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THE TRAIL STARTS HERE...

A meeting of forest users from the Bendigo and Castlemaine areas has provided an important step towards better management of trail bike riding in State Forests across Victoria.

The forum, run by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), raised issues and uncovered the potential for co-operation between groups of forest users that usually don't communicate with one another.

DSE's Statewide Recreation & Tourism Coordinator, Richard Wadsworth, said the community forum brought together trail bike riders, residents, recreational user groups, and government and industry representatives.

"The forum gave DSE and the user groups an excellent insight into how the community feels about trail bikes in State forests," Mr Wadsworth said.

"With the aim of promoting sustainable use of forests, the forum gave each of the groups the chance to raise issues that concern them and to contribute to co-operative solutions," he said.

DSE has four Trail Bike Project Officers in regional Victoria, and instigated the forum as part of its response to continuing strong growth in recreational trail bike riding.

"Some of these groups would have been apprehensive about approaching each other in the past, so it was great to see trail bike riders, residents and other forest users talking to each other," Mr Wadsworth said.

"The willingness to develop an understanding of each other's situation and to co-operate as people with a common interest in the forest was encouraging," he said.

The issues raised included bush etiquette, respect for other users of the forest, noise, compliance with the law and the need for rider education.

"Most of the issues boiled down to the need for all users to get along with each other and leave the forest in as healthy a state as they found it," Mr Wadsworth said.

"The forum raised a range of possible measures for discussion, including better maps, more user-friendly information on the law, more compliance patrols, and the need to rehabilitate some environmentally degraded areas," he said.

"One strong message from the forum is the recognition that trail bike riders and other users are all welcome in the forest, and are all invited to be a part of the co-operative forest user community," Mr Wadsworth said.

“The big challenge now is to explore the potential of the solutions identified at the forum as practical measures to put trail bike riding onto a more sustainable footing,” he said.

DSE’s Trail Bike Project Officers see education as the key to reducing friction between trail bike riders and other user groups, while reducing the need for any law enforcement activity.

“The organised riders’ groups can make a big difference there, by setting the right example with their own riding and conveying the message to other riders, who are more likely to listen to fellow trail bike enthusiasts,” Mr Wadsworth said.

“The issues raised and the co-operation initiated at the forum constitute an important step forward in a campaign that will ultimately benefit forests across the state,” he said.

Members of the community who would like to participate in the project, or would like further information are encouraged to contact Adrian Parker, Trail Bike Project Officer – North West on 5430 4452 or to visit the project website www.dse.vic.gov.au/trailbikes

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