

HikeWest Strategic Plan 2023–26



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Introduction

This Strategic Plan underscores HikeWest’s commitment to seeing more people hiking in Western Australia more often. It sets out the context, challenges and opportunities facing HikeWest over the next 3–5 years, and outlines a roadmap that will enable HikeWest to achieve its mission of encouraging and supporting more people to pursue health and happiness by hiking in nature.

The strategies outlined in this plan have been developed with the objectives of the WA Hiking Strategy 2020–30 in mind, and recognises that although hiking is a popular activity and we have many great trails in Western Australia, there is also much more we can do to increase hiking participation.

By prioritising participation, access to trails, advocacy, and organisational sustainability, HikeWest aims to foster a thriving hiking community that values the natural environment and enjoys safe and responsible bushwalking.



Our vision, mission and values

Our vision To see more people hiking in Western Australia more often.

Our mission To encourage and support more people to pursue health and happiness by hiking in nature.



Our values

We are open, ethical, professional and accountable in all that we do.

We are inclusive and respectful of diversity.

We respect and love our natural bushwalking environment.

We are committed to the organisation and take pride in it.

We actively embrace change.

About HikeWest

HikeWest is a not-for-profit association committed to encouraging the community to participate in safe and responsible bushwalking and to providing services to bushwalking groups, independent hikers and the wider community.

We actively work for the conservation and effective management of the natural environment that the hiking community enjoys. We also work to assist with the development and maintenance of walking tracks and trails where possible, to enhance their accessibility and value to all.

Since 2021, HikeWest has delivered the popular WA Hiking Expo which promotes hiking participation by bringing together hiking and outdoor enthusiasts and introducing members of the wider community to hiking opportunities.

In 2023, the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) recognised HikeWest as a State Active Recreation Organisation (SARO) and the pre-eminent representative organisation for hiking in Western Australia.

As a SARO, HikeWest now has access to funding support under the Industry Investment Program. The funding which we anticipate receiving during the initial three-year funding cycle will be critical for HikeWest to successfully pursue the strategies and initiatives outlined in this strategic plan. The funding commenced in the 2022–23 financial year.

Our constituents

HikeWest advocates in the interests of anyone who bushwalks, hikes or walks in nature in Western Australia.

Hiking vs bushwalking

In this strategic plan, the terms ‘hiking’ and ‘bushwalking’ are used interchangeably; are considered synonymous with ‘walking in nature’; and are distinct from trail running.

Context

Popularity of bushwalking: Bushwalking is one of the most popular recreational activities in Australia and has been steadily increasing in popularity, rising from 1.165 million participants nationwide (5.7% of the population) in 2018 to 2.14 million (9.9% of the population) in 2022 (reference). This represents an increase of almost one million participants, or 84 per cent growth, over five years. This is the largest increase of any of the top ten recreational activities. In 2022, approximately 155,000 West Australians participated in bushwalking, making it the sixth most popular recreational activity out of 133 possible activities. AusPlay data for 2022 indicates a majority (57%) of hikers are aged between 35–64, followed by 15–34 year olds (32%) and those aged over 65 (11%). In WA, 66 per cent of hikers were women and 34 per cent were men, while nationally, the ratio was 56 per cent women to 44 per cent men.

Health and social benefits: The health benefits of walking are well known, and include reducing the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and stroke, improving sleep, and helping to prevent mental illness. Research has found that spending time in natural environments, such as forests, woodlands and parks, can also have a profound effect on mental and physical health and wellbeing. Given its manifold benefits, walking in nature should be seen as a life-long activity available and accessible to anyone, and across a wide range of fitness levels, considering the needs of the young, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, as well as those individuals seeking more challenging hiking experiences. The significant health and community benefits of hiking are outlined in the *WA Hiking Strategy 2020–30* (pages 25–27) and the publication *More People More Active Outdoors* (DLGSC).

Australia’s ageing population: With Australia’s population ageing over the next forty years, there will be a huge increase in health and social costs “if people don’t get moving” (Sport Australia 2018). According to the *2023 Intergenerational Report*, the population of people aged 65+ will more than double and the population of people aged 85+ will more than triple (Australian Government). Bushwalking is well-suited to keeping an older demographic active, healthy and connected.

Context continued

Hiker preferences: 80% of WA's population lives in Perth ([reference](#)). Surveys conducted by DLGSC in 2018 and HikeWest in 2023 confirmed that walkers in WA have a wide range of hiking preferences and expectations, from easy short walks on well-constructed paths to multi-day walks in remote, wilderness areas. A majority of recreational hikers prefer walks close to home in attractive, undisturbed natural environments, free from excessive development. They also prefer to walk on single-purpose, uncrowded, circuit/loop trails, free from noise, or interference from other recreational users (for example, off-road trail bike activity).

Increasing avenues for participation: A wide variety of opportunities and choices exist today for entry-level participation, including through HikeWest member clubs; Bibbulmun Track Foundation; Meetup and Facebook groups; commercial guided walks; special events (e.g. WA Hiking Expo); schools; scouts; and outdoor recreation organisations.

Increase in online hiking groups: There has been a rapid growth of hiking groups online, such as Meetup and Facebook groups. These groups tend to have less formal structures than traditional clubs, a predominantly younger membership (18–40), one or two 'champions' as organisers, and may be less conscious of risk management and liabilities. Most do not offer benefits like skills mentoring, the development of risk management, or insurances, but the informal participation model appeals to many. Members are also able to access and share much information on hiking opportunities online which was once only accessible via membership of a club.

Value of bushwalking clubs: Clubs have long had an important role of introducing walkers to bushwalking. WA hiking clubs offer many benefits, including: access to a wide spectrum of safe bushwalking experiences at low cost; development of bushwalking skills, self-reliance, first aid and good risk management; training and development of members in leadership through ongoing mentoring and experience; protection of members through liability and personal accident insurances facilitated through their HikeWest membership; sustainable activities through minimum impact/tread lightly practices. Clubs also have strong organisational structures and good risk management and safety awareness practices ([reference](#)).

Challenges

Market fragmentation: Many pathways for entry-level hiking participation now exist, but are spread across the commercial and non-commercial sectors, resulting in market fragmentation and increasing competition for participants and income.

Limited income streams for HikeWest: Presently, HikeWest is largely reliant on government grants and funding. HikeWest's traditional member club base is currently not large enough to contribute substantially to the organisation's financial resources. As more commercial and non-commercial entities enter the hiking sector, there is increasing competition for resources, especially income from grants. There is also the potential for unanticipated shortfall/s in organisational funding support from State Government under existing Industry Investment Program.

Many hikers prefer walking independently or with online groups: HikeWest member clubs have long had an important role in introducing the public to safe and responsible bushwalking but today cater to only a very small percentage of the total hiking community. Club membership is not growing in line with the rapid growth of hiking participation overall.

Lack of trails to meet user needs: There is a widely recognised, urgent demand for more accessible and safe hiking opportunities, particularly half or full-day circuit or loop trails, within easy reach of Perth. Currently only one developed circuit walk of at least 15 kilometres exists within the Perth metro area – Eagle View Trail. Most of the designated walk trails in the parks and state forests of the Darling Range near Perth are short walks, strongly skewed toward entry-level participation, with limited opportunities to stimulate progression and skills development, and to satisfy the expectations of the more experienced trail users. Further, the over-promotion of popular trails via social media can lead to overcrowding and unsustainable use, resulting in disappointing user experiences.

Challenges continued

More hiking areas are required: There is a need for Government strategic planning to recognise the importance of access to expanded hiking opportunities in the forests close to Perth metropolitan area. There are restrictions on recreational activities on land managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) out of concern in particular for the safe conduct of organised activities. Under the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's current Operational Policy 13, entry to Reservoir Protection Zones around drinking water reservoirs is limited, except on designated tracks (reference). Traditional backpacking with overnight stays away from Bibbulmun Track designated campsites is banned anywhere in the water catchments. No new trails are to be developed unless supported by government strategic planning and will only then be considered if there are no suitable alternative trail development opportunities available outside of the catchments.

Barriers to trails development and maintenance: Potential barriers and constraints to new trail development include funding and sustainability, water catchment policy, mining priorities, cultural heritage, SW Native Title Settlement implications, lack of Regional Trails Master Plans, lack of park management plans for many national parks, and a lengthy Trails Development Series process. Once trails have been developed, they need to be well maintained and have suitable supporting infrastructure and accessibility if they are to meet user expectations. The maintenance of existing trails and campsites is an ongoing challenge for DBCA.

Perth's bushwalking areas are shrinking: The forested bushwalking areas close to Perth face several threats, including: expanding bauxite (and other) mining in the Darling Ranges; no new protections proposed for the Northern Jarrah Forest under the draft Forest Management Plan 2023–33 (reference); the push for the development and commercialisation of national parks for tourism; and the lack of park management plans for many national parks.

Opportunities

Develop a Hiking Trails Master Plan for Perth: There is an opportunity to collaborate with DLGSC and DBCA to develop a master plan for the Perth region. This would identify opportunities for a range of hiking trails within close proximity to Perth that meet the needs and preferences of a broad range of bushwalkers, and which would be developed over the next decade.

Develop trails maintenance program: Opportunities exist for the development of a trails maintenance program, powered by volunteers, and developed in collaboration with DBCA. This would support the maintenance of existing hiking trails in the Perth region which are not currently well maintained, as well as maintenance of future new trails.

Strengthened partnerships with gear retailers: With an estimated 155,000 bushwalkers in WA, collaborative partnerships with outdoor gear retailers provide opportunities for training and education in the planning and preparation for safe hiking, for example, introduction to hiking evenings, including gear demonstrations and discounts for participants.

Developing programs to increase hiking participation: Bushwalking is an activity that people from all walks of life, age groups, and fitness levels can participate in; however, barriers may preclude access for some segments of the community. There are opportunities for HikeWest to develop programs aimed at increasing participation for people from a broad cross-section of the community, including First Nations young people, low-socioeconomic groups, recently arrived migrants and refugees, people living with disabilities, and senior citizens. These programs could be developed in partnership with community groups and local governments.

Ongoing advocacy: It is important for HikeWest to continue advocating on behalf of hikers for increased access to fit-for-purpose bushwalking areas and trails. Operational Policy 13 is due for five-yearly review in June 2024, presenting a need for HikeWest to again campaign for increased access for bushwalkers in water catchment areas. Notably, in South Australia, ten drinking water reservoir reserves are open for recreation ([reference](#)). With the continued expansion of mining, and logging, activities in the Northern Jarrah Forests, it is critical for HikeWest to share the implications for hikers.

Opportunities continued

Increasing HikeWest's profile and reach: New strategies are needed to expand HikeWest's visibility; encourage increased engagement and participation in hiking; and grow our membership base. HikeWest's delivery of the WA Hiking Expo in recent years has helped grow the organisation's profile and visibility; however, targeted marketing efforts are also required to increase HikeWest's online presence and wider awareness of HikeWest's value to the hiking community.

Strategic growth of HikeWest: Realising initiatives outlined in this strategic plan will require a substantial and sustainable increase in income, and a broader funding base. New strategies are also needed to grow HikeWest's human resources including administrative and project personnel, and volunteers.

Promoting responsible hiking practices: It is important HikeWest continues to promote safe and responsible hiking, and awareness of minimum impact/tread lightly practices, encouraging all hikers, including traditional cross-country bushwalkers, to minimise their environmental impact.

Developing relationships with online hiking groups: There are many Facebook and Meetup hiking groups based in Perth. They represent a significant number of hikers who HikeWest has not traditionally connected with. By developing relationships with these groups, HikeWest could offer these groups various forms of support.

Strategic priorities for 2023–26

In order to successfully navigate the competitive, evolving landscape of the hiking sector, HikeWest must address the above challenges and others. To do this, we will focus on the following four strategic priorities:

1. Participation
2. Access to trails
3. Advocacy
4. Organisational sustainability.

Strategic plan 2023–2026

Successful implementation of this strategic plan will ensure HikeWest delivers positive outcomes for hiking participation in Western Australia. The specific strategies we will use to pursue the strategic priorities and objectives, are outlined below, along with performance measures and the delivery schedule. This plan is intended to be a living document, subject to regular review and update by the HikeWest Board. It supersedes the previous plan of December 2021 for the period 2022–24.

Strategic Priority 1: PARTICIPATION					
Strategies	Performance measures	2023	2024	2025	2026
Objective 1: Increase hiking participation in WA.					
Deliver the Hiking Expo every 2 years (including possible alternative or additional regional location/s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiking Expo is delivered biennially 	Deliver Expo	R&D for Expo 2025 Source funding	Deliver Expo	R&D for Expo 2025 Source funding
Develop and deliver a Hiking Forum/ Workshop / Series every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop (or other) is delivered biennially 	Planning Source funding	Delivery	Planning Source funding	Delivery
Engage with the community to understand and respond to community expectations for hiking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x survey every 2 years 	Survey		Survey	
Develop and facilitate delivery of community projects that introduce a broad range of the community, demographic groups, and regions to hiking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x community project piloted in 2024 1 x community project delivered from 2025 onwards 1 x stakeholder (funders and sponsors) walk each year 	R&D for community project Source funding for community project Lead one stakeholder walk	Planning for community project Deliver community project pilot R&D for school project	Deliver community project Deliver school project Lead stakeholder walk	Deliver community project Deliver school project Lead stakeholder walk

			Source funding for school project		
Continue supporting and promoting member bushwalking clubs by delivering the Club Support Program (CSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSP is delivered at least bi-annually, subject to adequate funding • Insurances are facilitated each year • Annual support meeting with each club • 1 x club exec/leaders event/walk each year 	CSP Insurances	Insurances	CSP Insurances	Insurances
Objective 2: Promote safe and responsible bushwalking.					
Develop educational resources and offerings to support hikers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver at least 1 educational resource per year 	R&D for potential offerings	Source funding for 1 resource Deliver 1 resource	Source funding for 1 resource Deliver 1 resource	Source funding for 1 resource Deliver 1 resource
Develop walk leader training program (for HikeWest volunteers, bushwalking clubs and online social media groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk leader training program is delivered annually from 2025 	N/A	R&D for program Seek funding	Deliver training program	Deliver training program
Continue supporting bushwalking clubs to pursue effective risk management (including following HikeWest Activity Risk Management Guidelines)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In liaison with Bushwalking Australia, review and if necessary update Activity Risk Management Guidelines (ARMG) annually and distribute to clubs 	Finalise ARMG	Review ARMG	Review ARMG	Review ARMG
Educate about low impact and sustainability of traditional cross-country bushwalking in WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of biennial workshop (under Priority 1: Participation) • As part of meetings with DBCA (under Priority 2: Access to trails) 				

Strategic Priority 2: ACCESS TO TRAILS

Strategies	Performance measures	2023	2024	2025	2026
Objective 1: More trails within 100km of Perth.					
Work with government agencies and LGAs to identify locations where new trails could be developed and develop proposals to justify their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one area where new trails could be developed is identified Proposal for new trails is developed and submitted to DBCA within the life of this Strategic Plan 	Initial discussions with DBCA	Research and meetings	Develop and submit proposal	
Influence government policies, strategies and management plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. 2 meetings per year with DLGSC Min. 2 meetings per year with DBCA 	Meetings	Meetings	Meetings	Meetings
Objective 2: Existing trails are well maintained.					
Develop a trails monitoring and maintenance program, in partnership with DBCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trails within 100km of Perth requiring maintenance are identified Trails maintenance program is developed. 	Initial discussions with DBCA	Develop maintenance program Research and trial feasibility of “snap and send” Recruit volunteers	Deliver maintenance program	Deliver maintenance program
Seek corporate partners who sponsor trail maintenance and encourage employees to volunteer for trail maintenance days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate partnership model is developed At least 1 corporate partner is secured 	N/A	N/A	Develop corporate partnership program Seek corporate partners	Develop corporate partnership program Seek corporate partners

Strategic Priority 3: ADVOCACY

Strategies	Performance measures	2023	2024	2025	2026
Objective 1: Encourage effective conservation and management of the parks and forests that constitute our bushwalking environment.					
Develop partnerships and alliances with aligned groups to increase our impact and success in advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1 new partnership each year 	Identify potential partnerships and alliances	Approach partners	Approach partners	Approach partners
Conduct or facilitate general public information sessions on relevant advocacy topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1 talk per year from 2024 	N/A	Develop talks program	Deliver talks	Deliver talks
Continue sharing information on conservation and environmental issues which affect hiking and bushwalking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 updates per year in e-newsletter Minimum 3 posts per year on website and social media 	E-news Website Social media	E-news Website Social media	E-news Website Social media	E-news Website Social media
Influence government policies, strategies and management plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Min. 2 meetings per year with government agencies Submissions as needed 	Meetings	Meetings	Meetings	Meetings
Objective 2: Advocate for bushwalking permitted in drinking water catchments					
Lobby government agencies to amend Policy 13 through conversations and submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HikeWest submission to Policy 13 review 		Water catchment submission Government agency review/workshop participation		

Strategic Priority 4: ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Strategies	Performance measures	2023	2024	2025	2026
Objective 1: Grow and broaden HikeWest's profile and reach.					
Develop and implement a marketing strategy to grow our reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HikeWest has 10,000 followers on social media by 2025 HikeWest newsletter subscriptions grow by 10% each year 	Develop strategy	Implement strategy	Implement strategy	Implement strategy
Review HikeWest website content and design and if necessary re-develop website to ensure it meets evolving strategic plan objectives and priorities, including the needs of the hiking community and other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website reviewed and develop plan for updating/redeveloping Funding sourced for website update or redevelopment Increase website visits by 10% each year from 2025 	Review website Develop plan	Source funding Redevelop website		
Commission and build resource of high-quality videography/photography for promoting hiking in a range of natural WA settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HikeWest images and footage depict people of diverse backgrounds in a broad range of settings. 	Briefs developed Quotes sourced	Funding Photography and videography commissioned	Photographs and videos in use and easily retrieved from central online storage	
Develop a membership strategy to strengthen HikeWest's appeal and relevance to all existing (and potential) membership groups, including in particular Individual and Affiliate members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HikeWest memberships increase by 20% each year from 2024 	N/A	Develop strategy	Implement strategy	Implement strategy
Develop relationships with Meetup and Facebook group leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing channels of communication and dialogue established. 	Reach out to group leaders and commence exploratory dialogue.	Establish dialogue.	Maintain ongoing dialogue.	Maintain ongoing dialogue.
Consider broadening objects to more broadly encompass walking in nature and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objects are broadened (as needed) 	Review objects	Propose change to Rules for	Review and propose change	Review and propose change

trail running			broadening objects as needed	to objects as needed	to objects as needed
Objective 2: Build HikeWest's workforce					
Fund and recruit personnel (including for program delivery, admin, marketing and social media etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding is obtained for key positions Key programs are delivered on time Admin, marketing and social media officer is recruited 	<p>Identify roles required</p> <p>Identify funding for roles</p>	<p>Recruit admin and marketing personnel</p> <p>Recruit project personnel as required</p>	Recruit personnel as required	Recruit personnel as required
Build a pool of committed volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient volunteers to support key HikeWest initiatives Volunteers are retained 	Develop strategies for recruiting volunteers	<p>Review and put in place all requirements under Volunteer Support Plan</p> <p>Recruit and train volunteers</p>	Manage and retain volunteers	Manage and retain volunteers
Objective 3: Grow our income.					
Apply for grants to deliver the programs and initiatives identified in this strategic plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient funding to deliver key programs HikeWest's income from all funding sources grows by min. 30% each year 	<p>Identify funding for key programs</p> <p>Apply for funding</p>	Apply for funding	Apply for funding	Apply for funding
Develop a fundraising strategy that enables us to increase income e.g. through sponsorships, advertising, raffles, donations, and sundry other sources, enhanced relationships with stakeholders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase income from non-funding sources by 20% each year 	N/A	Develop strategy	Implement strategy	Implement strategy