

Access for trail based large group activities in SE Queensland

Summary

The Parks and Wildlife Service refuses group activity permits for any new fun run or walk in South East Queensland which:

- includes shared use of walking tracks, or
- is in a quality conservation area, including the Great Walks

The current permit system does not involve an assessment of the merits and impacts of a proposed event. Instead, it is based on the environmental classification of conservation areas, dividing the conservation estate up with the most attractive forest and trails reserved exclusively for individual walkers.

In our experience the vast majority of walkers are happy to share the trails with other users, and we only ask for one day a year. Instead, under current policy, large group activities are forced to apply for the left-overs on rougher maintenance roads and fire trails, usually without signage or facilities, or the limited number of shared-use urban areas trails.

The Trail Running Association of Queensland was formed in 2006 to coordinate non-profit trail runs. We believe in and support conservation too. Large group activities are controlled events with no negative environmental impacts.

They also inspire individuals to keep fit and enjoy the outdoors, provide a fun focus for community and regional promotion, and ensure a supported and safe shared experience in remote areas.

We are appealing to the Minister and senior QPWS managers to change current policies which ban fun runs and walks from occasional shared use on most of Queensland's walking trails.

TRAQ specifically requests:

1. Permission for a combined fun run and walk at Mapleton, including Decicia Conservation Area and the northern loop of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk. Great Walks are designed to be high use areas.
2. Favourable consideration for one event per year at new Great Walks, provided the event design takes appropriate consideration of other users and other local issues.
3. Support for trailwalker events in Brisbane Forest Park and on Fraser Island Great Walk.
4. Support for regional trails events including in national parks, where (a) usage is lower (b) tourism benefits are higher (c) demand on high-use SEQ locations is reduced.
5. QPWS sets event numbers are at reasonable, sustainable levels. Standard practise in other countries is 200-400 for established events, depending on location.

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Appendix 1: Permit refusals and limitations 2007

1.1 Summary

It is normal practise for QPWS permit declines to pre-emptively deny appeal by listing multiple standard “reasons”. Most simply confirm that QPWS interprets its management plans as denying running events a share of designated walking trails.

Also common practise is the inclusion of statements citing “risk” and “environmental harm” without any substantiating evidence or specifics.

1.2 Specific permit outcomes 2007

- 1.2.1 Mapleton – all options declined
- 1.2.2 Lake Manchester – option 1 unacceptable, option 2 permitted
- 1.2.3 Mount Glorious – options 1 unacceptable, 2 declined including walk, 3 permitted
- 1.2.4 Rainbow Beach – walking track section declined as “unsafe”, but beach run section competing with 4WDs permitted; organiser declined to proceed.
- 1.2.5 Bunyaville mixed-use trails – approved course on a combination of mixed-use walking and bike trails; QPWS push to shift start off trails onto concrete path.

1.2.1 Mapleton

The Mapleton area provides many walking opportunities, including the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk. QPWS opposed all possible routes close to the township, depriving the community of a valuable activity and a great opportunity for regional promotion.

Part of the proposed run was on the northern loop of the Great Walk which is clearly underused and in need of publicity. The average number of weekend walkers on this track is estimated at under five, and most weekends there are no through-walkers at the campsites.

Instead QPWS insisted any run or group walk be on a complex network of rough and unsigned forestry trails north of Mapleton.

Declined.

1.2.2 Jollies Lookout / Lake Manchester

1.2.2a Initial proposal for a small run from Jollies Lookout early in the morning, before most walkers are likely to use the trails. Included flat section of Boombana National Park suitable for walkers/joggers, and longer run to Lake Manchester. Ideal promotional opportunity for a sunrise radio/TV broadcast promoting “getting outdoors and active”.

QPWS advised at pre-permit meeting that no run from Jollies Lookout would be approved.

1.2.2b Run from Lake Manchester Reserve, with three courses using forestry maintenance roads beside reservoir and up lower reaches of Brisbane Forest Park.

Approved. This is a good course, a good starting area, and the reserve has good facilities. Most of the forest roads are relatively flat and in unusually good condition. A section of the rough horse track joining the reserve to the most popular route on the eastern shore of the lake has been lost to road widening and needs rebuilding.

1.2.3 Mount Glorious

1.2.3a Initial proposal on the rarely-used western ridge trail starting across the road from the Maiala picnic area.

Declined. QPWS advised at a pre-permit discussion that under no circumstance would they approve this location for a run.

1.2.3b Proposal for (1) Run from Cedar Flats to Northbrook mountain via old trails, and (2) Supported walk on western ridge trail, no more than 40 total in groups of up to 5 throughout one day.

Both options (1) "off-track" run and (2) walk declined. TRAQ accepts the decision to refuse an event on old farm roads which are revegetating, but is very puzzled by the refusal of a walk in small groups.

1.2.3c Run from Cedar Flats via steep unmarked fire trails and lower grade forest to reach intersection on maintenance road below Northbrook Mountain. Suitable for very fit runners only.

1.2.3c Approved.

1.2.4 Rainbow Beach

Proposal to follow the Leisha Track from Rainbow Beach, then Telegraph Track and sections of beach before returning via Leisha Track. Various distances from 17km to 50km.

Shared use of walking trails refused citing area management plan; impact on other users; *risks to participants* and the general public; *assigned as a high risk activity* and inconsistent with the public interest; impacts of the activity on the social attributes of the area are unacceptable; likely cumulative effect of the proposed activity on the protected area poses an unacceptable risk; inconsistent with the orderly and proper management of the area.

Shared use of beach with high-speed 4WDs approved.

Organiser declined to proceed under these conditions.

1.2.5 Bunyaville mixed-use trails

Proposal for an annual fun run/walk starting at Bunya Recreation reserve on a mix of designated mixed-use walking and mountain bike trails.

QPWS indicates approval is supported, but also their preference to shift the course of this trail run from a start on the sports field then an existing trail, to a start in the carpark then along a concrete footpath beside a road.

QPWS states they are not convinced it is a safety issue to start the run in a carpark which sees several hundred cars enter and exit for the many weekend sports events held at this venue.

We are mystified why staff feel such determination to shift a trail run off trails.

Table 1: Reasons for permit declines 2007 and TRAQ response

<p>General citation that a competitive event is not compatible with the area.</p>	<p>Competition is a very normal part of life. For the vast majority of runners, it is simply a spur to retain relative fitness. It is not, as QPWS asserts, an incentive to race to the exclusion of pleasures observed on the trails.</p> <p>Competition is also not incompatible with any area, including national parks. It simply raise issues of appropriate event design. On narrower trails we advise runners to walk around other users who may not be aware they are passing. Similarly, early starts avoid times when other users will present etc.</p>
<p>General citation of excessive, increasing demand.</p>	<p>TRAQ targets areas with low usage, and adjusts the size and design of an event to balance the impact on other users according to the specifics of the location.</p>
<p><i>A national park is to be managed to—</i></p> <p><i>(a) provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area’s natural condition and the protection of the area’s cultural resources and values; and</i></p> <p><i>(b) present the area’s cultural and natural resources and their values; and</i></p> <p><i>(c) ensure that the only use of the area is nature-based and ecologically sustainable.</i></p>	<p>Other States and other countries don’t seem to have QPWS’s difficulty coming to terms with occasional larger events in national parks.</p> <p>Well designed trail running events are ecologically sustainable. QPWS has no evidence on the damage real or potential, but repeatedly claims this as a reason for permit refusals.</p>
<p>Section 49 of the <i>Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2006</i> provides the guidelines for the granting of permits for access, conduct and use within protected areas:</p> <p><i>In considering an application for an activity permit for a protected area, the chief executive must have regard to each of the following—</i></p> <p><i>(a) the impact the activities that may be conducted under the authority may have on the character and amenity of the area and adjacent areas;</i></p> <p><i>(b) the likely cumulative effect of the proposed use and other uses on the area;</i></p>	<p>Well designed trail running events are ecologically sustainable. QPWS has no evidence on the damage real or potential, but repeatedly claims this as a reason for permit refusals.</p>

<p>Individual sections of the proposed activity are not consistent with the designated Landscape Class for those areas</p> <p>QPWS Landscape Classification System is a tool used to assist in making decisions in relation to appropriate recreation activities for an area.</p> <p>The 'Western Window Circuit' is categorised as a Landscape Class 3 area under this policy, therefore an event with a total of more than 15 participants would not be permitted.</p>	<p>Every class of the landscape class system provides is used as an excuse to not consider the option of shared use.</p> <p>Either the forest is too good and therefore reserved for individual walkers, or it is a remote experience and similarly reserved for walkers.</p>
<p>Individual sections of the proposed activity are not consistent with the track class for that section</p> <p>The Australian Standard for Walking Tracks AS 2156.1 guides QPWS in management of our walking track system. Under this system, walking tracks are not designed for trail running and cater primarily for walking. The 'Western Window Circuit' is a class 4 walking track under this standard, which is defined as those where there is opportunity for visitors to explore and discover relatively undisturbed natural environments along defined and distinct tracks, <i>with minimal facilities and where users can expect opportunities for solitude with few encounters with others.</i></p>	<p>Is it possible 364 days a year of walking in solitude would be sufficient?</p>

<p>Use of Cedar Flats picnic area:</p> <p>The activity will affect the orderly and proper management of the area</p> <p><i>The Nature Conservation(PAM) Regulation, section 49c requires that the orderly and proper management of an area must be considered.</i></p> <p>The proposed activity is incompatible with other users of the area and that the long-term implications of this activity on the management of this area are unacceptable. Allowing this event to go ahead will set a precedent for future activities of this nature at this site. Owing to parking and general space limitations at the White Cedar Day Use Area the activity will have an unacceptable impact on the public use of the protected area.</p> <p>This site is designed to allow for 11 parking spaces. Therefore even with the reduced numbers that you have suggested, the area would require exclusive use based on the fact that all parking would be filled. Exclusive use will not be permitted at this site.</p> <p>Parking on the grassed area of the picnic area is not acceptable due to the potential damage to the site including underground waterlines, as well as the impact on other users at the site, particularly on their enjoyment of a natural area.</p>	<p>There are two picnic areas, each with their own carpark at Cedar Flats. Typical total usage on the weekend is 2-5 cars, sometimes 10 from a total capacity of 60.</p> <p>Refusing to let a large event make use of the smaller and less popular of these two carparks on one day a year is simply obstructive.</p>
<p>Walk of up to 40 persons in groups of <5:</p> <p>The section of the activity that was proposed for the 'Western Window Circuit' is considered to be inconsistent with the management principles, intent and current planning practices for the D'Aguilar Forest Reserve section of Brisbane Forest Park. The area is zoned as a more remote/natural setting than other sections of the park and is reserved for recreation opportunities that are unstructured ensuring minimal impact to this area.</p>	<p>This area is adjacent to the Maijala picnic area carpark; it is a sensible proposition to have one group activity a year so that the area is known and used.</p> <p>Many areas of Brisbane forest which were well know to the public 20 years ago are now little known and rarely seen due to the QPWS policy of restricting "structured activities".</p> <p>This is not an "impact to the area", it is an appropriate use of the area.</p>

<p>Rainbow Beach trails:</p> <p>Use of Leisha and Telegraph tracks refused citing incompatibility with area management plan; impact on other users; risks to participants and the general public; assigned as a high risk activity and inconsistent with the public interest; impacts of the activity on the social attributes of the area are unacceptable; likely cumulative effect of the proposed activity on the protected area poses an unacceptable risk; inconsistent with the orderly and proper management of the area.</p> <p>Shared use of beach with high-speed 4WDs approved.</p>	<p>Clearly QPWS is applying risk very selectively to ban shared use of a trail with walkers, but approve shared use of a beach popular with 4WDs.</p> <p>The claims of environmental risk are neither substantiated, and nor warranted.</p> <p>Similarly there are no risks to the public in this event, where a small number of runners start in the early morning before walkers would be on the trail, and return later in the day when they would be well spread out and have no impact on walkers.</p> <p>“impacts of the activity on the social attributes of the area are unacceptable”; what does this mean? No evidence provided.</p>
<p>Mapleton fun run/walk:</p> <p>Delicia Road Conservation Park is used by members of the public for the purposes of enjoying the natural surrounds and it is considered that the proposed activity is inconsistent with the public interest.</p> <p>Sections of the proposed course traverse the Great Walk track and the management intent does not allow for competitive events.</p> <p>Owing to parking and general space limitations at the Delicia Rd CP entrance the activity will have an unacceptable impact on the public use of the protected area.</p>	<p>QPWS's position is that organised runs are not considered consistent with walkers at Mapleton and will not be permitted at any time in this reserve or on the Great Walk.</p> <p>In other regions such runs do take place eg "Run the Whitsunday Great Walk", Lamington National Classic.</p> <p>Runners and walkers can in fact share a walk; and event notices and signage provide information so that on the outside chance one person is worried they can choose another of the many local walks that morning.</p> <p>Average use of the Delicia carpark on weekend mornings is 0-5 cars parked. The carpark is large and the run route uses the far left side fire trail as its entry point.</p>
<p>Delicia Road Conservation Park is habitat for endangered and rare species of frogs and the proposed activity has the potential to adversely impact on rare and threatened wildlife or their habitat (through increased water sedimentation).</p>	<p>Citing sedimentation due to one day of runners on an established trail is not remotely credible. Runners follow the trail, just as walkers do, with the impact of either group being too small to measure, and 100 runners having far less impact than 10 walkers per day x 100 days per year.</p> <p>QPWS regularly contracts bulldozers to maintain these trails, including 3km of the Great Walk right next to this Conservation Park, and parks maintenance roads off Delicia Road.</p>

The close confines of the tracks may pose problems in the evacuation of injured participants and it is therefore considered that the risks to the general public are unacceptable.

Event organisers, just like bushwalking groups, make arrangements to cover identified risks.

In this case, Mapleton is far more accessible than most parks, with forestry roads providing ample emergency access to all sections of these trails.

Appendix 2: Good Event Design

Our ideal trail run is:

- A. Through areas of quality forest and good trails which will inspire runners into the outdoors;
- B. May also include sections of maintenance trails to reduce loads on sensitive areas; takes account of local trail condition and usage in its route selection;
- C. Includes a short fun run/walk option on well-maintained trails which have an even surface, for less fit and less confident walkers/runners;
- D. Provides support to ensure safe participation;
- E. Involves the local community and promotes the region.

Design elements which mitigate impacts on other users:

Our program aims to have approximately one quality event per month. Some of these will be in regional centres. As well as providing community promotion and tourism income, this lessens the load on South East Queensland locations.

A few “signature” events in conservation areas are supplemented with shorter, more frequent events in accessible city parks and multi-use areas.

Well-designed routes often also include sections of low-demand and or low-quality trails

Progressive ‘wave’ starts can ensure runners spread out quickly to single file. Entry numbers can be capped if necessary.

Signage can be placed to advise other users when an approved large event is taking place.

Well planned trail runs have minimal environmental impact. We always provide a “sweeper” who follows behind the last runner, for safety but also to remove trail markings and check for litter.

Trail organisers provide post-event evaluations to review the course design and event systems from an environmental and safety perspective.

Competition is not incompatible with conservation areas, including national parks. For the vast majority of runners, competition is simply a spur to retain relative fitness, as is their enjoyment of conservation areas. Competition simply raise issues of appropriate event design.

On narrower trails we advise runners to walk around other users who may not be aware they are passing. Similarly, early starts avoid times when other users will present etc. Pre-race trail courtesy briefings are a standard part of trail runs, as are reminders not to litter.

Providing support at fun runs also provides a safe option for fun-walkers, particularly women. While a tiny minority may resent sharing the current monopoly of walking trails, most walkers welcome other users. They also benefit from occasional large group activities which publicise new areas and provide a safe environment.

Trail runs can provide visible support for trails through funding trail maintenance and providing working bees, provided QPWS allows them to reach a sustainable size.

Appendix 3: Case studies

New Zealand's "Kepler Challenge", 60km alpine trail in national park

- 20th year in 2007, 400 participants & 200 on shorter option; 2006 online entries full in 20 minutes
- Major fundraiser for Kepler Track maintenance including helicoptering gravel for trails and hut extensions

Many similar New Zealand trail runs coexist with overnight walkers in National Parks and on 4 of the 9 Great Walks, including Routeburn track, Abel Tasman, Tongariro.

Sydney: Trailwalker

- Trailwalkers events change lives. More than any other event, they create a culture of fitness. You're encouraged to practise over sections of the trail, get used to carrying a pack, maybe walk to work with it, learn to navigate at night, and of course get fit.
- 502 teams of four entered in 2007; raised \$3million for charity

Queensland's "Airlie Beach – Run the Whitsundays Great Walk"

- New in 2007, QPWS limit of 100, sold out despite the distance to major cities, attracted inter-state and New Zealand participants
- Received \$30,000 local sponsorship from tourism industry & local government because of its promotional value



New South Wales' "Six Foot Track", Blue Mountains

- 9th year in 2007, 800 participants, raised \$37,000 in 2007 for volunteer fire service & trail development
- Two new trail events in Blue Mountains approved for May 2008