

Theme

Comment

Location of trails

Horse riders can currently only bypass the downhill tracks by heading for the top of the Ridge. However the fire trails are too steep for horses, and cyclists coming down them have little control over their bikes on the rocky slippery surface. Riders take their horses to the top of the ridge underneath the neighbouring power line which enables them to zig-zag their way up on grass. This route is outside the pines. For safety reasons horse riders need an alternative route home - not one that runs the gamut of downhill tracks and speeding cyclists.

The many users of the Isaacs Pines can share the space with some compromise if the downhill track is maintained as a low entry-level recreational facility which is kept off the management trails.

ACTEA would like to see downhill tracks moved further north along the face of the Ridge where there is more room to fit longer tracks on the same contour lines while avoiding the equestrian trail.

Do not want to be moved from existing trails that they can currently use.

At present safe loops for equestrians in the pines are limited and will be more so if there is increased mountain bike presence.

Woden Valley Community Council

Information regarding the project was provided to the WVCC meeting on 5th August 2015, people were invited to complete the on-line consultation survey.

Parks and Conservation Service - Park Care Support

Location of trails

If the extent of the trails go beyond the pines and into the reserve area there could be conflicts with environmental outcomes (ParkCare).

Access to the pines may see increased passage through the reserved lands - users may form new trails in the reserves to get to the pines. This has occurred on Mt Majura as a result of the Majura Pines Upgrade.

Type of trails

Majura Pines have a jumps section. I would not support this happening again in other areas for the following reasons: it requires specialty skills and understandings to build and maintain; it is not sustainable due to its reliance on individuals with this knowledge; the maintenance level is high; it has a limited user group; potentially has the highest risk of injuries and use by non-experienced riders; has the highest probability of being not maintained to the correct standard, hence increasing the risks.

Land management

The pines have a lot of weeds such as serrated tussock in them. With increased users moving through the pines and reserve there could be a transfer of weeds into the reserve.

Establishing a trail management/maintenance group

PCS does not have the resources to patrol/assess or maintain trail/networks. If there is not a committed volunteer group dedicated to the network maintenance, the project will fail. From the onset of public consultation, expressions of interest should be sought for a volunteer trail maintenance group. Establish a few key people to consult with through the design process and beyond.

Depending on budgets the group can or may have to build a non-technical section of the trail. It assist with a sense of ownership and establishes the bonding of the group. Design is key to sustainability. Signage is key for user compliance and respect of a formal network (deters informal trail building)

Theme

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Initial set up for volunteer group cost about \$2000 for tools, etc. This need to be accounted for in the budget.

The group needs to be separate from the Park Care group but could do joint works with his group if the opportunity arises. This group has a recreation focus. The group's primary priority is trail maintenance/management; secondary priority is weeds and land management.

The group should have overt recreational user branding. Similar to the Majura Pines group, called Majura Pines Trails Alliance.

Ensuring long term on-going maintenance of trails

To ensure long term ongoing maintenance of trails a couple of strong leaders are required who can share the load; preferably with good networking skills and a strong association/involvement with CORC/Pedal Power. With all the trail networks coming on board the groups need to have some sort of unity and cooperative strategies. It would be ideal to have a group that floats around all networks and assists at work parties.

PCS would need to close the network if it became a safety issue.

PCS do not have the resources to maintain the trails directly.

The group that forms may be members of CORC but CORC as an entity would not be acknowledged as being the group. The group forms independently from CORC under our volunteer policy and are part of our volunteer system. They are registered PCS volunteer members who are part of a specific group(s). For instance an individual PCS volunteer could be part of several groups such as Isaacs Pines, Bruce Ridge, Majura Pines, etc.

CORC as such would not have ownership over the land or trail network.

CrownCastle - Telecommunications Infrastructure Managers

Need to maintain access to the telecommunications towers during any upgrade works.

Rural Leaseholders

Contact with the main rural leaseholder indicated they had no concerns with the project.

Parks and Conservation - Offsets Manager

No recreation activities should be undertaken in the offsets area. Have had issues with horses there in the past.



Plate 5: Steep section of fire road which horse riders find difficult.

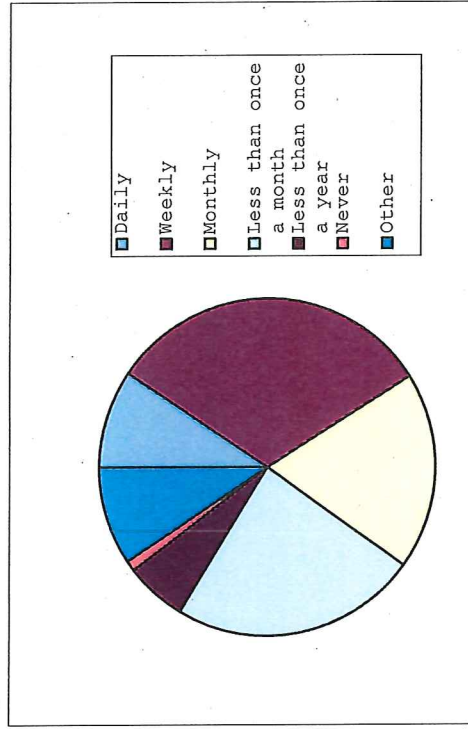
Community Responses

4.1 On-line Survey Responses

292 people responded to the on-line survey. In addition 9 people completed the survey in hard copy at the consultation session and 6 surveys were completed in hard copy at ACT libraries. Surveys completed in hard copy were manually inserted into the electronic data base. The sections below provide a summary of the responses to each of the questions.

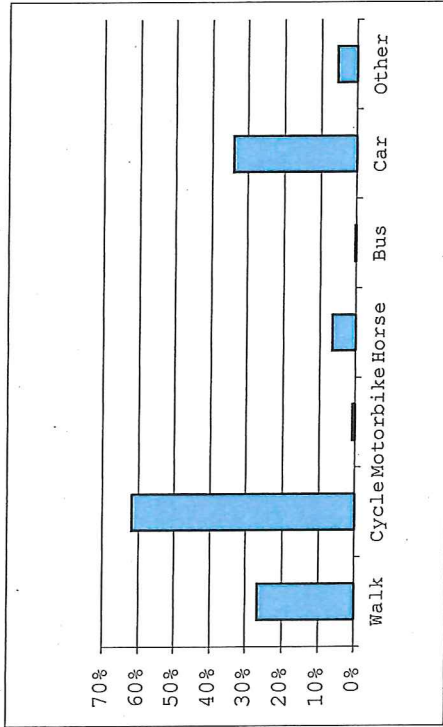
Word clouds have been used to assist in visualising the responses to some of the free text questions. In the word cloud, the larger the word, the more often it appeared in the text.

Question 1 - On average, how often do you visit Isaacs Ridge pines?



32% of people visit weekly and 24% visit less than once a month. In the 'other' section a number of people indicated they would go there more regularly if there were better trails. Given the patterns of use indicated below, this suggests that the pines are being used frequently by repeat visitors.

Question 2 - What travel method do you use to get to Isaacs Ridge pines?

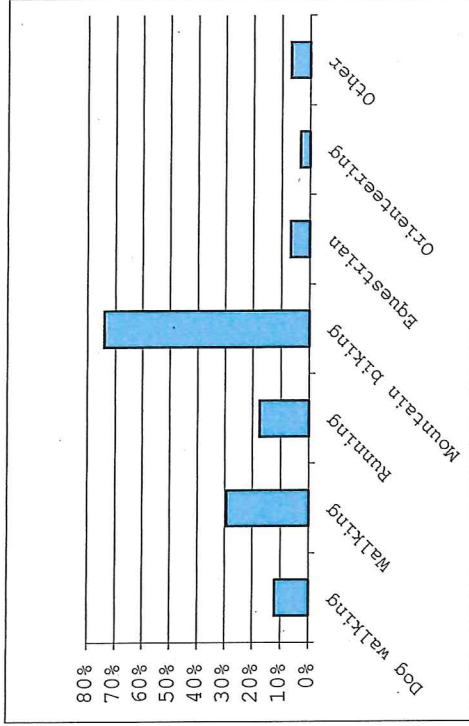


In this question people were asked to tick all that apply, so there were 416 different responses. 62% of respondents indicated they travel by bicycle, 34% by car, 27% walk, 6.5% by horse. In the 'other' category responses were mainly people running.

This suggests that the majority of people who completed the survey (those walking and cycling) are from the local area.

It is important to note that the survey was voluntary and participants were self-selected. While the opportunity to complete the survey was given to everyone in Canberra, particular interest groups may influence the results though greater participation in the survey.

Question 3 - How do you currently use Isaacs Ridge pines?



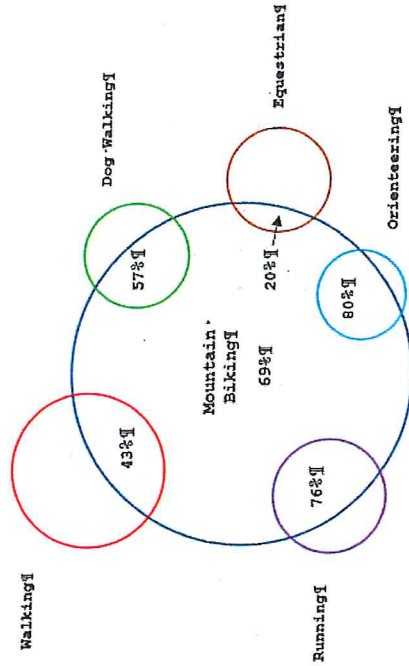
In this question people were also asked to tick all categories that applied, so there were 460 responses. 74% use the area for mountain biking, 29% for walking, 18% for running.

The responses to this question indicate that the majority of people who completed the survey use the area for mountain biking (227 respondents), well above any of the other categories.

Responses in the 'other' category included:

- Environment and conservation;
- General bike riding (as opposed to "Mountain biking";
- Picnicking;
- Exploring; and
- Commuting.

Many users are multi-disciplinary, and mountain biking appears to be a very popular activity for many people, including by those who undertake other activities in the area. The figure below (not to scale) indicates the percentage of people who use the area for other activities, but also use the area for mountain biking (mountain biking, being the focus of this project).



The figure shows that 69% of people who use the area for mountain biking, use it for mountain biking solely. The equestrian users had the lowest percentage of mountain bike use, at 20%; but 80% of people who orienteer, and 76% percent of runners, also mountain bike at Isaacs Ridge.

Additionally, some of the users may also use the area for more than two activities, they might walk the dog, run and mountain bike, for example.

Question 4 - What changes would you like to see to the trail network at Isaacs Ridge pines?

This was a free text question which asked about the changes people would like to see to the trail network at Isaacs Pines.

Key themes were:

- Creation of Formalised, well maintained Mountain bike trails of different types (XC, downhill, gravity endure) for a variety of levels. Keep challenging natural, rocky features.
- More flow style like Majura/Stromlo.
- Providing signage and maps with loops/level of difficulty for mountain bike trails
- On-line maps.
- Dedicated walking trails and horse trails, separate trails for different users.
- Signage; dogs on-leash signage, trail/usage protocols to ensure respectful use of the area, signage at trail intersections.
- More regular grading and maintenance of fire trails for all users.
- Provide linkages to Centenary trail.
- Permanent orienteering course.
- Erosion control/drainage.
- Access to red hill/Garran via pedestrian/cycle bridge over Hindmarsh.
- Places to sit.
- Parking.
- Drinking water tap.
- No change - leave it as it is.

The majority of responses to this section were with respect to developing purpose built mountain bike trails (of a variety of types and skill levels) and associated signage.

As we saw from the response to question 3, the majority of those surveyed use Isaacs Ridge pines for mountain biking, and therefore there was a large amount of support for the creation of formal downhill mountain bike trails.

However, more detailed assessment of the data, when broken down by user group (ie. walking, dog walking, running etc.) showed that within other user groups, people were also in support of mountain biking. The group with the least support was the equestrian users, 38% of whom answered no to this question, and 19% were unsure, although 43% of equestrian users were also in support.

Walkers, dog walkers and people orienteering showed relatively strong support for the upgrade of mountain bike trails with only 25%, 27% and 30% respectively responding no to this question.

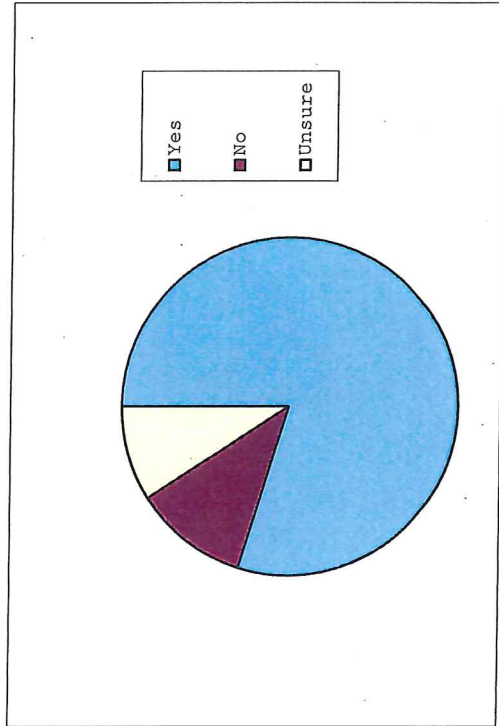
Overall, only 11% of people said no and 9% were unsure, if people responded with no to this question they were asked why, and the key responses here were:

- Also want XC or other types of trails not just downhill.
- It will disrupt the peace/natural environment/impact wildlife.
- Impact the ability of horse riders to safely access and use equestrian trails.
- Issues with respect to trail conduct/people experiencing rude mountain bikers.
- Safety issues.
- Noise.
- Erosion.
- Consider that there are already enough formal trails for mountain biking at other locations.

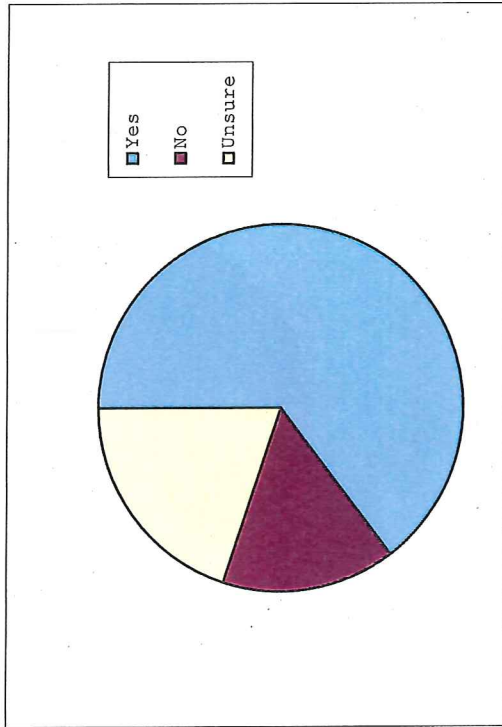


Figure 4: Word Cloud for responses to question 4.

Question 5 - Do you support the creation of formal downhill mountain bike trails at Isaacs Ridge pines?



Question 6 - Would you like to see organised events at Isaacs Ridge Pines?

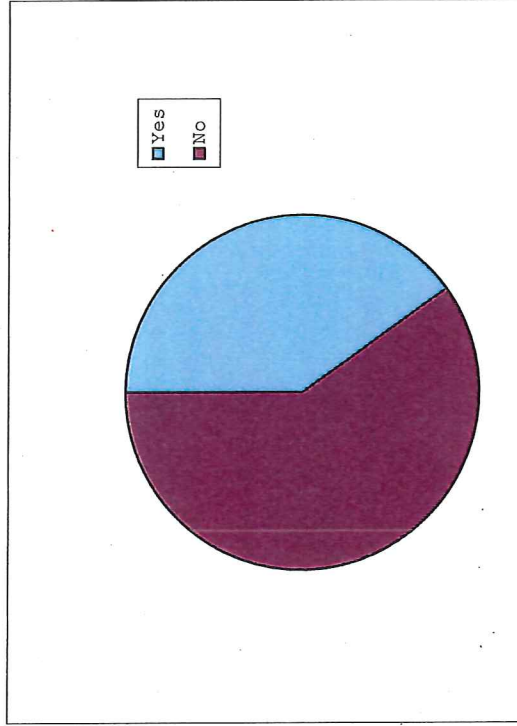


In response to the question about organised events, the majority said yes, the type of events mentioned included:

- Mountain biking (all styles - XC, gravity, downhill, enduro)
- Orienteering
- Walking
- Running
- Learn to ride
- Women's events
- Club Races
- Training
- Social/family/dog walks
- Trail building days
- Dog sleds;
- Equestrian endurance events

The majority of responses related to mountain biking events.

Question 7 - Would you be interested in volunteering to help manage and maintain the recreational facilities within Isaacs Ridge pines?



People were asked to register if they were interested in volunteering to help manage and maintain the recreational facilities within Isaacs Ridge Pines, 40% of respondents (118 people) said yes. If interested, people provided their email addresses or contact details in order to be involved in the development of trail alignments, trail construction and maintenance.

While there is a big difference between saying yes to this question in the survey and actually participating in a volunteer group, the number of positive responses suggests that there is enough interest to establish a group.

Please provide your email address if you would like to be updated on the Isaacs Ridge trail network upgrade

204 people provided their email addresses in response to this question.

4.2 Consultation Session

The consultation session provided the opportunity for the consultants and the ACT Government to engage with the community directly regarding the project. Twenty-five people attended this session which included attendees from the following groups:

- Isaacs residents;
- Farrer residents;
- ACTEA;
- CORC;
- IRMMM Park Care;

- Pedal Power.

Nine hard copy surveys were filled out at the session, and many of the attendees indicated that they had already completed the on-line survey.

Many mountain bikers attended this session indicating their support for the project, not only for downhill mountain bike trails, but also for cross country trails/loops and technical uphill trails.

A discussion between some of the attendees provided a good opportunity for different members of the community to understand the needs of different recreational users, for example the downhill mountain biking community indicated that they would be amenable to removing large jumps over the fire roads, which are a safety issue.

5

Summary and Recommendations

5.1 Outcomes and Summary

The consultation process reached a broad audience, and was able to engage with the key stakeholders and a large number of community members. The consultation process in particular reached, and received responses from a proportionately large number of the mountain biking community. This was evidenced in the large number of respondents who used the area for mountain biking and were keen to support the upgrade of mountain biking trails, maintenance of trails and to see events

A summary of the outcomes of the consultation process is detailed in the sections below.

General

There is general support for mountain biking, provided there is consideration of the varied users and the amenity of the area, being proximate to residents and popular for walking/ dog walking etc. and provided the area does not become a big mountain bike park similar to Majura or Stromlo.

People enjoy the amenity the area provides, and in particular the mature pine trees, which provide shade and shelter. The community want the pine trees to stay.

The Forestry representatives at PCS may be willing to relinquish their activities at Isaacs as it is only a small area that could be potentially harvested and it is not really economically viable. This would allow the pine trees to be managed for amenity rather than harvest value.

Maintenance and protection of native vegetation within the Nature reserve needs to be ensured.

Location of Trails

The preference would generally be to keep mountain bike trails within the pines area.

Park Care has indicated support for the possibility of link trails in other areas. This would be subject to detailed analysis of any proposed link but was generally discussed in the context of a link between the two main pine areas.

The preferred location for downhill trails is generally in the area where they have been in the past. This area provides for the best slopes and most options for construction. It also focusses the majority of this activity within the pine forest.

The preference would be to keep a buffer between residences and the mountain biking trails.

Type of Trails

With respect to downhill trails, the mountain biking community are keen to have some natural, technical, rough and rocky trails, that are of a hand built nature, with some difficult features (drop offs etc.)

They do not want machine built flow type trails for the downhill trails, like what have been built at Majura. This is likely to make the trails appeal to a narrower band of users, which would be appropriate given the general desire to avoid turning Isaacs into a mountain bike specific location.

User interactions

Intersections between downhill trails and maintenance roads need to be carefully managed to minimise conflicts between users.

There remain concerns about the interaction with bikes and horses. A risk management approach may be required to address this.

There is a big orienteering event booked for next Easter. The project will need to work closely with the event timeframes to avoid disruption to their mapping and course setting.

Developing appropriate signage for the area would be a key aspect of this project as it will help to manage the expectations of the users and to educate them on appropriate use of the area. This would include:

- User protocols, warning signs at intersections;
- Trail signage for all types of trails; and
- Trail maps on the ground and on-line.

Trail Maintenance Group

A large number of people (118) responded yes to the question in the survey about whether they'd be willing to help with trail maintenance. This indicates a good base from which a Trail Management Group could be formed. The survey process has provided contact details for these people.

5.2 Recommendations

Based upon the feedback from the community, we make the following recommendations to inform the development of the Isaacs Ridge trails masterplan:

There is wide support for the ongoing use of Isaacs pines for a variety of recreational activities including informal use and organised events. The trails masterplan needs to acknowledge all of these forms of recreation and seek to avoid conflicts wherever possible.

Specifically, the master plan needs to acknowledge walkers, runners, equestrians and people on bikes.

From the outset, the project was described as a 'mountain bike trails upgrade' there is sufficient support among the community to pursue the upgrade of downhill trails to a level that allows them to be sanctioned for events. There is also sufficient support for the construction of a limited amount of cross country style trail, but not a full mountain bike park. The master plan should reflect this.

There is no clear plan for the pine forest area. It is currently being managed as a productive forest but it is of marginal value for harvest. The community enjoys the amenity it provides and a change in the forest management to focus on amenity should be formalised.

The ongoing management of the pine trees by Forestry within PCS should be considered. If the trees are taken out of production then the apparent role of Forestry will be diminished, however management of the estate by Forestry makes a clear distinction between the areas that are available for higher intensity recreation and those being managed for conservation outcomes.

Irrespective of the management responsibilities, a vegetation management plan and succession planning for the site should be undertaken. Some of the highest amenity pine areas will reach the end of their safe lifespan over the next 20 years. Replacement planting needs to be considered relatively soon to retain this amenity.

Consider removing the jumps over the management trails as one of the first pieces of work. This would remove the focal point for many of the safety concerns. As an alternative, they could be fenced off only for use during races or special events. CORC have indicated that significant trail features could be constructed within the pine forest, so there is no specific need for them to be at the management trails.

Consider pruning and thinning work in the pines prior to any trail construction works to avoid subsequent disturbance of the trails.

The most significant risk of user conflict will occur where downhill mountain bike trails cross the management trails. To reduce the risk of conflict it is suggested that up to four crossing points are agreed and that in those locations the trails are carefully designed and constructed to ensure a slow approach speed (using tight corners or technical trail features) and generous site lines.

Once the crossing points are agreed, the trail maintenance group could be given relatively generous licence to construct trail within the pine forest areas, subject to sustainable trail design codes etc.

CORC have expressed a desire to review trail alignments and the trail management report prior to finalisation. It is recommended that all stakeholders be given this review opportunity.

Planning for equestrian uses on a broader scale should be undertaken to ensure the equestrian community's needs are met with respect to adequate trail loops. Ongoing liaison with the equestrian community will be needed to review the proposed master plan and the proposed arrangement for trail crossing points.

The Equestrian community would like routes made available so that riders from agistment areas either to the north or south of Isaacs Ridge can undertake a loop during a ride. This might mean continuity of the equestrian trail around the private agistment property in the north east part of the reserve, and providing a loop route in the southern part of the reserve.

None of the stakeholders identified any significant needs for infrastructure to support the hosting of events. The primary area for improvement is the need for car parking and ensuring car parking entry onto Long Gully road is safe as this is an 80km/hour zone. This access point should be reviewed by Roads ACT or a consultant engineer.

Liaise with and provide proposed trail routes to ACT orienteering so they can plan for their event at Easter 2016.

Numerous individuals and CORC are keen to be involved in trail construction and maintenance works. There is an opportunity to run a trail building workshop as part of these works as an opportunity to teach people how to build safe, sustainable trails and choose suitable alignments. This may also help in minimising unauthorised trail building.

