

Bicycle Queensland's submission to the Brisbane Off-Road Cycling draft Strategy

February 2021

Summary

- Bicycle Queensland endorses the draft strategy's guiding principles of sustainability, diversity, diligent planning, collaboration, accessibility, optimal use of facilities, safety and mitigating risk, and education and engagement (p7).
- We affirm the need for environmental preservation (p8), community stewardship (p10), and supporting businesses (p12).
- **We strongly support Brisbane City Council opening up more forest reserves to sustainable mountain bike trails, and closing unauthorised unsustainable trails.**
- We support the development of **local trails for local people**. Cycling can really only be considered an environmentally friendly recreational activity when car trips are minimised. Bicycle Queensland is especially concerned with the lack of off-road opportunities for younger riders within Brisbane City Council's boundaries.
- We support well-designed, sustainable mountain biking trail networks being built in Toohey Forest, Glider Forest, Karawatha Forest, Brisbane Koala Bushlands, Bacton Rd Reserve, Whites Hill, Keperra Bushland, Gold Creek Reserve, Kholo Bushlands, Changing Mountain and Dandys Reserve and Shelley Road Park (as identified in the draft as opportunities for consideration in the short and long term, pp15-23).
- The main focus of the strategy should be providing sustainable well-designed trails for mountain biking in Brisbane forest reserves. A secondary focus is allowing bike access to existing fire maintenance trails within reserves. Other off-road cycling uses such as skills parks and pump tracks, and cyclocross venues, are lower priority in our view.

We need more green space

Bicycle Queensland has noted the intensity of discussion around this draft strategy, and in our involvement with previous consultations on the subject of bike riding in Brisbane's bushlands. There is one aspect of this discussion on which all community-minded people in Brisbane agree: there is not enough green space in Brisbane.

Habitat and catchment groups in Brisbane have generally not been in favour of increased access for bike riders to Brisbane's natural areas. BQ representatives in consultation forums have heard habitat group members make the claim that greater access for bike riding leads to more damage to the environment.

However, the story which is told by surrounding SEQ councils in the natural areas and forest reserves of Ipswich, Logan, Redlands, and Moreton Bay presents many counter examples to the fears of Brisbane's habitat groups.

The problem isn't bike riding in natural areas. This activity can be managed with sustainable trail design and community stewardship. See the success of the trail networks at Bayview, Cleveland, Castle Hill, Cornubia, Parklands and Tewantin for great examples of local authorities working with the mountain bike community.

We know this approach is not new to Brisbane City Council, but it needs to be clearly stated. Where the land authority works productively with the community, outdoor recreation can and does co-exist with preservation and rehabilitation of natural areas.

The problem is the low percentage of the green space estate within Brisbane City Council's boundaries, and the resulting pressure on that green space to meet the community's needs for recreation, while preserving conservation values.

Bicycle Queensland recommends that Brisbane City Council place a very high priority on the purchase of more green space within the city's boundaries. This would not be just existing natural areas, but also would include land purchased for rehabilitation purposes, which could eventually be used for outdoor recreation.

Local trails for local people

As noted in the summary, Bicycle Queensland supports the development of local trails for local people. Bicycle Queensland is especially concerned with the lack of off-road opportunities for younger riders within Brisbane City Council's boundaries.

The Lord Mayor references our outdoor lifestyle as integral to life in Brisbane, in his introduction to the draft strategy. We wholeheartedly agree, but our view is that it is vital that children and young people have the chance to experience this outdoor lifestyle close to where they live.

We have already referenced the issue of unauthorised trails existing in forest reserves such as Toohey Forest and Karawatha Forest, and in Mt Coot-Tha Forest as well. These trails demonstrate very clearly an existing demand for people to be able ride off-road in their local area.

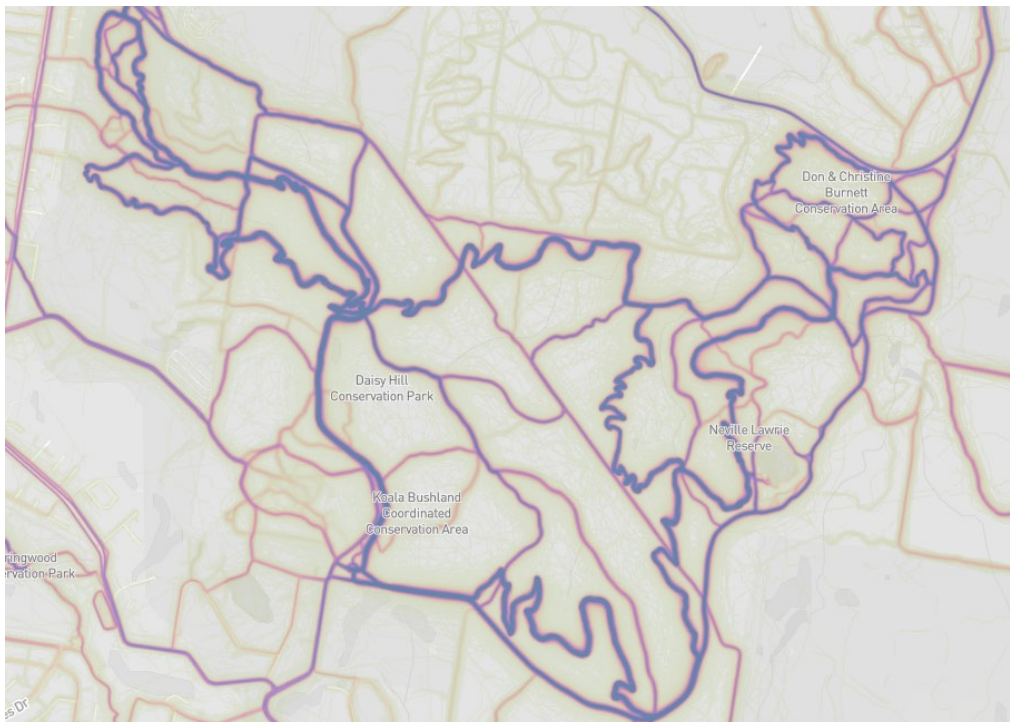
There are two aspects of this issue that relate back to our desire for Brisbane City Council to take more leadership in outdoor recreation. With Gap Creek (Mt Coot-Tha) being the only single-track network available to Brisbane residents, those people who want to ride their mountain bikes on well-managed and constructed trail networks are presently putting their bikes on their motor vehicles and driving to other council areas to go mountain biking.

Brisbane is therefore placing an extra burden on the trail networks in surrounding areas with its lack of provision of trail networks within its boundaries, and adding to the carbon in the atmosphere with the resultant car trips. Cycling can really only be considered an environmentally friendly recreational activity when car trips are minimised.

The case for managing mountain biking access vs not managing it: Daisy Hill vs Karawatha Forest

Daisy Hill and Karawatha Forest are within 10km of each other. The two reserves are broadly similar in size, topography and ecology. There is a similar socio-economic status in the populations of the surrounding suburbs.

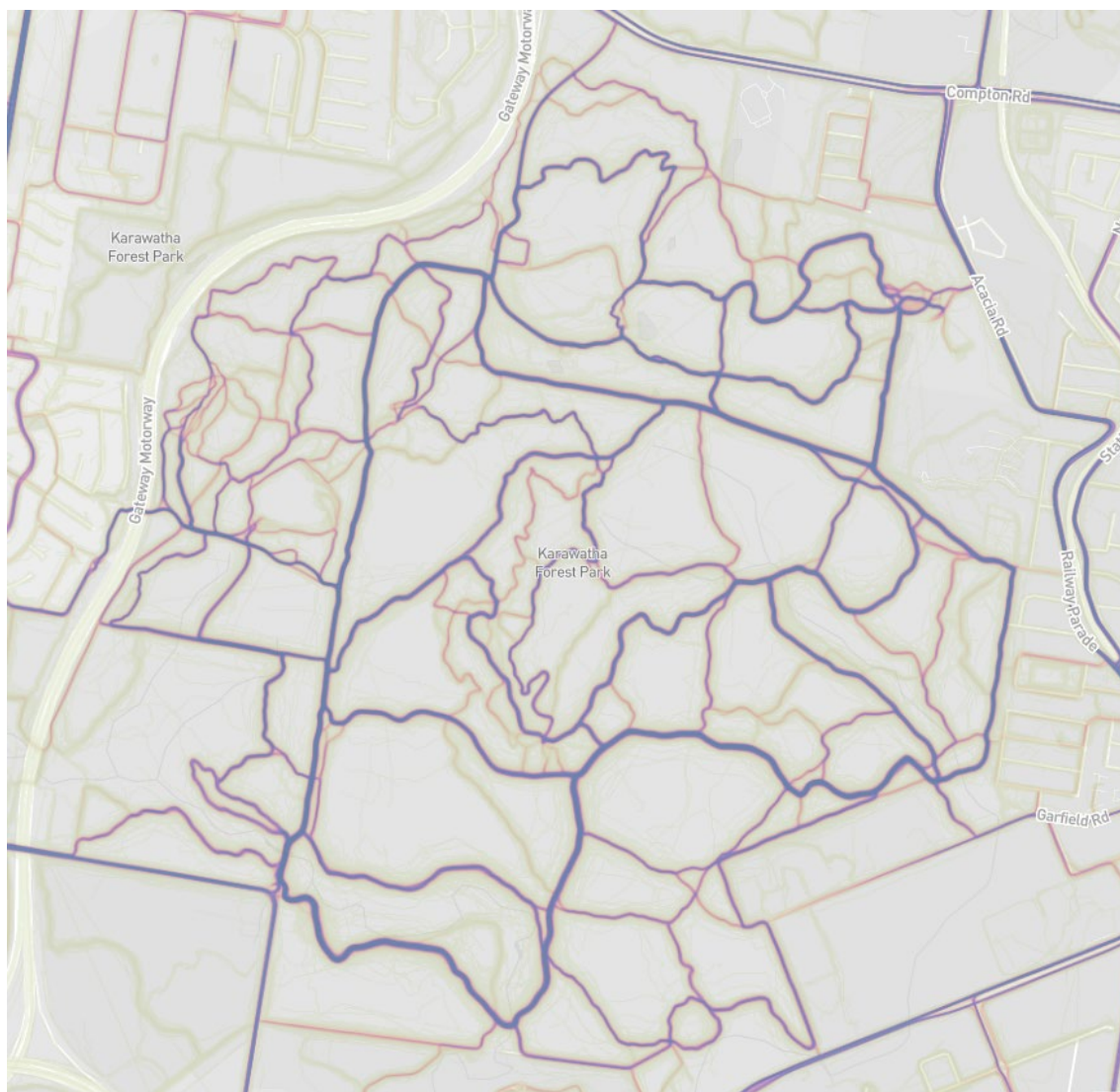
Daisy Hill Conservation Park is visited by thousands of walkers and mountain bikers every week. There is no significant issue in Daisy Hill with illegal trails, despite the massive demand for mountain biking, and despite the thousands of kilometres ridden in the forest each week. Strava's heat map (1) shows this very clearly -- all the activity is on legal trails.



1 Strava's heat map of Daisy Hill forest. The thick lines are the official mountain bike trails, used by thousands of bike riders. The thinner lines are fire trails, less used by mountain bikers but shared with walkers, runners and horse riders.

National Parks Queensland and Logan City Council and Redland City Council have worked with the mountain biking community, especially through partnerships with Rats Cycling Club. Daisy Hill remains a significant habitat for koalas, despite the daily presence of walkers and bike riders.

Karawatha Forest has a fire management trail network, and small number of walking trails. However, it also has a dense network of unauthorised informal trails made over the years by walkers and mountain bikers. Some of those trails create erosion through their informal design utilising the fall line of the terrain, but there are also some trails which have been there for years without further deterioration to surrounding bushland. The Strava heat map of Karawatha Forest (2) shows the main fire trails as thick lines, but also shows many informal trails as lighter lines.



2 Karawatha Forest. The darker lines are the fire trails. The lighter lines are mostly informal trails.

The main difference between these two outcomes at Daisy Hill and Karawatha is that in one location there has been a planned approach to managing and providing for mountain bike trail access, and in the other this use has not been managed. Mountain bike community members have contributed thousands of hours of free labour at Daisy Hill, working with land authorities in a co-operative effort. And every week, local people from Logan and Redlands and visitors from Brisbane reap the benefit of their work.

Karawatha Forest could benefit from this effort as well. Closing the existing unauthorised trails and replacing them over time with a sustainably designed trail network would have a positive benefit for the flora and fauna, and for all the human users of the reserve: walkers, bike riders and habitat enthusiasts alike.

This is why Bicycle Queensland supports the development of a well-designed, sustainable trail network in Karawatha Forest.

Fire trails

In our submission we have focussed our attention on provision of single-track mountain bike trail networks, because in our view this is the greatest need for development and investment by Brisbane City Council.

Bicycle Queensland also supports riding on fire management trails, in all Council natural area reserves that have those trails. Historically, fire management trails were not constructed with the highest regard for conservation values, and as a result many of these trails have a much greater footprint than would be needed just to get fire management vehicles to a fire.

Gravel riding is a fast-growing sector of the recreational cycling scene, and once again Bicycle Queensland supports the principle of local trails for local people. Bike riding on fire trails is unlikely to create any extra impacts to surrounding bushland, but Bicycle Queensland supports monitoring programs to ensure that no extra impacts arise from bike riding on these trails.

Fire trails can also be used by casual recreational riders who don't see themselves as "mountain bikers", even though they might be riding a mountain bike or gravel bike. We would also support signage and education around safety on steep fire trails, which in practice have often been more dangerous to bike riders than well-designed single-track.

Bicycle Queensland also support bike riding on shared use trails in Council reserves, where this can managed through careful design and planning, and consultation with local users.

Existing walking trails in Brisbane's reserves cover a wide variation in sustainability and suitability for shared use. In the main, fire trail access would be the major step forward for off-road bike riding other than mountain biking.

Conclusion

Bicycle Queensland commends Brisbane City Council's hard working Parks, Environment and Sustainability team for production of the draft Brisbane Off-Road Cycling Strategy. We support its acceptance by Council, and the implementation of the strategy over the next five years.

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