GSCORE
Great Southern Centre for Outdoor Recreation Excellence

GREAT SOUTHERN REGIONAL TRAILS

MASTER PLAN

2020-2029

FAQ

FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS

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Q: What is the Regional Trails Master Plan (RTMP)?

The Regional Trails Master Plan (RTMP) is a high-level strategic planning document that outlines a vision for trail development across the Great Southern Region. It is an **aspirational plan** – a vision of what the region's trail network could look like in ten years' time. It reflects community ideas, land manager input, research on trail user needs, and best practice planning principles. It focuses on terrestrial trails (eg: walking, cycling) and aquatic trails (eg: snorkelling, paddling).

Q: Why do we need it?

Put simply, there is a lack of high quality, sustainable trails that suit different user needs and a lack of trail planning at a local or regional level. Trails are a valuable outlet for exercise, play, challenge, recreation, and adventure. They can deliver significant social, health, and economic benefits and well-designed trails can protect environmental values. The achieve these outcomes, sound planning needs to be in place. The Western Australian State government's planning framework for trail development – the *WA Strategic Trails Blueprint* - recommends the development of regional trails master plans as critical planning tools for all tiers of government.

Q: Why do we need a plan, can't we just start building trails?

Trails are expensive to build and maintain. Poorly planned or constructed trails, or unsanctioned trails, can negatively impact on the environment, are difficult to maintain, and provide a poor user experience. Without a well-documented trail plan it is also impossible to apply for funding to build trails.

Q: Why do we need a regional plan; can't we just develop a local plan for each shire?

The *WA Strategic Trails Blueprint* outlines the State government's approach to trail development. It recommends that regional trails master plans be developed that sit above and reference all local level plans. These regional plans can be for all trail types or for single trail types (eg: mountain-bike only regional plans).

Q: Which local governments are involved in the RTMP?

The Regional Trails Master Plan covers all eleven local governments in the Great Southern region – Albany, Broomehill-Tambellup, Cranbrook, Denmark, Gnowangerup, Jerramungup, Katanning, Kent, Kojonup, Plantagenet, and Woodanilling.

Q. How was the Master Plan developed?

The plan was developed over 12 months using a combination of community consultation, research on trail user trends and needs, discussion with land managers, and expert input from specialised trail consultants. In undertaking this work, GSCORE employed the [Trail Development Process](#) (TDP). The TDP was developed by DBCA and DLGSC in partnership with international trail specialists, key stakeholders, and the trail community. This planning process provides guidelines to assist land managers, trail professionals and trail groups to develop and manage trails sustainably, and maximise environmental, social, and economic benefits. The TDP advocates an eight-stage planning process. The development of the RTMP represents stages 1 and 2 of the TDP.

Q: What was GSCORE's role?

The Great Southern Centre for Outdoor Recreation Excellence (GSCORE) is a not-for-profit organisation established to support the growth of outdoor recreation in the Great Southern region. GSCORE is the region's peak body for trails. We advocate for best practice and the importance of taking a whole-of-region perspective in planning and development.

GSCORE was the Project Manager for the RTMP. GSCORE's responsibilities included: (i) securing funding support and managing grants; (ii) employing the project coordinator; (iii) managing tenders for trail consultants and managing consultant contracts: (iv) developing and implementing community consultation and stakeholder engagement strategies: (v) providing secretariat support to the project governance committees; (vi) undertaking research to develop the Trails Background Report; (vii) developing a Trail Plan for snorkelling and paddling; (viii) conducting data analysis to support the multi-criteria assessment process to identify priority trails; (ix) collating and drafting the final master plan; and (x) managing the public comment process.

Q. Who made the final decisions?

A Project Management Executive Group (PMEG) was established to oversee project management, including financial management, review consultant's reports, monitor community and stakeholder engagement and make final recommendations on priority trails. The PMEG consists of representatives from DBCA, DLGSC, the Shire of Denmark (representing the Lower Great Southern region), and the Shire of Cranbrook (representing the Upper Great Southern Region) and was chaired by GSCORE.

A regional Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) reviewed the final recommendations. The SRG was made up of representatives from all local government partners, DBCA, DLGSC, GSDC, RDA - Great Southern, Department of Transport, SWALSC, Wirrpanda Foundation, Australia's South West (ASW), the Amazing South Coast Tourism Incorporated, Great Southern Treasures, South Coast NRM, Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Denmark Chamber of Commerce. The SRG provided ideas, advice, and feedback to help define the key directions, projects and actions in the master plan. A set of planning principles were endorsed by this group and used to guide decision-making throughout the project.

Each priority trail project was discussed with the relevant land manager (eg: local government authority or DBCA). The final decision as to whether a project was included in the RTMP rested with the land manager.

Q: How were priority trail projects identified?

A two stage multi-criteria assessment process was used to determine the 14 priority trails. The assessment process used four key criteria – market potential, destination significance, destination opportunity, and destination deliverability. This process is described in detail in the RTMP. The process used for the RTMP is based on a technique used by DBCA to assess trail opportunities in other parts of WA.

Q. What does the RTMP recommend?

The RTMP identifies fourteen proposed priority trails or trail networks to be implemented over the next ten years. These projects have been grouped into short, medium and long-term delivery timeframes. The timeframe for the delivery of the proposed trails is based on a combination of factors, including land manager and broad community support, the need to secure funding for

construction, the need to undertake detailed environmental and heritage assessments as well as additional community consultation, and the need for complex land tenure negotiations with land owners and managers.

Q. Who has the final say as to whether projects go ahead?

Decisions on how to progress the fourteen priority trail projects will be determined by the relevant land managers. The RTMP recommends that each land manager follows the eight-state planning process outlined in the TDP. This includes site assessments and stakeholder consultation. On the basis of this consultation and assessment, the land manager may decide not to progress the project.

Q: What happens next?

Now that the RTMP has been finalised, the next stage is to begin to implement the key recommendations. GSCORE has been endorsed as the Project Manager for the implementation process. The next steps are to:

- Establish Project Governance Framework – establish the Great Southern Trails Reference Group by September 2020
- Develop concept plans for short-term and medium-term priority trail projects:
    - Undertake further community consultation (Stage 2 of TDP)
    - Conduct site assessments (flora, fauna, heritage, dieback) (Stage 3 of TDP)
    - Develop concept plans (Stage 4 of TDP)
    - Release concept plans for community consultation (Stage 4 of TDP)

Q. How was the RTMP funded?

All three tiers of government have provided funding to support the development of the Master Plan. Funding for the RTMP was provided by the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF); Lotterywest; the City of Albany, the Shires of Broomehill-Tambellup, Cranbrook, Denmark, Gnowangerup, Jerramungup, Katanning, Kent, Kojonup, Plantagenet and Woodanilling; the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions; the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; and the Great Southern Centre for Outdoor Recreation Excellence.

Q: Does the RTMP have community support?

The RTMP is strongly supported by all funding stakeholders, as well as peak bodies for outdoor recreation, tourism and business industry groups, and many trail users. The Public Comment process revealed strong support for trail development. However, a segment of the community has expressed its reservations about the construction of new trails, particularly mountain biking trails, on publicly managed land including national parks and local government reserves. It is important these concerns are addressed before trail construction progresses.

Q: What is a 'regional trail'?

The WA Trails Blueprint classifies WA's trails into three types:

- **National/State Trails** – an extended trail or trail network that is of sufficient quality with appropriate facilities, products and services to be recognised beyond the State and to attraction visitors to WA (eg: Bibbulmun Track or Munda Biddi Trail).

- **Regional Trails** – A major trail or trail network that services a population centre or large regional community, with facilities and services of a standard and appeal that could attract visitors from outside the region.
- **Local Trails** – A trail that services the local community and provides facilities suited to local use. Some local trails may have potential for development to regional status.

Q: Albany already has a Trail Hub Strategy, why do we need the RTMP?

The Albany Trail Hub Strategy provides a comprehensive plan for the Albany municipal area. The Regional Trails Master Plan builds on this strategy to identify trail building opportunities in other parts of the Great Southern.

Q: Does the RTMP supersede the Albany Trail Hub Strategy?

No. The Albany Trail Hub Strategy is the foundation stone of the Regional Trails Master Plan. The Albany Trail Hub Strategy is the result of extensive community consultation in Albany and addresses the needs of a diversity of trail user groups. When implemented, it will position Albany as a regional Trail Town. However, outside of Albany most other local governments in the Great Southern lack trail planning. To position the region as a trail destination we need to create a network of trail towns and trail centres across the entire region.

Q. Why does the RTMP recommend mountain bike trails in the Porongurup National Park?

To be a successful mountain biking destination, the Great Southern needs to provide diverse range of trail experiences. The Porongurup National Park offers a unique opportunity for gravity-focused (downhill) trails due to its elevation. Other factors considered include existing recreation use within the park, proximity to tourism infrastructure, including accommodation, and easy access from major transport routes. Mountain biking is already identified as a future use in the park management plan.

However, the RTMP recommends that any MTB trail development in the park must take into consideration environmental and cultural values. For this reason, it recommends that MTB trails are limited to an area known as the 'Potato Patch' a former farm that has been incorporated into the boundaries of the national park. This area has already been extensively modified through intensive agriculture. As a result, it has a different character from the surrounding biodiverse landscape.

Progressing any development in the Porongurup National Park will require ongoing site assessment, feasibility studies, and community consultation.

Q. Isn't mountain biking destructive to the environment?

All types of trails have an impact on the environment, but this can be mitigated by appropriate trail design. The trail building industry is relatively new, meaning that many trails built in the past, including hiking and mountain biking trails, have been poorly constructed. This can often lead to negative environmental outcomes. In relation to mountain biking, the RTMP advocates best practice by adopting the standards described in the *West Australian Mountain Bike Management Guidelines 2019.*

Q. How does the RTMP protect environmental and cultural heritage values?

The RTMP recommends that trail proponents adhere to the Trail Development Process which requires environmental and heritage surveys as part of the Site Assessment stage. This will enable future planning to avoid areas of high conservation or heritage values.

Q: How does the RTMP project trail user safety?

All outdoor activities carry an element of risk. Well planned, well designed, well built, and well-maintained trails are essential parts of the risk management process for trails. Provision of safety advice is the responsibility of the land manager.

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