

Mountain bike trail management and evidence based policy making

The following table is a review of selected plans of management and other sources that deal with reporting on sport participation rates and/or management of mountain biking trails. The “details” column is a commentary on if and how mountain biking demand was calculated and whether the organisation has a monitoring schedule planned. Sadly, it appears that in parks and trail management, evidenced based policy making is not the dominant paradigm.

Of the 24 reports examined 5 (or 20%) had completed some sort of trail use survey, but only 3 of these reports (or 12.5%) had done trail counts. Only 2 reports mention a monitoring program for trail condition or trail use.

Evidence based policy making is decision making based on methodical and rational data collection and analysis. Its strength is avoiding making decisions based on ideological reasoning, anecdotal evidence or assumptions, all which may not reflect the actual conditions. For instance, surveys have shown that people feel that crime is increasing, when in actual fact crime in many categories has decreased. If we based our policies and plans of management on what we believe to be true (i.e. crime increasing) we risk wasting precious resources on strategies that have little impact and not fixing the things that would really help.

Evidence based policy making is not without its problems however. Collecting quality evidence that helps make quality decisions takes time, resources and skilled analysts. Park management organisations are notoriously poorly funded and under resourced, and I assume that for this reason that actual trail demand and actual trail condition reporting is not undertaken, nor a systematic approach to monitoring.

If our aim is to support sustainable trail management and development, and advocate MTB as a legitimate recreational activity, then we need to support these park managers by providing data they can use.

Organisation	Year	Details	Report name
NPWS Royal National Park	2002	Provides an informal breakdown of MTB demographics. Has done some meta analysis? On rider preferences. No details on consultation/survey process Apparently monitored trail use – need details	Royal Area Trial Cycling Management Plan
NPWS Kosciuszko National Park	2006	Observes a demand for MTB but no numbers. No program of monitoring	Plan of Management for Kosciuszko National Park
NPWS Kosciuszko National Park	2006-2009	No MTB monitoring programs	Plan of Management for Kosciuszko National Park Implementation Report – various years

City of Wagga Wagga and Dept Lands	2008? Not sure	Estimates number of visitors at 40,000 per year in 1993 by user survey. Observes that current use is mostly MTB – does not say how many.	Draft Plan of Management for Pomingalarna Park 2008-2013
NPWS Livingston NP	2006	Link did not work – contact parkies directly. Or Wagga Wagga MTB	Livingstone National Park Plan of Management 2006
QPWS	2010	Emphases trail sustainability through design – no mention of numbers of riders	QPWS Draft Cycling in Parks Policy
QPWS	2007	QPWS management of cycling extends to regulation and signage, permits and grants, track development, management and community consultation. No mention of monitoring paradigm but does consider the number of users accessing an area. This suggests trail counts at some parks.	Operational Policy: Visitor Management
Dept for Environment and Heritage SA	2008	No quantifiable survey on how many users. Bases plan on observations from patrols and interaction with the community	Shepherds Hill Recreation Park 2008
Dept Sustainability and the Environment, Victoria	2008	Measures overall number of trips to parks. Does not break it down by types of users.	State of the Forests Report 2008
NPWS Glenrock State Conservation Area	2009	Does look at working with the surrounding land managers to help develop a network of MTB trails. A program of monitoring is not specifically stated	Glenrock State Conservation Area Draft Plan of Management
NPWS Yellomundee Regional Park (Blue Mountains Region)	2009	Monitoring is a part of the management plan – in conjunction with local MTB clubs. Need to contact rangers directly for details	Yellomundee Regional Park Plan of Management
NPWS Lane Cove	1998	Not much about mountain biking in this plan, despite having a few MTBers in the park. However it is 13 years old	Lane Cove National Park Plan of Management
NPWS Livingstone NP	2008	Observes and increase in MTB numbers but no statistics. Are preparing a strategy with local MTB groups. Visitor monitoring is part of the program to determine levels of use. Talk to the parkies.	Livingstone National Park and State Conservation Area Plan of Management
NPWS Royal National Park	2010	Demand is estimated by a resident survey	Mountain bike discussion paper
Aust Sports Commission	2009	Demand is estimated by interviews: lumps MTB and BMX with cycling	ERASS 2009
Hornsby Council	?	Demand is estimated by MTBA membership and anecdotal evidence	Unstructured recreation strategy

Sustainable Tourism CRC - Claire Davies and David Newsome	2009	References other papers	Mountain bike activity in natural areas: impacts, assessment and implications for management. A case study from John Forrest National Park, Western Australia
East Gippsland Rail Trail	2009	Infrared Counters - trail is not mtb specific however	www.eastgippslandrailtrail.com
City of Mitcham, SA	2003	Does not estimate demand at all	Mountain bike trails, Mitcham Park
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing SA	2001	Uses general trend information - no hard data. General ABS data	State Mountain Bike Plan for South Australia: Mount Lofty Ranges Region 2001-2005
Sport and recreation Tasmania	2005	Demand is estimated by MTB sales, ABS data, club/event participation, IMBA survey	Mountain Biking in Tasmania: a summary of current trends and future opportunities
Office for Recreation and Sport SA	2006	Does not estimate demand or include a program of monitoring demand	Eagle Mountain Bike Park - Draft Management Plan 2006
Mt Stromlo Forest Park	2010	Current survey being undertaken	
Warringah Council	2007	Survey included visual trail counts over a week and user surveys	Manly Warringah War Memorial Park Mountain Bike Survey