIEW



- Existing single-track within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone – currently authorised for cycling, walking and running access only.
- Potential Mountain Bike (or multi-use) tracks within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone (tracks existing and informally used, but not constructed to required standards or currently approved for cycling). These tracks provide opportunities for staged upgrading to improve environmental sustainability and allow approved cycling or shared use.
- Management trail – cycling permitted (shared with other park visitors and management vehicles).
- Walking track – walkers and runners only, cycling not permitted.









Royal National Park

Proposed Mountain Bike Network

MAP 2 | TEMPTATION CREEK ZONE



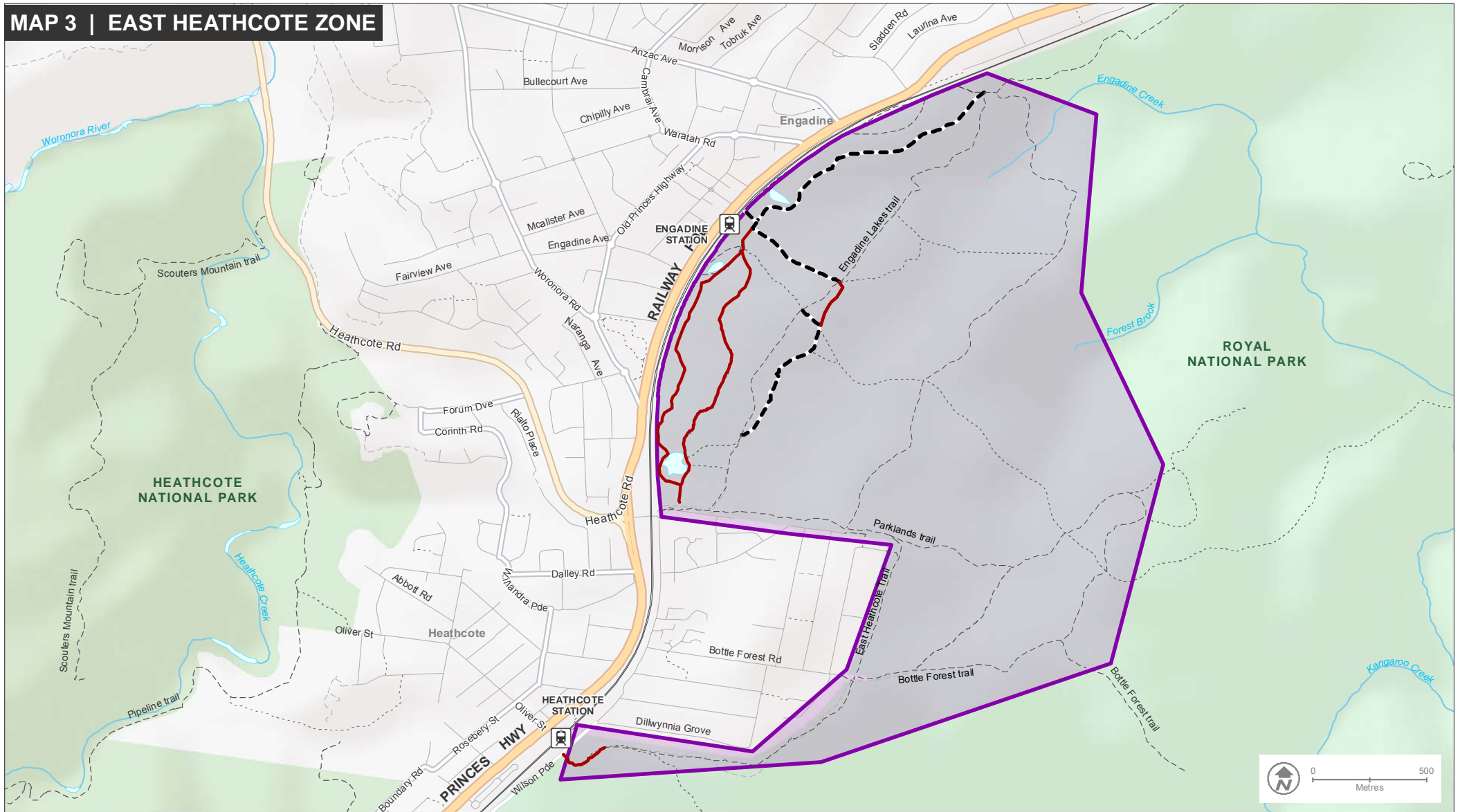
-  Existing single-track within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone – currently authorised for cycling, walking and running access only.
-  Potential Mountain Bike (or multi-use) tracks within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone (tracks existing and informally used, but not constructed to required standards or currently approved for cycling). These tracks provide opportunities for staged upgrading to improve environmental sustainability and allow approved cycling or shared use.
-  Management trail – cycling permitted (shared with other park visitors and management vehicles).
-  Walking track – walkers and runners only, cycling not permitted.



Royal National Park

Proposed Mountain Bike Network

MAP 3 | EAST HEATHCOTE ZONE



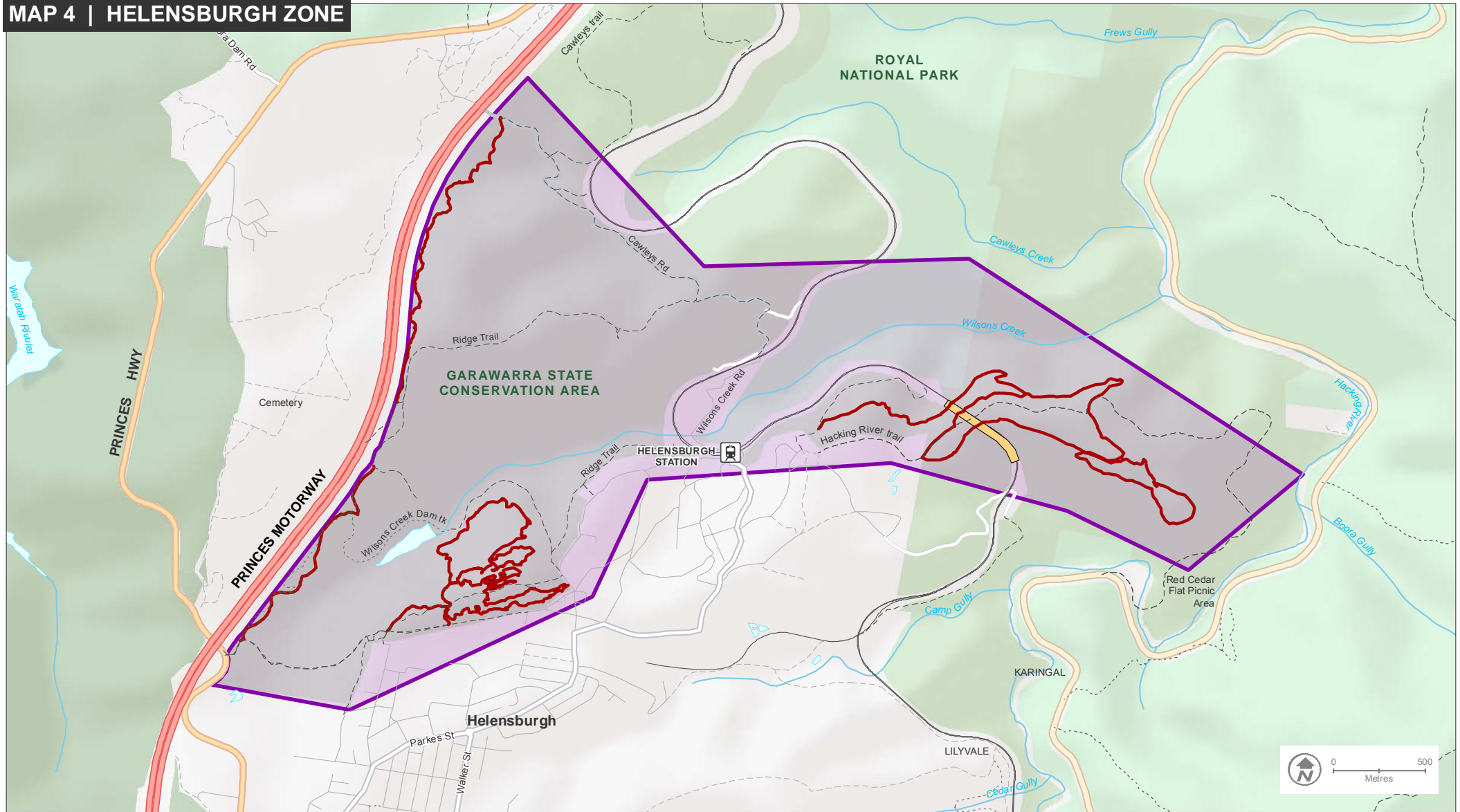
- Potential Mountain Bike (or multi-use) tracks within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone (tracks existing and informally used, but not constructed to required standards or currently approved for cycling).
- Management trail – cycling permitted (shared with other park visitors and management vehicles).
- Existing single-track within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone – currently authorised for cycling, walking and running access only. These tracks provide opportunities for staged upgrading to improve environmental sustainability and allow approved cycling or shared use.
- Walking track – walkers and runners only, cycling not permitted.



Royal National Park

Proposed Mountain Bike Network

MAP 4 | HELENSBURGH ZONE



- Potential Mountain Bike (or multi-use) tracks within proposed Mountain Bike Network Zone (tracks existing and informally used, but not constructed to required standards or currently approved for cycling). These tracks provide opportunities for staged upgrading to improve environmental sustainability and allow approved cycling or shared use.
- Management trail – cycling permitted (shared with other park visitors and management vehicles).
- Walking track – walkers and runners only, cycling not permitted.
- Helensburgh railway tunnel