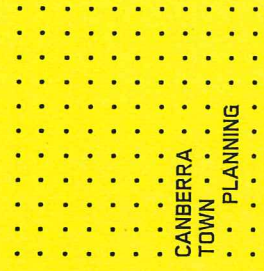


# Consultation Report

## Isaacs Ridge Mountain Bike Trail Upgrade Project

Prepared for:  
Territory and Municipal Services,  
ACT Government  
September 2015



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Version Control

15.09.15 :: Draft for Review :: Checked KT & Client

21.09.15 :: Final Draft Report

30.09.15 :: Final Report

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.1	Project Site and Context.....	4
1.2	Project Background and Need.....	6
1.3	Brief Recreational History.....	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Consultation Methodology</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1	Targeted Stakeholder Consultation.....	8
2.2	On-Line Community Survey.....	9
2.3	Community Drop in Session.....	9
2.4	Letter box Drop.....	9
<b>3</b>	<b>Targeted Stakeholder Responses</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Community Responses</b> .....	<b>18</b>
4.1	On-line Survey Responses.....	18
4.2	Consultation Session.....	24
<b>5</b>	<b>Summary and Recommendations</b> .....	<b>25</b>
5.1	Outcomes and Summary.....	25
5.2	Recommendations.....	26

# Introduction

Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) are developing a Trail Network and Management Plan for the Isaacs Ridge Pines area. This report has been prepared to provide a summary of the community consultation undertaken.

## 1.1 Project Site and Context

Isaacs Ridge Nature Reserve is located in the south east of Canberra as shown in Figure 1, behind the suburbs of Isaacs and O'Malley in South Canberra in the Woden Valley. The site encompasses Block No. 159 Jerrabomberra and Block 6 Section 593 Isaacs. The Isaacs Ridge Long Gully pine plantation is located adjacent to the Isaacs Ridge Nature Reserve (see Figure 2).

There are also areas identified as "special purpose reserve" and "urban open space" adjacent to the pine plantation areas in the Territory Plan. The location of these areas are shown in Figure 2. These areas, along with the Nature reserve areas are subject to the provisions of the Nature Conservation Act 2014, and activities within these areas need to be managed accordingly.

Isaacs Ridge Long Gully pine plantation is an area containing 23 Hectares of ACT Forestry commercial pine plantation. The commercial pine plantation is managed by ACT Foresters within the Parks and Conservation Service.

The land is managed by the South District, Urban Reserves, Parks and Conservation Service.

Isaacs Ridge Nature reserve includes areas of *Allocasuarina verticillata*, Box-Gum Woodland and high value woodland bird habitat.

Under the National Capital Plan Isaacs Ridge is identified as Designated Land, Inner Hills and as Hills Ridges and Buffers.

Figure 3 provides a plan which depicts the main existing trails in the area.

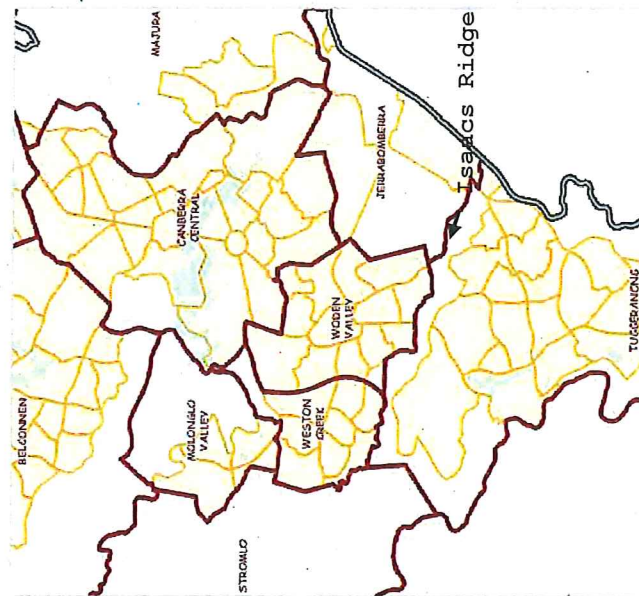


Figure 1: Regional Site Location (ACTMAPi, Aug 2015)

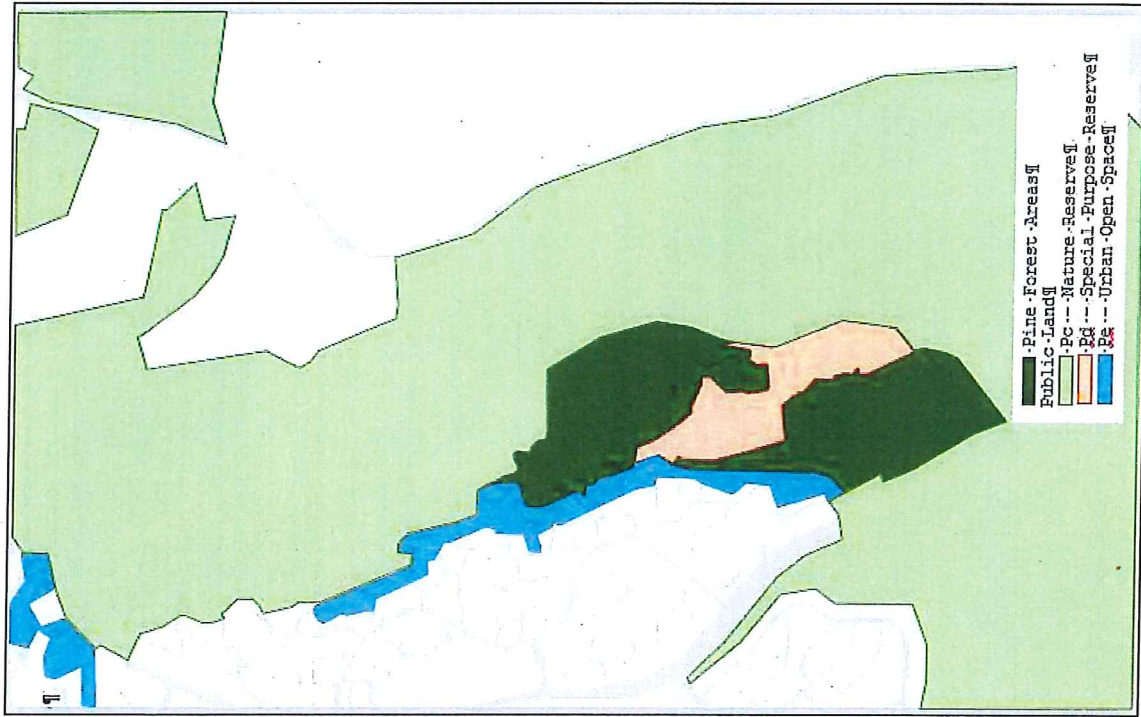


Figure 2: Overlay Boundaries

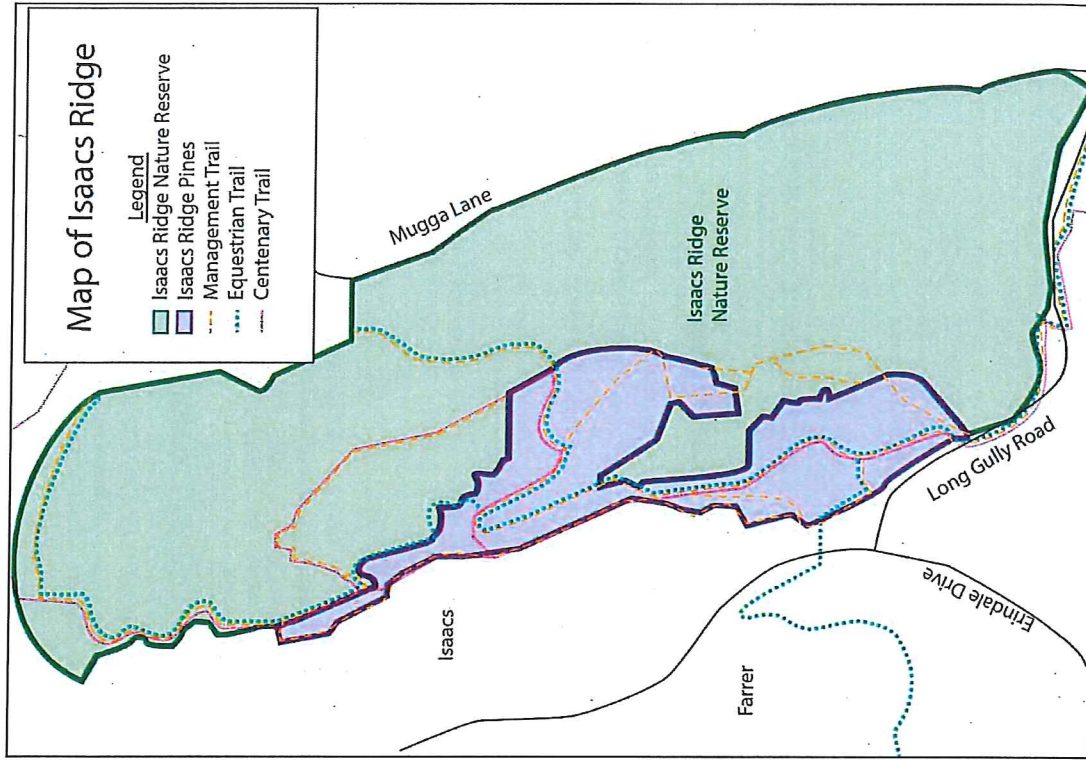


Figure 3: Main Existing Trails

## 1.2 Project Background and Need

There is a network of mountain bike trails in the Isaacs Ridge Pines (adjacent to the Isaacs Ridge Nature Reserve), which has been constructed by members of the public over a number of years. This includes technical downhill mountain biking trails which pose potential risk to mountain bike users and other users.

The purpose of this project is to undertake consultation to investigate community needs and better understand current usage and demands at Isaacs Ridge in the context of Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) management of the area. This information will then be used to develop a trail management plan and an associated trail network plan and then works would be undertaken as detailed in the trail management plan.

PCS has obtained financing within the 2015-16 budget to undertake the upgrade works.

The trail management plan would respond to the community consultation outcomes and PCS concerns with one of the purposes to enable approved club level downhill mountain bike events in the area.

The trail management plan is to interpret the outcomes of the community consultation to make recommendations for the provision of an appropriate trail network and supporting infrastructure at Isaacs Ridge to:

- Improve the standard, condition and safety of the existing downhill mountain bike trails.
- Ensure all trails are built sustainably and with all users considered in accordance with the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) trail building guidelines.
- Allow government to approve downhill mountain bike events using these trails and to enable event organisers to access insurance.

- Engage the community in the design and future maintenance of the trail network to ensure the ongoing condition and safety of the trails.
- Improve the trail network and the amenity of the area for a range of users.
- Improve the safety of all users and minimise potential conflict between users.
- Reduce inappropriate recreation within the adjoining nature reserves.

This document provides details of the Consultation phase, another consultancy will be undertaking the development of the trail management and network plan.

## 1.3 Brief Recreational History

For the mountain biking community, Isaacs Ridge has a long history as a great place to ride, and previously contained a network of both cross country and downhill trails. In particular, Isaacs Pines was renowned by the downhill mountain bike community for being steep, rough and technical, with large jumps crossing the management trails.

Below is an excerpt from an article published on *The Roost Mag* website by Robert Conroy, which gives an insight why the downhill community have enjoyed using this venue in the past for club races.

*"but seriously this place had it all technical off camber, jumps to berm, natural features, flat corners, drops and it was steep to boot ! Of course there were B lines but that didn't stop most guys having a go as is the essence of club racing. Whilst there were those bigger name elite guys there were plenty of junior and vets riders all out to shred. Club racing is not about hardcore racing it's about picking up new skills, learning off others, meeting new people to ride with in your downtime and the CORC guys really seem to have that covered. There was a certain second family atmosphere to the whole race."*

(<http://theroostmag.com.au/gone-clubbing-at-isaacs/>, 15 August, 2012)

In the past, the pines have hosted club downhill races (most recently in 2012) and dirt-crit races (short course cross country races) on a course set up on the lower slopes of the southern part of the pines area.

In addition to mountain biking events in the past, Isaacs Ridge hosts a number of other regular events such as the Sri Chinmoy Triple triathlon, the Tour de Ridges Mountain Running Race and Orienteering events.

It is also the recreational backyard for many locals who enjoy walking, running, cycling, horse riding, dog walking and generally enjoying the outdoors at Isaacs Ridge.



Plate 1: A section of one of the downhill trails



Plate 2: View of one of the road gap jumps.



Plate 3: Activities Declaration Sign in the reserve

# 2

## Consultation Methodology

A range of strategies were employed to undertake consultation for this project, in order to reach a wide community audience. These included:

- A variety of advertising strategies;
- Targeted stakeholder consultation;
- On-line survey;
- Community drop in session; and
- Letter box drop

The project and consultation period was advertised widely by the ACT Government in the form of:

- Signage provided at the main entry points within Isaacs Ridge (refer to Figure 4)
- A media release was issued on 5 August 2015 announcing the public consultation period.
- Information and hardcopy surveys were provided at Woden and Erindale libraries.
- Information and surveys on the TAMS and Time to Talk websites.
- Notice posted on the ACT Community Noticeboard
- Article in Our City Our Community e-newsletter.
- A whole of government email message.
- Letter box drop to all residents of Isaacs.
- Emails to key stakeholders and community groups.
- Social media messages on the ACT Government Facebook page, and TAMS and PCS Twitter feeds.
- Social media messages were sent to CORC and Majura Pines Trail Alliance.

- In addition, various community members and stakeholders also posted links to the survey and details of the community drop in session on websites including rotorburn.com, theberm.com.au, actea.asn.au, the bush capital horse forum, corc.asn.au and pedal power.



Plate 4: Consultation sign in the reserve

### 2.1 Targeted Stakeholder Consultation

Contact was made with representatives of parties identified as having interests in this project, and interviews were arranged where possible. The majority of these were face to face, though some were undertaken via email or telephone. The stakeholders consulted were:

- Australian Mountain Running Association;
- Orienteering ACT;
- ACT Equestrian Association;
- Canberra Off Road Cyclists;
- Woden Valley Community Council;
- Isaacs Ridge Mt Mugga Mugga Park Care Group;
- Parks and Conservation Service (Forestry, Park Care Support, Ranger/Land Manager, Off-sets manager);
- Sri Chinmoy;
- Adjacent leaseholders; and
- CrownCastle - Telecommunications Infrastructure Managers of the infrastructure at Isaacs Ridge.

The interviews were generally undertaken in the form of an open discussion, focusing on key areas of interest for the target stakeholder. Specific questions were also posed to ensure that key and significant information was obtained. Notes were taken during the meetings and minutes recorded.

Some stakeholders also provided written submissions as part of the consultation process.

## 2.2 On-Line Community Survey

An on-line survey was prepared by PCS and posted on the ACT Government "Time to Talk" web site ([www.time totalk.act.gov.au](http://www.time totalk.act.gov.au)). The survey was open from Tuesday 4th August 2015 until Wednesday 2nd September, 2015. Hard copy surveys were also provided at Erindale and Woden Libraries.

The survey asked eleven questions, some of which allowed for free text response. It also provided an opportunity for those surveyed to provide their contact details if they were interested in receiving further information as the project progresses, or if they were interested in being involved in the future maintenance of the trails.

## 2.3 Community Drop in Session

A community drop in session was held at Woden Hellenic Club on 18 August 2015. This session was aimed at providing the community with the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the project in an informal manner. A brief presentation about the project was provided and some open discussion followed. People were also given the opportunity to provide hard copy responses to the questions from the on-line survey and these were then incorporated with the on-line data received in the survey.

## 2.4 Letter box Drop

PCS undertook a letterbox drop of all residents located in the suburb of Isaacs, approximately 874 private dwellings (ABS, 2011).

# 3

## Targeted Stakeholder Responses

The table below provides a summary of the key themes and comments made by targeted stakeholders during the interviews conducted.

Table 1: Targeted Stakeholder Responses

Theme	Comment
Isaacs Ridge Mt Mugga Mugga Park Care Group Support for Downhill MTB Trails	Supports the upgrade of downhill mountain bike trails in Isaacs Pines on the understanding that appropriate management will reduce the number of illegal trails in the higher conservation value Isaacs Ridge Nature Reserve.
Safety	Concerns that the road crossings are hazardous but can be controlled during official events; consider moving the road jumps.
Type of trails	The existing downhill trails cater mainly for high level riders and it is considered that Isaacs Pines should also be developed for riders with lower or developing skills with a cross country trail that links to the downhill trails. A less technical downhill trail was also suggested from the ridge to Long Gully Road.
Location of trails	Main focus of trails should be within pines area. The Canberra Centenary Trail passes through the Isaacs pines and Nature Reserve. This could be an important link to other mountain bike areas. The official route has cyclists riding along the lower trail as it was thought that it was too steep to ride to the ridge and too expensive to make new trails suitable for all users. However, it should be noted that many cyclists use the steep sections and the ridge trail. There are two main unofficial mountain bike trails in Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve and it is doubted if they could ever be closed; they could be upgraded for environmental reasons and have occasional use but not be part of links to other mountain bike areas.
Trail maintenance/user group	The proposal is for the setting up of a user group for establishment and maintenance, which is a good idea. This would require removal of woody weeds and other invasive plants such as serrated tussock present in the area. An ongoing planting program should also be considered along with thinning of pines where necessary. Our group is very small so would not be able to provide a high level of assistance. Government support for trails needs to be ongoing. We are concerned that funding for long term maintenance is not guaranteed and could be cut, as happens even with legislated responsibilities such as weed management. Some of us have had involvement with Friends of Bruce Ridge and CORC, and hope that this will continue through TAMS and ParkCare.

**Theme**

**Comment**

**Vegetation Management**

Even though most of the trails would be in the pines which have been developed and cleared, there are also areas of native vegetation and returning native plants such as *Styphelia triflora*, *Eryngium ovinum* and *Acacia ulicifolia* which are listed as uncommon plants. The Isaacs pines should have similar environmental management plans as those for the nature reserves.

**Managing user interactions**

Additional or upgraded trails are likely to result in an increase in user activity. Most of this will be away from houses but will affect walkers and riders on existing management trails. It is noted that this is addressed in the draft Mountain Bike Strategy:  
 "Mountain bike activities are perceived by some other stakeholders as dangerous or in conflict with other recreational activities or ecological values. This is fuelled by a lack of clear signage and protocols for interaction and by sections of the informal track network that have been constructed with little regard to environmental sensitivities".  
 Some of the management roads on Isaacs Ridge are approved horse trails but horse riders also make use of other trails. In order to minimise conflict horses should be permitted only on those shared trails shown in the relevant Activities Declaration Notice.

**Australian Mountain Running Association**

**Recreational Uses at Isaacs**

Many dog walkers, runners, more proximate to residential areas than somewhere like Majura so more potential for interaction. More people walking around during the day. Pines offer protection from the weather in winter and summer. Walk dogs off lead, few kangaroos.

**Safety**

Existing MTB trails some are very steep and dangerous for other users if they come flying down the hill.  
 Need to address the angle of the track coming onto the fire road so that mountain bikes don't fly into people coming across roads.

Design trails so that there is a safe entry to trails.

**Timing of works**

Concern about timing with respect to an orienteering race event at Easter.

**Events and facilities**

Parking for events, orienteering, running. Need to identify a suitable area. Runners don't need power or water for events. Just use laptops plugged into an inverter.

Hold events like the Tour De Ridges race, which includes Isaacs Ridge.

**Location of trails**

Prefer mountain bike trails to be located in the southern area, where current downhill trails are found.

**Canberra Off Road Cyclists**

**Type of Trails**

Keen for hand built downhill trails, not machined flow trails, like at Majura. Isaacs has different surface character, they want technical rough, rocky trails for downhill.

These sort of trails can be built with volunteers, working with the downhill racers, and then cut a rideable track, and over time they could build up features, berms, rocks etc.

They'd like to see 2 or 3 downhill tracks with 1 or 2 start options, then trails that dissect and interlink trails, so they can vary the route.

There was also previously a short course, for dirt crits - a 800m to 1km long cross country course down the bottom of the pines area, would be good to see this rebuilt.

They push bikes up trail for downhill, no car shuttling.

**Theme**

**Comment**

Downhill tracks don't need machine work, but machines could be used in other areas to build a XC trail that loops around the hill, could get a 9-10km loop.  
 Other cyclists don't want just downhill trails. If technical elements have a B line (less technical optional route) then cross country riders can use them too, but CORC are keen to keep Isaacs as something different to the other MTB parks in Canberra.  
 Want at least one track that is really hard, then some easier options for other people to try.  
 In the past at Isaacs there were lots of natural jumps, rock drops. Build A and B lines, in accord with IMBA rules.  
 Need signage about the difficulty of trails.

**Trail Safety**

Can have tough, difficult trails that are safe, because trees are trimmed and well maintained.  
 Minimise fire road crossings to avoid conflicts with other users.  
 Jumps can be moved off the fire road and it is possible to provide ways to slow riders down near the roads.  
 Provide good sight lines at trail crossings and need for signage at intersections with fire roads, look listen etc.  
 Existing road gaps have been there for a while and there haven't really been any major accidents. There is a big road gap down the bottom, would be good to keep one, but could be fenced off if necessary.

**Trail design**

Would like to review the mapping and have direct input into the final trail design and report.  
 Usually cars are parked on Long Gully Rd.  
 Need to set up an appropriate access point and carpark and provide a trailhead.  
 Little lay off road with a few car parks.

**Signage**

Signage at the bottom and top, stop look listen signs at trail junctions.

**Events**

Would like to hold about 4 club races per year.

**Website**

Set up a central website like the Majura Trail Alliance one with links to all the trail maps.  
 Having a combined site with links to different riding spots and maps in the ACT would be great for visitors.

**Sri Chinmoy**

**Events**

The Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team conducts two annual events which include Isaacs Pines: an ultra-endurance running event, the Sri Chinmoy Canberra Trail Ultra (currently 102km) in late September; and a mountain bike leg of the Sri Chinmoy Triple-Triathlon in November.

**Support for Trails**

Are in support of formalising downhill MTB trails at Isaacs Ridge

**Consultation**

Consultation approach is excellent - including all users in broad, consultative discussion. Cooperation and mutual respect amongst all users will ensure the ongoing harmonious use of this significant and invaluable asset for all Canberraans.

**ACT Orienteering**

**Events**

Regularly hold events in the area, use the whole area once a year, but other parts at different times, approximately 3 per year.

Theme	Comment
Access and Parking	<p>Have a planned event for Easter 2016, on 26 March 2016. This will be a World ranking event with people from overseas attending with possibly 800 participants.</p> <p>Once the course maps for the event have been prepared it is important that no changes are made on the ground.</p> <p>Think about the access point and parking on Long Gully road there may be some safety issues.</p>
Works Planning	<p>Best option would be to keep the course for the Easter event away from the area where the potential trails will be built. Area of uncertainty don't want to risk it. Don't want to jeopardise the orienteering event.</p> <p>Would like to receive a Draft Plan that they could comment on in order to plan for their event at Easter.</p> <p>Any works in the area will need to be programmed around the event in negotiation with Orienteering ACT.</p>
Trail design	<p>Would prefer that trails keep away from more complex areas of rock, and for orienteering purposes would prefer no new trails, but they understand that areas change and sometimes this is for the positive.</p>
Type of trails	<p>XC style trail could be good for junior orienteering, a multi-use trail would also be good for runners.</p>
<b>Parks and Conservation Service - Ranger/Land Manager</b>	
Safety	<p>Need to ensure safety for all users of the reserve.</p> <p>Manage trail entry and intersections with management trails carefully. Don't want mountain bikers at high speed crossing the management trails, as there could be trucks using these.</p> <p>Could consider removing some of the management trails if no longer required for forestry.</p>
Erosion	<p>Ensure trails are located to minimise erosion, not directly along fall lines.</p>
Location of trails	<p>Concern that people may increase passage through the reserved lands.</p> <p>Need to assess native woodland areas before trails are constructed to avoid any sensitive areas, particularly the area at the top of the pines.</p> <p>Carefully consider location of any trails outside the pines area, with respect to sensitive vegetation.</p>
Parking	<p>Provision of parking and concerns with respect to the access and parking area at Long Gully Road needs to be considered.</p>
<b>Parks and Conservation Service - Forestry</b>	
Future of Forestry	<p>There is only a small area in south with potential for logging in approximately 10 years time. However, this area is not really economically viable to log as it is so small (approx. \$20,000 net worth as timber). The terrain at Isaacs is also difficult for forestry.</p> <p>Potential for forestry to hand over responsibilities at Isaacs ridge to Rangers to manage, they will follow this up with colleagues at PCS.</p>
Succession Planning	<p>Leave some as "pine forest" so that recreational activities can take place in the pines without the nature reserve taking over. Recognising the value that the community places on the mature pine forest environment.</p>

Theme	Comment
Vegetation Management	<p>One option for the future would be Special purpose reserve for forestry or park, but managed for recreation, rather than an addition to the nature reserve.</p> <p>Consider a proper vegetation management plan, succession planning for the site, keep some for pines, some natives, etc. as part of this project.</p> <p>Thinning work and pruning work needs to be done to manage pines with respect to safety. These works could be undertaken as part of bushfire management operations.</p> <p>This could be arranged to be undertaken prior to any new trail construction/upgrade.</p> <p>Ongoing dialogue is going to be necessary to further consider appropriate management of the land and the vegetation.</p>
<b>ACT Equestrian Association</b>	
General Issues	<p>Equestrian community is disappointed by the way this project was proposed as an 'upgrade' to the mountain bike tracks at Isaacs, and by implication, downhill bike riders have already been given priority over other users of the Ridge (prior to any consultation).</p> <p>In general the equestrian community feels it has lost access to many areas of public pine forest, and is forced to share dwindling open space with all other recreational users and feel they are being designed out of another important riding destination at Isaacs.</p> <p>The Equestrian Association is concerned about the reserve by reserve process that is being undertaken with respect to reserves and recreational spaces. Horse riders cannot transfer their activities easily by car so displacement to another area has significant implications.</p> <p>Equestrians do not believe that the needs of all the present recreational users of Isaacs Ridge will be met in a balanced fashion if the existing downhill track are 'upgraded'.</p> <p>The Isaacs Pines area is too small and has too few usable fire trails to cope with incompatible recreational uses.</p> <p>They suggest that managing the downhill tracks does not require the attraction of massively increased numbers of cyclists.</p> <p>Managing the downhill tracks does not require them to be 'upgraded' simply formalised and contained off the fire trails.</p>
Access to Isaacs Ridge for equestrians	<p>Isaacs Ridge is the main destination for riders agisting their horses at Rose Cottage, Hume, Gilmore and Macarthur horses paddocks to the south, via the underpass on Long Gully Road, and the private agistment properties on the western side of the Ridge via dedicated horse trails in the Nature Reserve. There are no other legal access routes.</p>
Safety	<p>At its southern end, the equestrian trail is crossed by several downhill tracks, concerns that it is dangerous when downhill riders use these tracks. Unsafe for riders to enter the Reserve but it is also impossible to divert to the alternative horse trail that travels west through Farrer Ridge.</p> <p>Concerns that upgrades of trails will mean the Ridge will attract more experienced cyclists, more frequently than presently happens. All this will make it dangerous for equestrians to even try to enter the pine forest.</p>
Types of trails	<p>Downhill mountain bike trails are not suitable for the limited area immediately adjacent to a suburb.</p>