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A Submission to the Victorian Government Trail bike initiative.

This submission is offered to the Noojee Community Reference Group by the Rokeby & Crossover Friends Group Inc.

The submission will include.

- Statement of position.
- Key objectives
- Secondary objectives.
- The geographic area of interest covered by RCFG.
- Unloading areas.
- Further Considerations.
- Recommendations for government legislative action.

Statement of position.

In formulating this submission we have referred to the Trail Bike Options Paper (Feb.2005 6 workshops).

The Rokeby and Crossover Friends Group Inc. was formed in 2003 by a mix of local people who share the same common interest in our beautiful slice of bushland. Our aim is to protect and maintain this land so it can remain a clean and safe home for wildlife and be enjoyed by all the various local and visiting groups who use the area.

However the friends group recognises that amongst the various users it is trail bike riders who present the largest problems.

The Rokeby and Crossover Friends group contends that the riding of trail bikes within hearing distance of residential development or farm settlement is not an acceptable activity. Further it is recognised that, for safety reasons, trail biking is also not compatible with the use of the forest by other interest groups like horse riding, mountain bikes, and bush walking. In that the prime concern is noise, followed closely by damage to the environment, with the major impacts being erosion and run off risks to water quality, this activity is considered to be contrary to the rights of our community members.

The RCFG recognises that trail biking is a recognised activity in the forest and wishes to contribute to the better management of its impacts.

Key objectives

There are three key objectives. The RCFG sees these three objectives as being inseparable one from the other. The implementation of only one or two of these key objectives would in the opinion of the RCFG be a total waste of time. For instance if only unloading areas were developed, this would effectively reward trail bike riders for being a noise nuisance, the old areas would still be used and the residents now effected would be no better off.

- 1. The closing of unloading areas that are within 2 kilometres of residential development or farm buildings.**
- 2. The judicious use of signs to direct riders to the new unloading areas.**
- 3. The development of new unloading areas at a greater distance than 2 kilometres from residential development or farm buildings.**

Secondary Objectives.

As stated above the RCFG wishes to contribute to the better management of trail biking in the forest. We plan to do this by recommending, helping to plan and implement the recommendations of Trail Bike Options Paper (Feb 2005 6 workshops) our key objectives and the following objectives.

1. The closing of the, unofficial, Rokeby common and Crossover, Gunn Road unloading areas.
2. The closing of the abandoned rail line through the Crossover regional park, to vehicular traffic, excluding emergency services.
3. The implementation and construction of dedicated unloading areas for both horse riders and bike riders.
4. The closing of appropriate or necessary tracks and roads within the forest by managers, DSE and Parks Vic., in order to implement the objectives.
5. To send a copy of our submission to the minister, local elected representatives, the land managers, DSE and Parks Vic., to remind them of the Trail Bike Options Paper (Feb 2005 6 workshops) and that the problems noted above still exist. The time for discussion is past and urgent action is now required.

The geographic area of interest covered by RCFG.

The RCFG has an area of interest which includes the Crossover regional park, part of the Neerim East forest and the Latrobe forest,

Unloading areas.

The RCFG has made extensive investigations with the invaluable help of the Gippsland 4x4 club, horse riding groups, Land Care representatives, land managers from DSE, Parks Vic and bike riders, walkers and prospectors.

We recommend the following:

1. An unloading area for the exclusive use of horse riders be established off Whitelaws track approximately .75km from the intersection of Latrobe River road at GPS co-ordinates 413052- 5792425. This unloading area could be also used by mountain bikers and walkers.
2. An unloading area for the exclusive use of trail bike riders will be established off Latrobe River Road at GPS position 0415294 - 5793803 this site is 3.3km from the end of the bitumen.
3. Alternate unloading sites for bikes are in the Sweetwater area, Parks land management area, and adjacent to plantation area at GPS 0415951 - 5793113.
4. The unofficial trail bike area on Gunn Road Crossover to be signed for the exclusive use of horse riders, passive bush users.

Further Considerations.

1. Design position of unloading areas.

Unloading areas should be positioned and designed to meet the following criteria:

- a. More than 2km from the nearest residence or farm.
- b. To be of a size to accommodate up to 30 cars and trailers.
- c. Horse and bike unloading areas to be positioned well apart to allow these activities to be undertaken separately and safely.
- d. Unloading areas should be designed to allow separate access and exit gates. (flow through design)

2. The closing of roads and tracks.

Roads and tracks should be closed at the discretion of the land managers to achieve the following objectives:

- e. To maintain a distance of 2km from residences and farms for trail bikes.
- f. The prevention of circling by trail bikes in an area which would take the activity within 2km of residences or farms.
- g. To minimise future environmental damage to the roads or tracks.
- h. Due to its proximity to residential development the old rail line in Crossover regional park, would be closed to 4x4 and trail bike riders but left available for horse riders walkers and emergency vehicles. Access to this area will still be open through Pilgrim Creek Road for prospectors and bush walkers.
- i. The development of Designated HWB areas.

3. Signs.

The erection of signs directing riders to new unloading areas is a key objective of this submission.

Signs should have a design with a colour coding/design that is easily recognisable and specific to the Trail Bike Initiative. The signs should be erected in such a way as to direct trail bike riders and horse riders from closed areas to the new unloading areas.

The Baw Baw shire should be asked to erect parking signs to encourage forest users not to continue to use closed areas and to police these parking regulations.

4. Amenities.

- a. The designated unloading areas would be equipped with an environmentally appropriate toilet facility.
- b. Signage would require users to take all rubbish home with them.
- c. Interested user groups would be encouraged to maintain these unloading sites to their advantage.

5. The development of an area separate to general trail bike riding areas for the safe instruction of junior riders.

- a. This area would be developed and maintained by a concerned trail Bike Riders Club.
- b. It would be undertaken using the distance and noise criteria mentioned above.

Recommendations for government's legislative action.

RCFG will be recommending to Government the following points:

1. Given that the main problem with trail bikes is noise, and that there is no valid mechanical or safety reason why they need to be so noisy: RCFG recommends that the noise level, in decibels, now tolerated be greatly reduced and that the fines for exceeding this noise level be reviewed and greatly increased.
2. In order to curb the rogue element within the trail bike riding fraternity.
RCFG recommends that all owners of off road bikes be required to be a member of a recognised club and that this condition be attached to the registration.
3. After the implementation of new signage and new unloading areas.
RCFG recommends that a concerted effort be made to police the riding of unlicensed trail bikes in forests and parks. This policing could include the confiscation by, police, of bikes using the existing hoon laws.
Further, consideration should be given to granting, selected land managers, DSE and Parks Vic., the right to fine offenders within the forest and park.
4. A full media campaign be undertaken to encourage responsible use of the forest and park resources. This media campaign would cover the all users, walkers, horse riders, 4x4 users but concentrate on trail bike use.

Principal author:

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With input from: David Dawson, Secretary Rokeby and Crossover Friends Group, and group members.