



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

27 August 2014

Mr Robert Greenwood
General Manager
Blue Mountains City Council
Locked Bag 1005
Katoomba NSW 2780

Dear Mr Greenwood

Knapsack Downhill Track inspection – 4 June 2014

On June 4th 2014, Lachlan Garland and Judy Smith, representing Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS), were taken on an official inspection of the Knapsack Reserve Downhill MTB Track with Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) officers Trish Kidd and Michael Hensen. The Downhill Track to the east of Lovers Walk was closed to allow for this inspection, with barriers and signage put in place.

The inspection commenced where the Downhill Track crosses Lovers Walk. No inspection of the section of bike track above Lovers Walk was undertaken (apart from in the immediate vicinity of the junction of the track and Lovers Walk). BMCS's main concern was the newly constructed section of track which is on the Eastern Escarpment and is within vegetation that is threatened at both state and national level.

It should be noted that, despite past assurances from BMCC, no volunteer maintenance or upgrade days have been held since the track was opened in late 2013. It was noted that the jump just above Lovers Walk was still in place. This was always considered a major issue as it encourages riders to increase speed over this jump and potentially cross Lovers Walk at a higher speed.

During the track inspection it was clearly apparent that the construction and on-going operation of the track had impacted adversely on adjacent vegetation. Approximately 12 photo points illustrating these adverse impacts, for example, where the track has become significantly wider or where silt has accumulated on the edges of the track, were selected and noted by Council Officers.

The main issues noted during the inspection were:

1. Motor bikes, possibly mini bikes or trail bikes, have been using the track and are causing damage.
2. Pedestrians appear to have been using the track and may also have dogs, on or off leash, with them. This is despite the signage prohibiting pedestrians.

3. The track has become wider than allowed in some sections. Damage to adjacent vegetation was noted on parts of the track.
4. Second, and in some cases third, track lines have been created, particularly in areas where the track is of a harder grade and some riders appear to seek an easier grade.
5. In some places riders have created complete short cuts through bushland between sections of track.
6. The old existing track, that had been completely brush matted prior to the opening of the new track, is being used again. Brush matting material has been thrown to the side of the track. It appears that the mini/trail bikes have also been ridden in this area.
7. In some sections there is significant active erosion with significant amounts of silt are being washed out from the track. In one case the silt plume extended approximately 18 metres from the track (photographed and measured with a tape by Council officers).
8. Unauthorised upgrading or renovation of the track has been occurring, and bush rock appears to have been taken from the bush for this purpose.
9. Small trees adjacent to the track have been pushed over, and have subsequently died .

It was noted that some of the unauthorised upgrade work has been of a good quality. In some cases, the work will protect the track. However, the point is no unauthorised track work is meant to take place at any time, now or in the future. Any unauthorised work only encourages others to attempt similar works.

One other major issue noted was that the track has now been extended at the eastern end, across the paved walkway to the Railway Viaduct which is a high use area for walkers, joggers, children on bikes, and dog walkers, often with their dogs off leash. The dangers to these people are significant if the downhill riders are riding straight across the paved walkway without slowing down. A barrier may be needed to stop the riders, to the point where they may have to stop and lift the bikes over the barrier. A follow up inspection by the Society indicated that the unauthorised track extension goes all the way to Leonay Oval. Council staff have subsequently committed to inspecting the extension and liaising with the other relevant public land managers.

Council officers agreed that the condition of the track should be monitored. During our inspection Council officers took a number of photos and made measurements of the distance to which impacts from the track extended into bushland.

Since the joint inspection, Lachlan Garland, on behalf of BMCS, phoned Trish Kidd to get an update on actions taken by BMCC. She advised that

- a mountain bike track construction contractor had been engaged to supervise upgrade and maintenance work, with the intention that four upgrade/maintenance days will be completed between now and the end of the year,
- that Council had not yet spoken to anyone in BMORC (the local user group) regarding the unauthorised work, and
- that Council is intending to demolish the unauthorised work undertaken to date to re-enforce the original ban on unauthorised work.

Subsequent to the joint site inspection, the Society inspected the area around Old Bathurst Road. A track south of Old Bathurst Road appears to be being used by downhill mountain bikes (evidence of constructed jumps and cross tracks). The Society has contacted Council with our concerns about the proliferation of tracks in this area, and Council staff have committed to inspecting the area around Old Bathurst Road in terms of the tracks described above and what management actions could be taken.

In relation to the Knapsack Downhill Track, the Society strongly recommends that Council

- devise and implement a comprehensive, regular ongoing monitoring program which monitors both the condition of the track and adjacent bushland;
- utilise monitoring results to guide on-going management of track impacts;
- make the results of the monitoring program available to all interested stakeholders, including the BMCS and BMORC;
- implement regular and ongoing maintenance and upgrades of the track, including volunteer days; and
- devise and implement a strategy (for instance signage, enforcement activities, liaison with the key user groups) to prevent or minimise unauthorised works occurring on the track, especially the making of new tracks.

The Society requests that Council provide a written update on their progress in relation to the commitments Council made during the joint inspection and subsequently, and a response to the recommendations outlined above.

If you have any questions regarding the issues raised, please contact myself, Alan Page, President on ph 4784 1704 or email president@bluemountains.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AP', written in a cursive style.

Alan Page
President Blue Mountains Conservation Society

cc All Councillors