

Operational policy

Visitor Management

Mountain biking in QPWS managed areas

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of Environment and Science. Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide an overview of the management of mountain biking on Queensland Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) managed areas, including:

- where mountain bike riding can occur on QPWS managed areas;
- what permits and other approvals may be required; and
- when and how QPWS engages with interest groups on MTB management, trail construction and maintenance.

Appendix 1 includes definitions used in this policy.



Background

QPWS supports recreation activities which are consistent with the management principles for protected areas and forests under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and *Forestry Act 1959*. These principles support sustainable nature-based activities in a variety of protected areas while protecting the areas cultural and natural resources and values.

QPWS adopts a whole-of-landscape approach to recreation supply and works with other land managers, including non-government agencies, to promote appropriate uses of parks and forests. QPWS endeavours to provide a wide range of nature-based recreation opportunities, with an emphasis on the provision of a variety of landscape settings to cater for different visitors without compromising conservation outcomes.

Mountain biking has become an extremely popular recreation activity since its development in the 1980s. There is broad recognition that high quality riding opportunities are poorly catered for in many areas of Australia, including Queensland.

Mountain biking trends and needs

Primary demand is for quality trails catering for rides of 1- 3 hours within close proximity to population centres. Many QPWS managed areas currently, or have the potential to, support cross country style riding. Limited opportunities are also available for downhill, touring and freestyle types of MTB riding.

Several areas provide MTB single-use trails, with the best examples at Daisy Hill Regional Park (RP), Bunyville RP, Smithfield RP and Tewantin National Park (NP) while many other QPWS managed areas provide access to multi-use trails on fire breaks and management roads.

QPWS manages a number of areas in close proximity to urban population centres that are often subject to unauthorised trail construction and unlawful MTB use. QPWS will endeavour to assess these sites with a view to providing opportunities for new or expanded MTB single-use trails provided they are sustainable and comply with management plans for the area.

Key policy statements

- QPWS recognise that mountain biking (MTB) is a legitimate recreational activity that can occur in QPWS managed areas and will promote the activity where suitable facilities and opportunities exist.
- QPWS will work collaboratively with other land managers, government agencies, Mountain Bike Australia Inc. (MTBA) and other representative groups to plan, provide and manage MTB activities across Queensland.
- Mountain biking opportunities will be provided on designated multi-use trails and MTB single-use trails where the activity has been assessed as suitable and resources are available to manage the activity.
- QPWS may enter into agreements with incorporated groups to construct, maintain and/or manage mountain bike trails and facilities on QPWS managed areas.
- QPWS will adopt and implement the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) trail classification guidelines and signage unless relevant QPWS standards apply or are developed. QPWS will collaborate with MTBA, other land managers and other representative groups on the development and adoption of any such standard.
- The design and construction of MTB single-use trails shall be consistent with IMBA building guidelines or other specific QPWS standards that may be developed.
- Cross country and touring styles of riding are generally considered to be the most appropriate form of mountain biking in national parks while more active riding opportunities will usually be provided in other QPWS managed areas.
- Competitive mountain biking may be allowed, on a restricted basis, provided the activity is considered suitable for the area by QPWS and satisfies statutory assessment criteria. These opportunities will usually occur in regional parks or State forests but may be considered in other QPWS managed areas. QPWS will assess any requests for competitive MTB events on a case-by-case basis.
- Downhill and freestyle mountain biking may be allowed, on a restricted basis, where no suitable alternatives are available and/or long-term MTB use is recognised and supported. This will usually be in regional parks or State forests and should only occur on national park where extenuating circumstances or special local conditions exist e.g. a previously disturbed area is assessed as suitable.
- Technical trail features (TTF's) may be approved to be incorporated on MTB trails or other places as considered appropriate, with preference given to natural or enhanced natural TTF's. All approved TTF's should be constructed in accordance with IMBA design principles, or other approved QPWS design, and should be consistent with the trail classification and/or expected skill level of potential users. Where feasible, alternate routes ("B lines") should be established around more difficult TTF's.
- Where land is being converted to protected areas, consideration will be given to maintain existing authorised MTB use provided it is sustainable and consistent with the new tenure's management intent.

Management of MTB activities in QPWS managed areas

Access

Mountain biking is allowed in QPWS managed areas:

- on all dedicated (gazetted) roads open for public use (and where not specifically restricted);
- in **protected areas** on authorised or formalised trails and roads including:
 - MTB single-use trails,
 - multiple-use trails (where mountain bike riding is a recognised use), and
 - QPWS managed roads (unless prohibited by regulatory notice or other signage);
- in **State forests, timber reserves and forest reserves**:
 - on roads, single-use trails and multiple-use trails where authorised by a regulatory notice or sign;
- on the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT);
- in other places where authorised by a management plan; and
- in other areas where special circumstances exist and are approved under a separate authority. Such extraordinary situations will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Assessing suitability of MTB activities in QPWS managed areas

When assessing the appropriateness or suitability of mountain biking QPWS will consider the following;

- availability of other MTB trails and opportunities in the area;
- community considerations – how MTB activities could enhance any tourism, employment, economic social and youth-focussed opportunities;
- land tenure – management intent and natural and cultural values of the area;
- site sustainability – assessment of the sites biophysical, managerial and social carrying capacity;
- compatibility with other user groups and activities;
- safety – risk assessment of MTB activity in the area;
- the landscape classification setting and management plans for the area; and
- involvement or partnerships with local MTB stakeholders e.g. club, individuals, etc.

Cross country and touring styles of mountain biking will generally be catered for, while limited opportunities will be provided for other styles including downhill and freestyle.

Special considerations need to be made when assessing MTB events to ensure potential impacts from spectators and event management requirements are adequately covered as these may have greater environmental or managerial impacts than the actual MTB activity. QPWS will apply any relevant policies or assessment criteria when considering an event application.

Tenure conversion

Where State forests or other land tenures become protected areas, existing MTB use will be reviewed with consideration given to maintain current authorised use provided it is sustainable and consistent with the new tenure's management intent e.g. existing MTB opportunities were maintained when Tewanin State Forest was converted to Tewanin National Park after an assessment and review of the trail network.

Technical trail features

As part of the evolution of mountain biking, technical trail features (TTF) have emerged as a commonly sought after feature of quality riding opportunities. TTF's enhance the character and difficulty of MTB trails and can be used to improve environmental protection and sustainability of the trail. TTF's typically include three types;

- natural (e.g. exposed rock, natural landscape features);
- enhanced natural (e.g. fallen logs, rock drops); and
- purpose built (e.g. bridges, berms).

Whilst purpose built TTF's are often removed or avoided on QPWS managed areas and other public lands due to safety and liability concerns, TTF's can be suitable, if not desirable, to incorporate on MTB trails if properly designed, constructed and maintained. Design guidelines from IMBA or other agencies may be utilised and approved by QPWS as required.

Public information

QPWS will provide information on where mountain biking can occur on its managed areas through visitor guides and information, signage and the DES website www.des.qld.gov.au

Iconic riding areas or high quality MTB facilities will be actively promoted by QPWS in conjunction with the community, partners and other agencies.

Internationally recognised trail classification and signage guidelines have been developed by IMBA for mountain biking and are used by most land managers around the world, sometimes with local variations. These guidelines should be used on QPWS managed areas until such time as any other system is developed that may be more applicable (e.g. a Queensland Government trail standard).

There are recognised issues associated with consistency in interpretation of IMBA trail classification standards. Where uncertainty or conjecture exists as to the level a trail should be classified, advice should be sought from suitable people both within and external to QPWS (including those in MTBA affiliated groups).

Permits, Agreements and Authorities

Commercial operations

A permit or agreement is required to undertake any commercial activity on QPWS managed areas. These may include regular commercial tours etc. or one-off events. As per the *Operational Policy – Commercial activities in QPWS managed areas*, any event where entrance fees are charged and/or prizes awarded will be considered a commercial activity unless assessed otherwise. QPWS will normally exempt club rides from requiring a commercial activity permit if the event is run by volunteers and fees are only charged to cover basic costs, such as insurance or temporary facilities.

Organised events

Certain activities may require an organised event permit if the size of the group and nature of the activity are likely to impact on other users (e.g. club rides with a large number of riders). Generally smaller group rides or those in areas where there are few other users will not require a permit. QPWS will determine the need for an organised event permit on a case-by-case basis.

Agreements to construct, maintain or manage MTB facilities

QPWS may enter into agreements with incorporated bodies such as clubs or local authorities for the construction, maintenance and use of MTB single-use trails and other facilities in areas which it manages. A site-specific MTB management plan or similar should be developed as part of any such agreement to detail a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and expectations. Agreements should also contain strategies or

details specifying what will occur in the event that the trails are not maintained or managed to an acceptable QPWS standard.

Where QPWS allows an external group to establish MTB trails, they will be constructed and maintained in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines applicable to QPWS at the time. They will be planned in consultation with, and authorised by, QPWS prior to the commencement of any construction.

Any authorised infrastructure constructed on QPWS managed areas will remain the property of QPWS unless otherwise specified.

QPWS sustainable management of mountain bike riding

QPWS recognises that the environmental and social impacts of mountain bike riding are affected by the trail type, construction standard, soil type, climate and rainfall, predominant riding style, group size and the number of bikes that use an area. Other factors that could cause impacts include other users e.g. horses (on multi-purpose trails) and illegal use e.g. trail bikes.

To ensure any use of an area is sustainable, QPWS will manage the environmental, social or amenity impacts from mountain biking through use of sustainable trail design and construction standards, setting limits on numbers of riders where necessary, monitoring for possible impacts and promoting a MTB Code of Conduct.

In recognising the special nature of some mountain biking activities or facilities QPWS will, where practicable and appropriate, collaborate with representative groups or stakeholders to determine management requirements for particular sites.

Sustainable trail design principles

QPWS will ensure that all new mountain biking trails meet sustainable track standards for design, construction and maintenance to minimise impacts on the environment and optimise the experience for the user.

QPWS will adopt the trail design and construction guidelines produced by IMBA (see relevant IMBA publications in Reference Material) if no applicable QPWS trail standards exist. It is envisaged QPWS may develop or approve updated or alternative trail design standards over time as required.

Mountain Bike Trail Classifications

The IMBA Australia Trail Difficulty Rating System is used by QPWS as the classification system for MTB single-use trails, however, for multiple-use trails the IMBA classification system will be integrated as far as possible with other approved QPWS classification systems.

MTB Code of Practice

QPWS recommends all riders adopt the IMBA Rules of the Trail to promote responsible, courteous and sustainable riding and where applicable the MTBA Code of Conduct (see Reference Materials).

Community and stakeholder engagement

QPWS will actively engage with relevant stakeholders including the Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, MTBA, IMBA Australia and relevant recreational and commercial interests and other land managers to identify and develop opportunities for mountain bike riding and its management on QPWS managed areas. In particular, QPWS will maintain active membership of the State MTB Forum while relevant and appropriate.

Matters of particular interest where consultation should occur include trail management and maintenance, planning for MTB activities and where existing MTB use may be impacted by tenure conversion.

QPWS may establish volunteer trail care programs with groups or individuals to construct or maintain trails or other mountain bike-related activities. Volunteer trail care programs will generally be managed by regional staff in accordance with agency volunteer procedures.

Reference materials

Operational policy – Organised events (non commercial) on QPWS managed areas

Operational policy – Insurance and indemnity requirements for QPWS authorities

Operational policy – Commercial tourism and recreation activities in QPWS managed areas

Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack (IMBA 2004)

Managing Mountain Biking: IMBA's Guide to Providing Great Riding (IMBA 2007)

IMBA Rules of the Trail – go to <http://www.imba.com/about/rules-trail>

MTBA Code of Conduct – go to <http://www.mtba.asn.au/cms/uploads/policies/codeofconduct05.pdf>

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Science should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved By

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Signature

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Date

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Appendix 1 – Definitions

Competitive riding refers to competitive events such as cross country races and endurance rides.

Cross country refers to riding a mountain bike on constructed but unpaved trails of varying slope and terrain.

Dedicated roads (also known as gazetted roads) are roads dedicated, notified or declared to be a road for public use under the *Land Act 1994*.

Downhill riding refers to riding of MTB bikes travelling quickly down steep and technical terrain and usually involves the 'shuttling' of bikes to the trail head (usually by vehicle or sometimes by chairlift).

Freestyle riding is a technical form of mountain bike riding involving challenges such as logs, rocks, elevated bridges, dirt jumps, drop offs and other man-made structures.

IMBA The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) is an international organisation of mountain bike clubs and individuals whose mission is to protect, create and enhance quality trail experiences for mountain bikers worldwide. IMBA has published books on sustainable MTB trail construction guidelines.

Mountain biking (MTB) for the purposes of this policy includes riding of a bicycle either on a road, track or trail or other surface and covers a range of styles such as cross country, downhill and free riding.

MTBA Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) Inc, serves as the national governing body for mountain biking throughout Australia and is an affiliated association with Cycling Australia.

MTB single-use trail means a track, trail or road specified for mountain biking use only and is signed to indicate that MTB is the recommended use

Multiple-use trail means a track, trail or road specified for use by a combination of various modes of transport (e.g. bicycles, horses, trail bikes, walkers, vehicles) and may be signed to indicate which mode is the preferred or recommended use.

Protected area includes national parks, conservation parks and other areas as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*

QPWS managed areas for the purposes of this operational policy includes:

- protected areas and forest reserves under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*;
- State forests and timber reserves under the *Forestry Act 1959*;
- recreation areas under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006*;
- reserves under the *Land Act 1994* where QPWS has been appointed trustee; and
- freehold, leasehold and USL held for the State by QPWS.

QPWS managed road includes any road that forms part of a QPWS managed area. Examples of a QPWS managed road include firebreaks, service roads and areas known as forest management roads. Dedicated roads or gazetted roads are not QPWS managed roads (see Dedicated roads above).

Road for the purposes of this policy is taken to include any area that is open to or used by the public and is developed for, or has as one of its uses, the driving or riding of vehicles. This includes areas dedicated to public use as a road, but excludes areas declared under a regulation not to be a road.

Setting is a term used to describe the character of a site or area which takes into account its physical, social and managerial attributes, derived from the QPWS Landscape Classification System.

Single-use trail means a trail designed for use by a singular mode of transport, (e.g. bicycles, horses, walkers) and are signed to indicate recommended use.

Technical trail features (TTF) includes natural, enhanced natural and purpose built features which enhance the character and difficulty of trails and should include signage, filters, fall zones and may include a number of lines. Examples of TTF's include bridges, logs, rock features and berms.

Trail for the purposes of this policy includes an area, track, road or pathway that is defined by a cleared alignment and used by the public under authority of QPWS

Touring refers to a form of mountain bike riding where riders travel long distances, varying from single day to multi-day trips with a group or solo.