



Mountain Bike Trails Position Paper

Friends of Berowra Valley

April 2020

<https://www.friendsberowravalle.org.au/>

Introduction

The aim of Friends of Berowra Valley (FoBV) is to protect the natural landscape, heritage and biodiversity of Berowra Valley while making the valley more accessible to the community.

Berowra Valley is a small, narrow area of bushland with high scenic and conservation values and needs to be managed for the preservation of these values and the benefit of the general community.

Recreation in the bushland of Berowra Valley

The FoBV supports recreation in the bushland of Berowra Valley that is consistent with our aim:

- recreation that does not damage the natural landscape, heritage and biodiversity of the valley
- recreation that includes the majority of the community
- recreation that is consistent with the protection and ecological status of the bushland

Catering for community needs in Hornsby Shire

The FoBV support, where appropriate, a balance in the recreational opportunities offered to local residents and those travelling to the Hornsby Shire to enjoy the natural beauty that exists in our area. The FoBV do not support recreation activities that lead to a degradation of environmental values. We acknowledge the findings of the Active Living Hornsby Strategy, 2015, that found walking for exercise had the highest level of participation (23%) while cycling of all types had a participation of 6.5%. Much of this cycling would in fact be road cycling rather than mountain bike riding. https://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/74444/Active-Living-Hornsby-Strategy-Final-Draft-Report-low-res.pdf

Legal protection and suitability of land for mountain biking

The FoBV believe no mountain bike tracks should be allowed in Endangered Ecological Communities, Biobanking sites and Nature Reserves.

In National Parks mountain bikes should be confined to park edges, for example asset protection zones, permitted on management trails and any new trails should be confined to edges and highly degraded site, for example sites with low resilience.

We also believe that the recreational needs of the general community take priority over specialised bike trails in Community Land.

We oppose trails that impact on sites with heritage value.

Soil Landscapes and suitability for mountain biking

The dominant soil landscape of Berowra Valley is unsuitable for mountain biking as the colluvial Hawkesbury soil landscape is typified by extreme soil erosion hazard. Smaller areas of other soil landscapes are also unsuitable for development of mountain bike trails as they support very different ecosystems and are valued for their biodiversity. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/eSpade2WebApp>

Riding a mountain bike and the sport of mountain biking

FoBV support the safe use of mountain bikes for recreation on management trails. During this activity there is plenty of opportunity for interaction with family and friends as well as the environment.

The FoBV do not support the sport of mountain biking in most of the local bushland as:

- It is not suitable for the broader community and therefore excludes other users, effectively quarantining areas of bushland for the needs of a particular sport. The sport of mountain biking focus is on technical difficulties and challenges. The comparison of a family riding bikes on a management trail to the sport of mountain biking is like comparing casually kicking a ball in a back yard to premier grade football codes.
- The dissociation of riders from the environment increases as trail difficulty increases. Advanced trails are too fast, too technical and too challenging for riders to do anything other than focus on the immediate trail and exclude any enjoyment of the biodiversity.
- Mountain bike trails are damaging to the natural environment and the damaging impact of mountain bike trails increases with their difficulty, for example:
 - increasing steepness and sharpness of switchbacks and berms
 - an increase in the difficulty of unavoidable obstacles, e.g.,
 - roots
 - rocks
 - drop offs
 - jumps
 - challenging climbs
 - super steep descents
 - increased speed which endangers fauna
- Switch backs, such a prominent feature of most tracks, chop the bushland into fragments and therefore reduce the conservation value of an area far more than the actual cleared area would indicate. Short cuts between track levels add to the erosion hazard and damage to the bushland.

Providing mountain bike trails is the same as providing facilities for other sports – it requires bushland to be cleared and provides exclusive use to a small number of users.

The sport of mountain biking does not depend on the presence of bushland. Trails are often developed on degraded areas such as quarries, mines, tips, state forests and farmland.

Hornsby Park (including Hornsby Quarry and Old Mans Valley)

The Friends of Berowra Valley consider that this area should be developed and maintained for biodiversity and geodiversity values as well as for the use of the general community, not specific sports.

FoBV do not believe community access should be compromised by mountain bike trails. The main users of this area will surely be residents from the units in the Mt Colah, Asquith, Hornsby and Waitara as they have very limited access to open space.

We therefore do not support mountain bike trails in any part of this area except for the well establish Hornsby Mountain Bike Trail in the southern parts near Quarry Road.

FoBV would like the area downslope of the Aquatic Centre and TAFE, currently used by mountain bikes, to revert to biodiversity conservation and bushwalking as the Blackbutt Gully Forest is a locally significant community and is very accessible to the general community for gentle, pleasant bush walks.

Tracks and paths within the quarry area should be available for the general public, not a specific sport.

Link Track between Hornsby Park and Westleigh

FoBV strongly oppose any link track that traverses the Biobanking site, the Critically Endangered Blue Gum High Forest and Berowra Valley National Park.

We support a link track that uses abandoned tracks, management trails, and Asset Protection Zones.

Westleigh Bushland area

FoBV opposes mountain bike trails in the Critically Endangered Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest, other EECs and near any threatened species.

Recreational use should be restricted to a limited number of well-designed walking trails and beginner mountain bike trails.

Conclusion

The FoBV supports recreation in the bushland of Berowra Valley that is consistent with our aim:

- recreation that does not damage the natural landscape, heritage and biodiversity of the valley
- recreation that includes the majority of the community
- recreation that is consistent with the protection and ecological status of the bushland

Mountain bike trails, particularly those at intermediate level and above, are inconsistent with the aim of the Friends of Berowra Valley.