

Trails ACT: Planning and Management Guidelines

In 2011 the Parks and Conservation Service commenced the development of a Trails Strategy for the ACT. The purpose of the Trails Strategy was to assess the development, management and use of trails for non-motorised and motorised recreation in the ACT with the aim of developing a consistent policy framework to guide decisions about the management of, and investment in, the tracks and trails network.

Limited consultation was undertaken with circulation of a Trails Discussion Paper to peak bodies and organisations with an interest in recreation and the management of the Parks and Conservation estate.

A draft Trails Strategy was then prepared, informed by the Trails Discussion Paper and broader consultation was undertaken to allow members of the public and other interest groups to make submissions. In all 41 submissions were received. Key messages coming out of the broader community and stakeholder consultation were:

- Protection of the natural and cultural values of the ACT is paramount. Any planning, management or use of trails must acknowledge the constraints that this brings. At a minimum the relevant statutory controls must be complied with;
- There is both demand for additional trails that are suitable for particular recreational pursuits; and at the same time a proliferation of inappropriate trails that are putting natural and cultural values at risk. In order to fulfil the stated vision, a balance needs to be struck that first protects these important values and secondly caters for the recreational demand;
- Open and effective communication channels between Government and other interested parties must be maintained;
- There is a lack of available information about the use, demand, condition and even number and location of trails in the ACT, making a strategic focus difficult to achieve;
- The draft Strategy's focus is more on the planning, management and use of trails in general. To make broader more strategic decisions without an overarching recreation strategy is difficult. The ACT needs an Outdoor Recreation Strategy that provides context and guidance on the preferred or appropriate locations for different recreational pursuits; and
- The Trail Assessment Criteria were widely supported as a decision making tool to assist land managers in relation to proposals to rationalise or create trails.

After considering all input received it was decided that the draft Strategy could not achieve a sufficiently strategic focus to be called a 'strategy' in the absence of an overarching outdoor recreation strategy. Therefore, the strategy was recast as planning and management guidelines to assist Parks and Conservation managers in decision making in relation to trails. The focus on protecting the natural and cultural values of the ACT was also strengthened.

While a key recommendation is the preparation of an Outdoor Recreation Strategy, many of the recommended actions relate to the gathering of information on the use, demand, condition and even number and location of trails. These and the many other actions identified will be pursued in the short term until an overarching recreation strategy is developed. As such it is envisaged that Trails ACT will serve to inform the development of any future Outdoor Recreation Strategy to guide the future of outdoor recreation in the national capital.

