



Bushwalking WA (Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc)

COMMENTS ON
DRAFT COLLIE RIVER VALLEY TRAILS STRATEGY 2018 –2021
28 June 2018

OUR INTEREST IN THE STRATEGY

As the peak body for bushwalking in the State, Bushwalking WA ('BWA') is pleased to provide input to this Strategy. BWA is a voluntary, independent association with limited resources, but is committed to helping achieve a vision of Better bushwalking for Western Australia. We have a mission of fostering and promoting bushwalking in the State, not just for our eleven Member Clubs but equally importantly for the broader outdoors community. BWA collectively represents an estimated 65,000 Western Australians who go hiking / bushwalking. We are actively participating as a key stakeholder in the current statewide bushwalking and trail running trails strategy development. A number of our Member Clubs are regular visitors to Wellington National Park for bushwalking and camping activities.

We have reviewed the draft as comprehensively as possible within the constraints of not having been an invited participant in the prior development of the strategy and having only received the draft Strategy for review less than one week ago on 22 June.

Bushwalker representation in the strategy development

BWA's recent [Bushwalking/Hiking Trails Strategy Development Discussion Paper](#), April 2018) in relation to the current statewide strategy development is acknowledged and quoted in part on p.57 of the draft.

We note however that the Collie strategy development to date has lacked the involvement of any direct and independent expert bushwalking stakeholders, including BWA. The Shire of Collie Trails Planning Reference Group ('TPRG'; ref p. 18) has included some representation from clubs within the Collie community, but none with specific bushwalking expertise.

BWA is the only truly independent and dedicated advocate for bushwalking and bushwalking trails in the State, but is omitted from the 'Collaborate – Partners' list on page 19 of and from the list of Activity-based Trail Advocates (also p.19). We request that these omissions be amended in the Strategy.

More information on BWA, including our current [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#), can be obtained via our website.

BWA ENDORSES THE STRATEGY VISION.

We support the Strategy's integrated, holistic approach to trails planning and development in the Collie Valley, including within Wellington National Park which has long been the focal point for bushwalkers in the region, aside from through walkers on the Bibbulmun Track.

A strategy that considers in parallel the needs of a full spectrum of trail users and trail types, rather than adopting a 'first-in-best-dressed' or 'winner-takes-all' approach, at the expense of other potential trails users, promises the best outcome for all trails users and the community.

Variety of trail types

We are pleased that an important strategic consideration for bushwalking is captured in the guiding principles in developing the strategy i.e. to "Provide a variety of trails types, levels, accessibility and experiences" (page 12, item 6). Section 5 (Walking Trails, p. 58) similarly also states that "A wide variety of trail lengths and diverse natural environment and features should be provided to cater for these preferences." Much of the prior focus in the State has been on:

- i) development and promotion of numerous 'entry-level' walks at the least challenging end of the opportunities spectrum; and,
 - ii) on just the two major iconic through walks of the Bibbulmun Track and Cape to Cape Track,
- giving experienced bushwalkers little encouragement to try other types of bushwalking challenges.

WALK TRAILS OPPORTUNITIES (refer p.57., Section 5)

We understand that a recent major online survey conducted for the current statewide bushwalking and trail running strategy development has shown from a sample of ~1400 Western Australian bushwalkers that around 70% prefer loop/circuit walks ahead of through walks or there-and-back walks. As noted on p. 57 (under Section 5, Walking Trails), quoting Bushwalking WA, the State has a dearth of easily accessible, developed circuit trails of good length to satisfy the many experienced bushwalkers who are seeking neither a longer through-walk nor a very short walk. The Walking Trail Audit (draft Section 5.4, p.59) reveals a lack of existing circuit day walks of at least 15km distance.

Proposed Wellington Dam Walk (& return) Trail/s (p.66)

The State Government's commitment (refer p.30) to a new minimum 4 day circuit walk trail from Collie around the Wellington Dam is encouraging. This type of trail development will be welcomed by bushwalkers provided the selected route offers a quality experience over most of its distance.

Additional bushwalking trail opportunity

Aside from the proposed multi- day Wellington Dam Walk Trail, good opportunity also exists to develop at least one more challenging walk within

Wellington NP on the south side of the Collie River and east of the existing MTB trails network. Such a walk could incorporate not only a short section of the existing Bibbulmun-Wellington Spur Trail (and Arcadia Campsite), but could also overlap with a short section of the proposed Wellington Dam Trail and connect to the strategy's recommended Wellington Dam Trail Centre. This would be consistent with Project #8 (p 143), contributing to the walking trails network, and also providing a different walking experience.

WELLINGTON NATIONAL PARK VALUES

We recommend that reference to the "Wellington National Park, Westralia Conservation Park and Wellington Discovery Forest Management Plan" (DEC & CCWA, 2008) be included in the Strategy, perhaps under Section 2, Strategic Context.

Bushwalkers most value national parks for the relatively undisturbed natural experiences they can offer. Intensive and unsympathetic development of trails, along with disturbances from conflicting, or multiple use, of trails would reduce walker satisfaction and destroy the key reason why bushwalkers visit Wellington National Park.

The strategy appears to understate the risk of over-development. It is important that:

- i. the strategy acknowledges that the vision and values for the National Park expressed in the Park Management Plan of 2008 will be respected, so that a balance will exist between the conservation of the natural values and recreation demands; and that
- ii. further substantial areas of the national park will not be heavily impacted by intrusive trails development, nor set aside for the near-exclusive use of one particular recreation sector with disregard for current or possible future interests of other recreation sectors and passive enjoyment of the Park by the community.

Intensive mountain bike trail development within the National Park as envisaged in the South West Mountain Bike Master Plan (p. 81-83) conflicts with the Park values. Such development has already occurred in the Mount Lennard area south of Collie River where 8-10 sq km of the Park has been developed for exclusive-use mountain bike riding (Fig.4, p.90), evidently without consideration of documented former attractive bushwalking opportunities that already existed within that same area. Figure 49 (p.97) indicates a significant expansion of mountain bike trails is contemplated in the Strategy; This will further narrow the opportunities for future quality walk experiences.

Effectively segregating off large areas of the National Park for intensive trails development and the exclusive-use of individual recreation sectors is not consistent with the Park vision. Such intensive activities should be located in State Forests, 'fun parks' and other land use areas, not in a National Park.

MEETING BUSHWALKING USER EXPECTATIONS

The Target Market (p. 134-136)

BWA agrees that “experienced bushwalkers” should be among the target markets and that their preferences are for “immersive experiences, often remote and/or challenging”, which includes “interesting and challenging trails, including short and long multi-day walks”. We also agree that experienced walkers are more likely than others to be prepared to travel to the region for trails experiences, provided the quality of the experiences meets their expectations.

Trails development

Trails development process - The Strategy (p.130) indicates that principles of the trail development process outlined in the Western Australian Mountain Bike Management Guidelines will be used to ensure the sustainable development of all trails within the Collie River Valley region. Given the intensive planning and construction and high costs involved in the development of mountain bike trails, BWA urges caution in applying a relatively inflexible model derived from experience with one trail type to all other trail applications. This particularly applies in achieving the types of minimally developed trails that are most preferred by a large proportion of the targeted ‘experienced bushwalker’ audience.

Unintended risks of trails development if the economic benefits become a key driver - On p.35 the economic benefits that can flow from trails development are noted. Over-emphasis or dependence on the economic benefits that flow from activities such as trail design and construction are a potential incentive toward excessive trails development which would have a perversely negative rather than positive impact on the environment.

Minimally developed trails - Not all bushwalking trails require intensive development and ongoing maintenance to remain sustainable. The less intrusively developed trails have special appeal to many bushwalkers, providing the more immersive experience they seek in less disturbed environments. Minimally developed, low cost, marked routes can provide the best, fit-for-purpose trail to meet bushwalking user expectations while also being environmentally sustainable.

In W.A there has been little recognition or consideration to date of the potential for such walk routes. Routes of this type already exist in Walyunga and Avon Valley National Parks near Perth (the Survey Heritage Trail routes) but information and maps are not readily available publicly, and so they are little known and consequently little used. Such minimally developed walking routes have sustainability advantages over the more developed trails that are too often overlooked or ignored. (For details see BWA [Bushwalking/Hiking Trails Strategy Development Discussion Paper](#), April 2018, p.1-12.)

Authentic bushwalking experiences

Bushwalkers seek authentic experiences. WA has numerous examples of sanctioned bushwalking trails that do not meet user expectations in terms of quality of experience. While good promotion via photos of 'iconic locations' (p. 137) is one aspect of marketing of trails and attracting users, it is at least equally important that users' actual trail experiences match the marketing 'hype'. Meeting user expectations must be a priority.

Good trail signage such as envisaged for the short Wellington Dam Wall Loop Trail (p. 67), and providing interesting cultural and historical information will enrich walk experiences. On the other hand, the current tourism trend toward 'enhancing' natural settings with sculptures or other tourist-oriented distractions or 'baits' would reduce rather than enrich the desired experience of being in undisturbed nature.

Support for conservation and protection in ensuring the sustainability of trails

On p.33, one of the community benefits of trails is recognised (from the WA Strategic Trails Blueprint) to be an "Improved awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and support for its conservation and protection". In the Collie River Valley context, the role of local and State Clubs in promoting the sustainable use of trails is noted as relevant. Added to the examples given (4WD Club etc) could be the contributions of peak bodies such as BWA and member clubs, through their policies, codes and best practices, in educating and encouraging environmentally responsible behaviours, including [Minimum impact / Leave No Trace principles](#). (Also relevant to p.131, Leave No Trace).

Trails management: Monitoring of trail condition

The trails management model (p. 131) makes no reference to the possibility of using inexpensive, ongoing monitoring of trails to identify possible deterioration in the condition of trails. Such deterioration is noted on p. 133 as one factor that could result in decline in users of a trail. One community-based approach to trails monitoring that could be considered in the trails management is the [Fluker Post Research Project](#) operated through Victoria University, Victoria. This provides a direct and inexpensive way of monitoring trail condition rather than relying solely on trail counters to identify decline in users which may or may not reflect trail deterioration (as suggested in section 11.3, p.133).

Information Distribution (p.139)

Apart from local newspapers & industry magazines (p.140) voluntary peak bodies such as Bushwalking WA and other such relevant organisations should not be overlooked as avenues for disseminating information more directly to trail user members via their own eNews, Facebook sites, websites etc. Such orgs can ensure the information has more certainty of reaching those organisations' own members rather than more indirectly via agencies such as Sport & Rec and Parks & Wildlife.

We understand that a recent major online survey conducted for the current statewide bushwalking and trail running strategy development has shown (from a sample of ~1400 Western Australian walkers) that: Less than 5% obtain their walking trails information from the 'official' Trails WA site; ~25% obtain their information from other online sources (including social media) and traditional media; the remaining ~70% is obtained from 'other sources', including by word of mouth.

An independent community-based Collie Walking Club

Appendix 1 includes a project ('WT01') to support the development of an independent community-based Collie Walking Club to represent the interests of 'walkers' and runners, organise events and form a local community network. This would perhaps be more of an 'alliance' or broad association of various recreational interests having some common objectives, but also their own particular sector priorities, rather than being a conventional club with a typically clearer, narrower focus. BWA recommends that prior to developing such a new body, the proponents discuss with the respective state peak bodies for each activity the specific services each provides to their members. This should identify areas of overlap and differences between sectors which could assist in establishing the most practical way forward for 'walkers' and runners within the Collie community.
