



# Oxford Falls Plan of Management User Group Consultation

Northern Beaches Mountain Biking Group Response

15 May 2009



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## About this Document

This document was originally prepared to accompany recommendations for the use of Crown Land areas in the Oxford Falls region.

It is hoped that as well as supporting those recommendations it may also be of help to cycle and trail advocacy groups in Sydney and beyond.

NoBMoB notes that a vast amount of information regarding the Environmental and Economic impacts of Mountain Biking is available through the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) website: <http://www.imba.com/resources/science/index.html>

Readers can visit the NoBMoB website at the following address: <http://nobmob.com/>

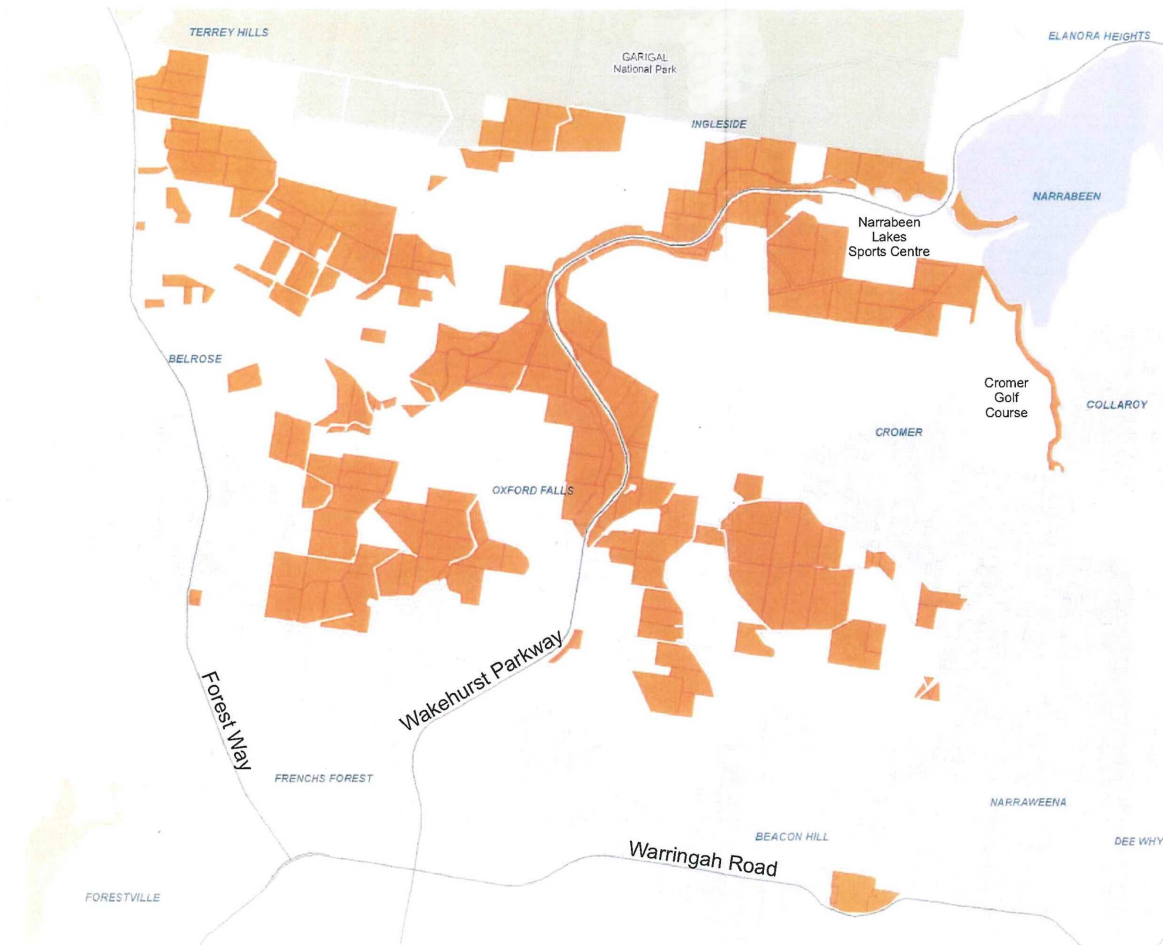
The site administrators can be contacted at this email address: [admin@nobmob.com](mailto:admin@nobmob.com)

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

On 21 April 2009 the Northern Beaches Mountain Biking group (NoBMoB) was contacted by Cardno Lawson Treloar in relation to the development of a Plan of Management for the Crown Reserve at Oxford Falls. NoBMoB was identified as being representative of a significant user group of recreational mountain bikers who have used parts of the reserve for approximately 20 years.

The land under consideration is identified in the figure below.



## 1.2 Purpose of this Report

This report presents the views of the significant mountain biking community that uses the northern beaches mountain bike trails. We note that emphasis has been placed on presenting the opinion of recreational mountain bikers who are typically not members of an organised club as these riders are typical of the bulk of trail users represented within the NoBMoB community.

We understand that separate comment has been sought from the Manly-Warringah Mountain Bike Club. Their comments will provide further complementary insight with regard to the club participants views of the potential management of the reserve.

Similarly, we are aware that a group of riders has previously met with the Belrose Residents Community Association and the local member Jonathon O'Day to discuss trail access at Oxford

Falls. This has resulted in the amelioration of residents concerns through informally negotiated access and management<sup>1</sup>arrangements. NoBMoB notes that we have not collaborated with this group of riders but strongly recommend that separate comment from this group be sought in relation to the consultation.

### **1.3 Northern Beaches Mountain Biking Group**

NoBMoB is a network of approximately 1600 recreational mountain bike riders located around the northern beaches of Sydney. Numerous members of the group regularly participate in rides arranged through the NoBMoB website and a majority of users who access the website to discuss equipment, obtain trail information or participate in online discussion forums.

In addition the users who have registered, a much larger number of people access the website for information without participating in forums. As an indication of the scale of the total user base, the NoBMoB website is accessed by over 20,000 unique visitors each month<sup>2</sup>.

#### **1.3.1 Community represented**

NoBMoB provides a forum to arrange informal recreational mountain bike rides for anyone interested in mountain biking in the area. In our experience, most riders do not wish to join a club because the focus of most mountain biking clubs is on racing and organised events<sup>3</sup>. Many recreational riders do not wish to ride competitively and do not have the time to be involved in organising or participating in club events and the associated club obligations.

Involvement in NoBMoB rides is open to all and are frequently attended by people who are new to Sydney and/or mountain biking and wish to meet other mountain bikers in the area.

The NoBMoB group is comprised predominately of riders between the ages of 20-40. Most riders are employed full time in a professional capacity (e.g. accountants, teachers, IT managers, lawyers, environmental, engineering, management consultants, small business owners) as well as tradespeople, students and travellers.

#### **1.3.2 Role in consultation**

Considering that the majority of mountain bike users in Sydney are not affiliated with a formal mountain biking club, Cardno's recognition that the consultation process should include recreational networks such as NoBMoB as separate stakeholder group is applauded. In our personal experience, it is these community networks that underpin most cycling participation in Sydney.

### **1.4 Oxford Falls Crown Reserve**

The area of Crown Land at Oxford Falls has been used for mountain biking for over 20 years. The long history of competitive and recreational mountain biking at Oxford Falls is discussed in section 4.2.

The recreational riders represented by the NoBMoB community are concerned that recent trail closures, residential development approvals and changing land management attitudes are limiting access to existing trails and encouraging the proliferation of unofficial trail building in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Mountain Bike Magazine February March 09, p.57.

<sup>2</sup> NoBMoB web logs, May 2009

<sup>3</sup> NoBMoB site survey: <http://nobmob.com/node/4751>

The NoBMoB community appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the PoM for the Oxford Falls Crown Reserve. The NoBMoB community would like to work with the relevant land managers to develop a truly sustainable trail network and management strategy for the site to provide equitable recreational access that respects the natural and Aboriginal heritage value of the area.

## 2.0 Mountain Biking Overview

This section provides an overview of mountain biking in Australia, a discussion of the different disciplines, participation rates and organisation of the sport. The key contemporary issues affecting the sport that relate to trail access and management are also identified in section 2.6.

### 2.1 Mountain Biking in Australia

Mountain biking has developed over the past 30 years to become the predominate form of recreational cycling in Australia. Currently, of the 1.2 million bikes sold annually approximately 70% are mountain bikes<sup>4</sup>.

However as mountain bike ownership has increased, land managers have also increased restrictions on trail access. This has resulted in a larger number of riders forced to ride on fewer trails, with a corresponding escalation in user group management issues at the remaining riding locations.

#### 2.1.1 Australian performance

Australia is regarded as one of the strongest countries in international competition across both downhill, cross country and park disciplines. Current UCI world rankings for both Downhill and 4X indicate that Australians occupy 9 of the top 50 ranked places in the world for both disciplines. Australia is currently ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the world in Downhill racing.

Furthermore, Australians have dominated the world 24 hour solo championships, with Australians occupying the first four places in the 2008 men's event and second place in the women's event<sup>5</sup>. A further five Australians obtained a place in the age restricted classes at the world championships. This is in addition to Craig Gordon's world championship win in 2006.

For example:

- Sam Hill – World Downhill Champion (2006 & 07), Numerous World Cup race wins & places (World No. 3 - DH)
- Nathan Rennie – Numerous Downhill World Cup places. (World No. 8 - DH)
- Craig Gordon – World Champion 24 hour solo endurance racing (2006)
- Jared Greaves – Current World No. 1 - 4X, World No. 27 - DH
- James Williamson - World Champion 24 hour solo endurance racing (2008)
- Jason English – 2<sup>nd</sup> World 24 hour solo endurance racing (2008)
- Katrin Van Der Spiegel – 2<sup>nd</sup> World 24 hour solo endurance racing (2008)

Significantly, Nathan Rennie, James Williamson, Katrin Van Der Spiegel and Jason English are from Sydney, and Craig Gordon is from Wollongong, demonstrating the high calibre of local mountain biking talent.

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<sup>4</sup> Retail Cycle Traders Australia 1998-2005

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2008/07/30/2318985.htm>



### 2.1.2 Mountain biking facilities

Unfortunately, despite the high achievements of local mountain bikers on the world stage, the development of, and support for, mountain biking facilities in Sydney is lagging other cities in the region. This is discussed further in section 3.0 of this report.

However, in recognition of the growth of the sport in the region, official mountain biking facilities have recently been developed in each of the eastern Australian capital cities, each of the major New Zealand cities and a number of NSW regional centres.

Where officially developed, these facilities are planned in a manner that minimises the impact on the local environment through proper track design and appropriate management of traffic. Many of these facilities attract considerable numbers of visitors to the region to further support the local economy.

Notably the \$7.5m Mt Stromlo forest park in the ACT was built in 2004 with support from the ACT government and in 2008 hosted the first World Cup race to be held in Australia since 1996. In 2009, Mt Stromlo will host the World Championships, attracting an estimated 40,000 spectators and broadcast audience of 25 million worldwide<sup>6</sup>.

## 2.2 Disciplines

There are a number of disciplines in mountain biking, each with its own requirement for terrain. To provide an overview of the full spectrum of the sport, the main disciplines of mountain biking are discussed below.

### 2.2.1 Cross Country (XC)

A well designed cross country trail network will involve a number of short interlinked trails that can be combined to form loops that can exclude sections of trail that do not match the riders skill level or the event that they may be training for. For this reason, trails should be graded for difficulty to allow for more challenging sections to be built to cater for more experienced riders.

#### Race

Cross country race courses are typically around 10km in length and involve smaller obstacles and drops with steep climbs and technical sections of trails. XC is the dominant form of mountain bike racing, with events ranging from small club races to 100km marathons and 24 hr endurance events, such as the recent Mont 24 hr race in Canberra which attracted 2250 riders in 2009.

Cross country race bikes are lightweight (9-14kg) with no, or little suspension.



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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.actlabor.com.au/Documents/Policy/Tourism%20Policy.pdf>

## Trail

Trail riding is probably the most common form of recreational mountain biking where speed around a course is not necessarily the purpose of the ride. Therefore trail riding involves more demanding obstacles to enable skills to be tested in a manner that would be unsuited to a XC race course. As a riders skills progress, trail riding increasingly incorporates elements of the downhill disciplines into cross country riding.

The majority of existing trails at Oxford Falls are suitable for this type of riding. However recent closures have severely limited the extent that are now accessible.

Cross country trail bikes (also called 'All-Mountain') are typically 12-16kg with moderate amounts of suspension.



### 2.2.2 Downhill (DH)

A well designed downhill course will involve a number of drops, gaps and obstacles over a significant vertical descent. Downhill courses are typically 3-6 km long and riders will ride the course a number of times in a day.

Downhill bikes are typically 15-23kg with lots of suspension, front and rear. Full face helmets and protective pads (leg, arm, torso) are typically worn to avoid injuries. Due to the specialised nature of the bikes, downhill courses should be accessible at the top and bottom to allow return vehicular transport of the bikes to the top of the hill.



## Race

DH racing involves posting the fastest timed decent of the course. Courses can also involve 'A' and 'B' lines to cater for differences in rider skill levels. A DH race course can typically be covered in 5-10 minutes by elite riders. Due to the speed and nature of DH racing, only a single rider is 'on course' at any one time.

## Freeride

Freeriding is similar to downhill, however as freeriding is non-competitive, the focus is on skills rather than simply speed. Therefore, freeride facilities typically include more demanding, slower speed obstacles, man made structures, more technical drops and longer jumps than would normally be found on a downhill race course.

Most of the existing downhill trails at Oxford Falls would be classified as freeride.



### 2.2.3 Park Disciplines

In addition to the trail based disciplines described above, a number of mountain biking disciplines that are typically undertaken in a compact dedicated park setting.

## **Dirt Jump**

Dirt jump riders aim here is to jump high into the air and perform tricks whilst airborne. To avoid injury, well designed jumps have a sloping landing to enable the rider to discard their bike mid-air and safely land (by either running or sliding on their knee pads) if necessary.

## **4 Cross**

4X is a racing discipline that is similar to BMX. Four cross tracks are short (2-300m) tracks of smooth undulating dirt four riders start simultaneously at the top of the course and descend together.

## **Trials**

Trials riding is a display of bike handling skills. Little more than a pile of rocks, or pallets or other natural or man made obstacles is required to practice this discipline. In competition riders aim to complete a course without penalties for touching the ground or falling off an obstacle.

## **2.3 Participation**

### **2.3.1 Cycling**

Recent surveys undertaken on participation rates in active recreational activities indicate that Cycling is one of the five most common forms of exercise undertaken in the Australia. In NSW, between 5-10%<sup>7</sup> of adults participated in cycling.

Significantly the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report notes that the Australian Capital Territory recorded the highest participation rate for cycling (12%), with New South Wales and Victoria recording the highest numbers (298,300 and 256,100 respectively).

The high participation in cycling in the ACT is supported by the presence of a large number of officially approved mountain bike trail locations and significant recent financial investment by the ACT government into recreational cycling facilities (e.g. Mt Stromlo).

### **2.3.2 Mountain biking**

Based on industry data, approximately 750,000 adult bikes were sold in Australia in 2004/05<sup>8</sup> with adult mountain bikes accounting for around 70% (525,000) of these sales. Whilst these figures include bicycles that are not ridden off-road, the numbers are indicative of the strong recreational preference towards off-road cycling.

The popularity of organised off road cycling events in NSW in recent years provides an insight into the level of active adult mountain bikers in the state. These events include the Dirtworks 100km, Mont 24 hr, Scott 24hr, Highland Fling 100km, among others, and typically involve 1,000-2,000 riders. In recent years, these many of these events have sold out months in advance.

Coupled with usage and survey data obtained from the NoBMoB website, Warringah Council's recreation survey results and a check against average participation figures, a conservative estimate

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<sup>7</sup>NSW department of Sport and Recreation, <http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/assets/pubs/industry/sportandphysicalactivity.pdf> & ABS Participation in Sports and Physical Recreation, Australia 2005-06, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4177.02005-06?OpenDocument>

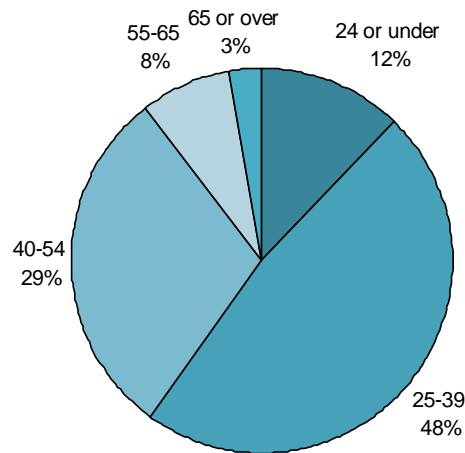
<sup>8</sup> Cycling Promotion Fund, [http://www.vote4cycling.com.au/cms/uploads/media/bike\\_sales\\_in\\_australia\\_july\\_06.pdf](http://www.vote4cycling.com.au/cms/uploads/media/bike_sales_in_australia_july_06.pdf)

is that somewhere in the order of 10,000 mountain bike users appear to be accessing existing trails in the Northern Beaches area.

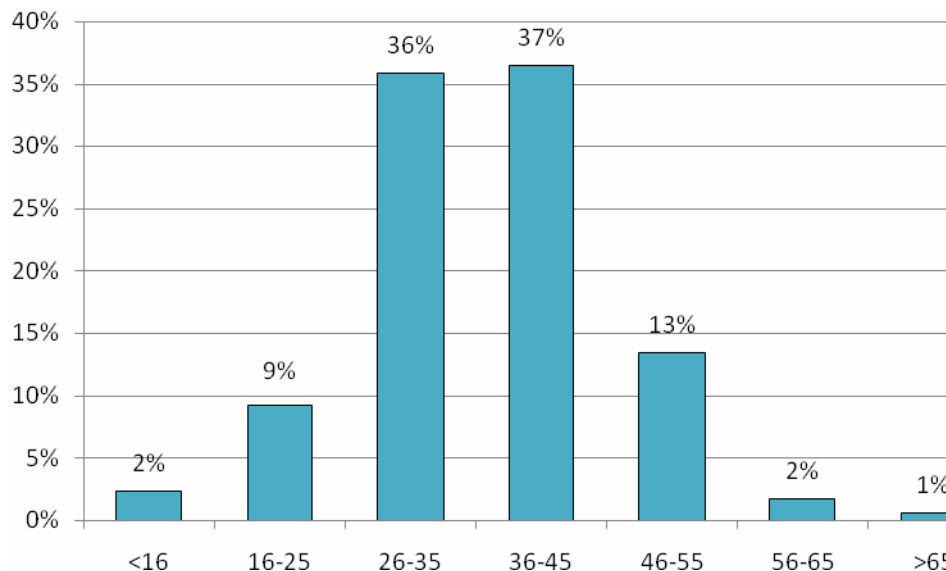
## 2.4 Demographics

Like most other forms of cycling, mountain biking appeals to a wide range of people from teenagers through to those in their 40's and 50's. People attending rides organised through NoBMoB tend to be between 25 and 40.

The graph below shows the breakdown by age of approximately 2800 respondents to a Brisbane City Council consultation regarding the use of mountain bikes in council administered bushland<sup>9</sup>.



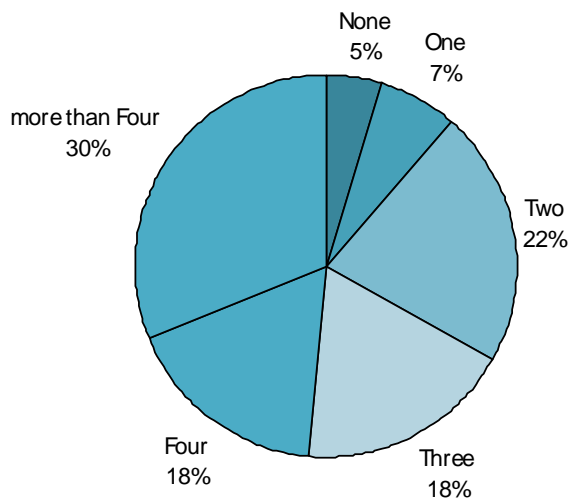
The survey results are similar to NoBMoB's experience in Sydney and generally consistent with Warringah Councils Survey results shown below. Due to the larger sample size, public accessibility of the BCC survey results and it's specific focus on providing facilities for mountain biking, these results have been used the purpose of this overview.



Older riders tend to favour cross country/trail riding, whilst younger riders typically prefer downhill, freeride and park disciplines. Many riders own a collection of bikes to enable them to participate in any or all of the different disciplines.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.zoomerang.com/Shared/SharedResultsSurveyResultsPage.aspx?ID=L23PXTCF9L5A>

The graph below shows the number of bikes per household for approximately 2800 respondents to the BCC consultation.

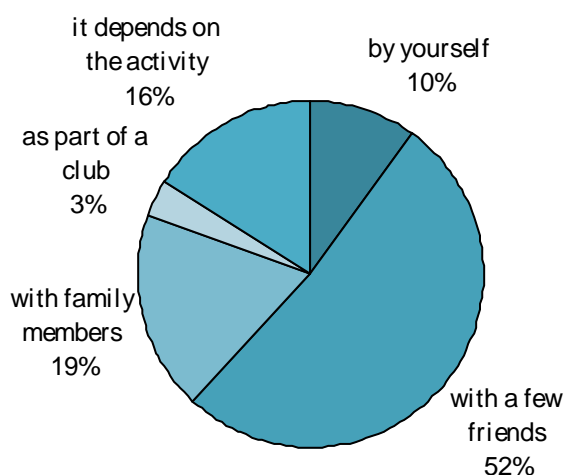


Whilst entry level mountain bikes are easily affordable, high end mountain bikes cost from \$1500 to \$7000 and are typically purchased by people in full time employment with salaries commensurate with the cost of their bikes. Therefore, the investment that riders make in purchasing and maintaining a number of high end mountain bikes represents a considerable dollar value.

## 2.5 Organisation

The majority of mountain bike riders are recreational not members of a club. However, given the large number of mass participation mountain bike events, a significant proportion of recreational riders do participate casually in some organised events.

The BCC survey provides an indicative assessment of the proportion of recreational users who undertake their, predominately mountain biking (80% of respondents), recreation activities as part of a club. Again, these results are comparable to NoBMoB's experience where the majority of riders ride with a small group of friends.



As most mountain biking is undertaken outside the formal club structures, it is important that the wider recreational mountain biking community is also considered in any assessment of the needs of mountain bike users with relation to the Oxford Falls reserve.



## 2.6 Key issues regarding trail access

The principal concern for the mountain biking community is that due to the growing popularity of the sport, increasing restrictions are being placed on trail access. Furthermore, no official trails are being developed in Sydney to meet the increasing need for recreational trails.

The mountain biking community recognises that many of the existing trails are not well designed and could definitely be improved, rehabilitated and more appropriately designed trails built. In many ways, this is similar to the improvements in the design of bush walking tracks for surface water and erosion control that have been implemented over the past 20 years to mitigate the environmental impact of walking trails.

In addition, based on Manly Dam, there is a proven sense of ownership within the mountain biking community with regard to volunteering to assist with trail maintenance where official trails are made available.

However, there remains a number of critical social considerations that need to be kept in mind through the consultation process. These deal with the practicalities of selecting suitable sites and design for trails, but also with the social factors that may influence the development of successful management strategies for the Oxford Falls Crown Reserve. The key issues are summarised below:

### **1. The mountain biking community is often the largest, most diverse user group however mountain bikers are often perceived as an illegitimate minority trail users**

Therefore consultation with 'mountain bikers' needs to involve formal clubs and informal groups and networks of riders. In the past, consultation has often included only one group of riders or only club participants. Given the broad demographic for mountain bikers noted above, and the very large proportion of recreational riders, it is difficult to reach a representative user base.

This difficulty has led to the underestimation of the size and diversity of recreational mountain bike trail users and tended to marginalise any concerns raised by the riders that were consulted.

The popularity of Manly Dam and the Oaks Fire Trail in the Blue Mountains is indicative areas where mountain bikers are clearly legitimate majority users of dedicated recreational mountain biking facilities.

### **2. Mountain bike riding has no more impact on trails than trail walking.**

Other user groups and environmentalists often put forward the case that riding a bike in natural areas causes environmental damage that is worse than walking. This is simply not true as erosion is usually due to water channelling as a result of poor design and construction.

The fact that riding is no worse an impact than walking has been proven by numerous studies. Quoting from one such piece of research<sup>10</sup>:

- No scientific studies show that mountain bikers cause more wear to trails than other users.
- Wilson and Seney found no statistically significant difference between measured bicycling and hiking effects. They did find that horses caused the most erosion of the trails, and that motorcycles traveling up wetted trails caused significant impact.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.imba.com/resources/science/impact\\_summary.html](http://www.imba.com/resources/science/impact_summary.html)

- Researchers at the University of Tasmania, Australia, conducted an experiment on an abandoned fire road to compare track impacts from hiking and bicycling... Chiu and Kriwoken found no significant difference in the trail wear caused by the two user groups.

### **3. Local trail access is necessary for younger riders as they do not have access to independent transport**

Therefore, younger riders need trails in close proximity to their homes. The closure of existing unofficial trails results in the alienation of these riders from their sport. Given few alternative options, these riders are likely to continue riding on the existing trails, or build further unofficial trails in new locations due to the lack of alternative options and inability to access transport to official riding locations, where they exist.

### **4. Trail closure relocates the issue, and usually leads to larger management issues at neighbouring sites**

The closure of unofficial trails in one area leads to the concentration of riding at the limited trails in the surrounding areas, which relocates and amplifies land management issues by concentrating traffic and increasing the frequency of pedestrian/cycle interaction on shared trails.

Manly Dam is a good example of the high cycle and vehicular traffic and trail wear due to its immense popularity. In addition, the track is getting less challenging over time to accommodate all levels of rider experience on the same trail.

### **5. Official trails can be built with consideration of environmental and operational management issues. Unofficial trails can't.**

Unofficial trails lead to poor design, poor erosion control, poor material choice and poor management of land use issues (e.g. resident complaints, interaction with other user groups).

It is ironic that environmental campaigns to prevent official mountain biking facilities lead to unofficial trails that due to the issues above cause more impact than a well designed and maintained trail does (as could be implemented when official access is available).

These issues are all readily managed for other sports and recreational facilities (sporting fields, bush walkers, dog off-leash areas) however, limited co-operation from land managers has been experienced in the past in considering how these issues can be most effectively managed for mountain bikers.

### **6. The wider mountain biking community is cautious as previous consultation attempts have resulted in further restrictions being placed on trail access**

Previous attempts to gain trail access have led to refusal of access and further official closures of trails. Therefore some groups within the mountain bike community have developed a level of secrecy regarding trail locations and suspicion of the consultative process.

### **7. Given the popularity and ongoing growth of the sport, widespread trail closure cannot be considered to be a sustainable management policy.**

The Northern Beaches mountain biking community is eager to work with land managers to resolve the trail access issues and develop a sustainable recreational trail management plan. Ideally this would include the development of minimal impact, official mountain bike trails that are sensitive to management plans, heritage and the needs of other user groups.

The level of community involvement and ownership of official mountain bike trails in the area has been demonstrated by the historical oversubscription of Manly Dam trail maintenance days.



## 3.0 Regional Perspective

Mountain biking has grown rapidly in popularity around the world particularly in recent years with many advancements in bike design and improved affordability.

Initially mountain biking was conducted on fire trails and existing walking tracks. The increase in popularity has led to a need for dedicated trail networks that cater to varying degrees of technical skill and fitness level. Dedicated public trail networks can be found in many regional and major centres around the world and in Australia and New Zealand. These trail networks provide recreational areas for local users and are also travel destinations for both national and international travellers providing real benefits to the local economy.

The following provides a summary of the available riding and management of public access trails in Sydney. Comparisons are made with a selection of official trails in other regional centres to benchmark the available facilities in Sydney against it's regional peers.

### 3.1 Sydney

Despite the prevalence of bushland in Sydney and its surrounds, official recreational trail access in the Sydney Metropolitan Area is limited to fire trails in national parks and Manly Dam. Compared with other centres it is lacking in official recreational trail networks, particularly for a city of its size.

This is despite the city having a long association with the sport and producing some of the worlds best mountain bikers.

A possible reason for this may be that there is a wealth of natural terrain that has, until recently, remained undeveloped and open to mountain bike access. This is currently under threat due to the increased popularity of the sport and the resulting impact on these informally managed areas, changes to National Park borders and policies, demand for residential housing and increasing demand by other recreational user groups.

Overall coordination of mountain biking in Sydney to develop official trail networks has been difficult from a rider perspective for a number of reasons. These are:

- The majority of riders are recreational riders that form a number of small social groups who are not affiliated with a club this has made it difficult to consult with the whole mountain biking community.
- Many mountain bike trails that previously existed passed through land managed by multiple land managers;
- Coordination at a planning level is difficult as Sydney is divided into a multitude of small councils areas with limited inter-council co-ordination with regard to the planning of recreational facilities. Specifically, planning for mountain biking as a legitimate activity seems to be limited to Warringah Council's efforts at Manly Dam.
- Council public consultation and research often has not included trail users who are from outside of that council region but live in relatively close proximity to the trails.
- Many existing trails were never constructed in a sustainable manner and as a result have erosion problems and provide a poor example to non-mountain bikers and new bikers alike.
- Due to the predominant 25-40 demographic of mountain bikers, many Sydney riders are relatively time poor due to work, family and personal demands. When compared to riders in

smaller centres Sydney riders have less time and face more resistance to co-ordinating and promoting the development of official trail networks

Mountain biking is currently permitted on National Parks fire trails within Sydney near Oxford Falls, however fire trails are only suitable for introductory riders or for building introductory riding fitness.

Narrower winding single track trails are required to develop fitness and biking handling skills that allow the rider to progress in the sport. The current trend in Sydney is to disallow mountain biking on these trails due to the perceived risks associated with walker interaction.

Recreation areas for local users should be within short travel times from residential areas to ensure that they are accessible for before and after work weekday riding. The Northern Beaches provides an excellent location due to its accessibility from the Sydney, North Sydney and Chatswood CBDS and the high youth population who, due to age and income, are unable to drive to trails further afield.

### 3.2 Adelaide

In contrast to Sydney, Adelaide has a number of trail networks with the most widely known being Eagle Mountain Bike Park. Located 12km from Adelaide, the park provides a network of trails that cater for a variety of mountain bike disciplines and abilities. Approximately 21kms of cross country trails, a specifically designed downhill trail, a skills development park, a jumps park and a trials area. This area is managed by the SA Office for Recreation and Sport (OSR).

South Australia is one of the more progressive states in terms of mountain bike trail access and has helped to demonstrate sustainable trail building for other states. SA promotes mountain biking trail network management through the document, "State Mountain Bike Plan, Office for Recreation Sport and Racing, Government of Australia, 2001-2005" which is available for download here:

[http://www.recsport.sa.gov.au/research-planning/state\\_mntn\\_bike\\_plan.pdf](http://www.recsport.sa.gov.au/research-planning/state_mntn_bike_plan.pdf)

The OSR also takes a cross government/industry leadership role in the State Recreational Trails network to secure, develop and manage land access with multiple land owners.

### 3.3 Canberra

In contrast to Sydney, Canberra is well endowed with official mountain biking trails. The adult cycling participation rate in the ACT is approximately double the rate in NSW. A large part of this is attributable to the accessibility of riding locations within the ACT.

Stromlo Forest Park is a purpose built multi-sport venue 16km from Canberra CBD. It was reconstructed with \$7.5m assistance from the ACT government following bush fires in 2003. Many of the trails were built by volunteers under the guidance of recognised trail designers.

The park houses a world championship downhill mountain bike track, approximately 45Km of dedicated single track mountain bike trails and approximately 30km of shared use fire trail. Being a dedicated recreational area, there are excellent facilities on site (toilet block, covered picnic area, parking, etc).

The park has held numerous large scale events, including the, the worlds largest 24 hour mountain bike race<sup>11</sup> (Scott 24 hour) and a round of the World Cup in 2008. In 2009 Stromlo will host the world

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<sup>11</sup> Scott 24 Hour website: <http://www.scott24hr.com.au/>

mountain bike championships, which is expected to attract 40,000 spectators and reach a worldwide television audience of 25 million.

Full details of Stromlo Forest Park can be found online at the following address:

<http://www.stromloforestpark.com.au>

Canberra also offers other venues with Majura and Kowen forests which also host significant endurance and club events.

### **3.4 Newcastle**

There are a number of popular trail networks in Newcastle. The Glenrock trails have been a popular but unofficial mountain bike destination for many years. In recent years NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has started to take the necessary steps to formalise some of these trails, culminating in organised works including a volunteer trail day.

NPWS have engaged well known Australian trail builders World Trail to provide sustainable design and construction expertise and techniques. World Trail will be working with the local NPWS staff and volunteers to teach them the specifics of trail design and construction.

Some further mountain bike trails at Awaba and Ourimbah between Gosford and Newcastle are also accessible from Newcastle.

### **3.5 Melbourne**

The topography of Melbourne differs from Sydney in that hilly bushland terrain is not as accessible as in Sydney. However there are still a number of mountain bike parks located within approximately 50km of Melbourne CBD. Two examples of these are discussed below.

#### **3.5.1 You Yangs**

The You Yangs has two designated mountain biking areas that contain over 50km of environmentally sustainable trails that cater for riders of all ages and ability. All trails are sign posted and graded according to difficulty. The tracks account for 45% of annual park visits attracting over 60,000 mountain bike visits in 2006.

The first area is an easier and flatter trail network comprising of 3 loops tracks with a total length of 20km. This provides the option of rides of varying length depending on available time and fitness. The second area has a range of flowing single tracks and steep technical sections through rocky landscapes totalling approximately 40 km. Within this area are two downhill tracks and a range of cross country trails. There are also other trails in the area designated for other park user groups.

The trails have been carefully designed with local rider input and Parks Victoria to protect environmental values of the park, whilst providing a high quality Mountain Biking experience. The trail system has been designed for sustainable long term use.

The mountain bike park recently won the Community Facility Design Award in the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual 'Go For Your Life' Sport and Recreation Awards, held at the MCG. The award recognised an invaluable contribution to the sport and recreation industry in Victoria. The ceremony was presided over by The Hon. James Merlino MP, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs.

The audience heard how the mountain bike tracks have been incredibly popular, attracting 60000 mountain bike visits in 2006 (45% of annual visitation)! The You Yangs trails were designed and constructed by a core group of volunteers and staff who applied international sustainable principles. The trails have also supported the emergence of a number of local businesses offering bike hire, tours and lessons to visitors. The site and the Geelong Mountain Bike Club will host a round of the national championships in December 2008.

### **3.5.2 Lysterfield**

Lysterfield Park is run by Parks Victoria and is approximately 40 km south of the Melbourne CBD. It has a wide variety of trails for all levels including the Commonwealth Games circuit. Individual trail sections within the network are typically 1 to 2 km long but can be readily joined to form a longer ride. The Commonwealth Games circuit is 6.5 km long.

## **3.6 Albany**

Albany is a small town of 34,000 in WA that has just initiated the construction of a new trail on Mount Clarence in the town. The Community Services Minister Robyn McSweeney presented a \$54,010 Lotterywest grant to the Albany Cycling Club to assist in the construction of a mountain bike trail on Mount Clarence, Albany for club and general public use.

The trail is a joint effort between the Albany Cycling Club Mountain Bike Chapter, City of Albany, Department of Sport and Recreation and Lotterywest and will be the first of its kind in Western Australia.

## **3.7 Brisbane**

Gap Creek is managed by the Brisbane City Council and has a number of multi-use and mountain bike only trails. The Gap Creek Trails Alliance is a not for profit group that works with the council and promotes sustainable riding in the area and organises trail maintenance in exchange for access from the city council.

## **3.8 Rotorua, New Zealand**

Rotorua is a small city on the North island of New Zealand with a population of 55,600, with the Rotorua District having a total estimated population of 68,000.

Even though the city has a relatively small population the city is home to a large mountain bike park that is a popular holiday destination for Sydney riders with over 70km of single track riding.

The park has held a range of premier mountain bike events including the UCI 2006 Worlds, UCI 2006 Oceania Championships and the annual madcap 12 and 24-hour Cateye Moonride4.

Full details of Rotorua Mountain Bike Park can be found online at the following address:

<http://www.riderotorua.com/>

### **3.9 Rest of New Zealand**

In addition, Christchurch (Port Hills), Wellington (Makara Peak) and Auckland (Woodhill) have extensive and dedicated trail networks to meet the needs of recreational mountain bikers.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In comparison to other Australian capital cities, NSW regional centres and New Zealand's major cities, Sydney is undersupplied with official recreational trails for mountain bikes.

NoBMoB notes that even the 10km Manly Dam loop includes 1.4km of sealed road and 3.6 km of fire trail. Therefore only 5 km of official single track is available within Sydney to cater for the increasing number of recreational mountain bikers.

## 4.0 Mountain Biking in the Northern Beaches

### 4.1 Manly Dam

The only official public mountain bike track in the Northern Beaches and Sydney is Manly Dam.

Manly Dam is a very popular mountain biking destination in the Northern Beaches with up to 400 visits per day. The trail features a mix of single track, fire trail and road riding. Overall management is coordinated by Warringah Council who send trail information such as wet weather closures and trail maintenance days to email subscribers.

Trail maintenance days have been well attended with the number of volunteers having to be limited to a maximum number of volunteers per day.

The trail while offering a variety of terrain is suitable for riders with around intermediate technical skills for cross country trail riding. The bike trail is dual use at all times although walkers tend to stick to walker specific dedicated trails. The mountain bike trail also includes a number of road segments and fire trail segments.

The fire trail and in particular the road sections are less desirable for a mountain bike track. The road component is approximately 14% of the total track length. The fire trail and uphill road segments provide some improved accessibility for beginner riders. A typical lap time would be approximately 1 hour for an average rider. The time spent on single track would be approximately half of this.

Typically once this course has been mastered riders move to more challenging terrain and to longer trail rides in the Oxford Falls area. Typical ride lengths in this area were 3 to 4 hours on mostly single track prior to recent restrictions on access.

### 4.2 History of Mountain Biking at Oxford Falls

The Oxford Falls area has a number of unofficial single track trails that have been used extensively for over 20 years.

Mountain bike riding on the Northern Beaches has been participated in probably as long as the sport existed. In the early 1980s road bike manufacturers began to build cycles specifically for riding off-road and the sport became more popular. The recent rise in popularity started in the late 1990s when lighter weight bikes with suspension appeared on the market and then became affordable.

Oxford Falls was home to state level events in this era and such activities gained massive interest and television coverage, as recounted by one of the organisers<sup>12</sup>, "...the 1986 National Mountain Bike Championships, sponsored by Bell Helmets and Suntour components, were held at Oxford Falls...I believe in April. It was covered by Channel 9's Wide World Of Sports. The winner of the elite men's event was Werner Wohlrab of Newcastle (NSW). There were six laps of a roughly 6km circuit, from memory."

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Whiteley, CEO/Director 23 Degrees Sports Management

In unison with actions around the globe, a number of cycling clubs incorporated off road riders into their ranks during the 1990's. At least one of these (Manly Warringah Cycling Club) was running races at Oxford Falls.

Details from more local event organisers at the time state<sup>13</sup>, "...we held a total of 9 Downhill races over the space of 4 years with events being local club rounds and state series level of competition. These races attracted some of the top riders in the country at the time with attendances of 150 – 200 riders per weekend."

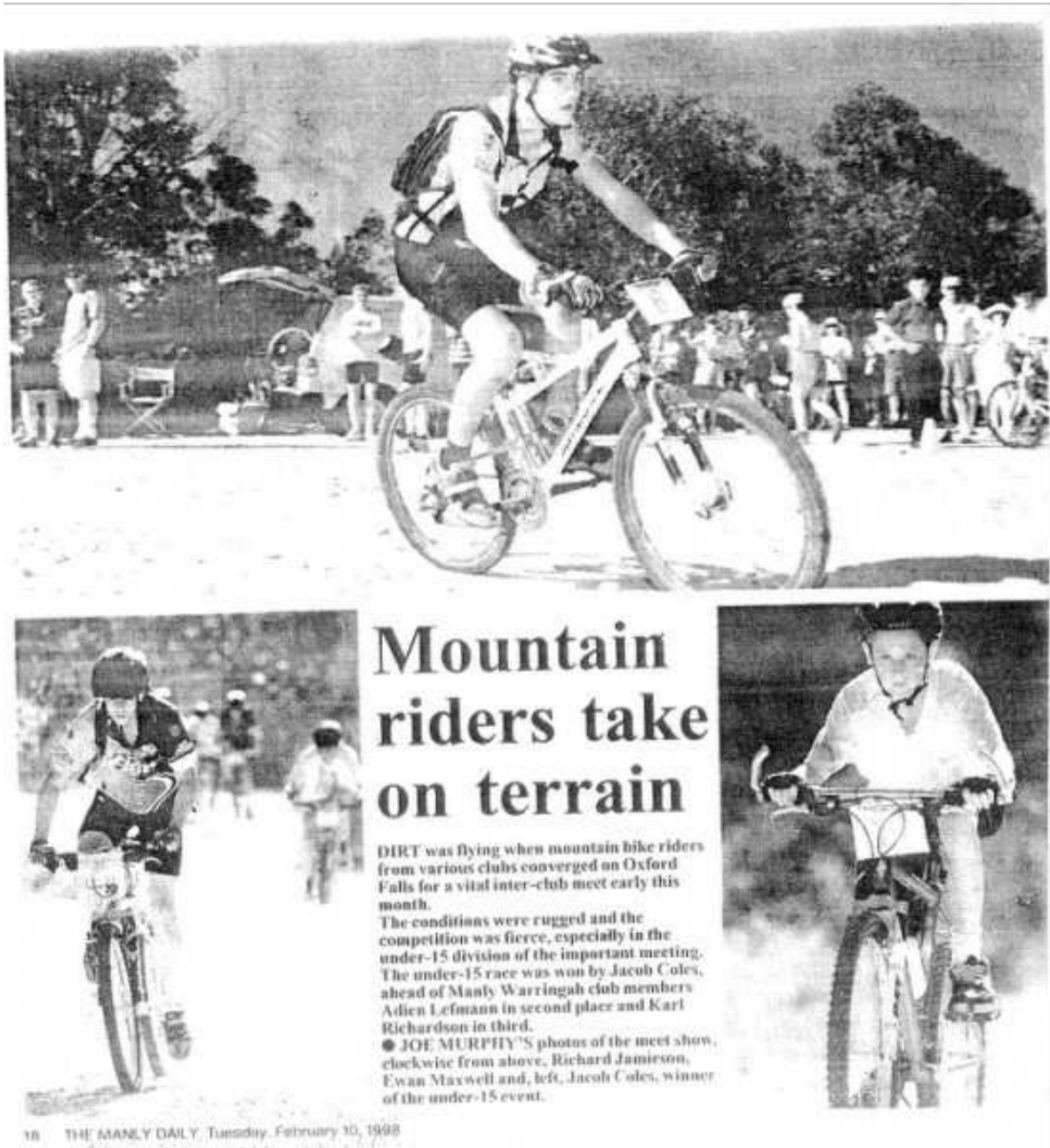
"...the Cross Country racing circuit the small loop in the Oxford falls areas we used to use was annexed by the National Parks in 2002 and has left Sydney mountain bike clubs and event organizers without a viable and accessible track for racing. Previously there were monthly club races held at Oxford falls which used to see the talents of Cadel Evans race there as an Olympics warm up event."

A flyer and race report from these early days is shown below:



The flyer features a logo at the top with the letters 'MWC' in a stylized font, followed by the text 'MANLY WARRINGAH CYCLING CLUB'. Below the logo, it says 'PRESENTS THEIR INAUGURAL Mountain Bike Race'. The central image is a black and white illustration of a mountain biker in a crouched position, leaning forward with their hands on the handlebars, ready to start a race. The biker is wearing a helmet and a light-colored shirt. The background is plain white. Below the illustration, the text reads: 'Saturday May 18 '96 at 8a.m. MORGAN ROAD, OXFORD FALLS'. Further details include: 'Entry point to track is 1.3 km along Morgan Rd. from Forest Way & 3km along Morgan Rd. from The Wakehurst Parkway. Start, finish line is 1.2 km from entry point! \$5.00 ENTRY FEE (Drink provided FREE)'.

<sup>13</sup> Hugh Flower, City Bike Depot, Sydney.



From The Manly Daily (10 Feb 1998)

In recent years the price of good quality bikes with front and rear suspension and hydraulic disc brakes became affordable for recreational riders. These bikes have superior cornering, braking distances and overall handling and comfort than other styles of bikes. These are popular with both younger and older riders. Many of the older riders, who remembered riding in their childhood, have returned to the trails around Oxford Falls on these bikes and progressed into keen recreational and sporting mountain bike riders (and have shed a few kilos or given up smoking in the process).

As we can see the Oxford Falls region has had and still has a strong association with mountain biking for older riders as well as current youth. Previously there were no issues with early riders and even racing on land at Oxford Falls. The land that was previously used for the cross country track used for club races in the 1990s and by recreational riders until early 2008 for weekend and after work riding has now wholly become part of Garrigal National Park following a shift in legal boundaries.



Negotiation with the Aboriginal Land Council also provided for downhill racing during the 1990s on land that was accessible by motor vehicle at both the top and bottom of the course.

Local cycling personalities have told how the last official racing in the area concluded around 2002. This was due to a number of factors from environmental groups pressuring land owners to withdraw access to lack of co-operation from other local user groups (notably the model aircraft club located just off Slippery Dip firetrail).

Although these moves put an end to official racing recreational riding continued and does so today.

### **4.3 Current Situation**

Although racing has not taken place in Oxford Falls for some time, recreational trail riding and race training in the area continues but is now severely limited by the land that is still open to riders and has single track. Issues have been raised in regards to erosion and trail construction. However without any official recognition of the trails and mountain biking in the area overall management, coordination and sourcing of sponsorship funding for maintenance and sustainable trail improvements has proven to be difficult.

The downhill area is still very popular for after work training and weekend recreational riders but is now under threat with development imminent. It is our understanding that while the council and local residents have objected to development in this area a developer has gained Part 3A approval to develop this land.

There is also currently high perceived risk that the remaining trails will be lost with no alternative equivalent trails available in the northern beaches. The nearest alternative trail networks that offer similar challenges, variation in terrain and sufficient trail length are located 90km to the north or 70km to the south of Oxford Falls with travel times of over an hour outside of peak traffic.

The loss of trails in this area due to closures and development would be a severe unmitigated social impact due to the loss of recreational facilities within the Northern Beaches area. Given the high concentration of bike shops that service the area, and large number of visitors from other parts of Sydney, a negative impact on the local economy would also be expected.

## 5.0 Local Benefits

### 5.1 Economic Benefits

#### 5.1.1 Bike Shops

The economic benefits are difficult to quantify without a detailed study. Using available references and discussions with people in the industry the following information was compiled for discussion and future investigation.

Mountain biking has grown rapidly in recent years with the Cycling Promotion Fund (Bicycle Sales in 1998 to 2005) showing that of the 1.1M bikes sold per annum in Australia around 70% were mountain bikes<sup>14</sup>.

Robin Rainton (NoBMoB) conducted a telephone survey of bike shops on the Northern Beaches and surrounding suburbs. The purpose of this survey was to establish the number of people employed within the immediate industry.

The list of shops that were identified in the Yellow Pages were:

- Belrose Bicycles - 65 Prince Charles Rd Frenchs Forest NSW 2086
- Bike Addiction - 380 Pittwater Rd North Manly NSW 2100
- Bikebug Pty Ltd - 120 Pacific Hwy North Sydney NSW 2060
- Brookvale Bike Factory - 750 Pittwater Rd Brookvale NSW 2100
- Cranks Bike Shop - 283 Alfred Street North Sydney NSW 2060
- Cranks Bike Shop - 352A Penshurst St Chatswood NSW
- Cyclesport - 274A Pennant Hills Road Thornleigh NSW 2120
- Favourite Cycles - 22 Darley Rd Manly NSW 2095
- Hornsby Cycles - 266 Pacific Highway Hornsby NSW 2077
- King of the Mountain Cyclery - Rear, 178 Military Rd Neutral Bay NSW 2089
- Kuringai Cycles - 139 Pacific Highway Hornsby NSW 2077
- Le Spit Cyclery - 20 Spit Rd Mosman NSW 2088
- Manly Cycles - 36 Pittwater Rd Manly NSW 2095
- Neutral Bay Cycles - 232 Military Rd Neutral Bay NSW 2089
- Northern Beaches Cycles - 5/1 Powderworks Rd Narrabeen NSW 2101
- Northside Avanti Plus - 815 Pacific Hwy Chatswood NSW 2067
- Pedals Plus - 1747A Pittwater Road, Mona Vale, NSW
- Pedals Plus - 219 Mona Vale Road, St Ives, NSW
- Procycles Hornsby - 148 George Street, Hornsby, NSW 2077
- Renegade Cycles - The Village, 43-45 Burns Bay Rd Lane Cove NSW 2066
- SIC St Ives Cycles - 1/190 Mona Vale Rd St Ives NSW 2075
- Supreme Cycles - 1316 Pittwater Rd Narrabeen NSW 2101
- The Bicycle Shop - 13 Babbage Rd Roseville NSW 2069
- The Bike Hub - 755 Pittwater Rd Dee Why NSW 2099
- Turramurra Cyclery - 1366 Pacific Hwy Turramurra NSW 2074

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<sup>14</sup> Retail Cycle Traders Australia 1998-2005

- Universe Cycles - 160 Victoria Ave Chatswood NSW 2067

Statistics from this survey:

- Number of stores: 26
- Number taking part in survey: 21
- Number declined to take part or not contactable: 5

Of those who took part:

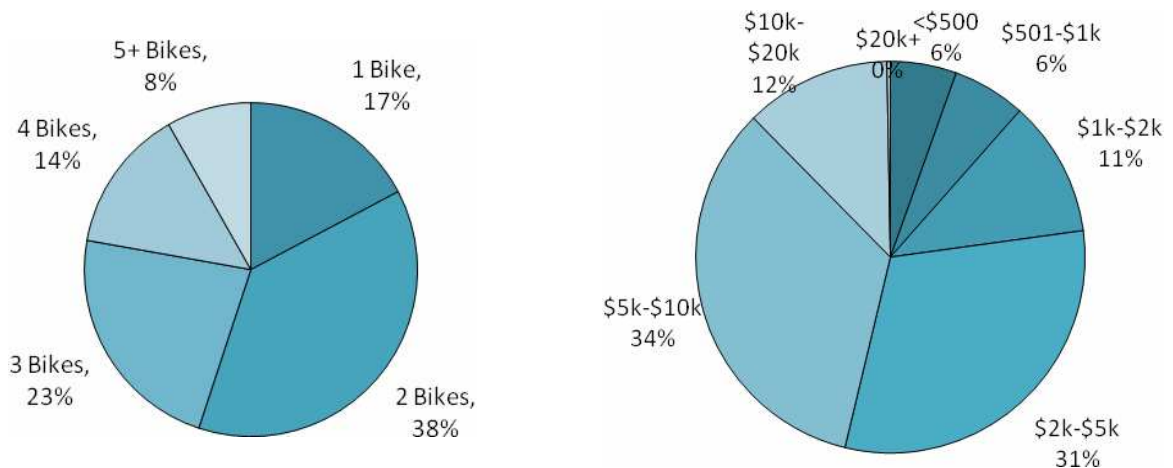
- Total number of full time employees: 89
- Total number of part time employees: 67

If the average income of these employees was \$35,000 per annum the total wages from supporting biking in this region would be \$5.25M. Of this \$5.25M it could be justified that 70%, \$3.68M was to support mountain biking.

Survey data was obtained for 350 riders within the Northern Beaches area<sup>15</sup>. The survey data indicates that the average number of bikes that are owned per person is 2.7 (Figure 1). The average value per bike of \$2155 and the average value of bikes owned per person is \$5739. Assuming that the average value of bikes owned is also \$5739 for NoBMoB's 1600 members the total bike value would be in the order of \$9.1M.

It is worthwhile noting that while NoBMoB has 1600 members we register activity from around 20,000 unique visitors using our Northern Beaches based website per month. This may indicate that the economic value of mountain biking in the northern beaches is significantly higher than the estimates for our membership alone.

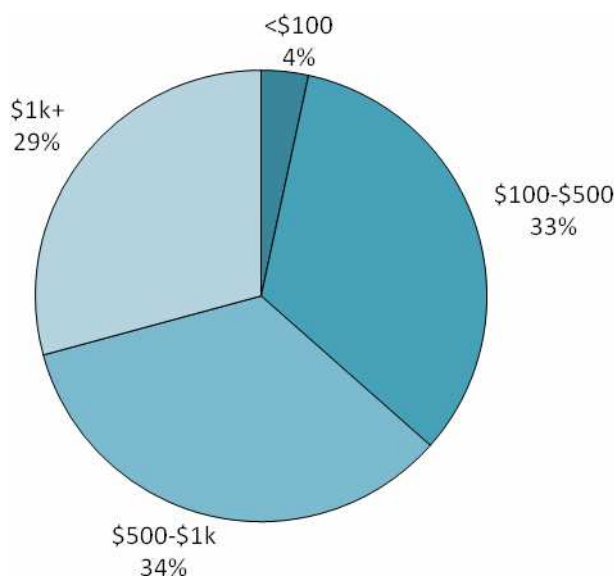
**Figure 1 Number of bikes per person (left) and total value (right)**



Of the people surveyed the average annual expenditure in a bike shop was \$780 (Figure 2). Assuming an average spend of \$780 per annum our 1600 members would spend \$1.25M per annum in bike shops. Again the true direct economic value of mountain biking in the northern beaches may be significantly higher based on the activity on our website.

<sup>15</sup> Hornsby Shirt Mountain Bike Alliance, May 2009

**Figure 2 Annual Bike Shop Expenditure**



### 5.1.2 Pubs/cafes/local businesses

There are a number of indirect economic benefits from mountain biking in the Oxford Falls region.

For the majority of riders biking is a social activity that is followed by patronage at favourite local cafes, bakeries and establishments.

There is also the opportunity for it to become a holiday destination for mountain bikers. Many of our members frequently travel to New Zealand, Victoria, Queensland and other parts of New South Wales or further afield for mountain biking trips of up to a month in duration. Oxford Falls is often discussed on internet forums as it is well known but currently it is generally recommended to give it a miss as there are better developed trail networks along the NSW coast.

## 5.2 Social benefits

### 5.2.1 Fitness and Mental Health

The health benefits of exercise are well established however many people are unlikely to train in a gym or exercise for exercise sake. For many of our members improved fitness is a result of partaking in our favourite activity rather than the purpose of the activity.

Many people in our group since beginning to ride now drink far less regularly with a change in behaviour from a number of after work drinks to significantly reduced alcohol intake and instead favouring beginning the weekend with an early morning ride. Many have also given up smoking<sup>16</sup> and lost a few kilos as they become more competitive amongst their social riding network.

The accessibility of mountain biking in Oxford Falls also provides a much needed activity and outlet for youth in the area, many of which are growing up with sedentary lifestyles and due to modern housing and lifestyles limited backyard space at home for physical activity.

<sup>16</sup> NoBMoB site survey: <http://nobmob.com/node/8565>

A typical Saturday and/or Sunday morning for many of us would involve meeting in the Oxford Falls area around 8am followed by a 3 to 4 hour ride. Normally we would then swim at one of the local beaches before returning home for lunch or frequenting a favourite food establishment.

The close proximity to residential areas also allows those with families to head out for a ride earlier in the morning.

The accessibility of Oxford Falls also promotes year round after work rides mid-week under lights in winter or making use of day light savings time in summer.

Aside from fitness benefits the accessibility to the undeveloped (housing, commercial) bushland around Oxford Falls provides a great place to relax and de-stress. The mental health benefits of access to bushland is documented in Parks Victoria's document *The Value of Parks (page 9)* and is recognised in many council recreation strategies.

Furthermore, younger generations that do not visit natural areas suffer a 'Natural Deficit Disorder'. If this group is not encouraged to visit such areas they won't value and fight to preserve them<sup>17</sup>.

### **5.2.2 Social Networking**

Mountain biking is a very social activity resulting in riders forming strong social networks. The friendly competitive nature and technical features promotes discussion based on shared experiences.

As riders approach unfamiliar technical terrain it is common to stop and evaluate the terrain and riding lines and options. For more technical sections this becomes a problem solving task with riders individually attempting to ride the terrain. As riders get more competitive the problem solving is applied to all aspects from bike suspension setup, rider position, cornering lines and technique etc.

Riders usually stop and chat with one another whilst they catch their breath or fix a flat tyre. The sport does not have some of the negative culture associated with other sports in terms of 'this is our patch, go home'. Other riders are also always willing to provide assistance to each other if required due to injury or mechanical troubles.

Young riders also benefit socially from riding as the Oxford Falls local and riding community culture promotes the development and appreciation of the natural environment, social skills with other age groups riding in the area and other user groups and members of society.

### **5.2.3 Local Recreational Statistics**

The following statistics were gathered by Warringah council (the suburb of Oxford Falls is within this council's jurisdiction) as part of planning for their Unstructured Recreation Plan. The statistics were obtained following a telephone survey in April 2008 from a sample of 621 randomly chosen residents. The residents were asked a series of questions regarding their recreation participation over the last 12 months. SGL Consulting were contracted to undertake this survey.

The top ten recreation activities participated in by adults in the Warringah Council area is shown in Figure 3. Bike riding is third most popular and is ahead of other well established sports and

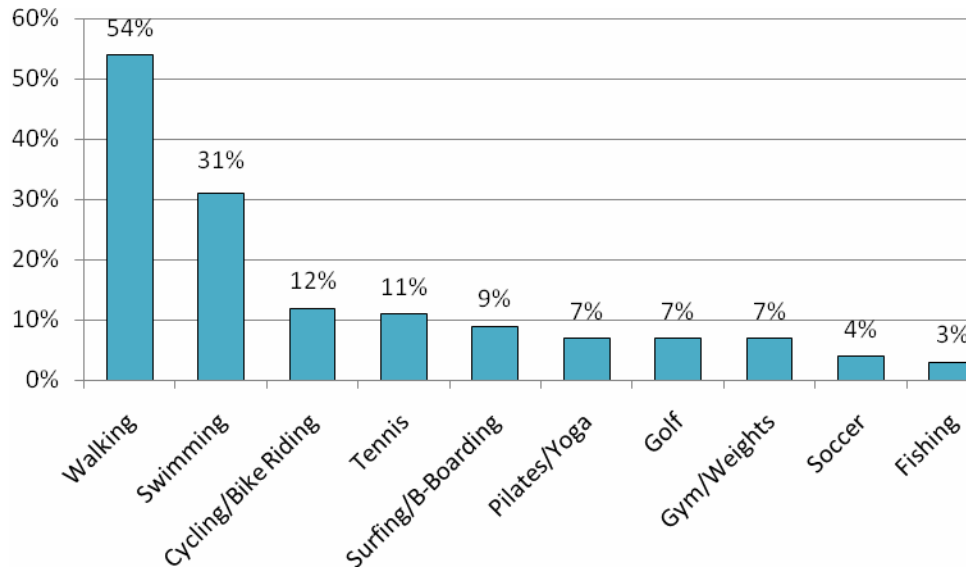
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<sup>17</sup> MTBA IMBA Summit, July 2008

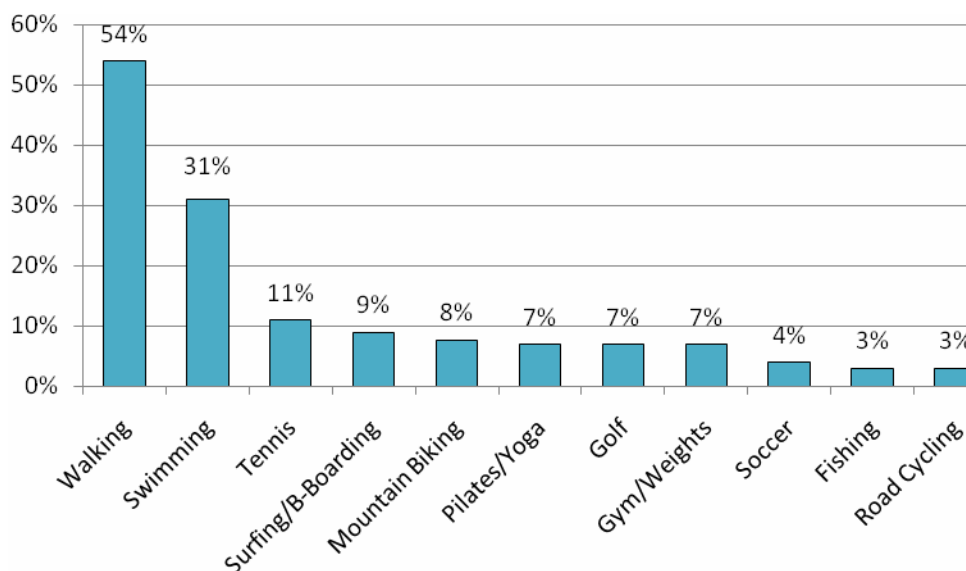
activities such as surfing, tennis, soccer and going to the gym which are highly recognised and well provided for in the area.

Based on sales data it may be assumed that at least 70% of the bike riders have chosen to purchase a mountain bike. It should also be noted that many road riders also partake in mountain biking. This indicates that this style of riding may be the fifth most popular activity in Warringah with a similar popularity as surfing (Figure 4). This is despite there being no official public mountain bike trails in the area, only unofficial trails in the Oxford Falls area.

**Figure 3 Top ten recreation activities participated in by adults in Warringah**



**Figure 4 Estimated ranking of mountain biking**



In August 2008, 333 students from 16 schools completed a 'Children's/Youth Activity Survey'. The survey collected data regarding the children's current recreation participation behaviour and their attitudes towards sport and recreation.

The study showed that 63% of children participate in bike riding.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Approximately 150 jobs in the surrounding areas as well as a significant amount of general expenditure at local businesses associated with mountain bikers visiting the Northern Beaches are supported by mountain biking.

The establishment of an official trail network at Oxford Falls would provide significant social and economic benefits in the region. In contrast the failure to make appropriate provision for mountain bike usage of public land on the Northern Beaches would potentially put a large proportion of these jobs and local business revenue at risk.

Given the strong existing demand for mountain biking trails in the area and the stated desire of Warringah Council constituents to participate in recreational cycling, the Northern Beaches represents an ideal location for a mountain bike trail network.

## 6.0 Proposal for Oxford Falls Crown Reserve

From the discussion outlined in the preceding section of this report, the provision of an official planned mountain bike trail network over the Oxford Falls Crown reserve would address a number of key concerns relating to the current use of the land.

These include:

- the rehabilitation of unsuitable and poorly designed existing trails;
- the ability to maintain the existing trails in a structured manner under the land managers approval;
- natural limitations on the need for future unauthorised trail construction;
- other management issues such as parking and traffic can be dealt with in a co-ordinated manner once trail access is made official;
- agreement can be reached as to the management of user group interactions (give way rules/code of conduct); and,
- The environmental and cultural heritage of the land to be preserved.

In the process, the provision of official trail access will provide significant local and regional benefits by way of increased visitors from outside the area contributing to increased spending in local businesses.

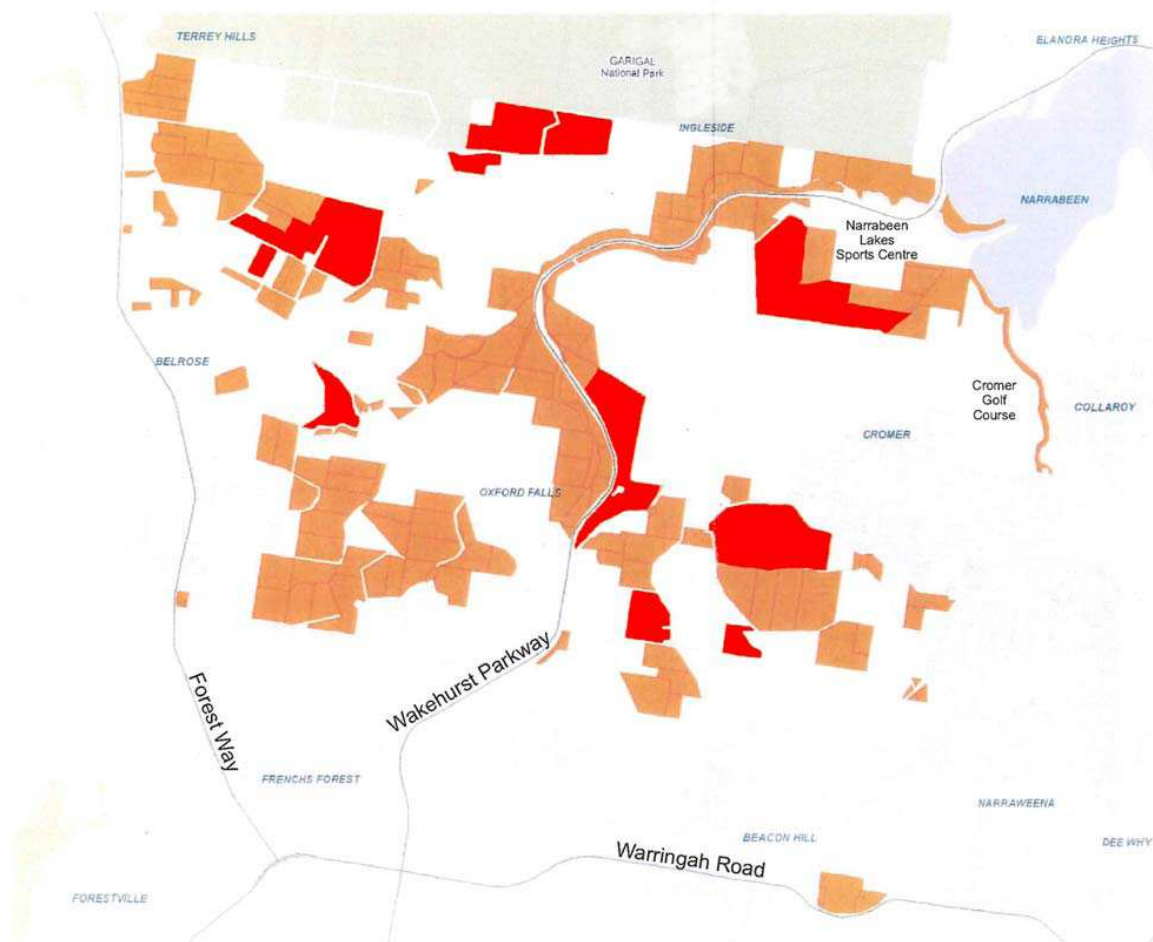
Furthermore, the establishment of a trail network in the Northern Beaches would provide for unstructured recreational opportunities for Warringah residents, in accordance with their preferred activities expressed in the recent council survey.



## 6.1 Known Trails

In order to understand how best the areas in question could be used we must first understand the current situation. NoBMoB notes that the unplanned development of the existing trails has led to trails in areas where they may not be suitable. Based on our knowledge of the area, the map below has been updated to show areas of crown land which are known to contain some form of mountain bike trail.

**Figure 5 Known trails**



## 6.2 Detailed Proposals

### 6.2.1 Overall Mountain Biking Strategy

Section 4.0 provides a history of the local trails and highlights the need for a comprehensive and overarching plan for the sport that takes into account all the relevant land owners and stakeholders.

We are sympathetic to the point that the suggestions proposed in this response can only cover crown lands listed but in order to extract the maximum possible benefit, any use made of them should be in consultation with adjoining land owners. Even if plans cannot be implemented in unison it is worth pursuing an overall strategy that will bring all the differently managed areas together at some point in time.

It is recommended that an official mountain bike body or community be created and assigned such a task. In South Australia for example, the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing took on this task and produced a State Mountain Bike Plan.

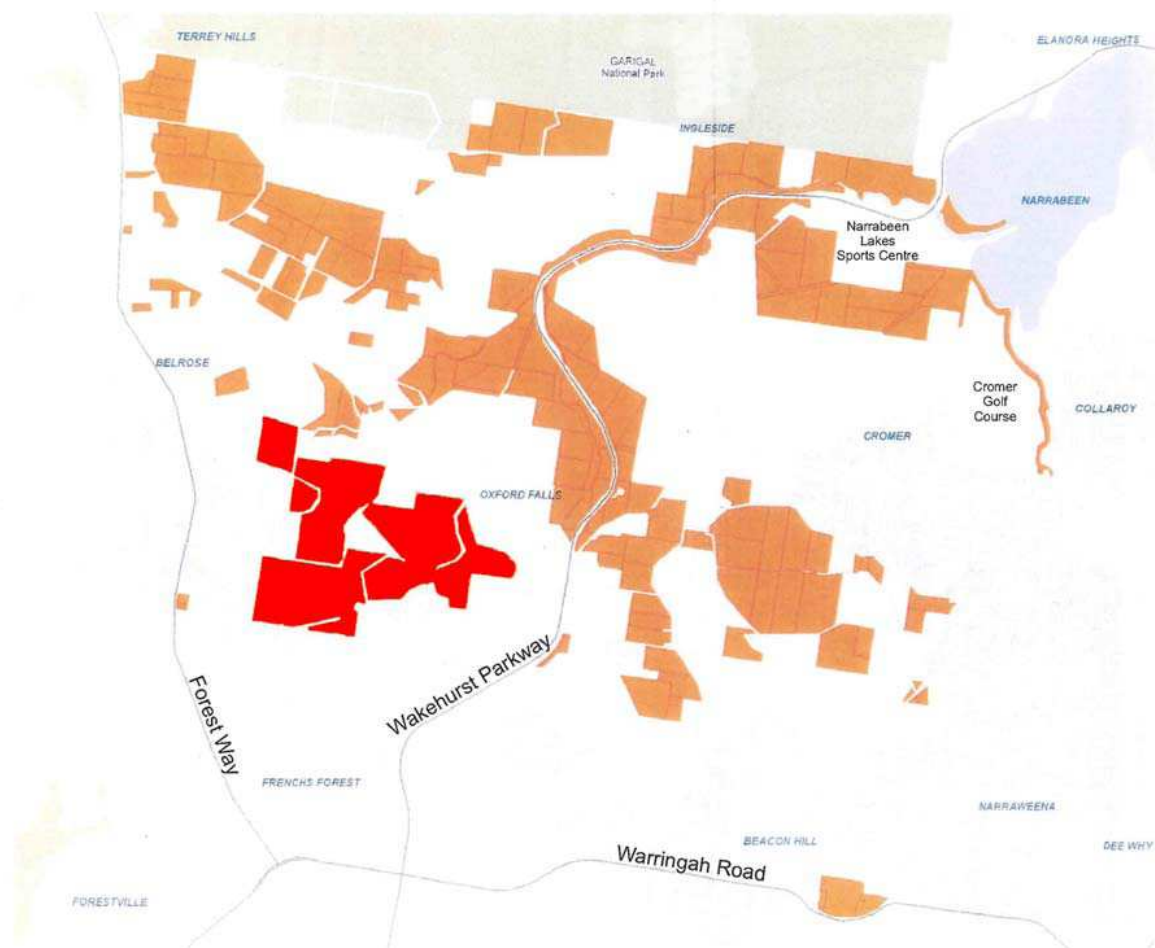
If a government body cannot be created or undertake this task there is probably scope for a more local organisation to perform the duty in the short to medium term. Candidates may be a local club (eg. Manly Warringah MTB or Turrumurra Off Road Cyclists), a board assembled from local shops, MTBA or NSWMTB (national and state representatives of the sport) or any other community assigned representative as necessary (eg. a trail advocacy officer could be created from the local NoBMoB community).

NoBMoB's initial suggestions with regard to management considerations such as trail design guidelines are discussed in section 7.0.

### 6.2.2 Multi-Discipline MTB Park

Figure 6 below shows an area which would be ideal as a multi-discipline bike park. This area is suited to a variety of riding disciplines, but most notably downhill, freeride, trails and 4X. It is envisaged that a small, novice cross country track could also be included in any facility in this parcel.

**Figure 6 Possible Mountain Bike Park Location**

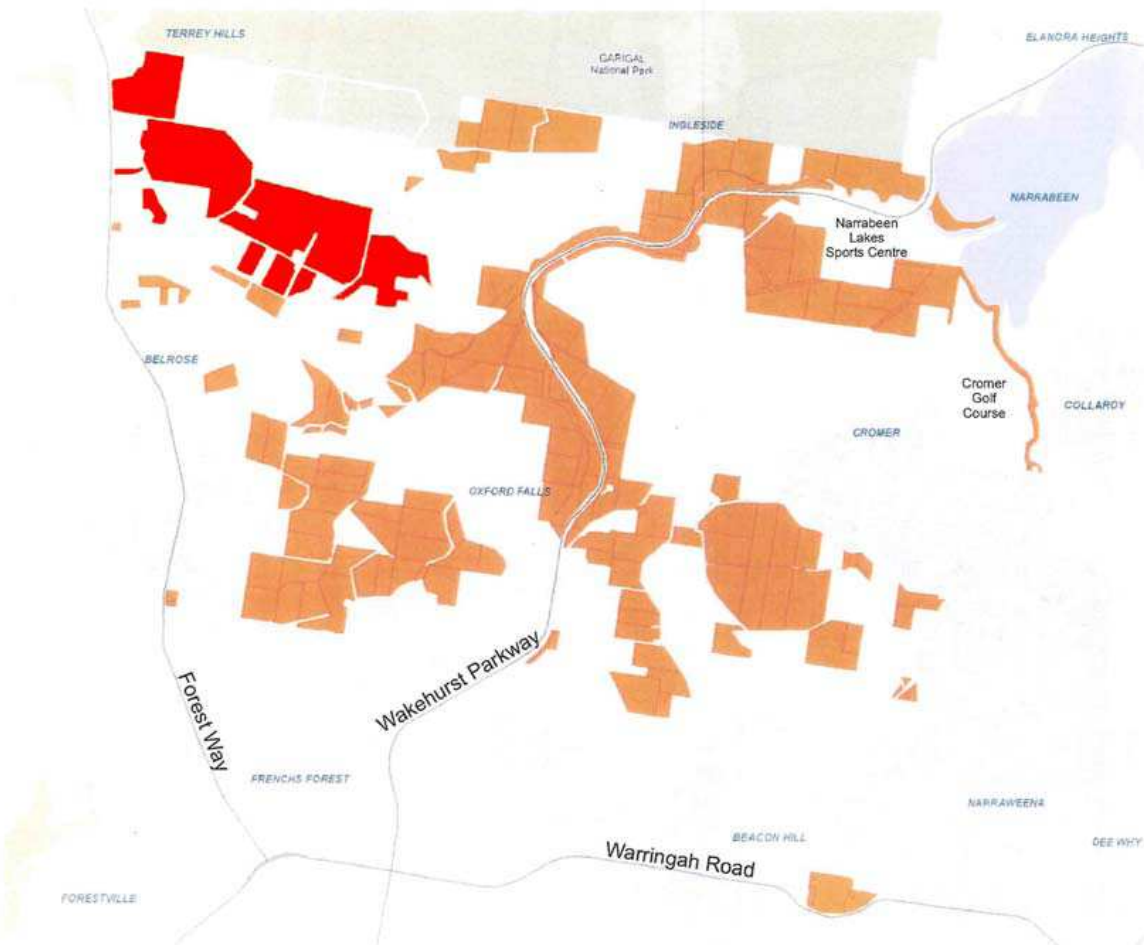


This would draw riders from other, unauthorised trails in the area, notable Lizard Rock and the 'Downhill' area along Morgan Road. The riding community is keen to see Lizard Rock rehabilitated as the Aboriginal Land Council have expressed concern with the trails in this area. In order to progress with that though, the community needs a viable alternative and hence the recommendation of this multi-use park.

### 6.2.3 Trail Riding Area

The area highlighted in the figure below has the potential for a trail riding and XC area.

**Figure 7 Potential Trail Riding Area**



Although this area of land is just over 2Km across it is wide enough to accommodate a quite substantial XC track and trail riding. In fact, this parcel is not dissimilar to an area of Yellomundee Regional Park on the West bank of the Nepean River (Hawkesbury Heights) which is home to a very successful XC track. Sadly this track is over an hour's drive away and out of reach of many of the local residents of the Oxford Falls area, and hence the proposed addition of such a trail more locally.

A key area of successful parks in other regions is that trails can be linked to form a larger trail riding network. This provides greater ride options to accommodate shorter and longer rides as well as increased riding diversity. It should be noted through successful negotiation with other land owners in the region trails could be linked between the trail area, proposed multidiscipline MTB Park and other trails in the area. It may also be possible to take advantage of existing firetrails from Hilversum Crescent, Five Mile Creek and Slippery Dip to provide linkages.

One would hope with some careful planning and dedicated work (work which members of the mountain bike community are more than willing to volunteer their time for) this could become a facility to bring many riders into the Oxford Falls area and provide certainty and direction for the sport in the region.

#### **6.2.4 Multi-Use Transport Corridor**

By encouraging more off road riders into the area one might also hope that the profile of cycling in general is raised. From an environmental point of view, clearly the more riders can be encouraged to cycle to their venue of choice and between venues in the same locality the better.

It is recommended that the thin strip of land to the East of Wakehurst Parkway be used to create a multi-use transport corridor. Such use could have a sealed path for walkers and road riders, but the land is also wide enough to include a trail on dirt that could meander somewhat and provide a more fun accompaniment.

A corridor such as this would provide safe passage for riders and pedestrians from the proposed multi-discipline park in the South all the way to the Sport and Recreation centre by Narrabeen lakes.

While the usefulness to casual recreation users is clear, it is worth pointing out that the end of Slippery Dip firetrail to the North is very close to where this corridor might end by the lake and hence would provide a useful link back to the South for riders wishing to rider along Slippery Dip, out of the National Park down to the Sport and Recreation centre, and then head South along this proposed corridor.

Warringah Council currently has provision for multi-use corridors in the area. It should be noted that two individual dedicated walking and mountain trails within a designated corridor have the potential to provide greater enjoyment of the trail and environment for each user group and also have less impact than a multi-use trail. This is because the overall trail width that would be required is around half of what is typically built to address perceived safety concerns.

## 7.0 Benefits and Management Outcomes

### 7.1 Benefits of the Proposed Network

#### 7.1.1 Mountain Bike User Benefits

If all these recommendations are put into place the benefits to the land users (the riding community) are clear. This would no doubt encourage more participants to the sport of mountain bike riding with all the health and social benefits that entails as discussed in Section 5.2.

The multi-use transport corridor will give much needed protection to any user from the busy traffic of the Wakehurst Parkway.

#### 7.1.2 Other User Benefits

Similarly the formalisation of the management and access of mountain bikes at Oxford Falls would enable user group interaction to be more effectively addressed. The establishment of a give way rule and separate cycle and walking tracks in technical or faster sections of track to avoid conflicting trail uses would ensure that other land users would benefit from an improved network of trails.

#### 7.1.3 Economic Benefits

We have discussed the direct economic benefits of mountain biking for the Northern Sydney area in Section 5.1. Encouraging more riders and economic expansion in the industry will help with job preservation and creation in the direct and ancillary industries.

While the focus is on providing a community facility the locality has the potential to be a viable venue for world class events. Canberra promoters are able to host numerous events that are the highlight of the Australian mountain bike calendar. There is no reason why the Northern Beaches with the varied terrain and proximity to the beach and city life would not be a significant draw card for future national and international events.

These events would bring an influx of visitors on a regular basis as well as provide local prestige through being able to host such events. The sport and recreation facility near the lagoon would be an obvious location to accommodate athletes during such an event.

Such facilities attract mountain bike riders and associated economic benefit to the region. For example, "During the Thredbo Australian Open of MTB (Mar 2007), 389 MTB riders injected approximately \$687,000 into the area. Each racer brought an average of 3.1 visitors that stayed for an average of 5.4 nights, creating 5251 bed nights."<sup>18</sup>

Two local promoters (Rocky Trail Entertainment and Wannaride) have expressed a serious interest in running events in the area if only the facilities existed. Rocky Trail Entertainment have estimated there is demand in the area for at least two or three events per year, one of which would be a major competition such as 12 or 24 hour race with up to 1000 entrants (facilities permitting).

### 7.2 Improved Land Management Outcomes

As highlighted above, when presented with an opportunity to build facilities in an official and controlled manner, mountain biking can have a strong positive influence on the other land users and the local community.

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<sup>18</sup> South East Mountain Biking Co (SEMBCO) - 29 Aug 08

It is clear that the existing situation is not ideal from either a land manager's or mountain bike user's perspective. In developing a well designed network of trails and retiring/regenerating existing unsuitable trails, a plan can be put in place that ensure that mountain bike users can help to improve the amenity of the area.

The principal land management concerns that can be addressed through adopting a planned approach to trail design are discussed below.

### **7.2.1 Sustainable Trail Design**

Sustainable trail design principles to control surface water runoff and soil erosion have been successfully implemented around the world. The International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) has produced design guidelines to ensure that trails have minimal impact on the environment. These guidelines should inform the design and layout of any future trail network.<sup>19</sup>

These principles are broadly consistent with control measures that are used to control erosion on walking tracks.

Furthermore, once quality approved single track is available, riders will be encouraged to abandon poorly designed unofficial trails, resulting in a further positive benefit to surrounding areas. Once abandoned, the unofficial trails can be rehabilitated as necessary.

### **7.2.2 Trail Maintenance**

As the proposed trails would be part of an authorised network, their maintenance can be planned for by the overseeing authority. In addition, the proven willingness of the mountain biking community to contribute to trail maintenance days ensures that the cost of maintaining the trail is likely to be small.

Official trails can also be closed for maintenance/rehabilitation more readily than unofficial trails. In addition, the ability to close the trails due to bad weather reduces erosion and trail widening considerably. This is a critical aspect of the management of the Manly Dam trail.

### **7.2.3 Traffic Management Issues**

The existing transport infrastructure and the relative immaturity of official mountain bike facilities in Sydney favours the dispersal of riders across a larger number of locations to avoid concentrating trail use and parking/traffic issues at one location, as seen at Manly Dam.

Therefore the availability of a number of riding locations, or at least, access points, is key to ensuring that traffic management and parking issues do not become a significant problem.

### **7.2.4 Safety**

The safety of other users can be managed by developing a give way rule and including it on the trail signage. The multi-use tracks at Mt Stromlo are a good example of this implementation.

Signage outlining the difficulty of the trail (similar to ski runs) should be provided to enable less experienced riders to avoid trails that are too difficult for them. Alternate lines around large obstacles should also be provided.

Further design considerations such as the provision of separate walking and cycling tracks through fast or technical sections helps to mitigate the risk of user conflict, whilst maintaining the enjoyment

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.imba.com/resources/trail\\_building/index.html](http://www.imba.com/resources/trail_building/index.html)

for both parties. Notably, a walking track and single track bike trail are less expensive, less intrusive and more desirable for all parties than a single fire trail.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This report presents NoBMoB's proposal to address the existing issues associated with mountain bike trails within the Oxford Falls Crown Reserve. In our view, the establishment of a well designed trail network will provide recreational opportunities to local residents, a reduction in the user group conflicts in the Oxford Falls Crown Reserve and an improvement in the protection of the environmental and heritage value of the site.

Without an appropriate management strategy that includes recreational mountain bikers, the legacy of unofficial trail building and unproductive enforcement costs is likely to continue due to the absence of alternative options.

The NoBMoB community appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the PoM for the Oxford Falls Crown Reserve and would like to work with the relevant land managers to develop a truly sustainable trail network and management strategy for the site to provide equitable recreational access that respects the natural and Aboriginal heritage value of the area.