
Discussion Paper – Access Management

May 2004

Preparation of Plan of Management for the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks



BACKGROUND

Context

During August to October 2003, the NPWS undertook consultation with the community to ascertain key values and management issues to be addressed in the preparation of a Plan of Management for the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks. The outcomes of this consultation are included in the *'Report from the Open House Forums'* (NPWS, October 2003). In addition to conducting a series of Open House forums, the NPWS also attended a number of other community forums and sought input from those who could not attend a forum through written submissions.

One of the key management issues identified through consultation related to access to and within the Parks. This included access via 2WD and 4WD vehicles, trail bikes, horses and bicycles. While bushwalking was also identified as a popular activity and way to access the Park, it is not considered in this paper but will be considered along with other recreational activities such as camping.

This discussion paper describes for each activity the Regional context, existing situation, 'non-negotiables' and 'negotiables' (legislation and policy), key issues identified through consultation, and other management and/or recreation issues. From consideration of this, a possible solution is described. More information on

the 'Regional Context' for each of the recreational activities is provided in the FSC draft Nature Tourism and Recreation Plan (2004).

The purpose of the paper is to seek additional community input on both the possible solutions presented in this paper and/or to nominate other solutions, for consideration in drafting the plan.

Information from and views of the community expressed through the consultation program, which includes this discussion paper, is an important input to the preparation of the draft plan. In making decisions and drafting the plan, the NPWS will consider this input within the policy and legislative framework (non-negotiables) and especially to its protection and conservation responsibilities of National Parks under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

The period for comment is Monday 10th May to Monday 7th June 2004.

Process for consideration of this Paper

1. Following the Open House Forums, the community was asked to nominate if interested in receiving the discussion paper on access management
2. Access Management Discussion Paper prepared and distributed to those who indicated interest (1)
3. **One month for comment on paper (via attached submission form, on-line submission or separate submission) WE ARE HERE**
4. Submissions reviewed by the community based Far South Coast Regional Advisory Committee (RAC)
5. Recommendations made by the RAC in response to submissions. These recommendations considered by NPWS management in the drafting of the plan
6. Report summarising submissions, recommendations of RAC and NPWS response/consideration distributed to those who indicated interest (1) or who made a submission (3)
7. Community/special interest forum on Karst Management
8. Development of draft Plan of Management
9. Draft Plan of Management including proposals for access management exhibited for comment for three months

How to read this paper

For each of the recreational activities of 2WD/4WD driving, trail bike riding, horse riding and cycling the following is outlined:

- ⇒ Regional Context
- ⇒ Current Use – Far South Coast Escarpment Parks
- ⇒ Negotiables and Non-Negotiables
- ⇒ Management/Recreation Issues, Consultation Issues
- ⇒ Possible Solution

Feedback on this paper is sought through the attached submission form or you can complete a submission on line at www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/escarpmentparks

***Note:** Within the paper, some of the roads referenced traverse the Parks and also private property. While the road network may make reference to both public and Park roads, any proposed management actions refer to Park roads only.*

Values Identified through Consultation

During consultation, people were asked what they valued about the Parks. Related to access, key values were:

- **Accessibility:** the ability for a variety of people to access the Parks (especially trails) for a range of recreational activities
- The ability to access the trails in the Parks as an **alternate route** between the tablelands and coast
- **Vehicular Access:** Accessing the trails for both registered trail bike riding and 4Wd'ing activities
- **Horse Riding opportunities** within the Parks and especially the ability to access the Bridle tracks on horses
- **Walking Opportunities:** including both remote bushwalking and shorter more accessible walks
- Opportunities to reach destinations for **camping, day-use, mountain-bike riding, fishing, photography and caving**

For a range of the above activities, people valued aspects of the **experience**, the adventure, excitement, exploration and ability to enjoy.

A range of other values were also identified that, in most cases, had some relationship or implication to how access is managed in the Parks. For example:

Natural Heritage

The uniqueness of the area and its '**naturalness**' (for example free from air pollution)

Intrinsic Values

- The experience of being within the Parks: beauty, quiet, solitude, peace, the sounds of nature, relaxation
- An opportunity to **escape from civilisation** and motor vehicles, seeking a sense of remoteness and/or 'wilderness' and knowing that future generations would also be able to enjoy this opportunity

Cultural Heritage

Freedom to enjoy Parks as ancestors did, particularly access on horses to historic bridle tracks

Non-Negotiable - the Legislation

For all recreational activities discussed in this paper (4WD, 2WD driving, trail bike riding, horseriding and cycling) there are two key pieces of legislation that set the framework / parameters for the consideration of recreational use and development of management guidelines. They are the National Parks and Wildlife Act (NPWA) 1974 and the Wilderness Act 1987. Policy related to this legislation is discussed for each recreational activity. In relation to the NPWA, there are general management principles that apply in the consideration of all activities. They are:

30E (1) The purpose of reserving land as a national park is to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or phenomena that provide opportunities for public appreciation and inspiration and sustainable visitor use and enjoyment so as to enable those areas to be managed in accordance with subsection (2).

30E (2) A national park is to be managed in accordance with the following principles:

- a) the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes,*
- (b) the conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value,*
- (c) the protection of the ecological integrity of one or more*

ecosystems for present and future generations,

(d) the promotion of public appreciation and understanding of the national park's natural and cultural values,

(e) provision for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment that is compatible with the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values,

(f) provision for the sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values,

(g) provision for appropriate research and monitoring.

The Management Principles for Wilderness areas under the Wilderness Act 1987 are:

- a) to restore (if applicable) and to protect the unmodified state of the area and its plant and animal communities,*
- b) to preserve the capacity of the area to evolve in the absence of significant human interference, and*
- c) to permit opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation.*

2WD, 4WD DRIVING ACTIVITY, TRAIL BIKE RIDING

Regional Context

A person may undertake recreational driving (4WD'ing and 2WD'ing) and trail bike riding, to reach a destination(s), for sight-seeing or for the activity itself. In the case of a destination, the route may be mostly within the one land tenure (for example Bendethera Camping Area in Deua National Park). For the purposes of sight-seeing or if the focus is on the activity itself, then the type of land tenure may not be as important. For this reason, it is important to consider opportunities for recreational driving and trail bike riding within a Regional context and across all land tenures.

Within the Region, there is one commercial 4WD-tour operator and one commercial trail bike tour operator, both offering tours through the hinterland and escarpment areas. Nine 4WD clubs/associations and two trail bike associations have expressed an interest in being involved in planning for the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks (there are also many club members on the mailing list).

Recreational driving (2WD, 4WD) along with trail bike riding are popular activities on the extensive road and trail networks through the Far South Coast Region, especially in the hinterland and escarpment areas. Table 1 shows the kilometres of roads within State Forests, National Parks and public access roads outside of these areas. Roads are classified as follows:

- Management trail (no public access)
- 4WD trail (may be a management access trail also but there is public access)
- Dry weather 2WD (unsealed)
- All weather 2WD (unsealed)
- Minor Sealed Road
- Major Sealed Road

Table 1: Road Access Network (km) by land tenure and road classification

	Management trail	4WD trail	Dry weather 2WD unsealed	All weather 2WD unsealed	Minor sealed	Major sealed
State Forests	1	3004	2173	1695	90	13
NPWS	279	1442	253	518	12	
Sub - Total	280	4446	2426	2213	102	13
Other public access	32	3580	2751	1922	1095	553
Far South Coast Region	313	8026	5176	4134	1197	569
FSC Escarpment Parks (outside of wilderness areas)	43	579	106	56	0	0

Note about Table 1: The above figures were determined utilising several different data sets such as State Forests and NPWS Access layers on respective GIS (Geographical Information Systems). Many of the roads include snigging tracks, are not necessarily maintained and/or have reduced access (dead-end) due to traversing private property. The above figures therefore indicate the kilometre's of trails/roads within the Region that, with the exception of management trails are generally accessible to the public. It does not show the kilometre's of trails/roads that would form part of popular and/or effective recreational driving and/or riding network. The figures therefore overestimate the length of trails available for recreational use.

The table shows that within the Far South Coast Region (From Batemans Bay in the north, south to the Victorian border), there are over 11,000km of public access roads suitable to 2WD vehicles. While the majority of this driving opportunity is outside of National Parks and State Forests, there is considerable opportunity within State Forests. There are 783km of 2WD roads within National Park, and 162km of this is within the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks.

Within the Region, there is over 4000km of 4WD trails accessible to the public within State Forests and National Parks (as highlighted above however, many of these trails would not necessarily be suitable for recreational use). Of this, 1442km are within National Park. Of trails within National Parks, 579km are within the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks.

Far South Coast Escarpment Parks - Current Situation

Table 2: Far South Coast Escarpment Parks - Road Network by Park and Road classification

Park	4WD trail	Dry weather 2WD unsealed	All weather 2WD unsealed	Minor sealed	Total
Badja Swamps NR	0	0	0	0	0
Deua NP	328	51	27	0	406
Gourock NP	5	3	11	0	18
Monga NP	95	38	0	0	133
Wadbilliga NP	151	14	18	0	183
Total Escarpment Parks	579	106	56	0	741

Table 2 shows that most of the driving opportunity within the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks is on 4WD trails within Deua National Park and Wadbilliga National Park. In total, there is 579km of 4WD trail with the majority (328km) being within Deua National Park.

At the open house forums in the activity where participants were asked what recreational activities they liked to do and where, some participants expressed an interest in using all trails, including those closed to public access, for either 4WD'ing or trail bike riding. There is approximately 124 km of management trails

within 91,197ha hectares of wilderness. Trails that have been previously used for recreational driving/riding that are now within wilderness include: the Turtle and upper Gollarabee Fire Trails in Monga National Park (Buckenbowra Wilderness), Bunbury Creek, Jillicambra and Green Hills Fire Trails in Wadbilliga National Park (Tuross Wilderness), and the Minuma Range Fire Trail between Pikes Saddle and Breakfast Creek (Deua/Woila wilderness).

The Far South Coast Region is implementing a comprehensive visitor monitoring system within the Parks to understand more about how and where people use the road network. From previous use and discussion with user groups however, the following observations are made that may assist with planning:

- There is a strong preference for circular driving routes within the Park
- Bendethera is a popular destination for 4WD's
- There is a desire for routes that traverse the Parks west/east, north/south enabling an alternate driving route between the tablelands and coast
- Monga National Park is a popular 4WD and trail bike destination, but especially for trail bikes

The negotiables and non-negotiables

Non-Negotiables

There are two policies that establish clear parameters for the consideration of access by vehicles (which include trail bikes) in the Parks. They are the NPWS Wilderness Policy (2002) and the NPWS Vehicle Access Policy (2002). These policies are applied in the Plan of Management and there is no scope/provision made for varying the policy. Wilderness areas and boundaries are established through the provisions of and processes outlined in the Wilderness Act 1987. A Plan of Management is prepared in accordance with the NPWA and while it may contain provisions for the management of wilderness areas, a change to the wilderness boundaries cannot be effected through a plan.

Relevant extracts from the Wilderness Policy follow:

3. (a) *Motorised transport operated by any agency, commercial interest or individual will not be permitted (within wilderness areas) except for management operations where:-*

** the operation is necessary.*

** there would not be any significant long term impacts; and*

** it is the only feasible option available.*

(b) Vehicle trails and helipads will be prohibited or where existing, closed and rehabilitated, except where required for necessary management operations.

(c) Where possible wilderness areas will be maintained free from signs, trail markers and other management devices.

(d) Recreational use of wilderness will provide opportunities for solitude and self-reliance subject to the following:-

- *mechanical personal transport must be manually powered.*

The following are relevant extracts from the Vehicle Access Policy:

1. *Generally speaking, public vehicle access will be permitted on all parts of the public access system. The NPWS reserves the right to close all or part of the public access system of an area, either permanently or temporarily, for specific management protection or visitor safety reasons. The NPWS may from time to time charge fees for vehicle use of an area for management or protection reasons.*

2. *The public access system will, where possible, be designated in an appropriate manner for public information. This may include brochures, plans of management, district blueprints etc.*

3. *Public vehicular access will not be permitted on management trails.*

4. *Off road recreational vehicles are permitted on the public access system. This use will not be permitted off roads or on management trails.*

Normal legal provisions relating to motor vehicles, including the Recreation Vehicles Act 1983 and the Motor Traffic Act will apply.

5. *No special provision for trail bike and four wheel drive vehicles will be made*

7. *The public access system will be limited on the basis of the need to limit environmental damage, reduce conflict between users, or for reasons of public safety.*

Therefore, public vehicle access on roads and trails within wilderness areas is prohibited and cannot be considered in the preparation of the draft plan. While these 'non-negotiables' were clearly defined at the Open House Forums, many comments/views were expressed about public vehicular access to trails within these wilderness areas.

Negotiables

Consistent with Policy, there is scope within this Plan to maintain a public access road network utilising existing roads outside of wilderness areas that considers issues raised through consultation especially:

- Maintain access to popular destinations such as Bendethera
- Traverse the Parks west/east enabling an alternate-driving route between the tablelands and coast
- Circular driving routes within Monga and Deua National Park
- Providing for separation between potentially conflicting uses such as trail bikes/4WD's and horseriders.

Management and Recreational Issues

Environmental Impact

Many potential environmental impacts are associated with illegal activity such as driving off designated 4WD trails and include loss of vegetation cover, compaction, sedimentation of waterways and erosion. Impacts such as accelerated erosion and

sedimentation can occur on designated 4WD trails resulting from increased use and/or irresponsible driving, especially after rainfall. Associated impacts include littering, vandalism, potential increase in fire hazards, weed invasion, feral animal predation and noise.

With the exception of cleared areas, the rugged terrain in the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks generally makes illegal off-road driving less likely if compared to for example Parks on the coast in sand based environments. However, illegal off-road activity has occurred in cleared areas (Bendethera) and on former trails in areas now closed to public access, which has caused environmental impact.

All of the above impacts can partly be addressed through increased policing of illegal activity and/or temporary road closures (for example after rainfall), and the encouragement of responsible driving/riding behaviour.

Funding

For a road to be classified as a public access road, the NPWS must have the ability to construct and maintain the road and also to regulate driving/riding activity. There are currently 741 km of public roads within the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks. The costs of maintaining public access roads means that priority is generally given to those roads that:

- are necessary for management purposes (especially for fire management);
- provide access to recognised facilities and attractions within the Park; and
- where servicing and maintenance of public use is cost effective and environmental impacts can be closely monitored and effectively managed.

Issues identified through consultation

The main issue identified through consultation related to how access is managed in the Parks. The widest, most divergent range of view points were expressed in this group of issues and included:

- Whether the **level of access** to trails within the park (mostly for vehicles) should be maintained as it is, increased from what it is or decreased.

- Access for **registered trail bikes, recreational 4WD's** and for **mountain bikes** on trails within the Parks was a key issue, with arguments for both maintenance of existing access and also for a decrease in level of access.
- The issue of **limited or gated access** was also debated with some people considering that there should be minimal or no gates (locked access) and others arguing for increases to gated/locked access. In most instances, the purpose of such access was not specified but based on the general response, it was most likely for vehicles.
- **Diversity of Access** for a range of people, undertaking different activities within a variety of areas was suggested as an important consideration.
- In some instances the **type of trail/access** was raised as an issue (**undeveloped versus developed**), 2WD versus 4WD, with some people feeling that there should be more areas accessible by 2WD and others considering that provision should be made for undeveloped trails for trail bikes.
- Ensuring that access has **minimal impact** on environmental values. Debate as to what was considered '**appropriate access**', especially within wilderness areas.
- The potential for a **controlled access/permit system** for vehicles on some trails was suggested.
- Suggestion that tag along tours (4WD's) be permitted in wilderness areas.
- Management of the Parks to ensure **preservation of wilderness qualities**, with emphasis on the irreplaceability of wilderness. Some suggestions were made for wilderness policy to achieve preservation, which included non-mechanised access only.
- **The designation of trail bike areas away from camping to minimise noise disruption.**
- **Minimisation of human impact** within the Parks and also from **neighbouring land uses** (principally forestry operations). To address neighbouring land uses, expansion of the park was suggested. Noise pollution in remote areas was raised.
- Increasing opportunities for **user groups to be involved** in both planning for management and on-ground management/maintenance works within the Parks and also to undertake initiatives for more responsible/cooperative park

management and use. Some felt that there should be more recognition and understanding of user groups by the NPWS. Providing more **volunteer opportunities** in the Parks and also providing concessions for volunteers.

Much of the debate at the Open House forums (for example more or less access for 4WD's and trail bikes) centred around trails within wilderness areas, with some people arguing for re-opening of access and others arguing for continued closure of these areas and also closure of additional trails outside of wilderness areas to mechanised access. A number of people felt that the natural and heritage values of the Parks including the recreational experience (within and outside of wilderness areas) were compromised by mechanised access (especially 4WD and trail bikes). Part of this debate was that these activities should be promoted in other areas outside of National Parks such as within State Forests.

In relation to gated access, most gates are for trails that are within wilderness or are management trails and therefore do not have public access. There are also a number of gates installed at the Park Boundary where the Park adjoins private property, access to the Park is through private property and where the road is not a designated public road.

In relation to types of trail/access (undeveloped versus developed) it is possible to provide a balance between both 4WD and 2WD opportunities, and 2WD access to some of the key attractions. In accordance with NPWS policy, where a trail is required for management purposes, it is possible to also consider use of this trail/road for recreational driving, provided it is outside of wilderness. Policy prohibits the construction of a road or trails for recreational vehicular use alone, where it is not required for a management purpose. Due to the steep terrain across much of the Escarpment Parks, many trails are suitable to 4WD's or trail bikes only.

A controlled access permit system could be considered for trails outside of wilderness areas and that are closed to public access. It is most likely however that this suggestion was made in reference to closed trails within wilderness areas.

Outside of wilderness areas, given the extensive road network (see attached maps) and that within this network there are both circular routes and through routes, there is unlikely the demand or justification for the establishment of a controlled access system.

Possible Solution

Considering the issues of environmental impact, funding and those identified through consultation, and within policy and legislative constraints (non-negotiables), a possible road network is shown on the attached maps. This network provides for:

- 443km of 4WD trails and 135km of 2WD trails
- 2WD circuits and through routes (tablelands to coast)
- 4WD circuits and through routes (tablelands to coast)
- Access to key recreational destinations
- Linkages with other popular recreation touring routes/roads outside of the Parks

There are also a range of possible north/south routes that traverse private property, State Forests and National Park. It is possible for example, for a person to travel from Deua National Park through to Wadbilliga National Park largely within or adjacent to National Park. Prior to the inclusion of Gollaribee and Turtle Fire Trails within wilderness and their subsequent closure, it was possible also to travel from Monga National Park (Kings Highway) south. The closure of these trails does mean that there is not a north/south route from the Tablelands through Monga National Park but it is possible to commence travel south from Araluen Road.

Possible Guidelines and Actions

- ⇒ Provide a recreational road network as indicated on the attached maps, to enable access to features of key interest, to traverse the Parks east/west and to provide circuit touring routes.

- ⇒ Permit registered vehicles, (which includes registered trail bikes) on the identified recreational road network.
- ⇒ Maintain all roads to the standard indicated by the classification shown on the attached maps.
- ⇒ Temporally close trails if untrafficable due to weather conditions or if required for management/maintenance purposes and notify interest groups of any closures.
- ⇒ Apply a maximum speed limit of 60km/hr for all roads within the park. In some areas, this speed limit may be reduced.
- ⇒ Where possible, in consultation with land management agencies and private operators, have information available on driving and trail bike riding opportunities outside of the Park and within the Region.
- ⇒ Where possible, work collaboratively with recreational driving and trail bike riding groups on trail monitoring, maintenance and also the development and promotion of codes of conduct that encourage responsible use.

HORSERIDING

Regional Context

Horse riding is a popular activity within the Region and several horse riding Associations along with individual club members, have registered their interest in planning for the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks. A number of Associations have shown an interest in the history of tracks (for example the Shoebridge Track) utilised for horseriding. There are four commercial operators based at Bodalla, Batemans Bay, Pambula, and one conducting rides adjacent to South East Forests.

Far South Coast Escarpment Parks – Current Situation

At the Open House forums, people were asked what activities they liked to do and where. From this activity, interest in the possibility of horse riding on several (closed) tracks was expressed and the continued use of existing tracks. There are a number of roads and tracks that are especially popular for horseriding outside of wilderness areas. Tracks include:

- Corn Trail
- Bendethera Mountain track
- Zig zag track
- Deua River track

A number of bridle tracks previously used for horseriding have been closed to public access following wilderness declarations. They include:

- Woila and Jump-Up Bridle tracks
- Shoebridge Bridle track
- Tracks within the Donovan Creek catchment
- Tracks within the Coondella Creek area
- Tracks within Brogo and Tuross wilderness areas

The NPWS is currently undertaking assessment of the historic/cultural values of the Shoebridge track, which will be considered along with other heritage values within this Plan.

Negotiables and Non-Negotiables

Non-Negotiables

There are two policies that establish clear parameters for the consideration of access on horses in the Parks. They are the NPWS Wilderness Policy (2002) and the NPWS Recreational Horse Riding Policy (2002). There is no scope/provision made for varying the policy provisions through the Plan of Management. Wilderness areas and boundaries are established through the provisions of and processes outlined in the Wilderness Act 1987. A Plan of Management is prepared in accordance with the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 and while it may contain provisions for the management of wilderness areas, a change to the wilderness boundaries cannot be effected through a plan.

***Note:** The NPWS is currently reviewing its Recreational Horse Riding Policy. Provisions within the reviewed draft policy have been considered in the development of the possible solution.*

Relevant extracts from the Wilderness Policy follows:

3(d) Recreational use of wilderness will provide opportunities for solitude and self-reliance subject to the following:-

- *horseriding and other forms of animal transport will not be permitted in wilderness areas;*

Relevant extracts from the Recreation Horse Riding Policy (2002) are:

- 1. The areas in which horseriding will not be permitted include:*
 - *areas sensitive to erosion;*

- areas susceptible to weed invasion, where this is a demonstrated problem;
- areas where rare plant and animal species occur;
- Aboriginal sites;
- nature reserves;
- special scientific areas;
- areas where horses may have an unacceptable impact on water quality;
- any other environmentally sensitive areas;
- areas where an alternate recreational use predominates.

2. Horseriding will not be permitted within wilderness areas.

4. Prior to making provision for a horseriding system regard will be had to opportunities which exist outside Service areas for horseriding.

Negotiables

Consistent with Policy, there is scope within this Plan to provide horse riding opportunities outside of wilderness areas that consider issues raised through consultation especially:

- Maintaining horseriding on popular trails around Bendethera, Deua National Park and within Monga National Park.
- Where possible providing for horsecamp, loading and unloading facilities

Management and Recreational Issues

Potential Environmental Impacts

Horses have been found to cause erosion of soils and tracks, increase soil compaction, introduce weeds and plants species not native to the area; and conflict with other recreational uses (*Recreational Horse Riding Policy 2002*). The degree of impact upon trails depends on the amount of use, position of the trail in the landform, parent geological material, soil texture and organic content,

rockiness and stoniness, drainage classes of soils and vegetation characteristics (Kuss et al., 1990). The effects of horses are significantly greater in wetter areas because of the effects of trampling and on slopes because of the weight horses exert on the soil causing erosion and soil compaction (Kuss et al., 1990).

For existing trails outside of wilderness areas, Park Rangers have undertaken a systematic annual assessment of environmental impact of horses on tracks. Over a two-year period, with current levels of use, the level of impact is moderate with no indication of an increase in impact.

Key Issues identified through Consultation

Another key issue also widely debated and for which there was a range of views expressed at the Open House Forums was opportunities for horseriding. A number of people expressed the desire to access bridle tracks including those that traverse declared wilderness areas. Suggestions included the creation of corridors through wilderness areas to enable horses to follow the trails. Conversely there was suggestion that horseriding is an inappropriate use within both wilderness areas and within a National Park.

Possible Solution

Considering the issues of environmental impact and those identified through consultation, and within policy and legislative constraints ('non-negotiables'), a possible solution is to permit horseriding on the recreational road network and on the following bridle tracks outside of wilderness areas, including:

- Shoebridge Track (outside of wilderness only)
- Alpine to Canoolie to Bendethera
- Alpine to Fairfield
- Zig Zag track (Bendethera to Krawarree)
- Bendethera to Bendethera Mountain
- Belowra to Yowrie

This permits the continuation of horseriding on popular trails around Bendethera and within Monga National Park. Horse loading and unloading ramps could remain/be provided at Sutherlands Camp (Wadbilliga National Park), Mongarlowe River (Monga National Park) and Bendethera Fire Trail (Deua National Park).

Possible Guidelines and Actions

- ⇒ Permit horseriding on the recreational road network and on bridle tracks outside of wilderness areas, including:
 - Shoebridge Track (outside of wilderness only)
 - Alpine to Canoolie to Bendethera
 - Alpine to Fairfield
 - Zig Zag track (Bendethera to Krawarree)
 - Bendethera to Bendethera Mountain
 - Belowra to Yowrie
- ⇒ Permit vehicle based camping with horses at Sutherlands Camp (Wadbilliga National Park), Bendethera (Deua National Park). Based on demand, investigate the suitability of permitting camping with horses at a camping area within Monga National Park.
- ⇒ Provide loading/unloading facilities for horses at Sutherlands Camp (Wadbilliga National Park), Mongarlowe River at Corn Trail Link (Monga National Park) and Little Sugarloaf Road (Deua National Park).
- ⇒ On sections of heavily trafficked tracks/trails by walkers, vehicles, or horses riders, a policy of walking your horse will be implemented. The Service in consultation with stakeholders will determine such a system and provide clear marking or signposted.
- ⇒ Where possible, work collaboratively with recreational horse riding groups on trail monitoring, maintenance and the development and promotion of codes of conduct that encourage responsible use.

CYCLING

Regional Context

During consultation for the preparation of the Far South Coast Nature Tourism and Recreation Plan (2004) and Open House Forums (2003), cycling (which includes mountain bike riding) was shown as being undertaken on the coast and in some Escarpment areas. Likely due to the rugged terrain, difficulty of riding and distance from population centres, cycling has not been observed as a major activity within Escarpment areas with it being more popular in the gentle terrain of the coastal areas. At the Open House forums, interest was expressed more so in the potential of cycling and cycling tours through the Escarpment areas with indications of its possible increase in popularity. There is currently one commercial operator conducting cycling tours within and adjacent to South East Forest National Parks.

Far South Coast Escarpment Parks – Current Situation

At the OpenHouse forums, people were asked what activities they liked to do and where. From this activity a number of trails were indicated as being utilised for cycling. These trails are indicated in table 3:

Table 3: Trails indicated as being utilised for cycling

Trail	Park	Wilderness
Boundary FT	Monga National Park	✘
Gollaribee FT (upper)	Monga National Park	✓
Quart Pot FT	Monga National Park	✘
Gollaribee FT (lower)	Monga National Park	✘
Oulla Ck FT	Deua National Park	✘
Merricumbene FT	Deua National Park	✘
Dampier Mtn FT	Deua National Park	✘

Trail	Park	Wilderness
Little Sugarloaf Rd	Deua National Park	✘
Coondella FT	Deua National Park	✘
Wamban FT	Deua National Park	✘
Comerang Rd	Deua National Park	✘
Belimbla FT	Deua National Park	✓
Falcon Rd	Wadbilliga National Park	✘
Belowra Rd?	Wadbilliga National Park	✘
Jillicambra FT	Wadbilliga National Park	✓
Wadbilliga Rd	Wadbilliga National Park	✘
Green Hills FT	Wadbilliga National Park	✓
Bourkes Rd	Wadbilliga National Park	✘
Razorback FT	Wadbilliga National Park	✘
New England FT	Wadbilliga National Park	✘

Negotiables and Non-Negotiables

Non-Negotiables

There is one policy that establishes clear parameters for the consideration of cycling in the Parks, being the NPWS Cycling Policy (2002). This policy is applied in the Plan of Management and there is no scope/provision made for varying the policy provisions. Relevant extracts from the Cycling Policy follows:

- Cycling is permitted generally on the NPWS public road network. In the interests of cyclists' safety, signs may be erected prohibiting cycling on certain NPWS roads where there is a potential danger to cyclists, motorists or other road users through the joint use of a section of road. In*

such cases, the NPWS will identify, where possible, practical alternative routes for cyclists.

2. Cycling is generally permitted on management trails (ie trails used principally by NPWS vehicles for fire and park management purposes) outside wilderness, unless otherwise indicated by signs. Periodic, occasional or permanent closure of management trails to cycling is at the discretion of the Regional Manager. Closure may be warranted, for example, where management trails are being rehabilitated; where cycling activities pose an unacceptable risk to the safety of other park visitors; where plants or animals are threatened by such activities; or where trails are affected by severe weather conditions or events.

3. Cycling is not permitted on single track 'walking' tracks unless a sign indicates otherwise. These are generally narrow tracks used principally by walkers and are not suitable for, or maintained for, the purpose of cycling.

4. Cyclists are permitted to push or carry bicycles on tracks or trails where cycling is not permitted.

5. In all cases, cycling will not be permitted off the road or track surface.

6. Cycling within declared wilderness areas is generally not allowed but may be permitted on specified management (vehicle) trails only. The use of a trail for cycling within a wilderness area must be approved by the Regional Manager and is only acceptable where such use will not degrade wilderness values or threaten the ability of the NPWS to meet its obligations under the Wilderness Act 1987. Trails suitable for cycling within wilderness areas may also be specified in plans of management.

7. Management trails available for cycling will be identified by appropriate signage or other information at trail heads outside wilderness areas for the benefit of cyclists and other park users. No other facilities, developments or improvements will be provided to accommodate bicycle access and use within wilderness areas.

Negotiables

Consistent with Policy, there is scope within this Plan to define cycling opportunities within and outside of wilderness areas.

Management and Recreational Issues

Potential Environmental Impacts

There is extensive opportunity for cycling in the Far South Coast Escarpment Parks and with the growing popularity of cycling, it is anticipated that demand for this opportunity may grow. Adverse interaction may sometimes emerge between cyclists and other users (eg walkers, horse riders, vehicles) as the intensity and frequency of all forms of access increase, and where there are different expectations with regard to access, use of trails and behaviour. Similar to driving and horseriding, there are potential impacts associated with cycling, which include erosion of soils and tracks, increase soil compaction, introduction of weeds and plants species not native to the area; and littering.

Key Issues identified through Consultation

It was suggested at the forums that opportunities for cycling be identified and also considered within a Regional context.

Possible Solution

Considering the issues of environmental impact and those identified through consultation, and within policy and legislative constraints (non-negotiables), a possible solution is that cycling be permitted on all roads and management trails (within and outside of wilderness) and on the Corn Trail in Monga National Park. At this stage there does not appear to be the need based on safety or recreational conflict to exclude cycling on any part of the road network.

Possible Guidelines and Actions

⇒ Permit cycling on the public road network shown on the attached maps and on management trails including those within wilderness areas.

- ⇒ Prohibit cycling on walking tracks except for the Mongarlowe/Corn Trail link and the Corn Trail in Monga National Park.
- ⇒ Permit cyclists to push or carry bicycles on trails where cycling is not permitted.
- ⇒ Encourage cyclists to 'walk their cycle' on sections of management trails that are heavily trafficked by walkers, vehicles, or horses riders, during peak periods. Include and promote this guideline through signage and interpretation outside of wilderness areas.
- ⇒ Prepare, package and promote cycling opportunities in the Park in conjunction with key stakeholders and user groups. This may include maps, preferred cycling trails and tour routes, codes of conduct and trail protocols, public access, points of interest, and links with cycling opportunities outside the Park. Identify shared trails to promote an acceptance of all forms of legitimate use, including cycling.
- ⇒ Where possible, work collaboratively with recreational cycling groups on trail monitoring, maintenance and also the development and promotion of codes of conduct that encourage responsible use.

References

Kuss, F.R., Graefe, A.R. and Vaske, J.J. 1990 Visitor Impact Management: A Review of Research.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003, *Open House Forums: Summary Report of Community Input, Far South Coast Escarpment Parks.*

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2004, (Draft) *Nature Tourism and Recreation Plan – Far South Coast Region*

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974.

NSW Wilderness Act 1986.

Attachments

Maps:

North Tile – Possible Recreational Road Network

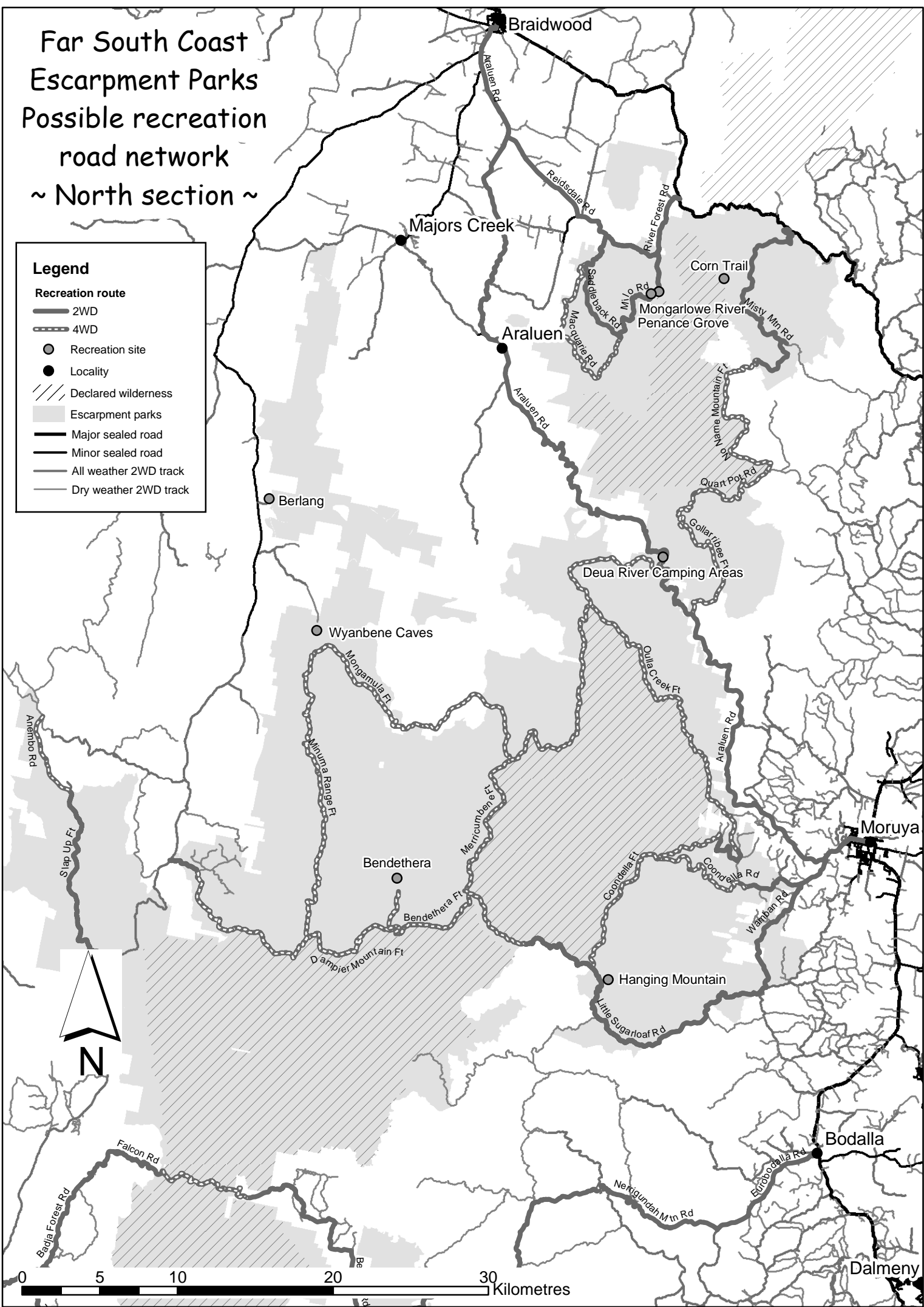
South Tile – Possible Recreational Road Network

Submission Form

Far South Coast Escarpment Parks Possible recreation road network ~ North section ~

Legend

- Recreation route**
 - 2WD
 - - - 4WD
- Recreation site
- Locality
- /// Declared wilderness
- Escarpment parks
- Major sealed road
- Minor sealed road
- All weather 2WD track
- Dry weather 2WD track



0 5 10 20 30 Kilometres

Far South Coast Escarpment Parks Possible recreation road network ~ South section ~

Legend

- Recreation route**
 - 2WD
 - 4WD
- Recreation site
- Locality
- Declared wilderness
- Escarpment parks
- Major sealed road
- Minor sealed road
- All weather 2WD track
- Dry weather 2WD track

