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1. PURPOSE

This policy has been developed to assist Australian Trail Horse Riders Association (ATHRA) affiliated clubs and members to acknowledge the benefits of a national horse trail network and to assist with the effective and professional management of existing and future trail access matters.

2. SCOPE

This policy covers all ATHRA affiliated clubs, members and all persons attending sanctioned ATHRA events as a Day Member or in any other capacity, not limited to but including representation at all levels of government and in the community in reference to horse trail access.

3. POLICY

Responsibility

ATHRA acknowledges that members and clubs rely on horse trail access via various land managers including state forests, national parks, water catchment authorities, local council, public roads, rail trails and private property. The responsibility of positive and effective communication in respect of any horse trail access matters rests with the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association, affiliated clubs and individual club members. Communication must at all times be fact based, professional, courteous and without excess emotion - whether verbal or written.

Clubs are encouraged to seek advice and guidance from the ATHRA Director Access if they encounter a problem with trail access in their area. Problems that clubs may encounter could include:

- Closure of a trail that has been in use for some time
- Proposed new trails that do not permit horse riding
- Trail maintenance and/or infrastructure
- Conflict with other trail users

Trail Access collaboration

ATHRA actively consults with the Bi-Centennial National Trail, Horse SA and government at all levels as required about trail access matters as they arise. Clubs are encouraged to develop relationships with their local land managers in the interest of preserving the heritage values of horse access on nature trails for future generations.

ATHRA fully supports the concept of multi-use nature trails as best use of limited funding to benefit multiple user groups. Clubs are encouraged to develop relationships with other nature trail user groups in their local area to work together on public nature trail access matters as they arise.

Preservation of the Environment

ATHRA requires all clubs and members observe and follow the Code of Conduct, in particular the 16 Environmental Rules.

Risk and Safety

ATHRA advocates for all clubs and members to follow the road rules when in public places. All club trail rides and events are organised in accordance with ATHRA guidelines and policies. Risk Management plans are required for all ATHRA sanctioned events. Insurance coverage on sanctioned trail rides includes personal injury and public indemnity. All members are covered by public indemnity when riding individually. Land Managers can request clubs to provide a certificate of currency when conducting rides and events on their managed lands.

4. BACKGROUND

Trail horse riding is a recreational activity that has strong cultural and heritage associations for many Australians and is a popular way to experience and enjoy natural environments. Similar to hiking and mountain biking on nature trails, horse riding is known to provide social, physical, health, cultural and economic benefits to individuals and the community. In particular, horses and trail horse riding can have positive effects on people's physical and mental health and sense of wellbeing. Trail horse riding facilitates participation and interaction between diverse community members and provides opportunities to experience natural and cultural heritage environments. It is a family friendly activity and is currently most popular amongst women over 50.

There are significant challenges in maintaining a national horse trail network in Australia, due to competing demands from other nature trail activities, private land holdings severing trail links and the closure of vast areas of public land for recreation. These competing demands are increasing the potential for trail user conflicts and the distribution of false and misleading information about trail horse riding impacts. A reduced horse trails inventory and limited recreational funding puts pressure on the recreational trail horse riding community to be organised, effective and efficient in its actions.

ATHRA actively promotes science-based research studies that are fact based and can provide advice to land managers to address any concerns they may have about perceived environmental impacts.

See also IMS- GU-058. Horse Access Guidelines.

5. POLICY REVIEW AND CHANGE

This policy will be reviewed as required by the ATHRA Board.

This policy is guided by ATHRA's:

Vision: to be consistently recognised as Australia's premier representative body for trail horse riders. Our members' needs will determine our path. Our values will guide us.

Mission: to educate, guide and promote safe and environmentally responsible trail horse riding in Australia, and in doing so help preserve our heritage."

Values: Professionalism, ethics, honesty and transparency in the administration of affiliated clubs and the Association.