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Have your say

We want to know what you think about this draft plan. To give us feedback, please send a written submission via:

- email to npws.parkplanning@environment.nsw.gov.au
- post to Manager, Planning Evaluation and Assessment, PO Box 95, Parramatta NSW 2124.

Written submissions must be received by 2 August 2021.

To help us make the best use of your feedback:

- Please tell us what issue or part of the plan you are talking about. You can do this by including the section heading and page number of the plan in your submission.
- Tell us how we can make the plan better. You may want to tell us what you know about the parks or how you or other people use and value it.

We are happy to hear any ideas or comments and will consider them all, but please be aware that we can’t always include all information or ideas in the final plan.

What happens to your feedback?

Step 1: At the close of the public exhibition period, we consider all submissions and prepare a submissions report. Multiple submissions received by the same author will be counted as a single submission.

Step 2: We provide the relevant local advisory committee and the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council with the draft plan, all of the submissions and the submissions report. They consider the documents, make comments on the plan or suggest changes, and provide their advice.

Step 3: Following assessment of submissions and advice, the draft plan will be finalised and submitted for approval as a subsidiary plan under the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Plan of Management (2021).

Your privacy

Your submission will be provided to advisory bodies (as outlined above). Your comments on the draft plan may include personal information. The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment complies with the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998, which regulates the collection, storage, quality, use and disclosure of personal information. For details see Privacy and security. Information that in some way identifies you may be gathered when you use our website or send us correspondence.

If you indicate in your written submission that you object to your submission being made public, we will ask you before releasing your submission in response to any access applications under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.
How to use this plan

This draft mountain biking plan is a subsidiary plan under the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Draft Plan of Management and should be read in conjunction with that plan.

This plan informs mountain bike riders and communities about sustainable mountain bike riding opportunities in Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area. The plan identifies authorised mountain biking routes, details their status and future management, and provides information on the assessment criteria for developing the track network.

Acknowledgments

NPWS acknowledges these parks are in the traditional Country of Aboriginal people of the Dharawal language group.

This plan was prepared by staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Contact us

For additional information or any inquiries about these parks or this plan, contact the NPWS Royal Area Office by email at npws.royal@environment.nsw.gov.au; by mail to PO Box 144, Sutherland NSW; or by telephone (02) 9542 0632.
Executive summary

Mountain bike riding is an increasingly popular activity, with parks near Sydney’s major urban areas experiencing rising demand for safe and accessible mountain bike tracks. In Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area, known collectively as ‘the parks’, cycling is currently permitted on public roads and management trails and on authorised tracks in the Temptation Creek and East Heathcote areas of Royal National Park. The authorised tracks are congested and are degrading from overuse. There has been an expansion of informal tracks and associated erosion and vegetation clearing.

This draft mountain biking plan addresses the growing demand for mountain bike tracks and the impacts of mountain bike use in the parks by proposing a network of properly situated, designed, constructed and managed tracks. The draft plan aims to provide opportunities for a sustainable level of mountain biking in the parks while protecting the parks’ important natural and cultural values and ensuring visitor safety.

The draft plan was developed using data from track audits, track suitability assessments and feedback from stakeholder consultation. The proposed network comprises 54 kilometres of track, supported by 150 kilometres of management trails and public access roads. It provides for all-mountain and beginner riding experiences. It is not designed to provide downhill riding experiences.

Mountain bike tracks will not be permitted in areas of high conservation value or where tracks may impact cultural or shared heritage values. Informal tracks that are outside of the mountain biking zones, located in inappropriate locations or pose safety concerns will be closed and rehabilitated.

This draft plan proposes providing mountain bike riding opportunities in the Temptation Creek, East Heathcote and Helensburgh mountain bike zones. Links between these zones, to allow extended rides and access to public transport, are provided by management trails and public roads. Mountain bike tracks will be designated shared-use tracks or preferred-use tracks, meaning they also provide opportunities for walking.

Following assessment of submissions on this draft plan, the track network will be determined and the final plan made available on the National Parks and Wildlife Service website. All tracks in the final plan will undergo formal environmental assessment under Part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and a user safety assessment prior to implementation.

Park managers will use the final plan to manage mountain bike riding in the parks. Implementing the plan will be subject to the availability of resources to construct and maintain the track network.
1. Background and context

1.1 Park values

Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area (collectively known as ‘the parks’) are valued as places of natural beauty and ecological richness, recreation and relaxation, and are a place of Aboriginal significance and cultural resilience. They provide a living record of post-settlement and social history, and are a place for research, education and experiential learning. Together the parks protect:

- more than 1700 Aboriginal sites in the traditional Country for Aboriginal people of the Dharawal language group
- more than 100 heritage items
- more than 300 species of animals, 1000 plant species, 12 threatened ecological communities and 60 listed threatened species
- thousands of hectares of relatively untouched vegetation, vital in providing wildlife corridors and maintaining the network of conservation areas in the Sydney region
- geodiversity values, characterised by valleys, ridges, rocky outcrops and waterways.

Additionally, the parks have immense value as they provide recreational, adventure and outdoor leisure experiences for people living in the Sydney and Illawarra regions as well as local, regional, interstate and international visitors. This includes mountain bike riders, walkers, surfers and nature enthusiasts, all of whom value the landscape of the parks and the opportunities they provide for stimulating and enjoyable experiences.
1.2 Mountain biking in the parks

Mountain biking is an increasingly popular way to experience and enjoy our national parks. The parks currently provide cycling experiences on public roads, management trails (approximately 150 kilometres) and tracks authorised for cycling. Currently, there are six kilometres of authorised shared-use or preferred-use tracks available for mountain biking in the Temptation Creek and East Heathcote areas of Royal National Park. These tracks were authorised in 2002 as part of a mountain bike track trial.

The areas of authorised tracks are congested and are experiencing degradation due to overuse and poor design. As a result, there has been an expansion of unplanned, informal tracks in the parks which has caused environmental degradation and safety concerns.

It is recognised that the existing authorised mountain bike network in the parks is currently inadequate. This draft mountain biking plan is an opportunity to address the growing needs of mountain bike users in the parks through properly designed, constructed and managed tracks while addressing environmental concerns.

The diversity of park values and the physical environment need to be carefully considered in the design and delivery of tracks and other infrastructure. Visitor activities, such as mountain biking, must be carefully managed to avoid sediment transport and loss of soil, transport of weeds, clearing of vegetation, movement of bushrock and disruption to animal habitat and behaviour. The overall purpose of this plan is to provide for a sustainable level of mountain biking in the parks whilst ensuring the protection of park values and visitor safety.

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Box 1: Road, track and trail definitions

Where these terms are used in this plan, they have the following meaning:

**Management trail or trail**: A vehicle trail in a park that is maintained to facilitate park management activities. Management trails can be used by visitors for walking and cycling but are only accessible to vehicles for National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) authorised purposes.

**Track**: A narrow track that can be used for walking, running and, where designated, cycling or horse riding. Tracks are not available for motorised vehicle use.

**Preferred-use track**: A track that is clearly marked as being designed for one type of use but other uses are permitted.

**Shared-use track**: A track that can be used for walking and cycling and, where designated in Garawarra SCA, for horse riding.

**Public roads**: Includes park roads (i.e. roads that are reserved as park and managed by NPWS) and off park public roads (i.e. roads managed by other agencies) that are available for public vehicle use. Public roads are also available for cycling, horse riding and walking.

**Linking trails**: Existing management trails that provide links between mountain bike areas shown on maps in this plan.

**Informal tracks**: Existing unauthorised tracks.
1.3 Strategic framework for the mountain biking plan

This draft mountain biking plan is a subsidiary plan under the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Draft Plan of Management (DPIE 2021).

The draft plan of management aims to protect the natural, cultural and recreational values of the parks. It identifies three visitor management zones in the parks (Figure 1). These zones will guide the visitor facilities and experiences provided, as well as identify areas where conservation is the priority.

![Visitor management zones diagram]

Figure 1 Visitor management zones
The draft plan of management permits cycling on public roads and management trails throughout the parks in all zones. Mountain biking is also allowed on designated and signposted tracks in the Zone 2 Recreation - mountain biking areas at Temptation Creek, East Heathcote and Helensburgh (see Figure 2). The Zone 2 mountain biking areas also include the Heathcote National Park link zone which, in the future, may provide authorised tracks. There are currently no authorised mountain bike tracks in this link zone and this plan does not propose authorisation of any tracks in the zone at this time.

The draft mountain biking plan identifies a proposed authorised track network within three Zone 2 mountain bike areas and allows for the future development of a track head in the potential Zone 3 Temptation Creek visitor precinct.

The track network has been developed based on data from track audits, track suitability assessments and feedback from stakeholder consultation. Details of the steps taken to prepare the plan are outlined in Appendix A.
Figure 2  Proposed mountain bike zones and linking trails
2. The proposed network

The proposed mountain bike network comprises 53.8 kilometres of track within three designated mountain biking zones in Royal National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area, providing for a variety of riding experiences in the parks. An additional link zone is identified in Heathcote National Park to allow for future tracks if needed.

The network is complemented by about 150 kilometres of management trails and public roads which substantially increases the available routes and opportunities for mountain bike riding and provides necessary links between zones and to public transport. Management trails such as the Uloola Trail which provides access to a camping area, are popular with mountain bikers.

The proposed network is designed to suit mountain bike riders but will also provide opportunities for walkers and runners. The network will provide for all-mountain and beginner riding experiences, with tracks suitable for beginner riders being located close to track heads, and progressively harder tracks located in more remote areas. This ‘stacked loop’ track structure provides safety and functionality. The network is not designed to provide opportunities for downhill riding. The network is designed to be of local to regional significance (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network design</th>
<th>Volume track</th>
<th>Event capacity</th>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Elevation m</th>
<th>Network signage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statewide significance</td>
<td>50+ km</td>
<td>National and regional events</td>
<td>Green to double black</td>
<td>200+</td>
<td>Highly developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional significance</td>
<td>20+ km</td>
<td>Regional events</td>
<td>Green to black</td>
<td>100+</td>
<td>Highly developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local significance</td>
<td>&lt;20 km</td>
<td>Club events</td>
<td>Varied</td>
<td>&lt;100</td>
<td>Functional signage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proposed track network is primarily formed from existing tracks (authorised and informal), complemented by a small number of new tracks. The audit and track suitability assessment identified some existing informal tracks that were not suitable for inclusion in the proposed network and/or fell outside proposed mountain biking zones. These tracks (around 50 kilometres) will be closed and rehabilitated.

An overview map (Figure 2) identifies the four mountain bike zones: Temptation Creek; East Heathcote; Helensburgh (Area A and B) and the Heathcote National Park link zone. Separate, larger scale maps shows existing tracks and the tracks proposed for each zone:

- Temptation Creek, Royal National Park, see Figure 3
- East Heathcote, Royal National Park, see Figure 4
- Helensburgh, Garawarra State Conservation Area, see Figures 5, 6 and 7
- Heathcote National Park link zone, see Figure 8.

Connections between these zones are provided via a combination of tracks, existing management trails (see ‘Linking trails’ on maps below) and the public road system. These connections enhance riding opportunities, improve accessibility, and help reduce overuse risk in some areas.

Access to the mountain biking zones is via management trails from a number of locations on the park boundaries. A new track head providing parking and basic visitor facilities is
proposed adjacent to the Princes Highway in the potential Temptation Creek Zone 3 visitor precinct. Development of the site will be guided by a precinct plan and subject to available funding.

2.1 Temptation Creek zone

The proposed network in this zone offers proximity to Sydney’s urban areas, with easy access from Loftus train station and the surrounding suburbs of Kirrawee and Grays Point. The zone includes several iconic viewing areas. There are significant environmental and cultural values in this zone that must be protected, including Aboriginal sites and several threatened plants, animals and ecological communities.

Current situation

There are currently four kilometres of track authorised for mountain biking and just over 21 kilometres of informal tracks used by mountain bikes in the Temptation Creek area. The current network can be accessed via management trails from a number of locations including Farnell Avenue, the Princes Highway, Grays Point and adjacent to Loftus Oval. The network includes tracks and management trails with a variety of difficulty levels and steepness. The four kilometres of authorised tracks are designated shared-use and preferred-use for mountain bikes (see Table 2) and are also regularly used by walkers and runners. The most popular tracks are known locally as Bobcats, Even Flow, Holy Trail and Blair Witch. The management trails south of Farnell Avenue are extensively used as a link to Heathcote.

Several of the tracks in this area are prone to retaining moisture and become boggy after periods of rain. There is also significant braiding (the creation of numerous informal tracks) in the area, and this detracts from the riding experience as it can make it difficult to follow the primary track. Holy Trail is creating erosion issues on the banks of Temptation Creek.

Proposed network

The proposed network will include 22.6 kilometres of track in the Temptation Creek zone (Table 2 and Figure 3). This includes tracks to the south of Farnell Avenue that support extended rides from Loftus train station to Heathcote East. Around five kilometres of informal tracks in the area will be closed and rehabilitated. These tracks are primarily side tracks that are poorly constructed and do not positively contribute to the overall rider experience, as well as some tracks that need to be closed due to severe erosion issues.

The proposed network has a mix of trail difficulties and is expected to support rider skill progression from beginner to advanced. The number and diversity of tracks provide a range of opportunities that can be selected depending on the rider's experience.

One of the most used tracks in the network (Holy Trail) requires extensive modification and realignment because it weaves in and out of environmentally sensitive areas. Modification of this currently authorised track will be prioritised due to the popularity of the track and the damage occurring.

A new climbing track is proposed for intermediate riders to ascend from Temptation Creek to join Extra Track. The proposed track will alleviate damage to the management trail in this area and will be located to avoid key natural values.

The draft plan of management identifies a potential Zone 3 visitor precinct in the Temptation Creek Zone. This precinct has the potential to become an alternative park entry point and visitor precinct with a track head for mountain biking, and basic visitor facilities such as parking, toilets and picnic shelters.
## Table 2: Proposed authorised track network for Temptation Creek zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name *</th>
<th>Track type †</th>
<th>Length (km)</th>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Current status ‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holy Trail (N1)</td>
<td>Preferred use</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal – needs major realignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawson</td>
<td>Shared use</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Partially authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair Witch</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobcats</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobcats to Even Flow</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can of Worms</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected West single track</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connex Extension</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creek Trail</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Partially authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even Flow</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Track</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Link</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Trail</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway Trail</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Entry Trail</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savilles Alternate</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savilles Creek</td>
<td>Shared use</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal – requires partial closure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savilles DH Link</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signallhouse Track</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Connex</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnamed – Engadine Lake Trail Link</td>
<td>Preferred use</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnamed - Loftus Trig Trail Link</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziggy &amp; Zaggy</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziggy &amp; Zaggy Loop</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New track (N2)</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Proposed new track</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total proposed track network** 22.6 km

**Notes:**

* Local names will be changed with implementation of the network.
† Track type to be confirmed (TBC) after environmental assessment and user safety risks assessment. These assessments will be used to determine if the track will be designated shared-use or preferred-use.
‡ All tracks require environmental and safety assessment before they become authorised tracks.
Figure 3 Proposed mountain bike track network: Temptation Creek zone
2.2 East Heathcote zone

This area is a popular mountain bike riding destination readily accessible from Heathcote train station or by car, with parking in local streets. The area is linked to the Temptation Creek zone by management trails and informal tracks. It contains significant pockets of threatened ecological communities, priority fauna habitat and a number of Aboriginal sites.

Current situation

This area of Royal National Park contains two currently authorised tracks and just over 20 kilometres of informal track used by mountain bikes. The tracks to the north of the residential area of Heathcote East are attractive due to their proximity to transport and their connection, via the existing management trail network, to the Helensburgh and Temptation Creek zones. These linking trails have a more remote feel, being surrounded by extensive bushland, and are suited to intermediate levels.

Numerous short informal tracks have been created to the east and south of the residential area of Heathcote East, in the asset protection zone (APZ) behind Heathcote East Public School and weaving around management trails. The area also contains a cluster of informal dirt jump tracks. Several of these tracks are in areas of high environmental sensitivity, while others are important for operational management activities and have been identified as a safety risk.

The most popular mountain biking route in this area is Parklands Trail, a management trail to the east of the proposed mountain bike zone.

Proposed network

The proposed network will include 7.7 kilometres of track in the area north of Heathcote East, to provide riding opportunities close to Heathcote and links to the Temptation Creek zone with the East Heathcote zone (Table 3 and Figure 4). Tracks in this area also link with several management trails (e.g. East Heathcote Trail and Engadine Lakes Trail), providing important connections in the network. The proposed track network increases the options available for mountain biking and will help reduce conflicts with popular walking track routes.

Informal tracks to the east and south of the proposed East Heathcote zone will be closed and rehabilitated to protect the sensitive natural values and reduce safety risks. NPWS will continue to actively manage and maintain the APZ in this area. Management trails are the most heavily used routes for mountain biking in this area, and these will remain accessible for mountain biking.
### Table 3: Proposed track network for East Heathcote zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name *</th>
<th>Track type †</th>
<th>Length (km)</th>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Current status ‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engadine Singletrack</td>
<td>Shared use</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Link</td>
<td>Preferred use</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Authorised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box Divit</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtree (Southbound)</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engadine Singletrack Link</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engadine Singletrack Start</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engadine Technical Link</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless (Northerly)</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Cricket Pitch Link</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock-Drop or Ezy Round</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woody One</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total proposed track network** 7.7 km

**Notes:**

* Local names will be changed with implementation of the network.
† Track type to be confirmed (TBC) after environmental assessment and user safety risks assessment. These assessments will be used to determine if the track will be designated shared-use or preferred-use
‡ All tracks require environmental and safety assessment before they become authorised tracks.

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**Figure 4** Proposed mountain bike track network: East Heathcote zone
2.3 Helensburgh zone

The Helensburgh mountain bike zone is located in Garawarra State Conservation Area near Helensburgh station. Management trails provide access into the zone from a number of locations on the park boundary, including access via council land near the Helensburgh Off Road Cycle Club (HORCC) facilities. The zone is comprised of two disjunct areas: Area A, which is generally to the north-west of Helensburgh and extends west to the Princes Motorway; and Area B, which stretches from Helensburgh east towards Lady Wakehurst Drive, near Lilyvale (see Figure 5). There are threatened species and Aboriginal sites throughout the area, with remnant rainforest habitat (a priority fauna habitat) in the eastern section of Area B.

Current situation

There are no currently authorised tracks in this zone. There are just over 32 kilometres of informal track used by mountain bikes in this zone within Garawarra State Conservation Area. Due to its accessibility, the network attracts high numbers of riders. Adjacent to the state conservation area is a mountain bike skills park on Wollongong City Council land, managed by HORCC.

Some tracks in the Helensburgh zone are well designed and are very popular with locals and visitors. The area towards Lilyvale in Area B is used mainly by local riders and includes a long track that winds towards the Hacking River through environmentally sensitive areas.

The high number of tracks in a small area, combined with a lack of signage, has resulted in extensive braiding, duplication and confusion for riders. There are three double black (level of difficulty) tracks in the area, all of which are showing erosion and two that are in a state of disrepair.

Several of the management trails in this area form an authorised horse riding network. These trails include Wilson Ridge Trail, Wilson Creek Dam Trail, The Ridge Trail and a section of Cawleys Road (see Figure 5). These trails will continue to provide for horse riding and mountain biking.

Proposed network

The proposed network will include **23.5 kilometres of track in the Helensburgh zone** (Table 4, and Figures 5, 6 and 7). This will combine with the existing management trails to create an extensive network in this area. Some sections of track will be realigned to create loops (e.g. Sams and Helensburgh 5) and a new return track will be provided in Area B.

The network will be improved by closing minor side tracks, braiding, shortcuts, and tracks currently used by only a small number of riders. About 10 kilometres of track is proposed for closure and rehabilitation. Signage describing the mountain biking track network is proposed for the primary access point, adjacent to the Helensburgh Off Road Cycle Club (HORCC) facilities.
Table 4: Proposed track network for Helensburgh zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Track type †</th>
<th>Length (km)</th>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Current status ‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the Dam</td>
<td>Shared use#</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackstump</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal – requires partial closure, and realignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cawleys Road to Dam</td>
<td>Shared use</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam Express</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disco Inferno</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helensburgh 5</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helensburgh 7</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helensburgh 8</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helensburgh 9</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal – needs major realignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helensburgh 11</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helensburgh 29</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sams</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slip n Slide</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal – requires partial closure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticks</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail to the Railway</td>
<td>Shared use</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Disco Inferno</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Sticks</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downhill to River</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Informal – needs realignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park Loop</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N3 Lilyvale</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Proposed new track</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total proposed track network**: 23.5 km

Notes:

* Local names will be changed with implementation of the network.
† Track type to be confirmed (TBC) after environmental assessment and user safety risks assessment. These assessments will be used to determine if the track will be designated shared-use or preferred-use.
‡ All tracks require environmental and safety assessment before they become authorised tracks.
# Sections of track have Shared-use with horse riding.
Figure 5  Proposed mountain bike track network: Helensburgh zone
Figure 6  Proposed mountain bike track network: Southern section of Helensburgh Area A
Figure 7  Proposed mountain bike track network: Helensburgh Area B
2.4 Heathcote National Park link zone

Heathcote National Park is located to the west of Royal National Park. It was dedicated as a ‘primitive area’ when it was established in 1943 and the park is significant in the development of the wilderness concept in Australia. The park has limited visitor facilities, provides low-key walking, camping and cycling opportunities on management trails, and contains several environmental and culturally sensitive areas.

Current situation

Mountain biking is permitted on management trails in Heathcote National Park. There are no tracks authorised for cycling in the park. The track audit (DirtArt 2020) has indicated there is 20.3 kilometres of existing informal track in this park.

Proposed future network

The purpose of the Heathcote National Park link zone is to provide for possible future authorised track(s) between the eastern boundary of Heathcote National Park and Powerline East Trail; and a north–south track joining existing linking trails to other bike riding zones in Royal National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area (see Figure 8).

This plan does not currently identify any track for authorisation for mountain bikes in the zone but will enable the future authorisation of tracks if required. Any future tracks will be subject to the requirements outlined in section 3.6.

Existing informal tracks in Heathcote National Park will be closed and rehabilitated.

Figure 8  Heathcote National Park link zone
3. Implementing the network

3.1 Environmental and user safety assessment

All mountain biking tracks proposed to be authorised in this plan (including new and existing tracks) will be subject to environmental impact assessment under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and review in relation to land tenure. Depending on the outcome of these assessments, proposed tracks may either be constructed/implemented, or not constructed, or may be modified, for example, realigned to minimise impacts.

Following environmental assessment, user safety risks will be assessed. These safety assessments will be used to determine if the track will be designated as a shared-use or preferred-use track (see Box 1). It is recognised that preferred-use tracks can reduce user conflict and increase safety.

A staged approach will be adopted, with construction and maintenance work undertaken as funding allows. Proposed tracks will be formally added to the authorised network once all assessments and works have been completed and the track is designated a mountain bike track via signs at the track head. Authorised tracks will be added to the mountain biking network map for Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area on the NPWS website (nationalparks.nsw.gov.au). This map will be updated as required.

All design, construction and maintenance of the track network will be carried out in accordance with International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) track standards. The approaches for construction and maintenance of tracks will vary depending on cultural and environmental sensitivities, and tracks will generally be designed for dry weather riding.

3.2 Track closures and rehabilitation

Closure and rehabilitation of informal tracks that are not proposed authorised tracks will be a management priority. This includes informal tracks in Heathcote National Park, as they are located in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.

NPWS may close tracks in the proposed authorised network on a temporary or permanent basis as required and particularly:

- during prolonged or severe episodes of wet weather in areas where soil types are easily eroded
- if IMBA track standards cannot be maintained
- to protect natural or cultural values
- for management needs (e.g. track maintenance or hazard reduction).

The NPWS Asset Stewardship Strategy outlines a strategic assessment process for assessing the relevance and performance of NPWS assets. Where it is considered that a mountain biking facility is no longer meeting requirements, it should be assessed under this strategy. Assets with low relevance or poor performance may be decommissioned.

NPWS will consult with the mountain biking community in making decisions on the permanent track closure of tracks in the authorised network. Advice on closures will be provided on the NPWS visitor website (nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).
3.3 Rider code of conduct

The success and continuation of mountain biking in the parks depends on rider compliance with the provisions of this plan and the NPWS Cycling Policy. NPWS will work with mountain biking groups to ensure that mountain biking occurs safely and in a sustainable manner.

All riders in the parks are expected to abide by the IMBA Rules of the Trail (also known as the IMBA Code of Conduct). The Rules of the Trail will be promoted on track head signs and on the NPWS website, and riders should maintain awareness of whether a track is a preferred-use or shared-use track.

All tracks in the network will be signposted using the IMBA Trail Difficulty Ratings. Riders are expected to responsibly gauge their own ability to ride a track, according to the information and guidance provided on the signs. In addition to information and regulatory signage at each track head, hazard and feature signs will be provided along each track to support a safe mountain biking experience for riders of all skill levels.

3.4 Cycling events

Organised mountain biking events can promote park values and contribute to positive park experiences. NPWS will assess proposed mountain biking events under the NPWS Events, Functions and Venues Policy including consideration of potential impacts on natural and cultural values, the track network and other park users. Consent for events may be given subject to NPWS conditions.

3.5 Monitoring and maintenance of the network

Track maintenance, design and drainage characteristics contribute to environmental protection and prevent damage from mountain biking. NPWS will seek user feedback on the state of tracks, presence of new informal tracks, signage and other infrastructure.

NPWS will schedule track and infrastructure maintenance via the NPWS Asset Management System.

NPWS will continue to support and further develop volunteer partnerships with the mountain bike community. Volunteers will be encouraged to assist with track construction, closure and rehabilitation of illegal tracks, track maintenance and track monitoring.

3.6 Compliance programs

Mountain biking in prohibited areas and the creation of informal tracks causes significant damage to natural and cultural vales in parks. Substantial resources are spent on strategies to address non-compliance in our parks. The creation of unauthorised tracks which then require closure and rehabilitation, and the vandalism of signage, directs our limited resources away from the improvement of cycling and mountain biking experiences.

NPWS will seek to reduce the creation of informal tracks by clearly mapping and signposting the authorised mountain biking network, as well as encouraging self-regulation among user groups. However, it is recognised that these actions must be undertaken in conjunction with closure of informal tracks and compliance programs.

There are penalties under the National Parks and Wildlife Regulation for removal of vegetation, ground disturbance, erection of structures and risking the safety of other users. There are penalties under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 for harming threatened species or threatened ecological communities.
3.7 Future changes to the network

The proposed network will continue to be implemented as resources allow.

Over time, there may be a need to develop new tracks (i.e. additional to the new tracks identified in section 2), realign tracks to protect park values or improve rider experience and safety, or decommissioning existing tracks. The creation of new tracks and realignment of tracks will be permitted only within the identified mountain biking zones and will be subject to environmental impact assessment and assessment against the criteria outlined in Appendix B – Network design and assessment. The status of the network will remain of local to regional significance (see Table 1 for definitions).
Appendices

Appendix A  Steps taken to prepare the plan

Implementation of a trial network

In 2002, a series of tracks in Royal National Park was authorised for mountain biking use as a trial for a future network (NPWS 2002). The trial included five shared-use tracks totalling almost six kilometres, creating loops and following popular routes used by mountain bike riders in the Temptation Creek and East Heathcote areas of Royal National Park. Mountain biking remains permissible on these tracks.

Audit of tracks

In 2015, DirtArt completed a track audit of Royal National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area. The audit found that approximately 71 kilometres of authorised and informal tracks were being used by mountain bikes (DirtArt 2015). The report identified tracks that were considered appropriate for mountain biking in their current form for inclusion in a mountain biking network, those requiring minor works, and a larger 'aspirational' network of tracks. The 2015 assessment did not consider environmental, cultural or management factors that may impact ultimate track selection.

The audit report was used to opportunities for expansion of the authorised mountain bike network in Temptation Creek, East Heathcote and Helensburgh.

Consultation on a proposed network

In 2017, NPWS exhibited several discussion papers seeking public input on key issues to be addressed in a new plan of management for the parks. One of these discussion papers was dedicated to mountain biking activities (NPWS 2017).

The discussion paper presented a proposed mountain biking network which included the 2002 trial authorised tracks and some additional tracks, totalling just over 30 kilometres of track. The network was informed by the findings of the mountain bike track audit (DirtArt 2015), and was based on the following guiding principles:

- 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 provide the most appropriate locations for mountain biking.
- Mountain biking in parks will be limited to tracks constructed or approved by NPWS.
- No new tracks will be created without appropriate environmental assessment.
- A published mountain bike track network map will provide certainty to all park users, including mountain bikers, about where mountain biking is and is not permitted.
- The network will be designed to provide opportunities for beginners to intermediate riders. The network will not be designed to provide opportunities for highly technical riders or downhill riding.
- All tracks will have a defined use, indicated by track head signs.
- Mountain biking will not be permitted on the Royal Coast Track.
The track network may need to be adapted over time in response to emerging information and environmental conditions.

Opportunities to involve the mountain bike community in the development, management and maintenance of the track network will continue to be 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.

In response to community feedback about the proposed network presented in the discussion papers, NPWS re-evaluated the network by updating the mountain bike track audit and assessing the environmental constraints of all proposed tracks. The guiding principles detailed in the discussion papers continue to underpin the revised network.

Appendix B  Network design and assessment

In 2020, the authorised and informal tracks being used by mountain bikes in the parks were audited (DirtArt 2020) and approximately 100 kilometres of tracks were recorded as being used by mountain bikers. The audit found that the quality of the current track network varies and includes some informal tracks that would add value to the existing authorised track network and require minimal works to enable formalisation, as well as some tracks in poor condition in unsuitable areas.

The audit (DirtArt 2020) provided a preliminary assessment of the value of tracks to the proposed network and provided environmental constraint mapping for the proposed mountain bike zones. NPWS subsequently assessed all tracks identified in the audit in a multi-criteria analysis to determine their suitability for inclusion in a network that would protect park values and ensure a safe and enjoyable mountain bike network. The following three criteria were used in this assessment:

Criteria 1. Routes are in appropriate locations where park values are protected, and ongoing use is ecologically sustainable

The assessment of track suitability considered characteristics of the specific site and the broader landscape context of the site (the surrounding area of reserved land). It included consideration of natural and cultural values, soil suitability and erosion potential, threatened species, topography, watercourses and habitat continuity.

Criteria 2. Routes facilitate an enjoyable and safe visitor experience

The assessment considered rider safety, ride experience, market appeal, value to the network, access, social compatibility and emergency access.

Criteria 3. Construction and maintenance costs are reasonable and sustainable

The assessment considered establishment, maintenance costs and long-term financial sustainability of the proposed track.

The assessment identified the existing informal tracks that were not suitable for inclusion in the proposed network. These tracks will be closed and rehabilitated. All tracks in the proposed network will be subject to further formal environmental and safety assessments before they are officially added to the authorised mountain biking network (see section 3.1).
References


