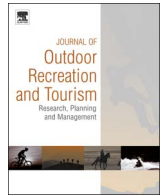




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Park management response to mountain bike trail demand in South Western Australia

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ABSTRACT

This case study reports on a collaborative approach where over 15 years, land managers employed proactive stakeholder engagement in the development of new facilities for mountain bikers in Western Australia. The collaboration involved a combined management process that resulted in successful funding applications, constructive partnering and the provision of a range of riding opportunities for mountain bikers. This included the development of a user/site compatibility matrix that assists managers in regard to the approvals process for mountain biking access under various land tenures. In addition there was the development of a long-distance mountain biking trail, the Munda Biddi Trail (491 km), an important, and potentially future iconic, tourism resource. Although the process involved in developing the trail demonstrates the success of partnerships between Government Agencies responsible for managing protected areas, mountain bike groups and others, by not setting clearly defined objectives at the start of the process, there were some misunderstandings between stakeholders about the type of trail and the type of mountain bikers likely to benefit from it. Overall the collaborative approach, by providing dedicated facilities at approved sites, appears to have led to a reduction in the impacts of unauthorised damaging activities such as trail modification and the creation of informal trails, highlight the benefits of this type of approach.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- Collaboration between managers and mountain bike lobby groups helped clarify differing stakeholder aspirations and intentions in regard to the development of mountain bike facilities in Western Australia.
- To guide the approvals process regarding mountain bike activity a user compatibility matrix was developed to take into account riding preferences, other trail users and the protected area status of government-managed land.
- A trail difficulty grading system was also developed for protected areas in Western Australia.
- Clear objectives in the early planning stages are deemed as vital to the process.

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1. Introduction and context

Mountain biking is a popular outdoor activity and spans a complex recreational activity spectrum that takes place in many pre-urban reserves, protected areas and urban green spaces (Taylor, 2010; Quinn & Chernoff, 2010; Hardiman & Burgin, 2013; Koemle &

Morawetz, 2016). The purpose of this paper is report on how government managers of protected areas in Western Australia have engaged with the mountain biking community. This included the development of a user compatibility matrix that facilitates park management decision-making to reduce negative social and environmental impacts while at the same time providing for a range of recreational opportunities in the protected area system. It also outlines the process involved in the development of a long distance trail that was conceived and designed in collaborations between government agencies and the mountain biking community.

Mountain biking is a well-established sport and recreational activity, including in Australia where it has increased significantly

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in popularity over the past 15 years (Bicycle, 2001; Goeft and Alder, 2001; CALM, 2007; Pickering, Hill, Newsome, & Leung, 2010; Australian Bicycle Council, 2013; Wolf, Wohlfart, Brown, & Lasa, 2015). There are a range of associated health benefits from cycling and mountain biking (IMBA, 2007; Maller et al., 2008). With improvements in technology mountain bikers can now access many different environments (e.g. Monz & Kulmatiski, 2016). Contemporary mountain biking therefore encompasses a wide range of users whose activities span non-organised recreational cycling activities through to competitive athletes who desire a diversity of riding experiences (e.g. O'Donnell & Carroll, 2003; White, Waskey, Brodehl, & Foti, 2006; Newsome & Davies, 2009; Wolf et al., 2015).

Over the last decade managers have recognised the need to provide a range of sustainable and contrasting trail types for people to ride in natural areas (Newsome & Davies, 2009; Wolf et al., 2015). This increasing demand, complex park user demographic along with the necessity to provide sustainable mountain bike trails, has seen the development of collaborations between protected area managers and mountain biking organisations. An Australian example of this is the collaboration between the Western Australian Government agency the Department of Parks and Wildlife who is responsible for managing protected areas in the State (formally known as CALM), along with the Department of Sport and Recreation, the Western Australian Mountain Bike Association and local mountain bike groups.

In Western Australia, the Department of Parks and Wildlife have developed a range of mountain bike riding trail experiences, many in protected areas, comprising technical downhill trails, touring trails and cross country trails (see Table 1). This strategy was based on staff field observations and the existing international literature pertaining to increasing demand and the need to control negative impacts (Newsome & Davies, 2009; Pickering, Hill, et al., 2010; Hardiman & Burgin, 2013; Koemle & Morawetz, 2016). In order to minimise negative impacts, extensive environmental and cultural assessments are completed by the Department prior to new trail construction, including surveys of aboriginal and other cultural sites, priority flora and fauna, the risk of spreading disease and conservation of drinking water catchment zones. In regard to

both existing trail use and the potential for conflict among users, undesired outcomes need to be assessed and managed where possible. Illegal trail construction in particular poses significant environmental and/or cultural impacts (e.g. Newsome & Davies, 2009; Pickering, Hill et al., 2010). For example, a survey of the presence of dieback disease (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) in an area of mountain bike trails demonstrated that the dieback disease had spread along informal (illegal) trails, as well as from an area where infected soil had been brought in for trail construction without appropriate authority and hygiene procedures (Stender pers. comm., 20/4/16).

In regard to dealing with negative impacts, the Department of Parks and Wildlife has employed a pro-active collaborative approach for more than a decade (Annear, pers. comm., 20/4/16). This has involved engaging with mountain bike clubs and associations and the local community to facilitate combined management. It has resulted in successful funding applications and partnering with volunteer groups (CALM, 2007; Harrison, 2014). Moreover, the Department has worked with mountain biking interests at the local (Western Australian Mountain Biking Association), national (Mountain Biking Australia) and international levels (International Mountain Bicycling Association) (CALM, 2007) to develop new trails and grading systems for trails, and a long distance trail for off-road cycling. Accordingly, this case study provides an account of the development of partnerships and resultant collaboration in regard to trail design and development and assesses whether this collaboration met the needs of a mountain bike lobby group in Western Australia.

2. Research approach

Research into the relationships between park managers, the community and interest groups is best approached on a case study basis (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Accordingly the case study reported here is inspired by the well-established and recognised need for collaboration in tourism planning (for example, Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Jamal & Getz, 1995). Collaborative

Table 1
Dedicated Mountain bike trails developed in collaboration between WAMBA and the Department of Parks and Wildlife in South West Western Australia.

Trail name	Region ^a	Time to complete	Length	Technical difficulty
Albany Downhill Mountain Bike Trail	South West	1–3 h	0.7 km	Difficult
Carinyah Trail	Perth	1–3 h	15.7 km	Easy
Coastal trail – Silver Sands to Madora Bay, Mandurah	Perth	1–3 h	5.5 km	Easy
Forsyths Mill	Perth	1–3 h	6 km	Moderate
Goat Farm	Perth	Half day	10 km	Moderate
Grey Stones	Perth	1–3 h	5.5	Difficult
Grizzly Trail, Mount Lennard	South West	1–3 h	6 km	Difficult
Kalamunda Mountain Bike Trails	Perth	Half day	44 km	Moderate
Kep Track	Perth	Multiple day	75 km	Easy
Kwinana Loop Trail	Perth	Half day	21 km	Moderate
Lake Leshenaultia	Perth	1–3 h	5 km	Easy
Langford Park, Jarrahdale (Peel Region)	Perth	1–3 h	12 km	Moderate
Margaret River Pines	South West	1–3 h	8 km	Moderate
Margaret River Rail Trail	South West	Full day	15 km	Easy
Marrinup Trail	Perth	Half day	8 km	Moderate
Merredin Peak	Eastern Wheat belt	1–3 h	2.4 km	Moderate
Mt Lennard	South West	Half day	30 km	Moderate
Munda Biddi Trail	Perth, South West	Multiple day	1070 km	Moderate
Mundaring Loop Trail	Perth	Half day	15.5	Easy
Old Timberline and Sidings Rail Trails	South West	Multiple day	37 km	Easy
Pinch Track	South West	Less than 1 h	0.6 km	Easy
Railway Reserves Heritage Trail	Perth	Full day	41 km	Easy
Rays Trail	South West	1–3 h	8 km	Moderate
South Shore	Perth	1–3 h	5 km	Difficult
Turner Hill Mountain Bike Trail in Murray (Peel Region)	Perth	1–3 h	11 km	Moderate

^a Most of the trails traverse State Forest and some sections/trails follow designated routes through protected areas.

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