

ITEM NO: 9

SUBJECT: DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACKS

FILE NO: F05689 - 10/87981

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**Management Plan Link**

*Principal Activity:* Looking After Environment

*Service:* Environmental Management

*Project:* This report does not relate to a Management Plan project

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**Recommendations:**

1. *That the Council receive the report and note the information;*
  2. *That the Council endorses further assessment and consultation with stakeholders concerning the formalisation of mountain bike tracks in Knapsack Reserve, as provided for in the existing Knapsack Reserve Plan of Management; and*
  3. *That the Council receives a further report by 30 June 2011 addressing the assessment of tracks, consultation outcomes and proposed usage strategy at Knapsack Reserve.*
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**Report by Group Manager, BM City Services:****Reason for report**

At the Ordinary Council Meeting of 16 March 2010, the Council resolved in part:

- "4. That Council works with local riders to find a new location for downhill bike riding in a non-environmentally sensitive and non-residential area. That a report comes to Council on this issue within three months and the report considers funding support from user groups"*

(Minute Number 103, 16 March 2010)

This report provides the result of further investigation into new locations for the provision of downhill bike riding, in response to the part of the resolution outlined above.

**Background**

The Council recently resolved to close several unauthorised downhill mountain bike tracks along the eastern escarpment. Part of the resolution required further investigation in order to identify alternative, less problematic sites where the needs of bicycle users could be accommodated. The Council has previously undertaken a detailed assessment to identify potential locations suitable for downhill bike riding during the development of the *Nature Based Recreation Strategy 2005-2015*. A further analysis of Council managed reserves has now been completed in order to identify a new location for downhill bike riding. The analysis was based on the desirable requirement being a height difference of 150m or greater in elevation within a single or contiguous reserves. A total of 13 sites were identified as meeting this primary requirement.

For each of these 13 sites, additional variables were considered including environmental constraints, impacts on amenity, and transport links. Table 1 shows the results of this

assessment. Of the 13 sites originally identified, only Knapsack Reserve (see Attachment 1) provides some potential for downhill bike riding. Several additional sites at Mt Victoria were also investigated and considered not feasible due to adjacent private land and the lack of existing roads.

**Table 1: Potential sites for Investigation**

<b>Reserve Name</b>	<b>Site constraints</b>	<b>Feasibility for downhill</b>
Hawkesbury Lookout	Reserve limited in size, adjoins National Park	No
Mermaids Cave Blackheath	Reserve contains endangered vegetation communities. Significant safety issues for any pick ups along Megalong Road.	No
Blackheath Glen Reserve	As above	No
Mount York Reserve	Reserve contains existing cross country bike tracks located on historic roads. Site has limited length of potential downhill sections.	No
Mount Wilson Reserve	Site contains endangered vegetation communities and is adjacent to the National Park. Lacks road infrastructure for ferry between top and bottom. Isolated site.	No
Mt Irvine Rd Reserve	As above	No
Du Fours Rocks	As above	No
Reserve, Oakland Rd, Hazelbrook	Site contains endangered vegetation communities. Lacks road infrastructure for ferry between top and bottom. Possible amenity impacts.	No
Terrace Falls Reserve, Hazelbrook.	Site contains endangered vegetation community. Service road through the reserve. Existing tracks could accommodate a short section of downhill track (40m drop over 600m). Site not suited to formalisation.	No
Sassafras Gully Reserve, Springwood.	Site contains endangered vegetation community. Adjacent to National Park. Lacks road infrastructure for ferry between top and bottom. Possible amenity impacts.	No
Knapsack Reserve (Access via Barnett St)	Reserve contains endangered vegetation communities but these could be avoided. In the Knapsack Reserve Plan of Management there is an existing allowance for cross country mountain bike riding and one downhill bike track. Provides a drop of 120m over 1.5km.	Yes - limited
Mt Piddington / Zig Zag, Mt Victoria	Site does not contain height difference requirement that is wholly within a Council managed land parcel. Site adjacent to Lithgow LGA and private property. Lacks road infrastructure for ferry between top and bottom.	No

Council staff met with rider representatives to discuss the findings of this new assessment. These representatives have acknowledged that aside from Knapsack Reserve, there are no alternative feasible downhill sites that have the potential to be formalised within the Blue Mountains Local Government Area at this time.

The adopted Plan of Management for Knapsack Reserve contains a provision for a single downhill track as well as cross country mountain bike riding opportunities. The provisions for these activities are on the basis that the tracks be adequately constructed and maintained by users under the direction of Council. To date, the formalisation of tracks has not occurred. The Reserve has existing use patterns and there is adequate parking. Rider representatives have expressed an interest in working with the Council in formalising and maintaining both the downhill and cross country opportunities within Knapsack Reserve. Given that the formalisation of bicycle tracks in this reserve has been previously endorsed by both the Council and community through the adoption of the Plan of Management, it is proposed that the Council pursues opportunities to work with the user groups to formalise and maintain the bicycle tracks at this site.

Formalisation of the mountain bike riding tracks in Knapsack Reserve will provide a number of benefits to the community and the Council. The implementation of the actions contained within the existing Plan of Management for Knapsack Reserve will provide an avenue for various bicycle sports to be undertaken using an approved and properly constructed series of tracks. Knapsack Reserve provides adequate off street parking at Barnett Street and John Whitton Memorial Reserve, limiting the potential impacts on residents. It is proposed that the Council undertake a full assessment of the tracks currently present within Knapsack Reserve and their predominant use patterns with the aim of formalising a series of tracks to be dedicated to walkers, shared uses and mountain bikes. This will allow for separation of use, avoiding the potential for user conflict, the ability to effectively signpost trails and undertake enforcement, improved safety, and will facilitate user group contribution towards maintenance. It is proposed to submit to the Council a further report by the end of June 2011 addressing the assessment of tracks, consultation undertaken, and proposed usage at Knapsack Reserve.

#### Sustainability Assessment

Effects	Positive	Negative
Environmental	More appropriate management will reduce environmental impacts.	Nil
Social	Improved safety, reduced user conflict and greater recreational amenity will be achieved by formalising tracks at Knapsack Reserve.	Nil
Economic	Nil	Nil
Governance	Formalisation of tracks at Knapsack Reserve will allow for greater regulatory control and enforcement.	Nil

#### Financial implications for the Council

The estimated cost for the assessment, community consultation and implementation of a formalised track network in Knapsack Reserve that caters for both walkers and bike riders is estimated to cost \$24,500, as set out in Table 2 below. These monies are already budgeted within 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 as part of the implementation of the existing Plan of Management objectives. While it is unlikely that individual riders or rider representative groups will be able to contribute direct funds to these works it is anticipated that a significant contribution of voluntary time and in-kind resources will be made available to assist with track formalisation and maintenance.

**Table 2: Summary of Financial Cost**

Action	Estimated cost	Funding/resource source
Detailed walking track and mountain bike track planning, Knapsack Reserve.	\$6,000	Bushland Management operational budget and Environmental Levy.
User group consultation for track planning, Knapsack Reserve.	\$2,500	Bushland Management operational budget.
Undertake a Review of Environmental Factors for track formalisation/development in Knapsack Reserve.	6 person days	BMCC Environmental Management staff.
Formalise tracks through regular Trackcare work days to stabilise track and restore degraded area.	12 staff days \$4,000 materials and contract work. pa	Bushland Management operational budget.
Design, fabrication and installation of interpretive and prohibition signage.	\$12,000	Bushland Management operational budget.

**Legal and risk management issues for the Council**

The formalisation of tracks at Knapsack Reserve in accordance with the Plan of Management will provide better opportunities for bicycle related activities within an appropriate and controlled environment and will assist with enforcement at this reserve as well as elsewhere.

**External consultation**

Council officers met with rider representatives on 1 April 2010 to discuss the progress of the Council's investigation of alternative sites for downhill bike riding. They have indicated their support for the formalisation of tracks at Knapsack Reserve in accordance with the Plan of Management. Additional consultation with other stakeholders will be conducted as part of the next stage of assessment.

**Conclusion**

There are limited opportunities for certain bicycle sports to be undertaken in bushland settings in the Blue Mountains. As participation in these sports is increasing, the ability of the Council to plan and implement sustainable track networks will assist in meeting this need within a controlled setting. The assessment of opportunities for downhill bike tracks in other Council managed reserves has indicated that Knapsack Reserve provides the only potential alternative site at this time. Knapsack Reserve also provides significant opportunities for cross country riding at varying grades. In pursuing actions within the existing Knapsack Reserve Plan of Management, the Council will be meeting a demonstrated need in a planned and sustainable manner.

**ATTACHMENTS/ENCLOSURES**

1	Downhill Mountain Bike Tracks - Knapsack Reserve Map - Attachment 1	10/85720	Attachment
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Attachment 1 - Downhill Mountain Bike Tracks - Knapsack Reserve Map - Attachment 1

