

Trail Bike Initiative

Project Update

July 2006

As part of the Victorian Government's \$200 million Environmental Sustainability Action Statement, \$5 million over four years has been allocated to better manage recreational trail bike use of State forests.

The recreational use of trail bikes in Victoria's State forests and other public land has long been a popular pastime and in the last five years, there has been a marked increase in the number of riders in the bush, particularly with the increasing settlement in Melbourne's outer eastern corridor. Rural tranquillity and the quality of life for many landholders with properties adjoining public land have been negatively affected by this increased trail bike activity, particularly around trail bike 'hot spots' within the Central Highlands area such as Paul's Range, Mt Disappointment, Rokeby / Crossover and Rawson. Trail bikes are also causing environmental damage in some areas of heavy use.

In 2005, in response to escalating community concern over trail bike noise, illegal off-road riding and associated environmental damage, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) undertook a review. Community input was sought through six regional workshops held in Broadford, Healesville, Yarra Junction, Pakenham, Warragul and Traralgon during February 2005. These workshops were well attended by trail bike riders, rural residents and other forest users.

The key areas of conflict identified through these workshops were noise pollution, off-road riding, environmental damage, and conflicts between trail bike riders and other forest users (such as picnickers, bushwalkers and horse riders).

As other Government agencies besides DSE are also responsible for managing and regulating vehicle use on public land, input from other agencies on the ideas put forward by the workshop participants were further discussed –with VicRoads, VicPolice, the EPA, Department of Justice, Parks Victoria and the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries.

The end result of these workshops and inter-agency discussions was an options paper containing

recommendations to address the concerns being raised by regional communities.

With the backing of Minister Thwaites, the Victorian Government has now provided funding through the Environmental Sustainability Action Statement to implement the key recommendations.

It has been clear from the onset that there is no single, easy solution to the trail bike conflict issues on public land but implementing the option paper recommendations will help reduce the current levels of conflict and bring trail bike riding onto a more sustainable footing.

What does this mean for trail bike riders?

Victoria's public land has an extensive network of public roads (including forest roads) available for trail bike use. Trail bike riding is a legitimate recreational pursuit and as with other recreationalists, trail bike users have rights. To ensure that this use is balanced with the needs of local residents and other recreationalists however, some changes are required to reduce current levels of conflict and environmental damage.



The key changes affecting trail bike riders will be:

- Provision of purpose built trail bike unloading areas in the forests. These areas will be chosen and designed with local rider input to provide suitable facilities for trail bike users to safely unload their bikes. Unloading areas will also provide information on where to ride and on local clubs to join.

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- Increased information for riders. Often riders are not aware that they are using illegal tracks or riding inappropriately. Better signs and better information for riders will help ensure recreational riders know what they legally can and can't do.
- Encouraging owners of excessively noisy trail bikes to get their exhausts fixed. Noise emission testing of trail bikes in the bush will be undertaken to ensure they comply with noise emission standards. Excessively and illegally noisy bikes are affecting the peace and quiet expected by many rural residents and also affect the recreational experience of other forest users.
- Closure and rehabilitation of illegal off-road tracks. Off road riding is illegal on public land and the spreading network of illegal tracks cause erosion, environmental degradation and sedimentation of waterways.
- Increased forest patrols. The focus of the patrols will be educational, though under-aged and unlicensed riders and unregistered bikes can expect to be warned. Repeat offenders will be prosecuted.

What's in it for rural residents?

Rural residents adjoining public land are often the unintended recipients of significant disturbance associated with trail bike noise and use. This initiative will provide:

- Improved noise protection for residents. In part, this will be achieved in hotspot areas by providing trail bike riders with unloading areas deeper into the forest, to move the noise source associated with starting up and warming up trail bikes away from residential areas. However, it may also involve the establishment of buffer areas (either voluntary or mandatory) which encourage trail bikers not to ride on roads in close proximity to residential areas.
- Quieter trail bikes resulting from an improved noise compliance testing program.
- Improved information and education of other forest users concerning the need to be considerate to those that live nearby.

What's in it for other forest users?

State forests are also enjoyed by people camping, picnicking, walking, fishing, horse riding, mountain bike riding and nature study. They also value their recreational use of State forests. The benefits for these users will be:

- Repair of environmentally degraded areas and closure of illegal tracks.
- Improved information and education of trail bike riders resulting in riding behaviour more sympathetic to other forest users.

Further investigations

Some additional areas have also been identified for further investigation under this initiative:

- There is a lack of purpose built venues for riders. This initiative will work across State and local government, private landholders and user groups, to identify the gaps in the provision of legal venues for under-aged riders and for unregistered bikes and investigate and support opportunities for the establishment of suitable venues.
- More research will be undertaken to better understand the extent of under-aged and unregistered riding. We will also research what makes a good ride and how forest roads can provide for a better riding experience as well as fund research to give us a better understanding of the dynamics of trail bike noise and how to more effectively design buffers.

A final note

Trail bike riding is an enjoyable pastime for many. Our challenge is to work together to ensure that trail bikers, other recreationalists and rural residents all get a fair deal, and that our kids and their kids can continue to enjoy the bush. If you are interested in having input into this project over the next four years, please email Richard.Wadsworth@dse.vic.gov.au to register your interest or call the Project Manager - Richard Wadsworth on ☎ 9637 8417 or the Powelltown Project Officer Joy Harte on ☎ 5965 9923.

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