

Bushwalking Infrastructure Policy

July 2014

Purpose

This document sets out Bushwalking Victoria's policy with regard to bushwalking infrastructure.

Bushwalking Victoria policy documents aim to:

1. Inform our members, bushwalkers, media, government, decision makers and other users of protected areas of our position on the topics covered.
2. Ensure consistency in the actions, words and decision making of office bearers, board members, staff, convenors and other volunteers, both now and into the future.
3. Ensure that Bushwalking Victoria office bearers, staff, convenors and other delegated persons may act without the need to refer all decisions to the Bushwalking Victoria Board.

Should an unforeseen situation arise, including circumstances where it will be desirable for actions to be taken which directly or implicitly contradict any Bushwalking Victoria policy, the matter should be referred to the Bushwalking Victoria Board for resolution, or in urgent cases to the Bushwalking Victoria Executive.

Bushwalking Victoria's policies aim to be consistent with the corresponding policies of Bushwalking Australia.

Principles Underlying Policy Positions

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as follows:

'A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.'

For the purposes of this document therefore, 'protected area' includes National Parks, State Parks, Forest Reserves, Fauna and Flora Parks, Wilderness or Reference areas, and any other natural area protected by Victorian or Federal legislation.

We believe that the challenge to all managers and recreational users of protected areas is to balance the rights of public access, conservation, and the right to quiet enjoyment of natural areas. The appropriate balance between these three factors depends on the nature and characteristics of each area.

At one extreme, wilderness and reference areas are totally focussed on conservation and scientific study. At the other, local parks and gardens are almost totally focussed on wider public access and recreational activities. Protected areas such as national parks must strike a balance, which may be achieved by defining zones within individual parks with different emphases. Such zones must be clearly defined and delineated in the management plans for each park.

Bushwalking Victoria believes that bushwalkers should enjoy the natural environment in a way that inflicts minimum damage or degradation. The practical application of this is outlined in the 'Tread Softly' brochure, (Bushwalking Victoria, May 2003).

In addition, we would refer walkers to the 'Leave No Trace' web-site. www.lnt.org.au/

Leave No Trace Australia is a national non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting and inspiring responsible outdoor travel and recreation through education, research and partnerships.

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Tracks

Tracks should blend into the environment while not endangering fragile environments or endangered species. In particular tracks should follow routes and be constructed so as to minimise erosion and other forms of environmental degradation.

The use of boardwalks, steps or matting should only be used in fragile and high use areas to stop erosion or to protect flora or fauna.

Tracks should show to the walker the diverse beauty of the area in which they are located and where possible allow the viewing of the local plant, animal and bird life.

Where possible, tracks should start and end close to public transport of some type to minimise vehicle traffic.

Bushwalking Victoria supports the view that, in the interests of conservation, some tracks may need to be subject to access control to limit the number of walkers at any given time.

We also support the periodic closure of tracks where necessary to rest or rehabilitate stressed areas.

For a more complete discussion of track design and construction, please refer to *Reid D., Guerin B., Walker T. (March 2008) Creating Trails that Walkers will Want to Walk* on the Bushwalking Victoria web site.

Track Standards

Bushwalking Victoria supports the consistent use of relevant standards in the construction and maintenance of all walking tracks, specifically *AS2156.2 – 2001 Walking tracks Part 2: Infrastructure design*.

We support the need for ongoing research into the use of natural fire resistant stone for steps and where applicable tracks to reduce the need for reconstruction after fires.

Track Classification and Signage

Comprehensive, consistent and accurate signage and mapping of all tracks should be provided in the interests of improving safety and encouraging more people to access Victorian tracks.

Bushwalking Victoria supports and advocates for the consistent use of relevant standards for track classification and signage, specifically *AS 2156.1-2001 Walking tracks Part 1: Classification and signage*.

Trail heads should provide accurate information on the track, including features, hazards, grading/ classification and emergency facilities if applicable.

Track Grading

BWV promotes the use of the Australian Walking Track Grading System to inform users about the level of difficulty so that they can gauge whether a track is suitable for them.

Shared Trails

Bushwalking Victoria believes that sharing tracks between different user groups needs careful planning and is subject to considerable limitations.

Four-wheel drive vehicles and trail bikes represent considerable hazards to bushwalkers, and should be confined to roads, and designated areas. They are not suitable as co-users of narrow tracks with limited visibility.

Mountain bikes can co-exist with bushwalkers in some areas, but where visibility is limited or where tracks are narrow, they are not suitable as co-users.

Horse riders can generally co-exist with bushwalkers, but where track usage is heavy this may become unsuitable.

In urban or peri-urban areas, many tracks are shared by walkers and cyclists. Whilst this is sometimes necessary, it is far from ideal for either group. Cyclists travel much faster than walkers, are often commuting or exercising, and prefer concrete surfaces. Walkers prefer softer surfaces, and to be able to relax and enjoy the scenery. Bushwalking Victoria believes that, where possible, the two should be kept separate.

Campfires

Bushwalking Victoria believes that campfires are not normally essential for comfort or cooking and bushwalkers are strongly encouraged to use fuel stoves instead. Campfires should only be lit in areas where it is permitted and safe to do so, and in properly constructed fire places.

Wood for campfires should not be gathered from within protected areas, and in other locations, should only be taken from wood already lying on the ground.

Campsites

Bushwalking Victoria supports the limited use of tent platforms to reduce environmental impact at high and medium usage campsites.

Bushwalking Victoria supports construction of toilet facilities at established and recognised camp sites to minimise visitor impact and ensure the health and safety of visitors.

We believe that management planning for popular and heavily used campsites should include plans to rest and rehabilitate them periodically, whilst providing alternative facilities.

Bushwalking Victoria considers that both huts and campsites can co-exist and consideration should be given to both forms of accommodation in parks visitation planning.

Charging for the use of facilities such as campsites should be confined to sites where facilities are provided, and should be based on cost recovery, not commercial profit margins.

Huts

Bushwalking Victoria believes that there should be no huts in areas which are classified as wilderness. Any existing illegally constructed huts in these areas should be removed.

Huts in other protected areas should be constructed and managed so as to minimise visual and environmental impact. They should be unobtrusive, and supported by management plans to deal with provisioning, litter and human waste.

Historic huts should be preserved and maintained where they do not conflict with good environmental management practices.

Huts constructed for commercial use should be in conformance with the principles set out in our policy for commercial activities in natural areas. In particular, they should not be constructed at the expense of or in place of non-commercial huts.