WA Strategic Trails Blueprint

2022-2027

Developed on behalf of
the Trails Reference Group

Echidna Chasm, Purnululu National Park.
Image courtesy of Tourism Western Australia.

On behalf of all Western Australians, the authors of the WA Strategic Trails Blueprint acknowledge and value the heritage, culture and spiritual connection of Aboriginal people with the lands and waterways through which trails pass. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as the Traditional Custodians and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Government of Western Australia

Department of **Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries**
Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**
Department of **Water and Environmental Regulation**
Tourism Western Australia
Department of **Health**
Department of **Transport**

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Contents

Foreword

Blessed with landscapes which naturally invite us into the outdoors, trails have been an important and valued feature of the Western Australian landscape for more than 60,000 years.

Our State's geography allows us to engage in a diverse range of trail experiences - be it a challenging ride, a leisurely stroll or a paddle along one of our many pristine waterways.

Some of Western Australia's most-loved trails follow traditional pathways through country that has been used by Aboriginal people for generations.

Even through some of the most disruptive and challenging times for the industry, trails have remained incredibly popular, increasing opportunities for social interactions, facilitating better health outcomes and growing the appreciation for our natural environment.

Social distancing and isolation guidelines during the height of the pandemic meant more people were holidaying at home and trails were considered a safe, affordable and enjoyable activity.

The growth in participation has been met with investment by the State Government, for example more than $20 million invested in the Great Southern region towards trails and National Park amenities and election commitments such as the Dwellingup Trails Gap Project.

We now face incredible opportunities to harness the advantage of increased participation in trail activities and create opportunities that promote and grow trails in WA to embrace and benefit communities on an economic, tourism and social level.

We have shown strength and resilience during difficult times and should be proud of our work to date on trails.

I am pleased that the Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2022-2027 has identified strategic directions for the future that respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

This document builds on the previous strategy and demonstrates the maturation of the trail community, providing a strong foundation to launch into the next five years.

It is a valuable resource for Western Australia to guide future investment, planning consistency and the sustainable trails development across our State – with the Trails Reference Group to oversee the implementation program through to 2027.

Of course, this document would not be possible without the enduring collaborative partnership between government, industry and the community.

I would like to extend a special thanks to our key decision makers for their continued investment in Western Australia's trail industry.

The growing importance of trails to the visitor and tourism economy as well as its powerful influence on community development and personal wellbeing is significant and I look forward to the opportunities for the Western Australian community ahead.

Hon David Templeman MLA
Minister for Sport and Recreation

Hon Reece Whitby MLA
Minister for Environment

I believe the WA Strategic Trails Blueprint clearly articulates a transition toward deepening connection to country, community, and culture.

This shift will assist to identify and engage with Aboriginal people to collaborate and ensure that First Nation's peoples' cultural values are integrated across all stages of trail development.

Aboriginal people can connect trail users to at least 60,000 thousand years of Dreaming Trail networks across this beautiful place we now share.

Therefore I congratulate the Trails Reference Group, and all authors of the WA Strategic Trails Blueprint. I can now hope as this trails blueprint passes from our direct sphere of influence, that it will receive the due diligence that it deserves.

Dr Noel G Nannup OAM

Bibbulmun Track hikers. Image courtesy of Off The Beaten Track WA

Executive Summary

The WA Strategic Trails Blueprint 2022-2027 (the Blueprint) is an overarching guide for consistent and coordinated planning, development and management of quality trails and trail experiences across Western Australia. It provides a vision, guiding principles, strategic directions and actions for consideration across the state by government, trail managers, landholders, trail organisations, tourism operators and the community.

Building on the successes of the Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017-2021, this new Blueprint presents a strategic refocus for the trails industry with a shift towards deepening trail users' connection to country, community and culture, whilst ensuring ongoing economic, environmental and social sustainability of trail developments.

Western Australia is blessed with stunning natural landscapes and opportunities to connect communities and visitors to these landscapes through trails. The Blueprint expresses the aspirations of the trails community to achieve improved and sustainable outcomes for trail supply, trail experiences, community development, Aboriginal enterprise, job creation and the local, regional and state visitor economies.

There have been record levels of investment committed to major trail projects such as Collie, Dwellingup and several locations within the Great Southern region. Conversely, there has been a significant reduction in funding approvals for the planning and construction of smaller, community-based projects state-wide. This has created a two-speed trails economy that has led to a level of inconsistency of trail provision.

Physical and mental health continues to be vitally important to the general wellbeing of Western Australian communities, and trails in all their forms provide a valuable outlet for exercise, play, challenge, recreation and adventure. This adds to the quality of life for Western Australians and reduces reliance on health services. Trails also improve the awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and build support for its conservation and protection.

Tourism is now playing a bigger and more significant role in the development of trails, as visitors look for interesting, challenging, authentic and unique experiences as part of their holidays and travels. This document recognises that quality trails have the ability to create "Trail Towns", "Trail Centres", "Trail Networks" and "Trail Destinations", which provide economic, tourism and social benefits to communities and regions.

Moving forward it is important that there is an Increased focus placed on ensuring trails are inclusive, accessible, have robust funding and management models, and are developed through engagement with Traditional Custodians and all other stakeholders.

Blueprint Vision

By 2027, Western Australia's trails will connect more people to Country through shared experiences in diverse landscapes, resulting in greater community, social, cultural, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes for Western Australia.

Blueprint Strategic Pillars and Actions

To achieve the vision for trails in Western Australia within this Blueprint, the following eight strategic pillars and associated actions were identified:

Note: The engagement and contribution of Aboriginal people is applied across all strategic pillars.

A. Greater trail use and awareness

A1. Grow participation and reduce barriers to maximise the positive benefits of getting communities outdoors.

A2. Support safe and responsible recreation and tourism trail use through provision of adequate facilities, resources and education.

A3. Build the capacity of trail focused events to increase participation and trail led economic stimulus.

A4. Establish an effective coordinated system for trail communication, promotion and marketing.

A5. Increase coverage of Western Australian trails in all forms of media, including social media.

B. Consistent and collaborative planning

B1. Continue the development and implementation of an integrated and consistent approach to trail and other relevant planning at state, regional and local levels.

B2. Continue to evolve the regional trails masterplan framework.

C. Sustainable design, construction and maintenance

C1. Ensure that information and training on best practice, sustainable trail design, construction and maintenance is available to current and potential trail developers, trail managers, volunteers, Aboriginal organisations and Local Governments.

C2. Advocate across all trail types and infrastructure provision for best practice construction and maintenance guidelines to be developed.

D. Community engagement

D1. Encourage community stewardship for trails by supporting and facilitating improvements in volunteer trail development, maintenance and management.

D2. Encourage environmental stewardship through participation in trail related training and programs.

D3. Enhance opportunities for community development through participation in trail experiences, activities and programs.

D4. Identify and engage with Aboriginal people to collaborate in the trail development process and ensure cultural values are integrated across all stages of trail development.

E. Sound knowledge base

E1. Investigate and evaluate trail use and trail technology trends to inform decision-making on new trail development, maintenance and participation.

E2. Improve the availability of trail-related data and research for use in trail planning, development, management, funding and safety.

E3. Establish education and training programs regarding sustainable trail development processes.

F. Effective governance

F1. Strengthen state-wide governance arrangements for trails across the trail sector through ensuring a coordinated approach.

F2. Strengthen involvement of Aboriginal people in the governance of trails.

F3. Develop sustainable governance models for trails, trail destinations and trail networks.

G. Investment and financing

G1. Provide guidance and support to organisations, communities and regions to evaluate and seek investment in existing and future trails.

G2. Investigate and encourage the adoption and expansion of a range of sustainable funding and resource options for the development, maintenance and management of trails.

G3. Establish a dedicated state-wide funding program for trail planning, construction, maintenance and participation.

H. Growing the visitor economy

H1. Identify iconic trails to be developed and promoted as the best in Western Australia and implement a staged program of trail development and promotion for iconic trails.

H2. Encourage and support private sector involvement in improving trail experiences.

H3. Encourage and support the involvement of Aboriginal people and enterprise in improving trail experiences.

H4. Implement the Trail Town Accreditation and Trail Friendly Business programs.

H5. Identify locally and regionally significant trails with the potential to stimulate tourism economies through increased intrastate visitation.

The Hiking Project introduces new participants to bushwalking.
Image courtesy of Bibbulmun Track Foundation.

Windjana Gorge
Image courtesy of Tourism Western Australia.

Where to from here?

This Blueprint has been developed for the consideration of the Trails Reference Group (TRG) which is convened by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC). The group is composed of Government agencies, industry bodies and community members. The TRG will review the Blueprint, develop a detailed implementation plan which builds on the existing implementation plan, and oversee specific aspects of its delivery.

1. Introduction

Jesters Flat, Margaret River
Photo by Frances Andrijich.

1.1. Background

Trails have been an important and valued feature of the Western Australian landscape for more than 60,000 years. Some of Western Australia's most-loved trails follow traditional pathways through country that has been used by Aboriginal people for generations. More recently, the planning and development of recreational trails has been a significant pillar of Government strategy, recovery and community development.

Over the past 26 years numerous trail development initiatives, both large and small, have been implemented across the State to provide opportunities for land and aquatic trail-based activities. It is well recognised that access to trails plays a significant role in encouraging participation in outdoor recreation and driving economic growth through nature-based and adventure tourism. In addition, using trails can assist communities to realise important health and wellbeing benefits, to make social and cultural connections, create active transport corridors and to enhance environmental outcomes.

Since the release of the Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017 - 2021, the development and use of trails in Western Australia has seen unprecedented popularity and growth.

Globally there has been a surge in outdoor recreation and trail use particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increase in the number of people seeking experiences in nature for recreation, mental and physical health benefits. Western Australia has also seen this trend with many Western Australians taking to the trails for their first trail experience during the 2020-2021 period.

In addition to the surge in trail use and popularity, there has been an increase in funding across Australia for new trail projects, including in Western Australia. Many of these projects have been developed to encourage Australians to explore and travel at home, stimulating local and regional economies and contributing to economic recovery.

Western Australia has led Australia in best practice trail development, producing the Trails Development Series; a series of documents to guide the planning, development and management of trails. Key state-wide strategy documents have been written, providing a strategic framework for many trail related activities across the state.

2017 Blueprint Achievement

The Implementation Plan for the Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017-2021 identified 77 specific actions.

In the five years since the launch of the 2017 Blueprint a majority of actions have been implemented or are in progress.

- Not addressed
- Ongoing
- Done
- In progress

WA Strategic Trails Blueprint actions

17%
27%
10%
46%
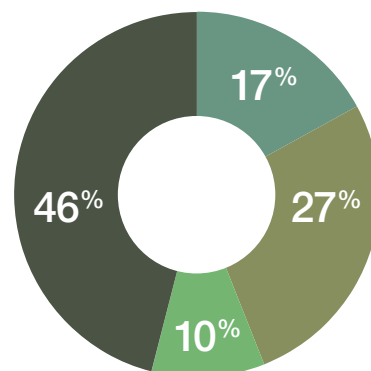
Image courtesy of Ngurrangga Tours.

"Wayiba, ngajutharndu yini Clinton Walker-nha, ngayi Ngarluma Yindjibarndi mayaga. Ngayi juru warrgam-mugardi nhurdu tourism-tharda mirnumagu Jibarra-bura, Mayaga-buratharndu ngurra-ngarli. Nhurdu tourism warrgam mirda jalya, wabamagu Mayaga-bura ngunhanmu Bijbarra-tharda!"

Hello, my name is Clinton Walker and I am a Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi man. I decided to work in tourism so that I could educate non-Indigenous people about Aboriginal country and culture. Tourism is very important for the future of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara!

1.2. Purpose and vision

The Blueprint is an overarching guide for consistent and coordinated planning, development and management of quality trails and trail experiences across Western Australia.

It provides a vision, guiding principles, strategic directions and actions across the state for consideration by government, trail managers, owners and operators, trail support groups and the community. The Blueprint expresses the aspirations of the Western Australian trails community to achieve improved and sustainable outcomes for trail supply, experiences, community development, health and wellbeing and the local, regional and state visitor economies.

This Blueprint seeks to build on the success of the previous strategies with refinements based on industry learnings, emerging best practices, visionary insights, comprehensive research and changes in participation behaviours.

Wambenger Trails, Wellington National Park.
Image courtesy of Common Ground Trails.

Vision

By 2027, Western Australia's trails will connect more people to Country through shared experiences in diverse landscapes, resulting in greater community, social, cultural, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes for Western Australia.

1.3. Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles will be applied in implementing the strategies and actions in this Blueprint.

Access, equity and inclusion

Consideration is given to ease of access for all members of the community.

Aboriginal leadership and collaboration

Collaboration with Aboriginal people in all levels of trail development and management strengthens the connection between cultural and heritage values, trail user experience and creates opportunity for Aboriginal enterprise, story-telling and cultural awareness.

Engagement

The community and user groups have the opportunity to become ambassadors for the trail sector through consultation, feedback and active participation in the trail development process, trail care and use of trails.

Quality trails

Good planning, maintenance and support networks, and an appropriate and sustainable funding model, result in a diverse network of fit-for-purpose, sustainable and high-quality trails.

Sustainability

Trail planning, development and management considers short and long- term community, health, social, economic and environmental factors.

Environment and culture

Trails help protect, interpret, conserve and raise awareness of environmental, cultural and heritage values.

Community benefit

Trails offer economic, health, wellbeing, social and community benefits for Western Australian residents.

Consumer focus

Trails are planned, developed and managed to align with current community and market needs, and respond to change.

Consistency

Lead agencies and relevant stakeholders enact coordinated change consistent with the Blueprint.

Innovation

Global advances in trail development, management and use, and emerging relevant technologies (such as media, measurement, research) are reflected in trail improvements.

Visitor economy contribution

Opportunities are realised for trails to support coordinated growth in tourism resulting in increased visitors, spend, new business enterprises and job creation.

Evidence base

Effective monitoring and evaluation contribute to continuous improvement of trail planning, development and management.

1.4.   Current State of Trails in Western Australia

In 1994 the State Government commenced a formal approach to community-based trail development across Western Australia. This included a series of successive State trail strategies up to and including this Blueprint. These strategies are designed for use by all trail stakeholders and decision makers with a specific implementation oversight resting with a joint agency implementation committee - the Trails Reference Group.

The Trails Reference Group has been instrumental in developing a suite of trail activity strategies, planning frameworks and guiding documents that are leading trails planning in Australia.

In addition to the increase in trail participation as a result of implementation of successive trail strategies, there has been an unprecedented increase in trail participation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and restrictions on international and interstate travel have encouraged many Western Australians to explore their own backyards, seeking experiences in nature for recreation, mental and physical health benefits. Trails have proven to be a valuable asset for individuals, local communities and regions.

A lack of consistent funding for all scales of trail development has been identified as a significant challenge in the WA trails landscape. Recent unprecedented investment in trails and trail infrastructure has seen new developments progressing though the planning, design and construction phases.

However, these investments are only within several specific locations, generally focused on recovery from natural disaster, pandemic or economic depression and tourism outcomes. Conversely, the funding available for community-based trail developments across most of the state has reduced significantly impacting on the delivery of smaller community- based projects. Inconsistent and inadequate funding for trail development and maintenance is a major challenge for the trails industry.

Trail maintenance including resourcing and knowledge has also been identified as a significant challenge for the trails industry. While trail maintenance has been identified in successive Blueprint strategies, there has been modest progress. With several larger projects under construction, there is a need for a sustainable and consistent approach to asset maintenance, including available funding and resources.

Lake Lefroy trails, Kambalda.
Image courtesy of Tourism WA

1.5. Partners in developing the Blueprint

The strategic development of trails in Western Australia is guided by a Trails Reference Group (TRG) which is convened by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

The TRG is composed of representatives from State and local government agencies and community members. The purpose of the TRG is to provide advice on the implementation of State trail strategies including this Blueprint. The TRG also monitors the progress of proposed actions and outcomes, reporting to Government and industry. The TRG can co-opt members for specialised purposes as required and undertakes consultation with trails stakeholders as part of its process.

The Blueprint has been collaboratively developed with input from a range of Government agencies and trail sector stakeholders at the state, regional and local level. Input was also received from regional development commissions, regional tourism organisations and eminent persons.

The TRG led the process to develop the Blueprint in partnership with a Project Reference Group comprised of representatives from:

- Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries

- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

- Department of Transport

- Department of Health

- Department of Water and Environmental Regulation

- Tourism WA

- Trails WA

- Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council

- Western Australian Local Government Association

Some of the key stakeholders in Western Australia with a role to play in the planning, development, management and maintenance of trails in the state include:

The **Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC)** mission is to enable dynamic and inclusive communities; support the WA economy through effective regulation; and facilitate outstanding sporting and cultural experiences and opportunities.

Goals related to industry development, enabling access and encouraging participation are part of the DLGSC mandate. With active outdoor recreation a growing trend, DLGSC plays a significant role in trails, coordinating the Trails Reference Group and is the lead agency responsible for coordination and oversight of the WA Strategic Trails Blueprint.

The **Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)** manages Western Australia's parks, forests and reserves to conserve wildlife, provide sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities. The department is the state's largest provider of public trails and plays a major role in trail planning, development, management and resourcing. DBCA works closely with government and industry partners, community (trail) groups and with Aboriginal people through joint management arrangements.

Trails WA was established in 2012 to carry out projects to further the marketing and advocacy of trails in Western Australia. The incorporated body manages the upkeep of the Trails WA website (trailswa.com.au) which includes trail information for over 800 sanctioned trails. Over the past five years, Trails WA has solidified their role in the trails industry, playing a critical role in the marketing of trails, including as destinations, businesses and trail networks. The current focus of Trails WA is to promote safe and accessible access to all types of trails for all trail users.

Tourism WA is responsible for the interstate and international marketing of Western Australia as a travel destination. It features trails on its website as potential experiences for visitors and promotes trail experiences in conjunction with regional tourism organisations.

The **Department of Transport (DoT)** coordinates and delivers specialist transport services that benefit and empower Western Australia's thriving community. DoT leads development of long-term cycle network planning strategies, provides grant funding to local governments for bicycle planning and infrastructure projects, and has developed WA's cycling network hierarchy that defines routes by function (primary, secondary, local, transport trails, and road cycling routes).

The **Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER)** supports Western Australia's community, economy and environment by managing and regulating the state's environment and water resources. DWER plays a key role in proposals for trail development within public drinking water source areas (PDWSA) consistent with Policy: Land use compatibility in public drinking water source areas 2021 and Operational Policy 13 Recreation within PDWSAs on crown land 2019, and assessing native vegetation clearing applications under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 and Country Areas Water Supply Act 1947 clearing controls across the state.

Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the WA local government sector. WALGA plays a key role in disseminating information and resources regarding trail development and best practice for local government agencies.

Local governments across WA manage and maintain many trails on behalf of ratepayers and the community by providing the infrastructure necessary for quality recreation and visitor experiences.

Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) is the premier Aboriginal advocacy body educating and informing Government and industry on the needs of Aboriginal tourism businesses and their market. WAITOC have a membership of Aboriginal businesses all over Western Australia; many are involved in delivering heritage and environmental tours.

The **Department of Health** provides leadership and management of WA's health system, ensuring the delivery of high quality, safe and timely health services, as well as state-wide policies and programs to prevent chronic disease and injury in WA. The Department of Health supports better health and wellbeing for Western Australians through the enjoyment of our state's national parks and recreational trails.

Community organisations may represent a particular trail activity such as bushwalking, cycling, trail bike riding and equestrian or have a special interest focus such as Aboriginal heritage, inclusion, management, volunteering, promotion and maintenance of specific trails.

Image courtesy of Experience Murujuga

"Ngaayintharri Gumawarni Ngurrangga."

"We All Come Together For Country."

Peter Jeffries. CEO Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation

1.6.   Aboriginal engagement and collaboration

Since the development of the Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017, there has been an increase in consultation with Aboriginal communities as well as encouraging more active involvement through Aboriginal leadership and overall collaboration with Aboriginal people. Recognising the connection to Country and wealth of knowledge Aboriginal people can contribute to a trail project is an important opportunity that will be embraced in the implementation of this Blueprint.

Collaboration with Aboriginal people as part of the trail development process through meaningful consultation, engagement and leadership, can strengthen partnerships and provide significant benefits to the process and overall trail experience. The trail development process also provides an opportunity for Aboriginal people to access jobs and develop enterprise.

Joint management of conservation estate in Western Australia allows Aboriginal people to have an active role in the management of lands and waters to which they have a traditional connection. Joint management arrangements are set to expand under the South West Native Title Settlement and Plan For Our Parks and offer a significant opportunity to work alongside Aboriginal communities in land management and trail development.

The Bungle Bungle Range, Purnululu National Park
Image courtesy of Tourism Western Australia.

Aboriginal tourism in Western Australia continues to be of great interest to visitors, with four in five visitors (81%) saying they would be interested in experiencing Aboriginal tourism in Western Australia if it were easily accessible. However, participation levels remain relatively low, with less than one in five visitors (17%) actually having an Aboriginal tourism experience in 2019-20; a decline compared to the previous year. Raising awareness and supply of Aboriginal tourism experiences is critical to meet visitor demand.

https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/Publications%20Library/Markets%20and%20research/2020/Ad-hoc/VEER%20Report%202019-20.pdf

2. The importance of trails in Western Australia

Rowley Shoals Marine Park, near Broome.
Image courtesy of Tourism Western Australia.

2.1. Trails covered by this Blueprint

Trails are pathways or routes that are used for recreation, tourism and appreciation of natural and cultural values. Trails may be short or long; be part of a trail network or a single journey; be used for one activity or be shared by several different trail activities; be primarily used by local residents or form a visitor attraction; or be purpose-built paths or routes designated by signage and information.

Many trails are developed as local community infrastructure and as a visitor experience with associated products, services, accommodation and interpretation. Trails covered by the Blueprint include non-motorised and motorised trails based on land and water, and include the following trail types:

Bushwalking / Urban Walking	Cycling	Drive (2WD)
Drive (4WD)	Horse	Mountain Bike
Paddle	Snorkel	Trail Bike
Trail Running		

Western Australia's natural assets, including its beaches, coastline and unique natural sights are the main reason visitors choose to holiday in Western Australia. It is also what visitors describe as their favourite aspect of their trip.

https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/Publications%20Library/Markets%20and%20research/2020/Ad-hoc/VEER%20Report%202019-20.pdf

Tourism Research Australia data shows a growing demand for nature-based tourism over the last 10 years. This demand applies across both overnight and daytrips.

20% of overnight trips in 2020 were for:

- visiting national or state parks.
- bushwalking.
- whale watching.

This compares to just 14% in 2010.

Western Australia's trails and trail networks are classified into significance categories including:

State trails

An extended trail or trail network that is of sufficient quality and with appropriate facilities, products and services to be recognised beyond the State and to attract visitors to Western Australia.

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 trail may have potential for development to regional status.

Adaptive Mountain Biking, Arklow Trails
Image courtesy of Trails WA.

In Western Australia, trail opportunities for local people and visitors are enhanced by the development of clusters of linked trails in localities. The different categories of trail clusters are:

Trail Town

A population centre which has been assessed and accredited as a destination for its trails offering through the provision of high quality:

- Trails (single or mixed use)
- Outdoor experiences that encourage extended visitation
- Trail-user related facilities and services (including accommodation)
- Trail-related businesses
- Trail branding and signage

Daytrips for nature-based tourism have increased from 6% in 2009 to 9% in 2020. International visitors make almost half of all nature-based daytrips.

https://www.austrade.gov.au/news/latest-from-austrade/2021/government-announces-449m-national-parks-upgrades

Trail Centre

A managed multiple trail facility with dedicated visitor services supported by high quality:

- Trails (single or mixed use)
- Outdoor experiences that encourage single day visitation
- Trail-user related services
- Trail branding and signage

A Trail Centre can stand alone in an individual location or may be positioned within a Trail Town.

Trail Network

A multiple trail facility with limited or no visitor services, supported by high quality:

- Trails (single or mixed use)
- Outdoor experiences that encourage single or part day visitation
- Trail branding and signage

A Trail Network may be a stand-alone facility or form part of a Trail Town or Trail Centre.

Individual trail

Individual trails

Trail network

Individual trails

Amenities

In the three years to 2018, 29% of Australians had a holiday that involved a cycling experience. Of these, 28% were categorised as destination cycle tourists while 72% were categorised as cyclists while on holiday.

https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/Publications%20Library/Markets%20and%20research/Specialised%20reports/Segmenting-the-cycle-tourism-market.pdf

Trails WA Trail Town Accreditation Program

The Trails WA Trail Town Accreditation program is a tailored, best practice accreditation system designed to help communities become world class trail tourism destinations. The accreditation process includes an application process where six categories, considered critical success factors, will be assessed:

- Branding and marketing
- Engaged businesses
- Partnerships (governance, management, planning, budget)
- Activities, amenities, attractions, accommodation, access
- Suitable network of quality trails appealing to diverse markets
- Landscape setting that is Iconic or suitable for proposed trails

Minimum essential requirements within each category will be assessed prior to a town receiving Trail Town status. The unique and comprehensive program will ensure Western Australian towns have the necessary capacity to perform in the trail tourism realm, resulting in increased visitation, bolstering local businesses and building a strong community.

"Trail Towns" is a Western Australian recognition for an international trail tourism destination that has been assessed and accredited through Trails WA (with the support of DLGSC and DBCA). Where towns and communities are unlikely to meet these high standards the term 'Trail Destination' will be used and development and promotion focused on targeting domestic and intrastate markets.

The promotion of inclusive, sustainable tourism in protected areas offers a way for countries to arrest biodiversity loss, assist post-pandemic recovery, and address longstanding development challenges.

https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35737/Banking-on-Protected-Areas-Promoting-Sustainable-Protected-Area-Tourism-to-Benefit-Local-Economies.pdf?sequence=5

2.2. Trends in trail use and development

Over the past five years trail use and development has evolved and matured within the Australian context. There are a number of industry trends and observations that have been noted. These are outlined below.

Participation

Growth in popularity of trails: Participation in outdoor recreation activities including recreational walking, bushwalking and mountain biking has been growing since 2017. The COVID-19 pandemic supercharged this growth, with many land managers reporting record trail use in 2020 and 2021. Land managers have also noted that many participants venturing onto the trail during the pandemic are inexperienced which has also led to an increase in incidents.

According to recent AusPlay data many Australians are favouring participation in informal recreation over structured sport. Trails offer more flexibility than traditional sports, as users can participate in a variety of different ways, independently or with variable group sizes, at times that suit them. Many trail users are drawn to trails to connect to nature and experience physical and mental health benefits.

Increase in female participation: Female participation in outdoor recreation activities has increased over recent years, particularly in bushwalking which now has more female participants than male in Australia.[1] AusPlay research indicates females are increasingly drawn to trail experiences that provide opportunities to spend time in nature and harness the physical and mental health benefits.

Inclusion and accessibility: Visiting outdoor places and spaces, including trails, can be more challenging for people living with a disability. The need to develop inclusive trails and trail experiences for people of all abilities is becoming more widely recognised, with trails catering to a range of abilities being incorporated into new trail development projects. Additional infrastructure and equipment including high contrast signage, accessible canoe launches, all terrain and beach wheelchairs and adaptive mountain bikes are just some of the equipment in use, improving the accessibility of the outdoors and trails.

Trail experiences

Trails for transportation: Trails have the potential to be integrated into active transport routes to work, school, retail precincts, community and recreation facilities. Integration between other transport services such as trains and buses, will be key in encouraging more people to use trails for commuting.

E-rideables and E-bikes: There is an increased use of e-bikes, e-scooters and other e-transportation on trails and paths. Financial year 2021 saw record sales of e-bikes in Australia and e-cargo bikes are increasing in popularity for short trips and commuting.[2] The challenge moving forward is adapting trail planning, design, construction and maintenance to suit these new modes of trail use whilst also addressing the potential safety issues and conflict with other trail users.

Multi-modal long distance trails: There is an emerging trend for multi-modal long distance trails such as rail trails, offering trail users options to tailor experiences to their preference including mode of transport and length of experience. Bike packing, cycle touring and multi-day walking routes also provide opportunities for small business development to support these activities and users.

Events and trails: Trail running and multi-sport adventure races and events are becoming more popular as people look to 'get off the beaten track' and challenge themselves in demanding and diverse terrain.

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1   Ausplay The Australian sport and physical activity participation survey 2021.
2   https://micromobilityreport.com.au/micromobility-products/bikes/its-official-2020-21-was-a-record-year-for-bicycle-imports/

Funding

Revenue models: Revenue models to support trail development, maintenance and provision of supporting infrastructure have diversified in recent years to include user pays, shuttle services, commercial operators, trail sponsorship and/or merchandise sales.

Increased trails investment: In response to the 2019/2020 summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, many state and territory governments have invested in projects that enhance community resilience, restore wellbeing and stimulate economic growth. Many such projects throughout Australia are trail projects and include new mountain bike destinations, walking/hiking trails, rail trails and interpretive trail experiences. Several states are developing iconic trails of national significance to attract interstate and international visitation. Western Australia has an opportunity to package and promote its trail experiences under one cohesive brand to cement its status as a premier outdoor adventure destination in Australia.

Digital communication

Digital apps: Social media and the use of apps is commonplace in today's society including within the outdoor recreation and trails industry. Digital apps are available for navigation, performance monitoring, training, marketing and promotion. Trail users are increasingly using digital apps in preference to paper maps and guidebooks as a source of information. Apps present an opportunity to assist in promotion of trails, awareness of environmental and cultural heritage values, capture important participation data, allow users to report maintenance issues, and improve safety on trails. Digital apps can also create safety issues if relied on for navigation without backup options that can be used in the event of a disruption to the electronic system such as a flat battery.

Social media and bloggers: Trail users and tourists are turning to social media pages and blog posts to connect with community groups and share information on their trail experience. This has on occasion led to a location 'going viral' and an unexpected influx of visitors to a location, causing issues with overcrowding and safety. Blog posts often provide key sources of detailed information regarding trails. Proliferation of user-created or 'open source' digital information presents challenges for trail managers, as information can be incorrect/misleading and dilute official information sources.

Safety

Safety education: Increased participation particularly during COVID-19 has anecdotally seen an increase in incidents and injury. Many of these new trail users may be unfamiliar with the risks associated with the Western Australian landscape or how to prepare to ensure their safety and that of others. Education of participants in safety and preparation is needed to ensure all trail users, including the growing number of less experienced trail users, are well equipped.

Emergency response: Climate change is creating more extreme weather events including bushfires, severe storms, flooding, and extreme temperatures. It is important that emergency services can advise trail users of trail closures, weather conditions or bushfires that may pose a risk and trail users can communicate their plans and reach for help in an emergency. Emergency services and navigation apps are increasingly being used to share trail issues and emergency information with trail users.

2.3. Benefits of trails

Trails and participation in trail related activities provide a range of far reaching social, health, economic and environmental benefits for individuals, communities, key stakeholders and Government agencies. Some of these benefits are outlined below.

Trails provide:

low-cost and accessible facilities for recreation.

low-cost transportation alternative to motor vehicles or public transport.

opportunities to implement placemaking; transforming public spaces to strengthen connections between people and these public spaces.

opportunities to improve the liveability of a community, city or region.

opportunities for social interaction and development of community identity through participation in trail activities, maintenance and land conservation.

economic benefits from employment and business opportunities in trail development, management, maintenance, events, and supporting products and services.

economic benefits through increased tourism and spend in communities.

opportunities for Aboriginal people to share their culture, values and stories through on Country learning experiences and alternative approaches to education.

opportunities to foster environmental, cultural and trail stewardship.

environmental benefits through contributions to conservation efforts and preservation of natural areas.

access to natural areas increasing the amount of open space available and accessible to the public.

opportunity for informal education, improved awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and support for its conservation and protection.

social and health benefits through improved physical and mental health, increased community cohesion and connection.

increase opportunities to engage in an active and healthy lifestyle which can result in reduced health care costs, and enhanced productivity.

Kalbarri Skywalk, Kalbarri National Park.
Image courtesy of Tourism Western Australia.

3. The current situation

3.1.   Trail supply

Western Australia has a strong and growing suite of trails for a wide range of users. Trails WA identifies 763 trails on its website, these are inclusive of all trail types and are spread across all regions of the state. The past five years has seen unprecedented investment in trail development across the state, positioning the Western Australian trails sector to capitalise on the many benefits provided by trails and trail experiences.

Trails are heavily concentrated in the Perth, South West and Great Southern regions of the state where there is a higher population density, milder climate and easier access to trail locations. Trails in the central and northern regions are more disparate or remote, harder to access, less supported by off-trail services and so less regularly used.

Western Australia's diverse landscapes offer significant potential to offer a point of difference in terms of trail experiences to those found in other parts of Australia. Ensuring a diverse range of trail experiences within these landscapes is key to capitalising on this point of difference.

Bushwalking trails

Bushwalking trails are abundant across the state although quality is variable. The recently completed WA Hiking Strategy noted a need to focus development of experiences that celebrate the diverse landscapes in Western Australia and on increasing accessibility to trails in the Perth region with half and full day loop trails. Developing iconic multiday trail experiences is also considered a priority for bushwalking trails across the state.

Urban walking trails

Urban trail and path networks are invaluable community assets offering opportunity to connect destinations within towns and cities and highlight environmental and cultural heritage values. Urban trails also provide gateway opportunities to engage new participants in walking and running.

Trail running trails

Trail running has seen significant growth in the past five years. Trail runners typically utilise the bushwalking and urban walking trails on offer throughout the state and in some instances dual use mountain bike trails, management vehicle tracks and fire breaks. While trails created specific for trail running are not considered necessary it is important to consider the needs of trail runners in development of walking trails and shared use trails particularly in terms of offering a range of technical difficulty.

Mountain bike trails

Mountain bike trail networks have seen significant investment over the past five years, with Dwellingup and Collie well on the way to becoming accredited Trail Towns. Existing established networks in the Perth Hills and in the South West have also seen investment to refresh these networks in response to current trends and demand. DBCA has also been planning for adventure style mountain bike trails in the Perth Hills and in the Valley of the Giants; both of which have potential to attract a new market to the state. Trails suitable for adaptive bikes are also being incorporated in many trail developments.

Cycle trails

Cycle paths for recreational riders are provided in Perth and larger regional centres. Cycle paths play a transport and recreational purpose. Increasingly cycle trails are being developed to connect towns and destinations to also enable an alternate transport function.

Equestrian trails

Equestrian trails exist throughout the state, particularly in the south, but have seen limited development to enhance the visitor experience. The demand for equestrian trails is considered in regional scale planning with the South West and Peel considered the regions with the most potential for the development of equestrian trails. The implementation of the 320km Warren Blackwood Stock Route is ongoing.

Paddle trails

Several trails have been developed for river, estuary and ocean canoeing and kayaking. An iconic multiday paddle experience along the Frankland River through the Walpole wilderness in the Great Southern is currently being developed.

Snorkel and dive trails

Trails for snorkeling or scuba diving exist in several areas and include trails at Coogee, Parker Point on Rottnest Island, Jurien Bay, Shoalwater Islands, Ningaloo and Shark Bay.

Trail bike trails

Trail bike riding incorporates both road registered and off-road registered vehicles. The majority of trail bike riding is done by licensed riders on road registered trail bikes on the many thousands of kilometres of popular legal routes on roads and tracks across the state. There are limited opportunities for sanctioned off-road recreational trail bike riding experiences in the State and no long distance trails exist. Lack of sanctioned off-road trails and facilities has significant impact on other trail users as well as impacting environmental and other values. Planning for the establishment of the Manjimup Trail Bike Hub continues with experiences tailored to specific trail bike rider segments currently being developed.

Drive trails (2wd)

Driving trails offer a range of half day, day and multiple day journeys exploring the natural environment, heritage and food and wine offerings across Western Australia with many linking to other types of trails.

Drive trails (4wd)

Four-wheel drive trails in the State are numerous, with a number of experiences recognised nationally by off-road interest groups including the Gibb River Road, the Canning Stock Route and the Gunbarrel Highway. Routes at Cape Le Grand and the Aboriginal culture-inspired Warlu Way offer further themed exploration trails.

Shared use trails

Shared use trails particularly for walkers and cyclists, are prevalent in urban areas. While shared use between some user groups is incompatible, for example motorised and non-motorised trail use, there is potential to develop more shared use trail experiences in WA. This can lead to efficiencies in terms of trail provision and also foster respect and understanding between different user groups.

3.2. Demand for trails

Participation in active and passive recreational activities that immerse us in nature and provide positive health and wellbeing benefits have continued to increase in Western Australia. As we adapt to a new 'normal' in response to the global pandemic, our connection with the outdoors has never been more important, driving increased participation in trail related activities. New and improved trail experiences, improved access, better promotion of trail opportunities and a growing trend towards nature based activities has also contributed to this increased participation.

The demand for trails and trail experiences continues to increase across a number of trail activities. Where this demand is unmet it has triggered the development of unsanctioned trails in some instances, causing negative environmental and cultural impacts. This highlights the need for a coordinated approach to trail planning, design, construction and management that is responsive to current demand and trends.

Recreational walking is the most popular form of exercise in Australia.[1]

Among those in Western Australia who walk in a typical week, a majority do so for recreation or exercise, other reasons cited included shopping and to travel to a café or restaurant.[2]

The primary motivators[3] for recreational walking are:

- fun/enjoyment,
- physical health or fitness,
- psychological/mental health benefits,
- to be outdoors/in nature and
- to walk the dog.

Mountain Biking saw the greatest percentage increase in participation of trails based sports in Australia, growing by 81% with 174,000 new participants to the sport between 2017 and 2020.

In 2021, 11 million adult Australians, or 51.9%, regularly go for a vigorous stroll. This is a large increase of over 850,000 (+8.5%) on a year earlier.

As Australia's Capital Cities endured multiple lockdowns over the last year a brisk walk around the local neighbourhood was one of the only legitimate reasons to leave home for millions of people.[4]

1   Ausplay The Australian sport and physical activity participation survey 2021.
2.   Western Australian National Walking and Cycling participation survey 2021.
3.   Ausplay The Australian sport and physical activity participation survey 2021.
4.   Roy Morgan https://www.roymorgan.com/findings/8823-australian-sports-participation-rates-june-2021-202110190323

46.7%

of Western Australian residents have ridden a bicycle in the past year.[5]

Approx
1.2m

Western Australian residents cycle once a year.[6]

21.4%

of Western Australian residents cycle in a typical week.[7]

1.5% of the Australian population ride an e-scooter, e-skateboard or Segway in a typical week.[8]

During 2020–21, there were 21.25 million visits to DBCA Parks and Wildlife Service - managed lands and waters–a 14% increase from 2014-2015.[10]
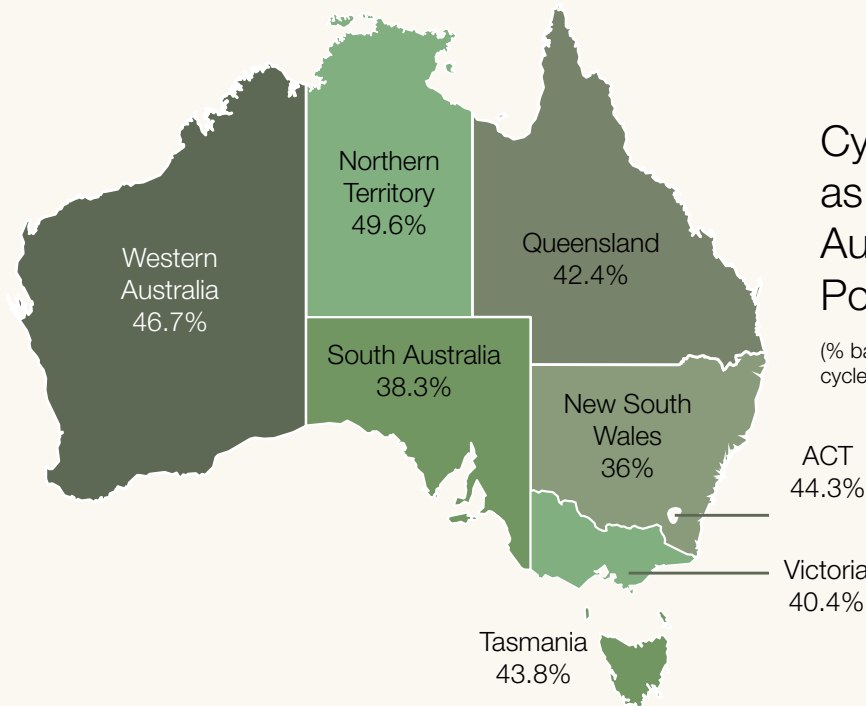
Cycling participation as a proportion of Australian Resident Population.[9]

(% based on residents of each state who had cycled at least once in the past year)

Western Australia
46.7%

Northern Territory
49.6%

Queensland
42.4%

South Australia
38.3%

New South Wales
36%

ACT
44.3%

Victoria
40.4%

Tasmania
43.8%
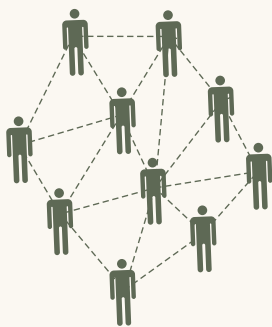
There has been a 14% average growth across the entire Perth Bike Counter network in 2020 compared to 2019.

Data suggests that elevated 'recreational' bike riding during and after the COVID lockdown period has influenced a diversified trip purpose over the remainder of the year.[11]

Most of the bike count growth across 2020 was due to additional weekend bike riding, especially in April, May and June. This suggests a greater interest in recreational bike riding among Perth residents and supports survey data indicating that by the end of 2020, a broader demographic spread of riders were using the bike path network.

5.   Western Australian National Walking and Cycling participation survey 2021.
6.   Western Australian National Walking and Cycling participation survey 2021.
7.   Western Australian National Walking and Cycling participation survey 2021.
8.   Western Australian National Walking and Cycling participation survey 2021.
9.   Australian National Walking and Cycling participation survey 2021 (for each state)
10.   DBCA 2020 annual report.
11.   Perth Bike Riding 2020 data insights Department of Transport

Participation across trail based recreation has increased across all activities over the past 5 years. Persons participating in Sport and Physical Recreation 2016-2021:[1]

	Activity	Adult participants 2016/2017	Adult participants 2020/2021	Increase
	Walking (Recreational)	8,655,600	9,856,500	14%
	Bush walking	1,252,200	2,077,400	66%
	Cycling	2,284,000	3,187,600	40%
	Mountain Biking	297,200	468,400	58%
	Canoeing/kayaking	322,600	434,800	35%
	Equestrian	193,800	224,500	16%

1   Ausplay The Australian sport and physical activity participation survey 2021.

Stacey's Loop, Jarrahdale.
Image courtesy of Off The Beaten Track WA.

3.3.   Planning and coordination

Enthusiastic and committed trail sector organisations and stakeholders, partners and community groups have collaborated to develop, deliver, and manage trails and trail experiences throughout Western Australia. Trail forums facilitated by DLGSC and the Trails Reference Group have become a key component of seeking feedback from the broader trails community, and communicating updates and trail information to key stakeholders, community organisations and volunteers.

The suite of state-wide plans has continued to grow with the list now including:

2022

(In Development) – Updates of
Strategic Trails Blueprint, Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy, Western Australian Trail Bike Strategy, Western Australian Trails Marketing Strategy
WA Horse Trail Management Guidelines
WA Hiking Trail Management Guidelines

Informing Tourism Western Australia's Dark Sky Tourism Products and Program

JINA: Western Australia's Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan

2019

Western Australian Mountain Bike Management Guidelines

Trails Development Series

More People More Active Outdoors, A framework for Outdoor Recreation in Western Australia

2020

Western Australian Hiking Strategy

2018

Western Australian Cycle Tourism Strategy

Adaptive MTB Guidelines (Australia)

Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines (Australia)

2017

Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017 - 2021 (Current Edition)

Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy 2015 - 2020

Western Australian Recreational Horse Trails Strategy

2015

2012

UNTWO Larrakia Declaration

Western Australian Trail Hubs Strategy

Our Bike Path: A Strategic Framework for Cycling in Western Australia

Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan 2014 - 2031

2014

2008

Back on Track Western Australian State Trail Bike Strategy

Local and regional plans and feasibility studies have also been developed at various locations across the State.

3.4. Challenges

There are a range of challenges that need to be addressed to continue to improve Western Australia's trails.

Access and equitability: While participation in general has increased there are still gaps evident in terms of provision of accessible trail experiences and equitable access. In particular increased diversity of trail types and increased access to new recreation trails in the Perth metropolitan area is needed to service a growing population.

Aboriginal engagement: Engagement with Aboriginal communities and groups does not currently meet the available opportunities for involvement in trail development, maintenance, storytelling and enterprise.

Community capacity building: User groups, volunteers, and local governments will benefit from capacity building in trail maintenance, development, advocacy, program delivery and funding acquisition.

Funding: While there are record levels of investment in major trails development at several specific locations, there has been a cessation of community trail development funding programs impacting the smaller community-based projects.

Maintenance: The ongoing maintenance and monitoring of trails and associated infrastructure to maintain high standards remains a significant challenge. Funding for maintenance and upgrades is not consistently available and the capacity of many trail management organisations is limited.

Research and data: Trail use is difficult to quantify due to informal user patterns and many trail users undertaking more than one type of trail activity. Trail use data collection, use of technology, tracking, understanding user profiles and market research could be better utilised to assist planning for future trails development and maintenance.

Trails database: The Trails WA website has become the public information source for trails across the State. Further effort is required to complete the database to cover all good quality trails. There is also a need to establish a database for trail managers with information such as trail status, condition, and assets.

Facilities: Access, signage, interpretation and supporting amenities on trails, at trail destinations and nearby towns needs to be improved to raise the standard and market appeal of many trails.

Administration and coordination: While significant progress has been made in recent years there is still opportunity to expand the reach of understanding among trails stakeholders of how the trails sector is administered and governed. Coordination between agencies, particularly between local and regional stakeholders and state-level administration could also be improved. Increased training and professional development opportunities across the trails industry is also needed.

Communication: Effective communication is essential between agencies and management authorities across regional boundaries and between urban/semi-rural borders.

Legislation and policy: There are some significant legislative, policy and land use barriers to the development and use of trails. These include limitations on trails and events in public drinking water source areas and competing uses of state forest areas such as for mining. Processes required to introduce charges for park / trail use also affect the ability to receive income from use of some parks and trails.

Bushfire: The threat of bushfires poses a safety hazard for trail users and trail infrastructure mechanisms for the communication of trail closures need to be refined. In the event of fire damage, significant costs may be incurred to repair damage. The impact of fire on direct repairs and on diverting trails staff from other work needs to be better communicated to the public and stakeholders.

Branding and marketing: The branding and communication of Western Australia's trails to tourist markets needs further development to achieve greater recognition of the State's trail opportunities.

Safety and education: The increase in participation has led to an increase in incidents and injuries on trails. This relationship needs to be better understood and addressed including protocols for shared trail use. Ensuring adequate emergency access for trail developments also needs improvement.
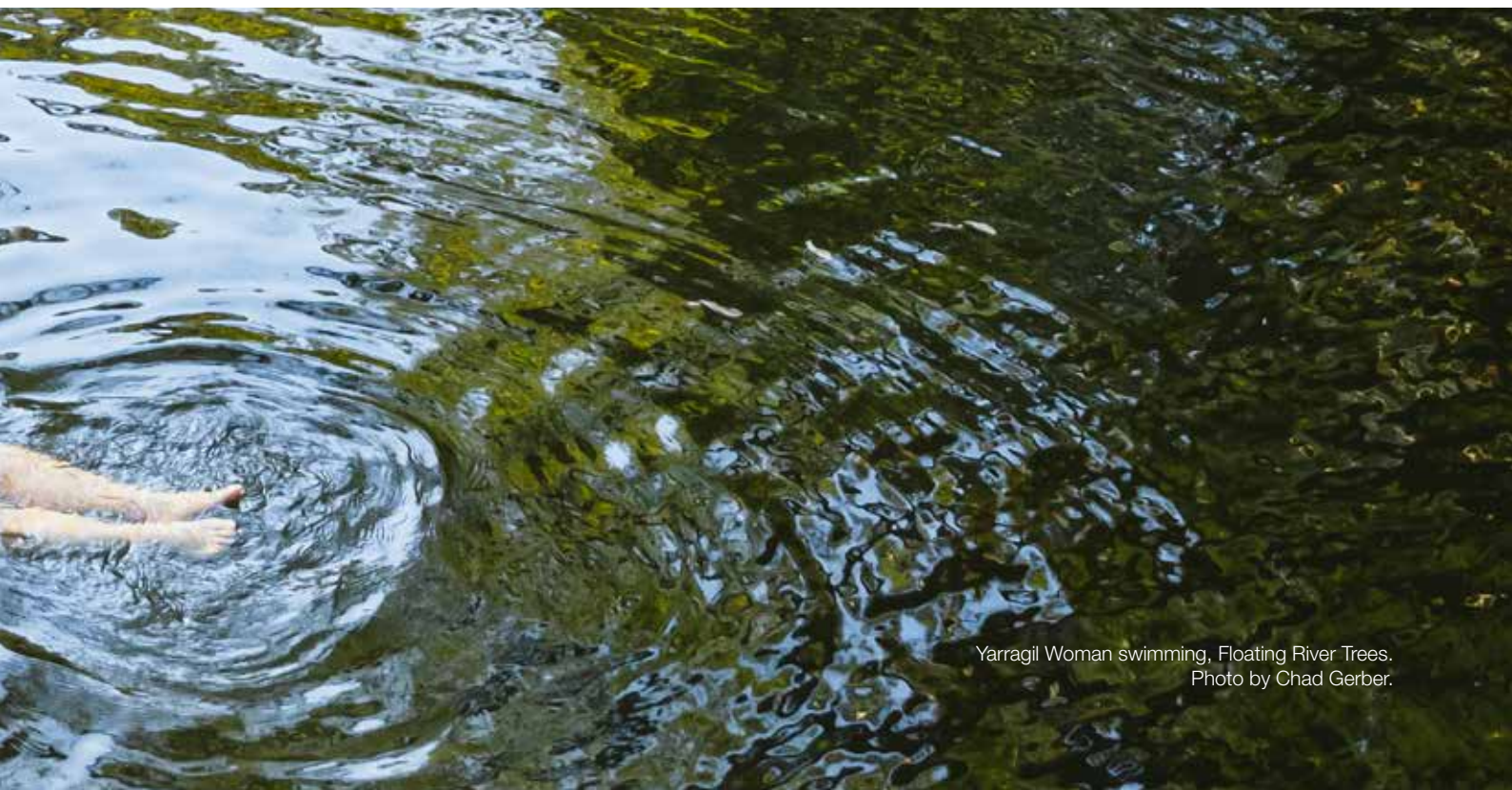
Yarragil Woman swimming, Floating River Trees.
Photo by Chad Gerber.

4. Strategic pillars

Strategic pillars

The strategies and actions in this section aim to achieve the vision for trails in Western Australia. The strategies cover the following aspects of trail development and management:

A.   Greater Trail Use, and Awareness

B.   Consistent and Collaborative Planning

C.   Sustainable Design, Construction and Maintenance

D.   Community Engagement

E.   Sound Knowledge Base

F.   Effective Governance

G.   Investment and Financing

H.   Growing the Visitor Economy

Bibbulmun Track shelter.
Image courtesy of Trails WA.

A. Greater trail use and awareness

Strategy A1. Grow participation and reduce barriers to maximise the positive benefits of getting communities outdoors.

Continuing to grow participation in trail-based activities will maximise the benefits for individuals, communities and the State. Focus should be placed on improving inclusivity and accessibility of trail-based activities. Reducing barriers to participation will help to develop a strong, inclusive, and vibrant trail user community.

No	Action
A1.1	Increase gateway opportunities to engage new participants of all ages, cultures, and other demographic backgrounds.
A1.2	Expand the pathway opportunities for participants to develop independence, including outdoor education, clubs, and community groups.
A1.3	Support growth of the outdoor industry including pathways for development of guides, instructors and leaders.
A1.4	Advocate for equitable access to trails and trail experiences.
A1.5	Ensure pre-visit trail information, trailhead signage and wayfinding signage is accessible and consistent.

Strategy A2. Support safe and responsible trail use through provision of adequate facilities, resources and education.

Improving access, signage, trailhead facilities and ways of telling the stories of the places and people through which trails pass will provide a more appealing experience for existing users and attract new users. In Western Australia's climatic conditions, information about safety measures in non-urban areas and extreme weather events (such as flood, fire and drought) is an important consideration for trail users.

No	Action
A2.1	Develop and promote a code of conduct for each trail type and shared-use combinations.
A2.2	Ensure that visitor risk information relevant to the safe use of trails is provided in communications that are accessible to all trail users including non-English speaking visitors. This should include emergencies such as fire, drought or flood.
A2.3	Review and improve visitor risk communication to ensure it is appropriate for trails.
A2.4	Identify opportunities to deliver education programs focused on safety and responsible trail use.
A2.5	Research and analyse the historic and trending incidents, injuries and accidents on trails (especially hiking and mountain biking trails).
A2.6	Based on the results of A2.5, consider actions to reduce incidents, accidents and injuries on trails such as targeted educational programs, additional training and/or alterations to trail development processes.

Strategy A3. Build the capacity of trail-focused events to increase participation and trail led economic stimulus.

Trail-based events and community activities have been successful in many places in encouraging greater local and visitor awareness, use and support of trails. Participation in club based events can be instrumental in achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

No	Action
A3.1	Identify existing trail-based events and activities across regions and trail types and identify opportunities for targeted assistance to grow events and improve economic impacts.
A3.2	Identify significant potential trail-based events across regions and trail activities and identify potential user markets, support organisations and potential economic, participation and other measures.
A3.3	Identify and support the creation of participative club, group or community trail-based events with a targeted health and wellbeing outcome (for example, group walks).
A3.4	Investigate the feasibility of establishing a trails awareness campaign aimed at Western Australian or local users (such as 'Try A Trail Week') with the aim of raising the general profile of the trails sector and local trails within communities and creating a central campaign around which to organise trail-based activities and volunteerism. This is also an opportunity to rally organisational and corporate support as well as capturing economic and participation data.
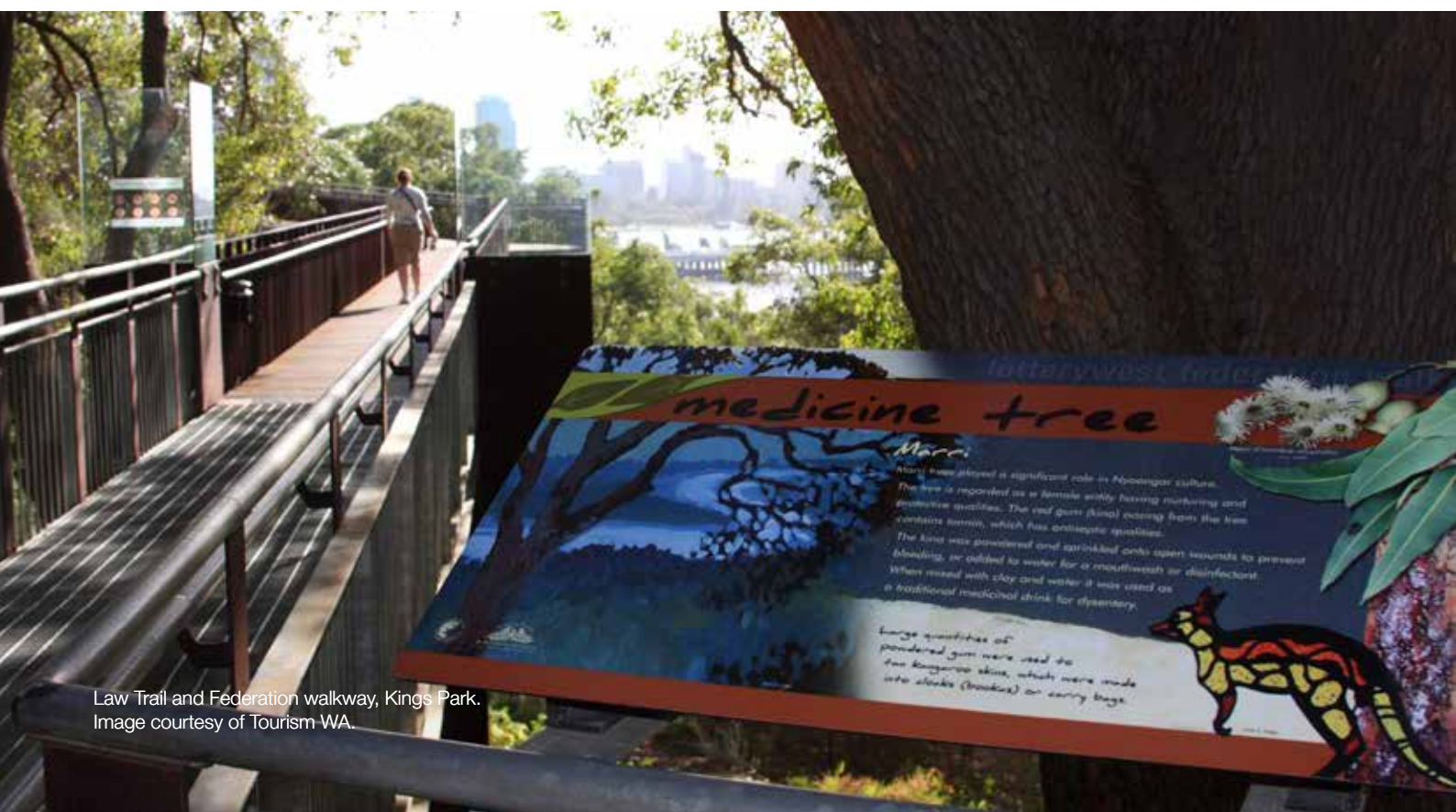
Law Trail and Federation walkway, Kings Park.
Image courtesy of Tourism WA.

Strategy A4. Establish an effective coordinated system for trail communication, promotion and marketing.

Marketing of trails to Western Australians, rather than to visitors from outside the State, requires targeting different markets, use of content and messages appropriate to markets, multiple communication methods and the cooperation of the different agencies and trail sector players. Effective intrastate trails marketing requires a more consistent and collaborative approach to reach markets.

Trails WA is ideally placed to expand its role to include the coordination of intrastate trail communication, promotion and marketing. The organisation could also act as a focal point for trails information and collateral resources.

A strategic marketing plan is required to guide Trails WA in the coordination of these activities. As part of this enhanced role, Trails WA would also work with partners in the promotion of significant trails products interstate and internationally.

No	Action
A4.1	Consolidate Trails WA as the lead non-government organisation responsible for the State-wide coordination of intrastate communication, promotion and marketing of trails.
A4.2	Strengthen the cooperation and coordination between Trails WA and partners in order to provide support for the interstate and international marketing of Western Australian trails including linking regional trails websites with the Trails WA website.
A4.3	Ensure Trails WA governance structure and funding remains sustainable long term.
A4.4	Investigate, assess and implement improved sources of funding and support for Trails WA and its operations, including appropriate staff position/s.
A4.5	Work with Tourism WA and regional tourism organisations to develop a strategic trails marketing plan to identify priority goals, outcomes and actions to achieve effective State-wide trails marketing and communications.
A4.6	Collaborate with local governments, regional development commissions, DLGSC, DBCA, Tourism WA and trail user groups including peak bodies to ensure two-way information flow on promotion and marketing of trails.
A4.7	Establish and implement a state-wide trails brand and marketing strategy.
A4.8	Engage with regional and local tourism organisations and tour operators to create accessible visitor experiences.
A4.9	Redevelop and relaunch the Top Trails program for Western Australia.

Strategy A5. Increase coverage of Western Australian trails in all forms of media, including social media.

Awareness of trails will lead to increased participation. Efforts need to be put into growing media coverage about Western Australian trail opportunities both intra and interstate.

No	Action
A5.1	Establish a trails-focused media familiarisation program that includes general travel media and niche user group media from Western Australia and interstate.
A5.2	Work with trails-focused event and tour operators to leverage media collateral (such as images, videography and editorial) from events and tours.
A5.3	Work with regional tourism organisations to identify significant trail experiences and identify appropriate marketing/media channels for them according to significance classifications.
A5.4	Establish controls/protocols to prevent trails promotion causing unsustainable trail over-use, overcrowding and poor visitor experiences.

10th Light Horse Trail
Image courtesy of Trails WA.

Charles Knife Gorge Cape Range National Park.
Image courtesy of Tourism WA.

B. Consistent and collaborative planning

Strategy B1. Continue the development and implementation of an integrated and consistent approach to trail planning at the state, regional and local levels.

A state-wide trail planning process to guide trail development at regional and local levels has been established (refer to Trails Development Series) and should continue to be implemented to ensure that trail planning and development occurs in a way that is compatible with other land uses, development initiatives, legislative and planning requirements, and the protection of environmental, social and cultural values. This approach assists to identify priorities for achievable trail opportunities and avoids duplication of trails. In accordance with the vision and principles in this Blueprint, a hierarchy of state-wide trail plans would be developed.

State-wide strategies for specific trail activities should be developed where there is demand from users, government and peak body support. This should address the gaps within the current suite of strategies and ensure strategies are kept up to date particularly in regard to trends in trail use.

Where practical, regional trail masterplans should be undertaken to provide a scheme for targeted trail development and management for all types of trails in regional areas. Localised trail plans should be developed as appropriate for areas, trail networks or trails, and need to take account of the supply of trails and any relevant linkages in adjacent areas.

State-wide trails planning hierarchy

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WA Trails Strategic Blueprint

⬇

State-wide activity based trails strategies:

Walking/running	Aquatic
Mountain Bike	4WD
Cycling (other than MTB)	Trail Bike Riding
	Equestrian

⬇

Regional trails masterplans

Referencing all trail uses/forms

⬇

Localised trails plans

Can be multi-use or specific use.
Project-based relevant to local governments,
private operators, community organisations,
user groups, trail centres, trail towns and/or networks.

</div>

* Some State activity strategies exist such as hiking, trail bike riding, equestrian, mountain biking and cycling. However others are lacking, for example, four wheel driving and snorkelling.

* Some regional trails masterplans exist such as the Great Southern and Pilbara trails master plans, however consideration is needed for a State-wide roll out.

* Most trails plans exist at this level, particularly trail towns and network plans.

Bald Head Trail, Albany.
Photo by Frances Andrijich.

No	Action
B1.1	Audit and create an inventory of current or draft trail plans across the State.
B1.2	Create a centralised and accessible library of all current and planned developments relevant to the trails sector.
B1.3	Identify gaps in the trail planning structure with a view to developing appropriate plans to fill gaps.
B1.4	Develop a tiered trail planning structure for implementation of the Blueprint consisting of state-wide activity-based strategies, regional trail masterplans (where possible or necessary) and localised trail plans.
B1.5	Strengthen connections between urban and regional planning processes and between transport and trails planning.
B1.6	Advocate for trails in planning and development processes for example ensuring planning commission protection of corridors for trails and noting suitability of ex mining and forestry areas for motorised and electric trail uses.
B1.7	Ensure strategies address capacity building within communities to strengthen local trail knowledge and stewardship.
B1.8	Where joint management arrangements are in place, incorporate agreed trail planning aspirations and outcomes.
B1.9	Encourage the consideration of trails as an important strategic land use for inclusion in local government planning strategies and structure plans.

Strategy B2. Continue to evolve the regional trails masterplan framework.

Where practical, regional trail masterplans should be developed to provide a guiding framework and priorities for trail development and management within each region. Several regional trail master plans have been developed such as the Peel Regional Trail Master Plan and the Great Southern Regional Trail Master Plan. These and other existing plans have proven the value of a regional planning approach.

No	Action
B2.1	Implement a staged program of regional trail master planning for Regional Development Commission areas where there is a high level of competing demands and opportunity.
B2.2	Ensure that regional trail masterplans recognise and integrate relevant current or planned trail strategies and local and regional tourism plans and strategies. Cater for a diversity of trail users, types and experiences. Cover planning for relevant trail towns, trail networks and visitor services. Establish trail development priorities (see Strategy F1).

C. Sustainable design, construction and maintenance

Strategy C1. Ensure that information and training on best practice, sustainable trail design, construction, and maintenance is available to current and potential trail developers, trail managers, volunteers, Aboriginal organisations and local governments.

There is scope to assist trail organisations and groups to build their capacity to plan and maintain trails. Such support will create longevity and sustainability in trail organisations, empower community and volunteer groups and encourage better resourcing around trails management.

There is an established set of classifications that are recognised and used internationally and in Australia in sustainable trails design, construction and maintenance. These guidelines include:

Mountain Biking
AusCycling Australian Trail Difficulty Rating System.

Walking
Australian Walking Track Grading System (for users).

AS 2156.1-2001 Walking tracks: Classification and signage (for design/maintenance).

International and national standards and guidelines require adaptation to suit Western Australia's specific climate, soil, environmental and cultural conditions such has been outlined in the Western Australian Mountain Bike Management Guidelines.

DLGSC and DBCA are currently developing best practice Hiking Trail Management Guidelines and Horse Trail Management Guidelines which will add to the State's information base. Additionally, further work is required to address the specific requirements for Off Road Vehicle trails.

No	Action
C1.1	Collate and locate all relevant trail planning, design and maintenance guidelines as one accessible online resource. Promote use of this resource to relevant organisations and trail groups.
C1.2	Develop and present trail design, construction, visitor risk management and maintenance workshops to trail management organisations and user groups across the different types of trails and uses.
C1.3	Identify and prioritise the high-level issues/challenges across all of the trail-activity strategies that have not been addressed, such as key components in the WA State Trail Bike Strategy.

Strategy C2. Advocate across all trail types and infrastructure provision for best practice construction and maintenance guidelines to be developed.

In lieu of Australian guidelines relating to the construction and maintenance of different trail types, there is scope to build upon existing documents such as the Western Australian Mountain Bike Management Guidelines to establish best practice construction and maintenance guidelines. Such a resource will help to ensure consistent and high quality trails.

Trail related infrastructure requirements such as carparking, toilets, shelter and signage will vary depending on the trail type and significance. Ensuring development meets minimum standards for accessibility is also critical.

No	Action
C2.1	Develop best practice guidelines for the construction and maintenance of trails, noting differences in requirements for different trail types.
C2.2	Develop best practice guidelines for the design and construction of trail-based facilities, outlining essential requirements relating to trail type and significance and minimum standards to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.

Arklow Trail Network, near Collie.
Photo by Frances Andrijich.

The Trail Construction Training Course, Collie.
Photo by Kate Rolland.

D. Community engagement

Strategy D1. Encourage community stewardship for trails by supporting and facilitating improvements in volunteer trail development, maintenance and management.

Volunteers have made significant contributions to Western Australian trails through assistance in trail planning, construction, marketing, promotion, stewardship, maintenance and administration. There is scope to encourage increased participation by volunteers through offering training and incentives such as the scheme offered by the DBCA Parks and Wildlife Service for volunteers.

No	Action
D1.1	Develop and support programs for community and user group involvement in trail development, maintenance and management.
D1.2	Develop or extend existing training and incentives programs to engage volunteers in community trail stewardship.
D1.3	Encourage larger formalised groups (such as Munda Biddi Trail Foundation, Bibbulmun Track Foundation, Kalamunda Collective and Margaret River Off Road Cycling Association) to support and mentor smaller community groups and organisations.
D1.4	Invite community input and consult with community stakeholders for local knowledge, insights and concerns early in trail planning and design process.

Strategy D2. Encourage environmental stewardship through participation in trail related training and programs.

As a focus of visitor activity, trails provide opportunities to develop environmental and cultural stewardship for both the trail itself and the natural and cultural environments through which it passes. This can be done through the use of information messages, interpretation and community education programs. There may already be existing activities and programs in an area that could be harnessed to include trails. Trail events are also an opportunity to communicate with trail users.

No	Action
D2.1	Ensure that trail information includes education (suited to user markets) on minimal impact trail use and appreciation and protection of the natural and cultural values of the area.
D2.2	Work with stakeholders such as Leave No Trace, land managers, community conservation groups and waste management networks to promote and educate users in minimal impact principles and environmental protection.
D2.3	Include interpretative materials and community education programs in trail management and participation programs.

Strategy D3. Enhance opportunities for community development through participation in trail experiences, activities and programs.

Community members can derive significant benefit from access to high quality trails. Using trails can create opportunities for community members to meet others and form stronger neighbourhood connections. Working with neighbours on trail projects and programs can enhance community connectedness and engender stronger community bonds. This can lead to the achievement of better community outcomes through building social capital and strengthening sense of place. For some people, proximity of good trails will influence their choice of where to live.

No	Action
D3.1	Ensure that community development remains a consideration in trail planning, design, management, funding, research, events and participation programs.
D3.2	Develop an engagement strategy for targeting non-trail users and new trail users with a focus on inclusivity.

Strategy D4. Identify and engage with Aboriginal people to collaborate in the trail development process and ensure cultural values are integrated across all stages of trail development.

Encouraging Aboriginal people to participate in the trails industry will provide significant benefits across the trail development process. Traditional knowledge has the potential to influence trail planning and design outcomes which will result in enriched trail experiences. Involvement from the start will also help to influence opportunities for storytelling and interpretation of cultural values providing a genuine and deeper connection to Country for end users.

No	Action
D4.1	Integrate trail planning, design, construction and maintenance activities into Aboriginal ranger programs and joint management across the state.
D4.2	Establish an engagement framework which outlines how and which Traditional Owner groups to engage with at each stage of the trail development process.
D4.3	Investigate traineeships within various trail and land management organisations to promote professional development opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Trail Running Event.
Image courtesy of Perth Trail Series.

E. Sound knowledge base

Strategy E1. Investigate and evaluate trail use and trail technology trends to inform decision-making on new trail developments, trail maintenance and trail uses.

Improvements in technology and an ever increasing comfort with using technology has potential to be utilised in trail development and management. There is a need to capitalise on opportunities to capture data on trail use and condition to help inform decision making and investment.

No	Action
E1.1	Investigate, monitor, assess and report on the rise of the emerging user groups and markets, identifying the challenges and opportunities they present and impacts on existing trail users.
E1.2	Provide input into policy frameworks around trail development and participation including for emerging trends such as electric bikes.
E1.3	Monitor, review and report on emerging technologies (such as virtual reality, smartphone integrations), their potential impacts and ways they may be utilised for trail user information, engagement, safety, planning, management and promotion.
E1.4	Investigate and implement innovative ways to capture data on trail use and condition, for example QR codes at trailheads linking to feedback surveys, mobile applications allowing for trail users to log trail issues.

Strategy E2. Improve the availability of trail-related data and research for use in trail planning, development, management, funding and safety.

Data on trail use is important to inform ongoing trail management, understand trail users and to evaluate the need for new trails. Improved trail use data collection and interpretation is required throughout the State through methods such as trail counters, visitor surveys and new innovative means. There is also potential to utilise user-generated input from online digital technologies such as Strava and Trailforks, which provide information on the use and popularity of walking, running and cycling routes.

No	Action
E2.1	Implement a system for recording, analysing and publicising trail-related data and research relevant to Western Australia. Consider the possibility of Trails WA website as a portal for such data.
E2.2	Investigate methods for standardised and consistent trail use monitoring with clear and measurable indicators and encourage adoption by trail managers.
E2.3	Encourage trail managers to periodically undertake standardised trail user surveys to obtain information on participation, visitor characteristics and satisfaction. Data should be collected by a central body and disseminated widely for use in improving trail experiences.
E2.4	Offer training programs for trail managers in trail user data collection and survey techniques.
E2.5	Investigate ways to utilise user-generated activity recording technology (such as Strava, Trailforks and All Trails) as a source of trail use data.
E2.6	Engage with the trails industry and all trail users to understand market needs and desires. Ensure balanced representation across all users and ensure community benefits are delivered as intended.
E2.7	Investigate development of a spatial dataset for trails and trail related infrastructure potentially stored within the Landgate database. Establish a custodian for the dataset ensuring it is kept up to date.

The Trail Construction Training Course, Collie. Photo by Kate Rolland.

Strategy E3. Establish education and training programs around sustainable trail development processes.

Education, training, and professional development opportunities across the trails sector will lead to improved standards, participation and sustainability outcomes. Providing clear pathways into the industry will also increase capacity to deliver the immense program of trail works currently underway across the State.

No	Action
E3.1	Develop a framework and training resources for a planning, construction and maintenance training program.
E3.2	Pilot the training program to local government and Aboriginal rangers as identified in E3.1.
E3.3	Deliver trails training widely across WA based on E3.3.

F. Effective governance

Strategy F1. Strengthen state-wide governance arrangements for trails across the trail sector through ensuring a coordinated approach.

As a group of key government agency and trail sector representatives, the Trails Reference Group assists in the coordination and facilitation of trail development, management and promotion across the State's trail sector. The group has evolved over the past five years and has been integral to many of the achievements within the trail industry. Work to strengthen the role of the group should continue including ensuring adequate resourcing and widespread understanding of its role among regional and local trail stakeholders.

The Trails Reference Group is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Blueprint.

No	Action
F1.1	Annual review and update of the structure of the Trails Reference Group including the Terms of Reference and representation.
F1.2	Create mentorship pairings within the Trails Reference Group that identify and support the next generation of trails ambassadors (succession planning).
F1.3	Establish and implement regular reporting of progress in the implementation of the Blueprint and provide feedback to stakeholder organisations at agreed times.
F1.4	Strengthen the capacity, credibility and sustainability of appropriate trail community organisations.
F1.5	Develop a regional coordination framework to guide the establishment of sustainable regional governance structures.

Strategy F2. Strengthen involvement of Aboriginal people in the governance of trails.

Involving Elders and leaders within the Aboriginal community in governance structures for trails projects will result in a strengthening of Aboriginal engagement across the trail development process.

No	Action
F2.1	Invite Elders and leaders in the Aboriginal community to be involved in project reference groups and governance groups with decision making authority.

Strategy F3. Develop sustainable governance models for trails and/or trail networks.

The key to the sustainability of any trail development is an effective governance and management structure. Given the range of stakeholders with an interest in trails, it is important to ensure management arrangements have the necessary representation and a willingness by all parties to play an active and appropriate role in the governance and management of trail developments. To ensure these roles and responsibilities are understood and carried out to a high standard, a governance hierarchy should be formally adopted by all relevant stakeholders for all trail networks.

Characteristics of effective governance models include:

- Structure and accountability which is clear and simple to implement in the long term.
- Clearly defined and allocated responsibilities and authority for each stakeholder in the model.
- A focus on ensuring quality visitor experience, product development and marketing.
- Robust range of funding sources with revenue raising avenues established to ensure cash flow and enable self-generated investment into maintaining and enhancing trails, facilities and services.
- Risk management protocols and processes are considered and implemented to reduce risks to staff, volunteers and trail users.
- Direct liaison and involvement of user and community groups to build support within the local community.

The most effective and appropriate governance model will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis and in consideration of key stakeholders, size and scale of trail development, land manager, the desired outcomes and many other criteria.

No	Action
F3.1	Develop and incorporate a new chapter to the Trail Development Series addressing governance models to help guide trail managers.

"Our culture is founded on the trails of our ancestors! Where, when and how we respectfully traverse our present landscape is in honour to our ancestors!

Gala ngandira yinjya mabu junu liyanjia!

Go walk with great spirit!"

Bart Pigram

Dryandra Woodland.
Image courtesy of Tourism WA.

G. Investment and financing

Strategy G1. Provide guidance and support to organisations, localities and regions to evaluate and seek investment in existing and future trails.

A consistent approach to the assessment of trail developments will be achieved through the:

- Classification of trails and trail networks according to their significance at state, regional and local levels.

- Application of criteria to assess the feasibility of trail developments (for existing and proposed trails) and prioritise them for investment.

No	Action
G1.1	Implement a state-wide classification system for trails to define their relative significance and broad developmental needs.
G1.2	Implement state-wide adoption of consistent criteria for trail development assessment and prioritisation.
G1.3	Assist trail organisations and managers to identify appropriate partnerships for trail development, experiences, maintenance and management.
G1.4	Provide trail organisations with access to a centralised pool of research and information to assist in the assessment of trail development needs, the preparation of funding applications and seeking investment partners.

Koomal Dreaming, Ngilgi Cave.
Image courtesy of Tourism Western Australia.

Strategy G2. Investigate and encourage the adoption and expansion of a range of sustainable funding options for the development, maintenance and management of trails.

Funding programs are a finite resource with many competing applicants. Additionally, once trails are developed there are often limited ongoing resources for trail maintenance and organisational support. Trail management organisations in other places (such as Trail Trusts in New Zealand) have been able to diversify funding sources and utilise partnerships to obtain resources for development and management of high quality trails. In turn, the success of these trails in attracting local and visiting users and contributing to local economies has assisted many trails organisations in securing public or private investment in the development of new or upgraded trails.

Funding sources utilised by trail organisations include:

- Membership fees, which typically produce low-income streams.

- Fundraising also tends to raise relatively small amounts unless there is a well-run campaign in a highly motivated community.

- Philanthropic donations and bequests, generally at a low level.

- Commercial sources such as sponsorship and fees from corporate sponsors, commercial operators and event managers. These sources can generate significant funds but are under-utilised in Western Australia compared with other places.

- User-pays contributions from sources such as trail use fees, park entry fees, parking fees and camping fees.

- Discounted trail fees, multi-entry or multi-trail passes, the proceeds of which are used for trail maintenance.

- Volunteers support organisations and trail maintenance. Volunteers can be effective but are not always available to provide consistent, on-going support.

- Partnerships to improve trail experiences, such as with commercial operators to provide trail- related products and contribute to trail and environmental management, and with private landowners to provide access to trails.

- Federal, state and local government funding.

No	Action
G2.1	Investigate successful international financial management models (such as the New Zealand Trails Trust) and assess relevance and potential viability within Western Australia.
G2.2	Review and report on current legislative arrangements for user-pays options on trails and on commercial usage fee structuring (introducing fees will be considered in light of tourism opportunities and in consultation with the industry).
G2.3	Identify potential commercial sponsorship and philanthropic income opportunities related to trails.
G2.4	Research and produce a credible advocacy platform that succinctly and powerfully informs decision makers of the evidence-based case for public support of trails development and maintenance. It should describe the economic, environmental, community, health and cultural benefits of supporting a varied and quality trail network. This should be done in conjunction with any future development of overarching strategic outdoor frameworks/strategies.
G2.5	Investigate ways to support volunteer groups and "friends of" groups to work in a financially sustainable way under a social enterprise framework.

Strategy G3. Establish a dedicated state-wide funding program for trail planning, construction, maintenance, participation and training.

The availability of long-term funding for the maintenance and management of trails is a major consideration in the development of sustainable trails. The majority of current funding for trail development in the state comes from grants awarded on a project-by-project basis. Grants from the Department of Regional Development's Royalties for Regions program and local governments have enabled development of many trails and it is important that such funding programs continue.

Establishment of a dedicated, specific and consistent state-wide funding program for trails will ensure trail development in the state is sustainable and responsive to demand and need.

No	Action
G3.1	Advocate for the reinstatement of a Western Australian Trails Grant Program to ensure that future investment in trails is strategically targeted through a strong alliance between key government agencies and the Department of Local Government Sport and Cultural Industries.
G.3.2	In lieu of the reinstatement of the Western Australian Trails Grant Program, advocate for the establishment of a new state-wide trails funding program to ensure future community trail development is sustainable and responsive to demand and market needs.

Maac Dive and Snorkel Trail, Marmion.
Image courtesy of DBCA.
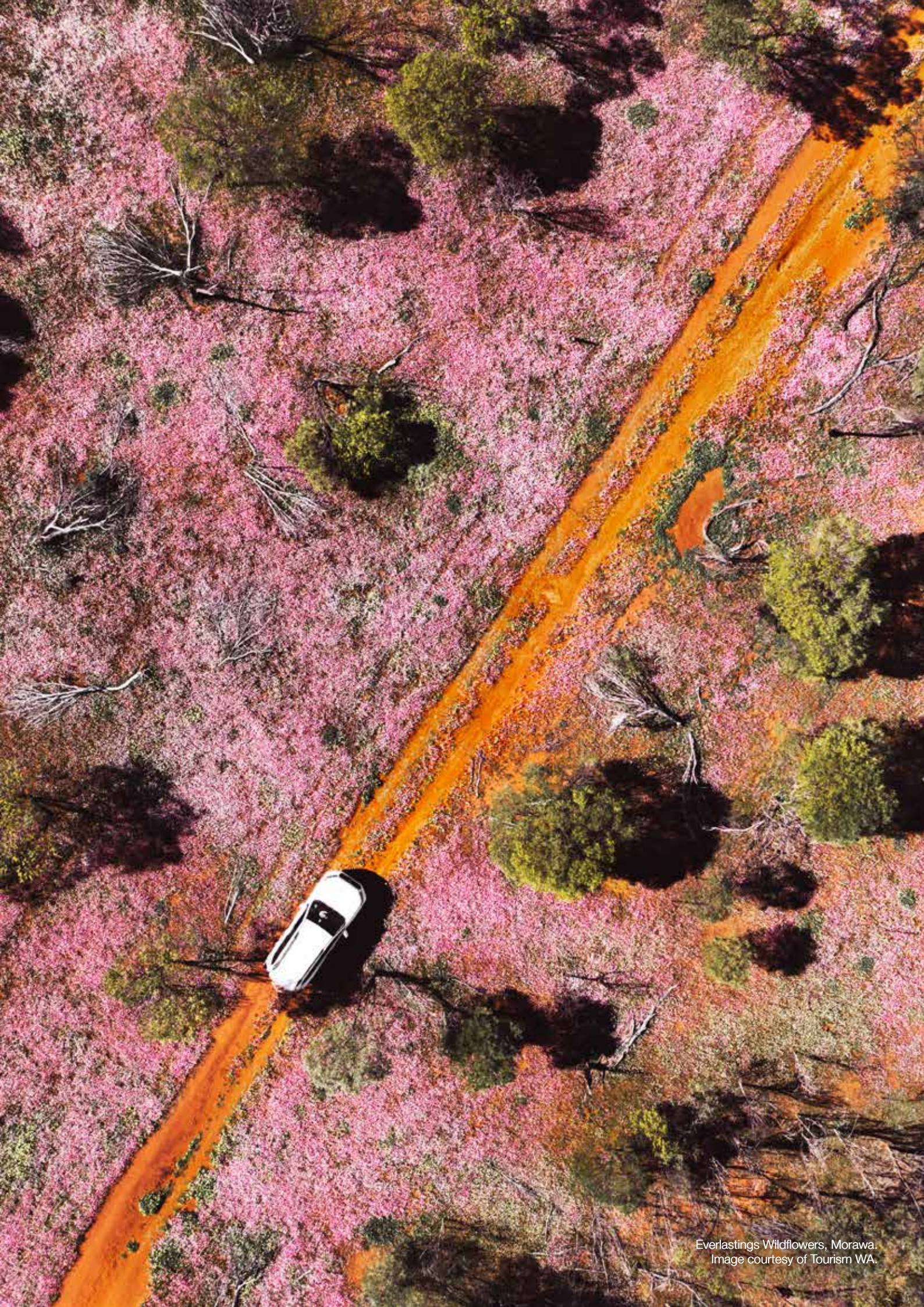
Everlastings Wildflowers, Morawa.
Image courtesy of Tourism WA.

H. Growing the visitor economy

Strategy H1: Identify iconic trails to be developed and promoted as the best in Western Australia and implement a staged program of trail development and promotion for iconic trails.

There is potential to develop and promote a range of high quality, iconic trails in Western Australia to showcase the State to interstate and international visitors and spearhead growth in the visitor economy. Such an approach has been taken in other places, including the Great Walks of New Zealand and the New Zealand Cycle Trails (Great Rides), with resulting growth in nature-based and adventure visitation. The quality of the experience offered by such trails is enhanced by supporting information, visitor services (such as transport, tour products and accommodation) and interpretation.

Trails across Western Australia are at different stages of development and market awareness. Ideally, the mix of iconic trails will reflect the unique visitor experience proposition that Western Australia offers whilst encouraging dispersal across the State. This will require improvements to some trails that already have a high profile but are not necessarily meeting the needs of contemporary markets, as well as commencing a program of development of other new trails. Experiences that encourage a multi-day stay are a priority.

Existing trails that already have a strong awareness in the market are the Bibbulmun Track and the Munda Biddi Trail. The Iconic Trails Subcommittee of the Trails Reference Group has also identified the Cape to Cape Track and the Wadandi Track as trails with potential to become iconic experiences. Alongside work on these identified trails there is also a need to work on establishing more remote iconic experiences on par with national exemplars such as the Larapinta Trail (NT), Three Capes (TAS) and international exemplars such as the Great Walks and Rides in New Zealand. Western Australia's point of difference is the diversity of landscapes which have potential to offer truly unique trail experiences.

Not all types of trail experiences will attract visitors from outside the State. Other trail experiences that have a strong community demand will still be available to visitors and will add to the local offering.

Achieving an excellent suite of iconic trails for Western Australia will require considerable investment in planning and development over time. In some cases it will also require engagement with the private sector to seek investment in accommodation and services suited to relevant markets.

Yeagarup Sand Dunes, Pemberton.
Photo by Frances Andrijich.

Priority for funding under this strategic goal needs to be directed to those trail experiences that have the greatest potential to contribute to the state-wide economy, particularly where there is a significant gap in the market. This will require strong partnerships across the State Government, regional tourism organisations, regional development commissions and local governments and a commitment to the value of trails to the State.

No	Action
H1.1	Continue work on establishing the Cape to Cape and the Wadandi Tracks as iconic trail experiences.
H1.2	Apply the criteria developed by the Iconic Trails Subcommittee in identifying additional iconic trail opportunities across the state, their characteristics, prioritisation, and requirements (including infrastructure, signage, information, interpretation, products, services, and accommodation), cost-benefit analysis and timeframe to bring the trail and associated products to market. Develop and undertake a staged program for investigation and preparation of master plans where initial feasibility is demonstrated.
H1.3	For each trail under development, work closely with Government, trail managers and organisations, the tourism industry and the community to encourage development of linked products, services and accommodation suited to target markets.
H1.4	As iconic trails are developed, work cooperatively to develop and deliver quality information and promotion to attract domestic and international markets.
H1.5	Identify opportunities for private sector investment in iconic multi-day trail experiences.
H1.6	Engage with trail tourism product providers to further develop market-ready visitor experiences.

Strategy H2. Encourage and support private sector involvement in improving trail experiences.

Whilst experiences need to be available across the range of price points for visitors, seeking commercial investment in accommodation, transport and other services can greatly add to the experiences and the attraction of trails. Not only can it offset government investment, but it encourages entrepreneurial vision in creating experiences suited to market.

No	Action
H2.1	Conduct a market gap-analysis to identify trails where linked products (such as tours transport, logistics operations, accommodation) could be established in a cost-effective manner to add to the attraction of the trail for target markets.
H2.2	Facilitate linkages between private sector providers and trail opportunities/service gaps.

Strategy H3: Encourage and support the involvement of Aboriginal people and enterprise in improving trail experiences.

There is a growing interest in Aboriginal culture and stories and trails offer opportunities to tell these stories either through interpretation or Aboriginal businesses and community members providing services on trails.

No	Action
H3.1	Liaise with, and support appropriate Aboriginal communities and groups to identify and progress opportunities to develop products, services and interpretation linked to trails.

Echidna Chasm, Purnululu
National Park.
Image courtesy of Tourism
Western Australia.

Strategy H4. Implement the Trail Town Accreditation program and the Trail Friendly Business program.

Trails WA has worked with both DLGSC and DBCA to develop an accreditation program designed to help regional communities become world class trail destinations. Based on international best practice, the Trail Town Accreditation process focuses on improvements to the destination across a range of parameters. It's a comprehensive destination development guide targeted at attracting existing and potential trail users. Once accredited, the Trail Town branding and Trails WA website will highlight and promote towns to trail users in Western Australia and beyond. Joint promotion of Western Australia's trails and Trail Towns will raise the profile of Western Australia to interstate and overseas visitors.

The Trail Friendly Business program has been designed to:

- help business offer services and amenities to meet the needs of trail users and support marketing and promotion of these services.
- create a community of like-minded businesses who share knowledge and cross-promote each other.
- complement the walker and cycle friendly business programs developed by the Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi Trail Foundations.

No	Action
H4.1	Finalise and make available the Trail Town Accreditation Application Form.
H4.2	Expand upon and market the Trail Friendly Business program, encouraging widespread take up increasing the effectiveness of the program.

Strategy H5. Identify locally and regionally significant trails with the potential to stimulate tourism economies through increased intrastate visitation.

Western Australia is large and diverse in its landscapes and trail experiences. There is potential to better promote locally and regionally significant trails as a means of boosting tourism economies.

No	Action
H5.1	Identify local and regional trails that have potential to attract intrastate visitors.
H5.2	Identify trail related accessible tourism opportunities and support development and promotion of these opportunities.
H5.3	Encourage development of trail-based events as an avenue to promote trail experiences and regional attractions.
H5.4	Create a better understanding among the trail industry as to what is required to market a trail as a tourism activity/attraction.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of plans and strategies is essential to keep track of progress and identify adaptations that may need to be made to address new issues and changes.

As part of its role in coordinating the implementation of this Blueprint, the Trails Reference Group (TRG) will review and report on the achievement of the identified priority strategies and actions in the Blueprint annually and at the end of the period covered by the Blueprint. The TRG will develop an implementation plan which will prioritise actions and assign responsibility. A scorecard will also be developed to document and monitor progress.

Success in implementing the Blueprint will need to be evaluated by the TRG and may include indicators such as:

- Progress in implementing specific actions in the Blueprint.

- Visitation data of the Trails WA website.

- Receipt of trail visitor use and survey data supplied by trail management organisations.

- Growth in nature-based visitation for Western Australia and its regions.

- Growth in awareness of Western Australia as a trails destination.

It is anticipated that this Blueprint will be responsive to new developments and opportunities as well as the emerging trends in technology and participation patterns. It is recommended the TRG institutes a process that allows for regular updating and modification of this Blueprint.

Image courtesy of Bindi Bindi Dreaming

"Kaya Wandju Wandju Whadjuk Noongar Boodja"

Hello and Welcome to Noongar Whadjuk country.

Marissa Verma

6. Case studies

Lane Poole Reserve Paddle Trail, Dwellingup, Dwaarlindjirraap.
Photo by Chad Gerber.

6.1. Aboriginal Engagement - Indigenous Youth Mountain Bike Association

In Canada, the Indigenous Youth Mountain Bike Association (IYMBA) works with indigenous communities to provide communities a connection to land, a way to generate revenue from trails tourism and the opportunities for health benefits that outdoor recreation provides.

Engagement is sought from the grass roots level with community led leadership. Goals, size and scope of trail projects are developed by the community, ensuring the community needs are put first to ensure the trails bring benefits direct to the community. For these projects, tourism is often a secondary focus, the primary focus is ensuring that what is developed is owned by the community and has high levels of community engagement and support.

The Indigenous Youth Mountain Bike Program (formerly Aboriginal Youth Mountain Bike Program) was founded in 2011 with the goal of helping Indigenous youth use mountain biking and trail building in the following ways:

- Develop Active, Healthy Lifestyles – participating in outdoor activities helps keep youth from developing chronic conditions like obesity and diabetes and provide an alternative to involvement with gangs, violence, drugs and gaming addictions.

- Improve Mental Health – getting outdoors and engaging in physical activity are known to increase physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

- Connect with Traditional Territories – connecting with the land is a way for youth to develop a sense of ownership, stewardship and leadership in their traditional territories.

- Build Employment Skills – riding and trail building provide youth with experiences that help youth develop skills and qualities that will prepare for future employment (like working in physically demanding conditions, persisting to master difficult trails and working as part of a team).

To date, the program has resulted in the development of over 80km of trails, the training of dozens of Indigenous trail crews in communities and the promotion of active living and reconnection with nature for thousands of youths, elders and families throughout BC.

Facilitators of this program have also worked with the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia to create a set of guidelines titled 'Working in a good way - A best practice guide for working with indigenous peoples on trails and outdoor recreation projects in British Colombia'. This document is intended to guide members of outdoor recreation groups and clubs who wish to work cooperatively with Indigenous communities when they are involved with projects in or adjacent to their communities and on the lands associated with those communities.

Sources:

- https://www.plucascatalyst.com/youth-program
- https://www.orcbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_ORC_Working-in-a-Good-Way_web.pdf

6.2. Trail User Education - Recreate Responsibly Coalition

The Recreate Responsibly Coalition is an active coalition of more than 1,600 businesses, agencies, non-profits, and influential voices who are working together to help everyone experience the benefits of nature and foster an equitable outdoors community.

The coalition was initially formed in response to the need to ensure people remained safe while participating in outdoor recreation during the pandemic in the U.S.A. Initially this group was formed to provide guidelines on social distancing, hygiene and covid-safe practices in outdoor recreation.

As the pandemic progressed, this group has broadened its reach to respond to the significant increase in trail users observed during the pandemic when record trail visitation was recorded at USA public lands and waters.

The coalition provides education and guidance for many new trail users, groups, and agencies who are also dealing with an increase in demand for trails. There is a central steering committee as well as regional and state chapters in Washington, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Michigan, Colorado, and California.

The recreate responsibly website provides sharable information tailored to social media posts so that members of the coalition can easily disseminate information to trail users. There are also key links to organisations and information arranged by activity as well as blog posts tailored to participant's levels of experience or interest, including the 'leave no trace principles', and articles for 'nature novices' on getting outdoors for the first time.

On the Recreate Responsibly website, information and guidelines are presented and adapted for different times of the year. So far, the coalition has released a 'Winter' edition, a 'Wildfire' edition, and a general edition of the recreate responsibly guidelines.

The coalition is in the process of developing inclusivity guidelines, information, and resources, to foster more equitable participation, access, and inclusion in the outdoors.

Source: https://www.recreateresponsibly.org

6.3. Western Australian Success Story - Dwellingup Trail Town

Dwellingup is a recent trail town success story in Western Australia. Significant investment in tourism infrastructure and trails has led to increased visitor growth, and to Dwellingup winning the Gold medal in the Western Australia Top Small Tourism Town Award for 2021.[1] Nationally, Dwellingup was a top six finalist in this category.[2]

Since 2017, when the original WA Strategic Blueprint was released, several multi-million-dollar trails and tourism projects have been completed in Dwellingup, establishing its status as a premier trails destination in Western Australia.

Dwellingup Trails & Visitor Centre. Image courtesy of Shire of Murray.

Engaging the community

Community understanding and support for trail tourism has grown significantly since 2008, when the council first raised the prospect of expanding the trail tourism offering in Dwellingup. In 2008, the benefits of trails tourism were not well understood, and initially, community support for the idea was low.

In 2012, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions gave a presentation to the Dwellingup community, sharing the benefits of trail tourism and development. This was a turning point when community sentiment began to shift and support for trails tourism grew.

In 2016, the Dwellingup Community Tourism Plan was developed, this plan was developed by the community and established a vision for the area that was in alignment with community values. Passionate members of the council recognised the importance of community support, and the long-term need for the community to 'own' and be proud of the project.[3]

Strategic planning and core partnerships

Through relationships with other key organisations, the Shire of Murray, supported the development of several key planning documents and advocated strongly for the project, to ensure that the Dwellingup trails project was considered a high priority within the region and state-wide.

Core planning documents included, the Peel tourism economic development infrastructure strategy 2016-20[4] and the Business case for the Dwellingup Trails and Adventure Hub. To develop the

1   https://tourismcouncilwa.com.au/wa-tourism-awards/town-awards
2   https://www.qualitytourismaustralia.com/australian-tourism-awards/2021-top-tourism-town-winners/
3   Shire of Murray CEO Dean Unsworth - Sustainable Trails Conference presentation
4   Peel tourism economic development infrastructure strategy 2016-2020

trails, the Shire of Murray followed the eight stage Trails Development Process, and established early partnerships with key organisations, to attain funding, support and advice on the necessary ingredients for a successful trails destination.

Crucially, the Shire engaged with the community and additional key organisations early, and partnered with them to develop the concept and further plans. This allowed the planning and development of the project to run smoothly as all key stakeholders were involved and had buy-in to the project. Strong partnerships allowed opportunity to address concerns in the early stages prior to attaining funding or progressing the project to near completion before issues were raised.[5]

The Shire ensured their plans were in line with key state-wide planning documentation including the WA Strategic Trails Blueprint and the Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy. Establishing Dwellingup as a trail town was identified as a high priority in the Perth and Peel Mountain Bike Master Plan.

What was created

Since 2017 Dwellingup has built on the natural assets of the town, as well as the connection to iconic trails Munda Biddi and Bibbulmun Track. To become a place 'where the trails meet'.

Community vision, Shire passion, excellent planning and relationships with key organisations attracted funding for two key projects.

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5   Shire of Murray CEO Dean Unsworth - Sustainable Trails Conference presentation

Mountain bikes and bushwalking, Lane Poole Reserve.
Photo by Josh Cowling.

Project 1 – Dwellingup National Trails Centre[6]

The first project, the 'Dwellingup National Trails Centre' attracted $4.5 million investment to

- Hotham Valley Railway Rail Relocation - relocation of the rail triangle and the implementation of a new train turntable.
- Visitor Centre Expansion - redevelopment of an expanded and transformed Dwellingup History and Visitor Information Centre with additional toilets and hot showers.
- Precinct Development – Skate Park, Pump Track and additional facilities.
- Munda Biddi Trail and Bibbulmun Track – realignment of the two trails, through the town to meet at the Trails Centre.

This project was completed in 2020.

According to Shire President Cr. David Bolt, the project is an example of how groups working together can realise great outcomes.

"The cooperation the Shire has enjoyed from Dwellingup Community Compact, Peel Development Commission, Departments of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Forest Heritage Centre, Mandurah and Peel Tourism Organisation and Alcoa, has been outstanding."

"I particularly appreciate Hotham Valley Tourist Railway's support, significant time allocated and willingness to have new rail lines built and the rail platform refurbished, which has allowed the entire precinct to be activated," Cr. Bolt said.[7]

Project 2 – Dwellingup Adventure Trails[8]

The second project received funding of $3.456 million through the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund and $4.95 million through Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. This project focused on creation of the trail experiences including:

Mountain bike trails

- 32km of quality mountain bike trails
- Realignment of the Munda Biddi Trail

Suspension bridge

- 80m suspension bridge from Baden Powell Reserve to the Murray South MTB circuit

Scenic Drive and 4WD trails

- Upgrades to the Captain Fawcett 4WD track
- Road improvements in Lane Poole Reserve

Marketing

- Marketing, branding and promotion strategies
- Sustainable business development model for the trails
- Online promotional websites and tools

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6   https://yoursay.murray.wa.gov.au/dwellingup-national-trails-centre
7   https://yoursay.murray.wa.gov.au/dwellingup-national-trails-centre
8   https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/images/documents/conservation-management/trails/Dwellingup%20Adventure%20Trails%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf

Baden Powell Visitors Centre

- Pop up cafe and hire facilities at Baden Powell Reserve
- Canoe trails, stairs to facilitate safer access to Murray River

Dwellingup brand

The Dwellingup brand signifies an adventure filled region for the 'Wild@Heart'. The brand material including comprehensive website and promotional video, provides a platform to market the trails and encourages trail users to identify themselves as 'Wild@Heart' travellers who convene in Dwellingup, where the trails meet and rivers flow. Travellers are encouraged to see the trails experience as more than a path through the landscape. They are a path to an experience, a path to feeling.

'Wild@Heart':

- Dwellingup is not just a place you see, it's a place you feel
- Collect moments, and disconnect from technology, to truly connect
- Take new journeys on ancient tracks
- Step out and gaze upon beauty
- Experience the thrill of a route untamed, surrounded by nature's abundance
- Serenity of country towns
- Majestic landscapes and big skies
- No dress code, no rush, no deadline, no boss
- The wisdom of the land and culture
- The destination that reminds you, you are 'Wild@Heart'[9]

Success and next steps

Dwellingup is working towards achieving the status of an accredited Trail Town destination of National Significance. The completed projects have already contributed positively to the Dwellingup economy and jobs in the region.

During construction the two projects generated 50 direct jobs and 156 indirect jobs. After completion there are anticipated to be 55 direct jobs and 28 indirect jobs as a result of this investment.[10]

The shire is working with businesses to provide additional services, restaurants, cafes and accommodation and keep pace with this growth in visitor numbers. A trail friendly business plan is being developed to cater for this demand, and a governance model is being developed long-term to establish a way to sustain the maintenance of the trails to ensure repeat visitation.

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9   https://dwellingup.destinationmurray.com.au
10   Shire of Murray CEO Dean Unsworth - Sustainable Trails Conference presentation

6.4. Accessible Trails – Parks Victoria

Parks Victoria manages a diverse range of parks covering more than four million hectares, or about 18.5% of Victoria. This includes national, urban and marine parks. Each year, these parks attract around 100 million visits, making a significant contribution to the visitor economy. Parks Victoria is committed to providing parks that are inclusive for all Victorians, and which enable all visitors to obtain health and wellbeing benefits from visiting a park.

Recognising the prevalence of people living with a disability in the community, Parks Victoria developed a Disability Action Plan in 2017 which outlined achievements in improving accessibility and priority areas for action moving forward. Priority areas identified included[1]:

1.   Community consultation and engagement

2.   Improved access to parks for visitors with disabilities

3.   Support and provision of health and wellbeing programs in parks

4.   Opportunities for trailing and education in parks

5.   Inclusive volunteering and employment opportunities at Parks Victoria

Implementation of these priority actions has resulted in improved access for those living with a disability. Programs and resources that have been delivered in the past year include[2]:

Improved park facilities

- Undertook construction of the first Australian dementia trail established at Woowookarung Regional Park, launched on 25 June 2021.

- Continued project implementation and planning for development of Changing Places toilets at Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park and Jells Park.

- Incorporated universal design principles and facilities design into the new Parks Victoria visitor facilities manual.

- Accessibility audits were completed for twelve parks with higher visitation rates. This information will be used to update park information for the community as well as inform park plans and programs.

Training and capacity building

- Delivered an accessibility tourism training webinar to Licensed Tour Operators.

- Delivered universal design webinars to Parks Victoria staff, including project managers.

- Provided technical advice to incorporate all-abilities access into major capital works programs for redevelopment of park facilities including Victorian Great Outdoors, Economic Stimulus projects and Urban Active Wellbeing initiative. These works are progressively being implemented.

Delivered inclusive programs and activities

- Created a series of ten videos that promote all-abilities experiences in parks.

- Supported Blind Sports and Recreation Victoria to provide guided group walks for blind or vision impaired people, including running forest therapy activities.

- New social scripts for children with autism were completed with these now available at eight parks across the state.

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1   Parks Victoria Disability Action Plan 2017-2020
2   Parks Victoria Annual Report 2020-21

- Recruited people of all abilities for the Volunteer Park Guides program at Serendip Sanctuary that provided wildlife tours for visitors.
- Provided 'Come and Try' events at Dandenong Ranges Gardens for visitors with mobility limitations to trial all-terrain 'TrailRider'.

The combination of improved facilities, training and capacity building, and provision of resources, programs and activities has resulted in a comprehensive outcome where parks and trails are more accessible and inclusion and universal design is ingrained across Parks Victoria areas of responsibility.

6.5.   Creating environmental stewards - Mākara Peak Mountain Bike Park

Mākara Peak was cleared of native vegetation in the early 1900s and farmed through to the mid 1990s before it was turned into the park it is today. One small remnant of the pre-European forest exists. The 250 hectare Mākara Peak Mountain Bike Park was established in 1988 by the Wellington City Council and is now the largest trail network in lower North Island.

Mākara Peak is classified as a Key Native Ecosystem and is Wellington's first Ministry for Primary Industries certified 'carbon sink' - a forest set aside for atmospheric carbon dioxide absorption. The park provides a safe corridor between neighbouring reserves as well as an important habitat for native birds and other wildlife.

With an 'education through recreation' ethos, the Mākara Peak Mountain Bike Supporters was established with the main goal to restore the park to a healthy, thriving native forest full of native animals. A volunteer group, the Supporters is made up of park users – mountain bikers, runners, walkers, and residents with a passion for Mākara Peak. By encouraging users to become involved with the park developments and restoration, Mākara Peak Mountain Bike Park is an example of how conservation, community, and recreation partners can work together.

With the support of the Wellington and Greater Wellington Regional Councils, this volunteer driven effort managed by Mākara Peak Mountain Bike Supporters encourages park users to learn about and care for their surrounding environment. Supporters assist in a variety of ways including pest animal and plant control, protecting and reintroducing plant species and planting thousands of seedlings.[3]

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3   Makara Peak Supporters Inc, Makara Peak Mountain Bike Park [website], https://makarapeak.bike/, (accessed 6 September 2021).
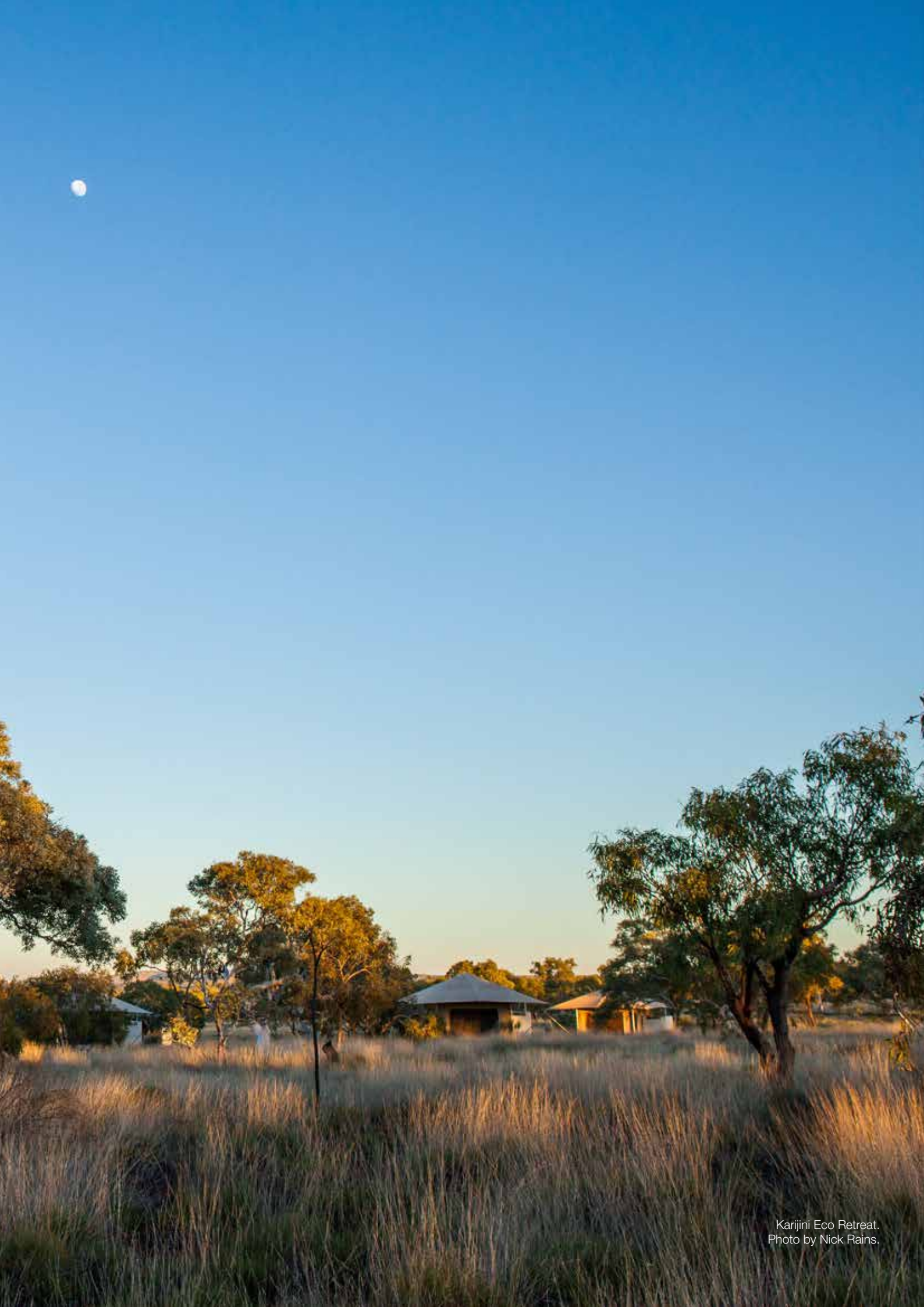
Karijini Eco Retreat.
Photo by Nick Rains.