

## **SUBMISSION BY GAP CREEK TRAILS ALLIANCE Feb 2004**

Gillian Duncan  
President  
Ph 3378 4606  
gillian\_duncan@hotmail.com

### **MOUNTAIN BICYCLE ACCESS TO NATURAL AREAS WITHIN BRISBANE**

#### **Introduction**

Mountain bicycle riders are accepted as legitimate users of bushland areas throughout Australia and overseas. Cross country cyclists share similarities with walkers, hikers, orienteers and other nature-based activity groups. Essentially bush settings are enjoyed and valued as a place to recreate. Mountain biking, like other forms of cycling is healthy, affordable exercise for the general community. For these reasons, the policy of Brisbane City Council to mountain bike access should be to permit and encourage off-road cycling on a network of enjoyable bush trails.

#### **Access to State Forests**

Approved access to fire management trails occurs in Qld Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) forests. (See attached booklet *Where to Mountain Bike in South East Qld*). The operational approach of QPWS is to sanction mountain biking on fire management trails which are maintained for QPWS vehicle access. Added to this bicycles are permitted on some single (lane) tracks which are currently popular with cyclists. These narrow tracks have been assessed according to various criteria: popular with cyclists, provide sensible links, are not located in regionally significant ecosystems and do not endanger threatened species. Mountain bikers have assisted rangers on the ground in maintaining these tracks.

#### **Living in Brisbane 2010**

Cycling has been promoted and encouraged by Brisbane City Council as a form of 'clean and green' transport with an extensive network of bikeways. The Council's 'active and healthy' vision includes sport and leisure neighbourhood precincts. The brochure 'Get active and healthy in our green city : A guide for you and your family' promotes cycling in natural areas such as Boondall Wetlands and Kedron Brook.

Mountain bicycle riding is consistent with these Council programs.

#### **Access to Natural Areas in the Greater Brisbane Region**

Mountain biking occurs throughout the greater Brisbane region on an extensive system of trails yet to be sanctioned for access. Most of these trails are under the management of Brisbane City Council and adjacent local government councils.

Mountain bicyclists are visiting BCC natural areas where bush tracks already exist. It is proposed that BCC should adopt a similar policy to bicycle access as outlined under QPWS. Wide trails maintained for management should be open to bicycles and also existing single track should be assessed according to criteria similar to QPWS.

Popular narrow tracks which allow access and form circuits should be open, but regionally significant ecosystems should be protected from the impact of all visitors.

#### **Issues**

Questions have been raised about the impact of cycling in BCC nature reserves.

Mr Wayne Cameron in the South-East Advertiser (June 18, 2003) refers to studies which "showed mountain bikes made 30 times more impact on parks than walkers."

Firstly it should be noted that cyclists stay on the trail provided unlike walkers and orienteers who may trample vegetation off the path.

The findings of the studies referred to by Mr Cameron are disputed. In a literature review by Cessford (1995a) of specific mountain bike research, walkers and hikers had a similar level of impact on a consolidated track. Thurston & Reader (2001) compared the static weight of hikers and mountain bikers adding on average 13.5kg for the weight of the bicycle. Hiker's foot ware area was 215 square cm while bicycle tyre area was 224 square cm . Hiker's static weight was calculated as .29kg per square cm while

cyclist's was .35kg per square cm. Thurston & Reader found hikers and bikers had a similar impact on vegetation loss and soil exposure.

Ute Goeft (2001) researched a recreation trail and a race circuit in Western Australia. Analysis of soil compaction, erosion and trail widening revealed variable results over 12 months of monitoring. All three measures were in constant flux, increasing and decreasing over time. Goeft suggests that trail degradation can be minimised or avoided by trail siting, design and maintenance.

### **Social Conflict Research**

Cessford, Thurston & Reader and others have suggested that mountain bikers are perceived by other users to cause damage. This may be the result of social conflict on the trail as bicycles are fast and silent and may startle other users. It may be due to the belief that bicycles are 'mechanised' and not appropriate in a bush setting.

Cessford (2002) surveyed 370 walkers who completed a multi-day trek on the Queen Charlotte Walk in New Zealand where mountain bicycles are permitted to share a narrow trail (except in summer.) The attitude of walkers to bikers on the trail was largely positive (88%) while the strongest negative attitude came from older walkers who had not actually met a cyclist on the trail. The management implications are that users should be informed to expect cyclists and cyclists should be encouraged to comply with a code of conduct.

If mountain bike access is sanctioned then the increased volume of use is an issue. The negative impact of increasing numbers of visitors needs to be weighed against the positive outcomes from encouraging people to be active and healthy.

Trails are a valuable, long-term asset which should be well presented and promoted to the community.

### **References**

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Addressed to:

Councillor Tim Quinn  
Lord Mayor  
Brisbane City Hall  
King George Square  
Adelaide Street  
BRISBANE 4000

Copies to:

Councillor Helen Abrahams

Mr Doug Yuille *Environmental Policy Advisor*

Mr Russell Luhrs *Manager - Environment and Parks*

Mr Alan Barton *Principle Program Officer – Environment and Parks*

Mr Michael Griffin *Senior Program Officer – Conservation Reserves*

Mr Roy Sonnenberg *Biodiversity Advisory Committee*

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