

CYCLING IN FORESTS GUIDELINES

1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 Forest owners and cyclists each have a contribution to make to the successful development of off-road cycling. This applies equally to the use of existing infrastructure and in the expansion of forest cycling facilities.
- 1.2 Cycling in Forests Guidelines are required to assist owners or managers of forests and cyclist users of forests to take sufficient account of risks in respect of liability, accidents and damage to the forest environment associated with off-road cycling. In this context off-road includes the use of unsurfaced forest roads and paths.
- 1.3 The scope of the guidelines includes the variety of cycling opportunities that forests provide, and where cycling is not allowed because of the risk of accidents, damage to sensitive areas, or disturbance of wildlife.

2. Use of forests for cycling

- 2.1 Cycling in forests takes many forms, ranging from casual cycling for pleasure on level ground to more specialised or competitive cross-country cycling and adventurous downhill riding involving risk to the rider. Requirements for cycling facilities are therefore diverse, and reflect preferences of different riders. Correspondingly the capacity of forests in various locations to absorb different cycling activities will also vary widely.
- 2.2 Exclusion might be necessary in order to protect vulnerable habitats or because of hazards such as unstable slopes. In addition, temporary measures are required to prevent incursion into organised events, to allow path maintenance, forest road works and other forestry operations, and to avoid disturbance of breeding birds.
- 2.3 Use of forest roads and some footpaths by cyclists need not be a significant safety issue, provided they are aware of the likelihood of forestry traffic and are respectful of walkers and other users. Well planned, dedicated and properly used cycle routes enable cyclists to use forests with reduced risk to other users and to the environment.
- 2.4 Planning and design of dedicated cycling routes should cover resource requirements for design, construction, signage, management and maintenance. It should also take account of impacts on soil, water and biodiversity and the forest management cycle of tree planting, stand management, harvesting and replanting.

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- 2.5 The potential for conflict between users of dedicated routes with harvesting and other forestry operations can be minimised by making use of open space, young plantations, and wind-firm stands. Larger forest areas, e.g >500 ha, can generally offer greater potential to absorb dedicated routes than smaller blocks.
- 2.6 Zoning of areas of forests for specialist cycling activities is an option in larger forest areas where there is a likelihood of conflict between users e.g. horse riding and walking, and particularly where terrain conditions are attractive for downhill cycling.

3. Managing risk

- 3.1 Owners or managers of forests and cyclist users of forests may perceive risk in different ways. Landowners and managers are primarily concerned with the safety of their visitors, liability for personal injury claims and other legal responsibilities, including those related to the environment. Cyclists using forests are primarily concerned with their own safety, avoiding accidents and in protecting the environment for future use.
- 3.2 The basic requirement of risk management is to analyse risks and introduce specific controls. Recommended controls will include:
- A system of regulation taking account of the type of cycling use
 - A code of practice communicated to users by various means e.g. in association with permissive signage at forest entrances, in car parks and trail heads, distribution in leaflet form at information points or through websites, and on websites
 - Safety information communicated to users by various means
 - Appropriate warning signage in relation to natural hazards e.g. steep slopes or deep water
 - Signage at intersections of routes indicating where cyclists are likely to be in close proximity to other users such as walkers or horseriders
 - Inspection regimes and monitoring arrangements
 - Effective lines of communication between owner, manager and users
 - Temporary or long-term exclusions to avoid forest areas where risk is unacceptable, forest operations or protected natural habitats
 - Patrols by wardens instructed to provide information and offer advice to users
- 3.3 The controls indicated in 3.2 may in themselves not be sufficient. Landowners and managers should always seek professional advice regarding their specific circumstances.

4. Regulation

- 4.1 Permissive notices placed at suitable locations indicating where cycling is allowed may be appropriate for casual or family cycling uses where risk is considered to be very low.

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- 4.2 Individual permits or self registration may be appropriate for regulating family and cross country cycling on private estates, in named Forest Service forests or forest blocks, zones within forests, or dedicated routes. Regulation of cycling by issue of individual cycling permits or a self registration process provides a means by which a code of practice and safety information is communicated to the cyclist.
- 4.3 Regulation of family and cross country cycling events by an appropriate agreement with the organisers enables owners or managers to identify roles and responsibilities for managing the event and to set conditions, such as agreement to comply with a code of practice, planning to take account of vehicle access and emergency procedures.
- 4.4 Formal lease or licensing arrangements with an incorporated association subscribed to by cyclists or cycling membership organisations are appropriate for regulating specialist cycling use where riders may place themselves at significant risk. The arrangements should include for example provision for cycle trail construction and management, proper use of the trail, built trail features, vehicle access, and emergency procedures.

5. Cycling in Forests Code of Practice

- Have respect for signs, for other users, for the forest environment.
- Take your rubbish home
- Forests are dynamic. Expect the unexpected even on familiar routes.
- Use information provided for your safety
- Maintain your bike
- Wear appropriate body protection
- Stick to the trail