

Redwood Park

ON THE continuing discussion of the proposed expansion of high-impact mountain biking in Redwood Park.

Firstly, I would like to address the implication that local environmental groups are against expansion of trails in Jubilee Park and other appropriate places along the escarpment.

Recreational use of natural spaces benefits everyone and the sort of mountain biking most people think of when hearing the term may indeed be of comparable environmental impact to other recreational trail uses.

This is not what local environmental groups are raising their voices to try and prevent.

What we're trying to prevent is irreversible environmental damage to Redwood Park specifically.

Some scientific literature on the matter does indeed say that mountain biking can be as low impact as hiking, but those same papers also confirm that the most environmentally damaging part of the sport is the construction of the trails themselves.

There is no way to avoid the simple maths that choosing to construct these trails through Redwood Park would involve clearing a 30-odd kilometre path of about one metre wide, meaning the destruction of at least 30km² of ecologically valuable habitat.

Moreover, comparing the subject matter of these studies to the development being proposed for Redwood Park is much like the old adage of comparing apples and oranges.

Existing literature is primarily focused on the impacts of "family" mountain biking, as opposed to the relatively new-to-the-scene and likely more intensely damaging "black diamond" and "double black diamond" trails required for downhill racing and endurance events.

Another common approach in existing scientific literature is to create simulations of these scenarios to answer specific questions, but long-term studies of high-impact racing on the biodiversity of natural spaces is sadly lacking.

"Specific effects associated with mountain biking activity and infrastructure ... emerged as a considerable gap in the research literature." (Quinn & Chernoff, 2010)
A more recent study by Evju et al.

(2021) found that "higher trail degradation can be expected if a large proportion of

the users are mountain bikers, particularly in wet trail parts”.

The substrate on the range is notoriously prone to erosion (think of the landslides and measures required to manage them), meaning that we could perhaps expect a decent amount of erosion if high-impact endurance racing was to occur in Redwood Park.

While many state governments are integrating more mountain bike use in their national parks, our neighbours south of the border are having none of it. The National Parks Association of New South Wales “is opposed to all forms of cycling on all roads, trails and tracks in wilderness areas, and the policy intent should take the same approach so that Plans of Management do not allow it”.

Mountain trail bikes have in fact been likened to a Trojan Horse to national parks, because they facilitate the spread of further environmental damage.

In 2015 ABC’s Ann Jones reported on research conducted by Professor Catherine Pickering from the Environment Futures Research Institute at Griffith University.

While Pickering greatly supported the health benefits and connection to nature mountain biking promotes, the tendency of resourceful Aussies to “improve” upon mountain bike trails meant that her team found over 116 additions to mountain bike trails, averaging 36m² of cleared vegetation at each site, as well as almost 8km of unofficial trails.

This sort of unaccounted-for damage further supports the construction of mountain bike paths in less ecologically valuable areas.

There is also the question of how much damage enthusiastic spectators of the sport could cause in such an ecologically sensitive area.

Not to mention the vulnerable ground-dwelling species that are currently residing and known to be breeding in relative safety within the park. Or the inevitable increase of invasive weed spread that would complete the Trojan Horse analogy.

It is incredible to hear of the collaborative efforts occurring in other states between the government and the community to enhance the recreational potential of our natural spaces. It is amazing that these initiatives have the support of local environmental groups.

The difference between our situation and theirs is that the plan to develop Redwood Park does not have the support of local environmental groups here in Toowoomba.

There was very little done in the way of consultation with local environmental groups, and the failure to investigate options other than the biodiversity, historical and cultural hotspot that is Redwood Park has left local groups no option but to make some noise.

We’re trying raising our voices about an issue that we believe might cause more environmental damage than it’s worth.

We are not against mountain biking, or sustainable and responsible economic expansion.

We are for preserving our most valuable ecological resources during this inevitable expansion so that they may thrive for generations to come.

There are better choices, that allow for both development and preservation. Let's choose them.

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