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## Introduction

This Horse Trail Access Guideline has been developed to provide a set of standards and information about horse trails and access issues for ATHRA Executive, affiliated clubs and members to use when communicating with external stakeholders.

The responsibility of positive and effective representation on behalf of ATHRA for any horse trail access issues rests on all ATHRA members. This representation must at all times be professional, without excess emotion and all communication, whether verbal or written, must at all times be courteous using good communication skills without any use of profanity or verbal abuse. It is imperative that any representation on behalf of ATHRA at any time in regards to horse trail access issues is cordial, polite and professional, portraying ATHRA in the best possible way for the future building of relationships with all levels of government, stakeholders and the community. Poor representation of ATHRA will do much more damage than good in the long term and will not be tolerated by ATHRA in any way.

Common Horse trail access issues can include, but is not limited to:

- Sustainability of trails
- Environmental Impact
- Conflict with other users
- Loss of Access by government policy changes
- Lack of good quality information for horse trails and access
- Loss of trails to development, competing demand for land
- Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities
- Competing demands for trails from other user groups
- Competing demand for funding for trails
- Insurance issues

## Background

Historically horses have been an integral part of our heritage and culture in Australia, with horses being our main form of transport for many years. With the introduction of motorised transport, horses were no longer required and horse riding, or more specifically horse trail riding, became a recreational activity. With the pressure from urbanisation and suburban sprawl, along with political and environmental pressure, areas to horse trail ride have continually become under threat or have been completely lost. ATHRA, as the premier body representing Horse Trail Riders across Australia, considers representation by ATHRA members advocating for better and increased horse trail access is vitally important to the sustainability of this important recreational activity.

It is internationally well documented that all trails, including horse trails, have multiple benefits including, but not limited to

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Positive lifestyle

- Social interaction
- Environmental influence
- Economic benefit to both individuals, businesses and communities
- Community Pride and Identity
- Transportation
- Historic and Heritage Preservation

Horse trail riding is known to provide social, physical, health, cultural and economic benefits to individuals and the community, similar to all other trail users. Trail horse riding facilitates participation and interaction between diverse community members and provides opportunities to experience natural and cultural heritage environments.

## Stakeholder Management

It is important for ATHRA members to understand that access issues often arise from areas of government and the community who have none, or very little understanding of horses and horse trails, where in fact they may never have been considered as a relevant trail user group. The first step in advocating for better trails and access is to build relationship with the relevant stakeholders that have direct influence over policy and decisions affecting trails. This includes;

- State Government departments including Parks and Wildlife, Environment, Water and Sport and Recreation. The names of these departments vary from State to State but can easily be determined for each state by a search on the computer. These may in fact have strategies and policies in place that will assist.
- Local Government including City's, Shires etc.
- Commercial Operators and land owners
- Private land owners

In building relationships with these stakeholders, networking and advocating for horse trails and horses is developed and can be built upon, so that before decisions are made, consultation with ATHRA, as the "Premier body for horse trails in Australia", may occur and can be established for the long term. Good professional advocacy for horse trails will go a long way to developing a strong working relationship with stakeholders which can help prevent some access issues.

These benefits must always be the focus of every conversation with regards to "Why Horse Trails? Politics at all levels is about the benefits to constituents, whether it be the in the reduction of expenditure or increasing of income. Trail benefits affect the economy in both these areas.

## CHALLENGES

### Sustainability of trails

It is important for the future of trails including horse trails that they are built to be sustainable which includes having a governance structure, ongoing maintenance, access to continued sources of funding and they are built to a standard that is environmentally complimentary. Sanctioned well built trails are the supported by most government departments and funding providers. To develop a new trail it is important to follow a structured process to ensure sustainability for the trail into the future. This process has been developed and well set out by WA Mountain Bike Association and the Department of Parks and Wildlife in WA and is shown in the Figure 1 below.

Informal or unsanctioned trails are used by all trail users often and ATHRA clubs and members are encouraged to consider landholders policies, guidelines and requirements at all times, including obtaining relevant permits whenever needed. These permits are used by government departments not only to ensure the safety of those using the trail, but also to document the use of certain areas by trail users. It is also important to let government departments know who will be in what area at what time for information regarding controlled burn offs and bush fire management.

### Trail Development Process

Sustainable trails means developing the right trails, in the right places, in the right way and for the right reasons. The trail development process provides protocols and procedures which ensure that any trails are an asset to landowners and managers, trail users and the community rather than a liability.

The trail development process involves eight stages (figure 1) and encompasses a constant evaluation, review and improvement process as trails are being extended or revised. Each stage must be completed before moving on to the next stage. If trail revitalisation/ renewal is required the process should begin again.



Figure 1: Eight Stage Trail Development Process (draft)

Stage	Outcome	
1	<b>Proposal</b> The proposed area is either supported in principle for trail development, or is not supported due to environmental, social or cultural constraints. Or proposal to identify suitable areas.	Decision
2	<b>Framework</b> A project outline developed by project steering group (stakeholders), including: project objectives, project management model, stakeholder roles, target market, requirements, standards, execution, and ongoing trail management model.	
3	<b>Site Assessment</b> Undertake a broad scale study of the area and identify constraints, soil types, vegetation etc.	Field
4	<b>Concept Planning</b> Identify opportunities and conceptual trail plan including infrastructure requirements produced. Broad trail corridors are physically flagged in the field.	
5	<b>Corridor Evaluation</b> Detailed assessment of corridor.	
6	<b>Detailed Design</b> Detailed trail design produced and physically flagged in the field, including: trail classifications, technical trail features (TTFs), construction types and specifications. Approvals gained.	
7	<b>Construction</b> Trail is constructed in line with the detailed design.	
8	<b>Management</b> Management plan implemented detailing maintenance and monitoring requirements.	

Figure 2: Trail Development Process Summary (draft)

### Environmental Impact

Many people believe horses have an extremely detrimental impact on the Australian environment but this is not supported in actual scientific evidence, but is primarily based on conjecture and unfounded opinions of opponents of horse trail riding. Horses ridden along well-formed roads and tracks (for example gravel forestry tracks), in fact have been shown by a Queensland University study to have the same impact as other trail users including mountain bikes. (See Appendix A)

ATHRA takes environmental issues very seriously and insists all clubs and members host horse trail rides in an environmentally sustainable manner. The guidelines for this are outlined in the ATHRA Code of Conduct which is available for all to view at its website, [www.athra.com.au](http://www.athra.com.au) under “Forms and Info”, Governance.

The Code of Conduct includes the 16 Environmental Rules on Page 10.

The following “Sixteen Environmental Rules” and other Rules in the Code of Conduct were formulated to help minimize the impact of horses on the environment and to promote safe and environmentally responsible trail horse riding:

- 5.1 Only allow your horse to eat weed free feed at least 48 hours prior to entering bushland areas. Weed free feed includes clean chaff, pellets, and cracked, rolled or steamed grains. Never take meadow hay as it often contains weed seed.
- 5.2 Undertake some basic education in weed identification, and whenever possible assist land managers in quickly identifying and eliminating new outbreaks of problem species.
- 5.3 Members should become familiar with and put into practice ATHRA's Guide to Combatting Phytophthora<sup>23</sup>.
- 5.4 Always be observant and avoid disturbing unstable or erosion-prone soils and vegetated sand dunes. Avoid disturbing coastal birds nesting in soft sand, and ride between the high and low tide water marks when you have reached the beach.
- 5.5 Rather than risking damage to fragile creeks, streams and riverbanks, select firm, stony crossings. Use bridges wherever possible and when safe, to help limit erosion and ensure good water quality.
- 5.6 Do not to allow your horse to defecate or urinate during stream crossings. Stop prior to entering the water to allow your horse to rest, relax, and (hopefully) to eliminate waste PRIOR to crossing. By not allowing your horse to stop or dawdle in the water you may also help prevent contamination.
- 5.7 Carry and use canvas or collapsible buckets, and/or a pump and hose, to water and wash horses where possible. Wash horses at least 50 metres away from any watercourse.
- 5.8 All ATHRA members are to utilize supplied facility yarding where it is logical and appropriate. Members should be conscious of the space they take up within the yard to ensure efficient and shared use of the available area.
- 5.9 Always camp horses well clear of watercourses – at least 50 metres, unless camping areas or yards provided by the governing authority are constructed/situated contrary to this rule.
- 5.10 Avoid vegetation being denuded by horses, especially during stays of more than one night, by regularly relocating nightlines and portable yards.
- 5.11 Use tree protectors and suitable length stops to prevent damage to trees caused by nightlines and horses.
- 5.12 Where possible, make the nightline length 15 metres or more to reduce concentrated ground impact.
- 5.13 Avoid horses not already familiar with each other being yarded together. This will avoid conflicts in establishing a new social order.
- 5.14 Dispose of or disperse manure from overnight camp sites.
- 5.15 Remove all rubbish from campsites. Do not bury it as feral animals may dig it up. Where possible remove litter left by others. Take out what you take in.
- 5.16 Always be friendly and civil to other bushland users. Members should always take the initiative to avoid any conflict or potentially dangerous situations involving your horses and the general public."

Other supporting Documents-

Australian Horse Alliance “Horses are our Heritage” Fact Sheet – Environmental Arguments  
 This document is available under “Access” at the ATHRA website.

**Conflict with other users**

Unfortunately, conflict with other trail users is a reality but the actual incidences are quite low. Most interactions with other trail users can be a positive experience and ATHRA believes that the negative occurrences can be lessened by better education of other trail users. To address this, ATHRA has developed the “Sharing the Bush” Document available at <http://www.athra.com.au/forms/general-forms.html>.

*Through the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association’s (ATHRA) ongoing education program, “Sharing the Bush”, ATHRA is attempting to establish dialogue with other bush user groups to discuss common issues of concern. With ever increasing numbers of bush users comes the inevitability of more frequent contact between the different user groups, and the need for better understanding and cooperation between them.*

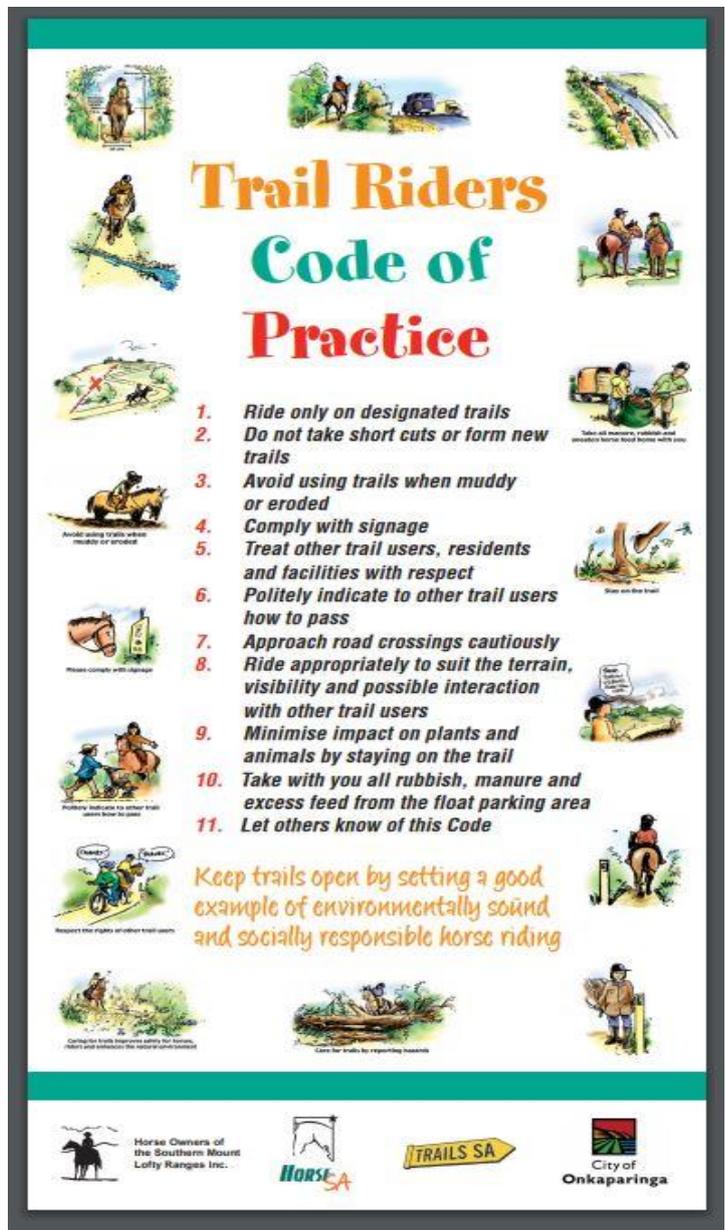
Another useful resource – Trail Riders Code of Practice – Horse SA  
<https://www.horsesawarehouse.org.au/trails/>

**Loss of Access by government policy changes**

Government policy is constantly changing, whether it is Federal, State or Local so it is important that ATHRA Clubs and members establish involvement in policy development and changes as early as possible. These might be in the form of Management Plans, Strategies, Masterplans etc. Positive networking whenever possible in the areas of government is the most beneficial way to get involved in these processes, along with ensuring someone in the organisation is added to email lists or the like to be informed of any changes and public comment opportunities. Websites are also a great source of information regarding these developments and regular monitoring of important government department websites is important, for example

- Local Government
- Environment
- Sport and Recreation
- Water
- Parks and Wildlife
- Transport

Please note department names may differ between states but their area of responsibility will be similar. This networking process with government may begin by simply connecting with your local council reserves or parks officer, who then may have contacts within State Government moving up into Federal Government.



If within your state, your state department may hold seminars, conferences or forums regarding trails or recreation use etc., even if it is for another user group, which may be beneficial to attend for networking with relevant contacts. Raising the awareness of ATHRA as the “Peak Horse Trail Riding body” nationally is the most beneficial process in addressing access.

## **Lack of good quality information for horse trails and access**

As we now live in a world that is dominated by Smart Phones, there is a lot ATHRA Clubs and members can do to improve the quality of information available on horse trails. If each club was to commit to mapping on a smart phone application all their local **sanctioned trails** including a description of the trail the availability of information would be greatly improved. Examples of this can be seen on several websites like;

- All Trails – [www.alltrails.com](http://www.alltrails.com) and Smart Phone Application
- TrailsWA – [www.trails.com.au](http://www.trails.com.au) and Smart Phone Application
- Rail Trails Australia – [www.railtrails.org.au](http://www.railtrails.org.au)

Examples of mapping applications are;

- All Trails
- Map My Hike
- Trail Tracker GPS
- Gaia GPS

These mapped trails can then be uploaded to a website, such as All Trails or as in Western Australia, TrailsWA and then shared with people via Social Media or Email etc.

ATHRA Clubs and Members can now take on the important responsibility of promoting Trail Horse riding and the trails we enjoy. Get on Board!!

## **Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities**

Most levels of government actually are ill informed as to what Horse riders require for adequate trail Infrastructure and Facilities. This again is where networking and then sharing of information is so beneficial. Documents relevant to this area have been listed in Appendix A.

## **Competing demands for trails from other user groups**

As an organisation it is most beneficial if we support and promote the development and maintenance of multi use trails, which is sharing the trails with other user groups. We are after all usually out doing the same thing on a different mode of transport and if we can connect and network with other user groups this will enhance our influence at all government levels. The more trails are multi use the more aware other trail users are of the needs of each other and most of the time common courtesy and politeness prevails. There is only small minority that may be a problem.

## **Competing demand for funding for trails**

In each state there are grants offered for all sorts of recreational activities and horse trail riding may be included in some of these categories. Grants across Australia are listed on the Grants Hub website - <https://www.thegrantshub.com.au/>

Local Governments often offer clubs and association’s grants as well as most banks, such as Commonwealth, ANZ, NAB, Westpac and regional banks like Bendigo Bank.

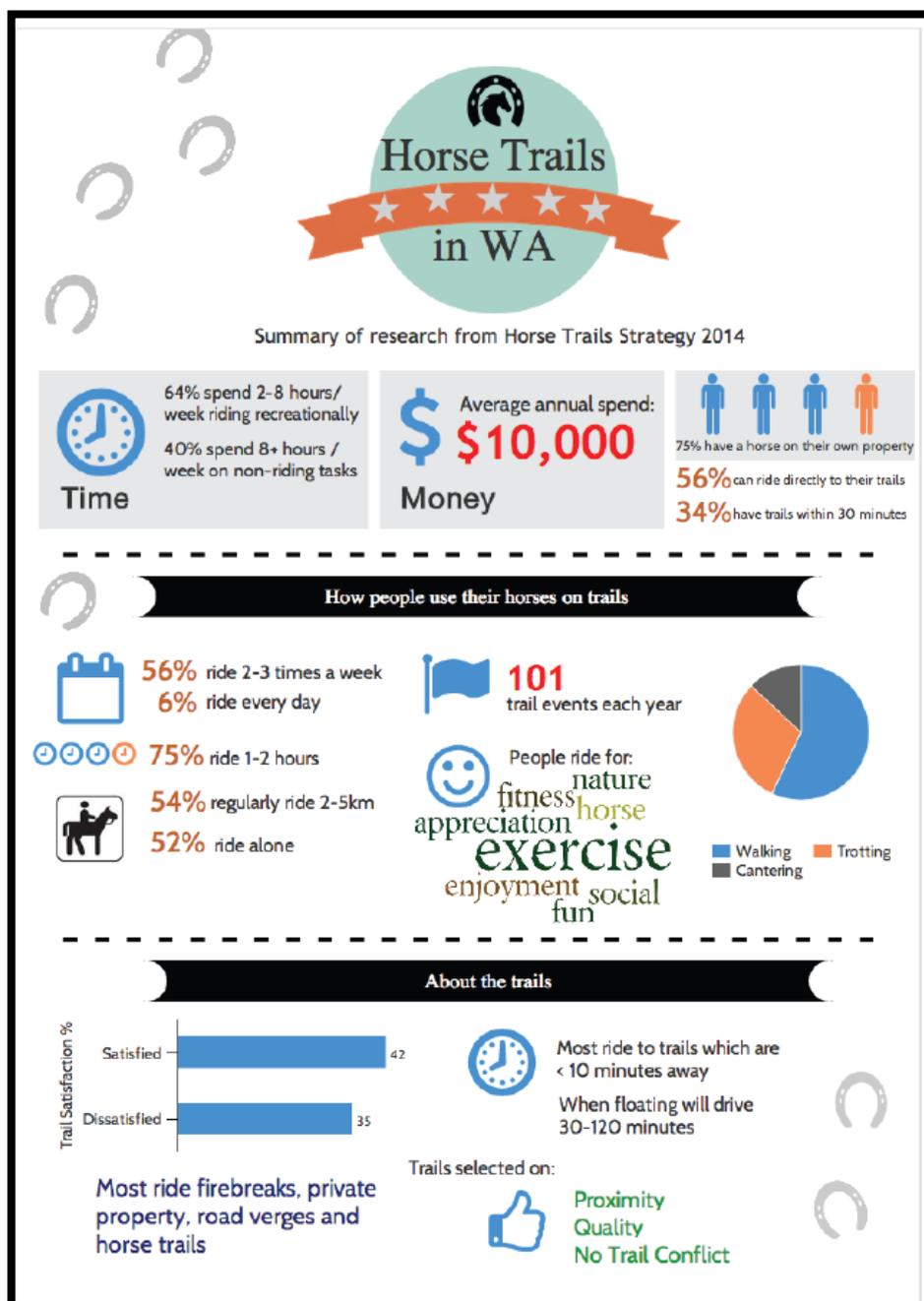
**Insurance issues**

ATHRA has secured with its Insurance brokers comprehensive and competitively-priced insurance cover – Combined General Liability, Personal accident and Management Liability and Professional Indemnity. These insurance policies should cover all Clubs and its members who behave in the appropriate manner in most if not all situations. Sometimes clubs will be requested to provide a Certificate of Currency for the relevant Insurance policy and this is readily available from ATHRA by emailing the Insurance Coordinator, [insurance@athra.com.au](mailto:insurance@athra.com.au). Further information on what ATHRA’s insurance policies provide are readily available at the ATHRA website, [www.athra.com.au](http://www.athra.com.au) under both the “Insurance” tab and the “Forms and Info” Tab.

**Horse Trail Riding Snapshot – Western Australia**

Source – WA Horse Trail Strategy – Taking the Reins.

Here are some helpful and insightful facts and figures!



## APPENDIX A - SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS AND REFERENCES

### Trail Riding Benefits

**The Business of Trails – Kerstin Stender, Edith Cowan University, Thesis**

<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/1957/>

**Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2018-2021, Page 22**

“2.3 BENEFITS OF TRAILS - A Global Body of evidence shows that the provision of trails leads to multiple health, lifestyle, social, environmental and economic benefits for communities”

<https://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/about/plan-for-the-future/western-australian-strategic-trails-blueprint-2017-2021>

**American Trails – Benefit of Trails**

<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/benefits-of-trails>

**Rails to Trails Conservancy (US)**

<https://www.railstotrails.org/experience-trails/benefits-of-trails/>

### Sustainable Trails and Infrastructure

Horse Trail Infrastructure – Guides for Peri-Urban Precincts [https://www.horsesawarehouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Horse\\_Trail\\_Infrastructure\\_A4.pdf](https://www.horsesawarehouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Horse_Trail_Infrastructure_A4.pdf)

Building Sustainable Horse Trails

<https://elcr.org/sustainable-trails-for-equestrian-use/>

<http://www.southernaustraliantrails.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Trail-Design-Guidelines.pdf>

### Environmental Impact

Patterns of road surface movement after three endurance horse-riding events in protected areas, south-east Queensland - <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14486563.2012.664949>