



POSITION STATEMENT

Mining Impacts on Hiking in the Darling Range



Mt Solus

Introduction

Bauxite mining in the Darling Range, near Perth, poses a growing threat to Western Australia's hiking community, impacting both current and future bushwalking opportunities. With over 400,000 Western Australians participating in bushwalking, HikeWest is committed to protecting access to high-quality natural environments. This issue is critical not only for recreation but also for public health and wellbeing, particularly as Perth's population continues to grow.

As an advocate for sustainable forest management and trail development, HikeWest seeks to address the impacts of mining on hiking areas, ensuring balanced decisions that benefit both the community and the environment.

Background

The Darling Range, known for its unique jarrah forests and wandoo woodlands, has long been a favourite destination for bushwalkers due to its proximity to Perth. However, extensive bauxite mining leases, covering nearly 10,000 square kilometres, now threaten this natural resource (Figure 1). Mining operations are clearing vast tracts of forest, with more than 60,000 hectares already impacted, and mining expansions are projected to continue until 2070.

Perth, home to 80% of WA's population, has experienced significant growth over the past 25 years, driving increased demand for access to nearby natural spaces. Bushwalking, a highly accessible activity, supports mental and physical health, contributing to the prevention of chronic illnesses such as obesity and diabetes. Yet, restrictive policies and mining activities are reducing opportunities for recreation.

Although the Forest Management Plan 2024–2033 acknowledges the recreational value of forests, it fails to adequately address the specific importance of the Northern Jarrah Forest and the broader social and ecological impacts of mining. The FMP overlooks the importance of interconnected national parks in the Northern Jarrah Forest region to sustain viable forest ecosystems.

HikeWest's Position

HikeWest is not opposed to mining but strongly advocates for sustainable practices that minimise the adverse impacts on forests, trails, and the hiking community. Current mining operations and expansions are resulting in:

- Significant deforestation and habitat loss, with rehabilitated mining sites unable to provide the same quality bushwalking experiences.
- Fragmentation and degradation of popular hiking areas.
- Insufficient planning and protection for recreational access and trail development near Perth.

Evidence from satellite imagery and community reports highlights the extensive disturbance caused by mining, far exceeding earlier industry estimates. To date there has not been a lease-wide analysis of the environmental and social costs of an anticipated 100+ year mine-life. Without a lease-wide assessment, the cumulative impacts on natural environments and hiking opportunities will continue to be overlooked.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, HikeWest recommends the following actions:

1. Policy Reforms

- Develop state policies that prioritise multiple-use forest management, ensuring recreational access and the development of new trails.
- Incorporate comprehensive environmental and social cost assessments into mining approvals.

2. Transparency and Community Engagement

- Require mining companies to provide detailed and transparent reports on their operations and expansions.
- Ensure communities have a voice in decisions affecting forest access and recreational areas.

3. Mitigation Strategies

- Maintain existing forest roads for trail access.
- Retain scenic landscapes and connected patches of original forest within mining areas.
- Establish wide vegetation buffers to shield trails from mining operations and minimise dust and noise pollution.

4. Precautionary Measures

- Apply a precautionary principle to mining proposals, prioritising the protection of natural environments and recreational opportunities.

5. Public Awareness and Advocacy

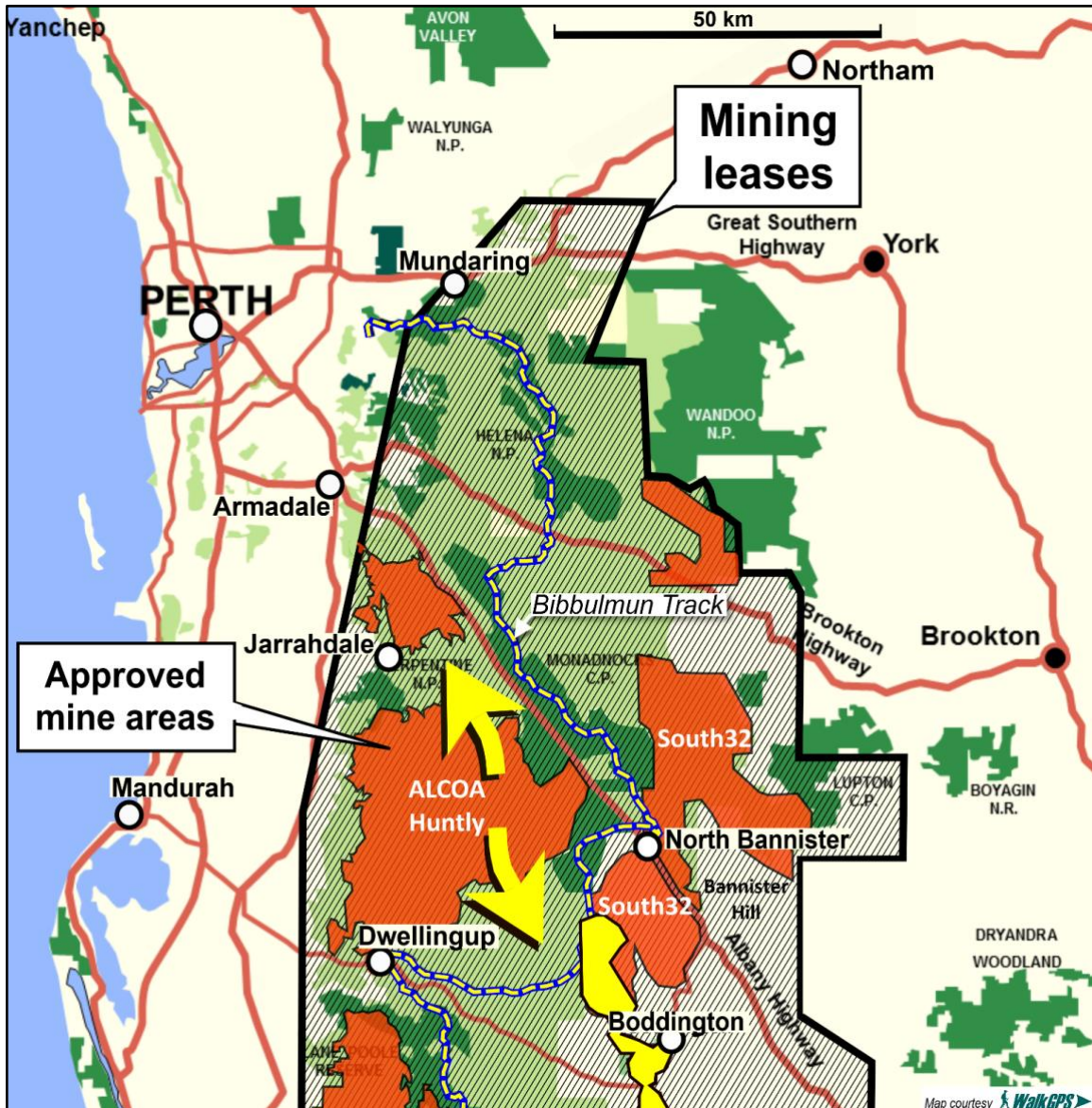
- Educate the community on the importance of protecting hiking areas for health, wellbeing, and future generations.

Conclusion

The Darling Range's forests are a vital resource for recreation, conservation, and community health. Unchecked mining expansions threaten to irreversibly degrade these landscapes, diminishing the quality of life for Perth residents and future generations.

HikeWest urges the state government, mining industry, and community stakeholders to collaborate in creating sustainable solutions that balance economic development with environmental conservation and social wellbeing. Together, we can preserve the unique hiking opportunities of the Darling Range for all Western Australians.

Appendix



BAUXITE MINING IN DARLING RANGE NEAR PERTH (CURRENTLY PROPOSED EXPANSIONS IN YELLOW).