

The threat to the integrity of Redwood Park

Apart from invasive weeds, cats, dogs and feral animals, the latest threat to the environment of our escarpment parks is from human intervention - particularly habitat loss and/or fragmentation. The current example of this is Toowoomba Regional Council's plan to extend the downhill racing mountain bike tracks into Redwood Park.

In 1921, Toowoomba's Redwood Park was designated a bird and fauna sanctuary by the Qld government.

In early 2019 State MP Mick de Brenni, a keen mountain-bike rider came up to Toowoomba and offered \$25,000 to Toowoomba Regional Council (TRC) to upgrade existing Mtb trails and establish new ones on the Range. TRC has two large public parks on the Range: Jubilee Park which already has a network of Mtb trails maintained by the Toowoomba Mountain Bike Club; the second is Redwood Park, which TRC describes thus –

"This ... bushland park is a feature of Toowoomba. Located on the Great Dividing Range, it provides excellent views from many locations throughout. Redwood Park has diverse vegetation which includes grey ironbark and brushbox, river oak, birds nest ferns, orchids, Moreton Bay fig, broomstick wattle, blue gum and grass trees.

Goannas and birds such as white-headed pigeons, brown cuckoo doves, eastern yellow robins, double bar finches, eastern whipbirds (listen for its distinct call), scrub turkeys (you can't miss their large built mounds on the forest floor) and black-breasted button-quail can also be seen" (Actually, this is unlikely since there are few of them and they are very wary of disturbance.)

TRC added to the \$25,000, as did Lockyer Valley Regional Council, to make up \$60,000 which they used to engage the services of Dirt Art who produced the **Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley Escarpment Mountain Bike Master Plan** – available on TRC website. It includes 30+ kms of downhill racing tracks in Redwood Park, down a ridge that forms the ecotone between rainforest and eucalypt forest, and which is not open to walkers. Despite TRC's claims, minimal community consultation took place. TRC conducted an online survey – responses on the web – mainly targeting cyclists. Householders living close to the range were advised of the survey and were invited to a workshop. Long story short, Dirt Art's report has been accepted by Council. Council has now engaged Redleaf Consulting to produce an EIS on both Jubilee Park and Redwood Park, but is not obliged to accept their findings.

Members of the Friends of Escarpment Parks (FEP) have worked as volunteers to keep Redwood Park as weed-free as they can for decades. They have joined Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club, Lockyer Upper Catchment Inc., Toowoomba Bird Observers/Birds Southern Qld, Darling Downs Environment Community, the Wilderness Society and QCC, to form a Steering Committee to fight the expansion of Mtb trails into Redwood Park.

These are the concerns;

The attitude of many people, including some in our Council, is that the bush can withstand any pressure put on it. This is not true. The loss of species due to incremental habitat destruction and/or fragmentation is something we are responsible for. The 30kms of proposed criss-crossing, looping mtb tracks is a prime example of habitat fragmentation. Some birds, including BBQ are reluctant to traverse across pathways, thereby reducing their individual habitat area.

When we talk about species loss, we also mean plant and fungi loss. A healthy and complete habitat then sustains the birds and fauna that shelter within it.

Flora is obviously damaged when creating a trail. New young trees are permitted to be cut down to make way for mtb trails and soil brought in contains weeds. The soil is brought in from elsewhere and dumped in and up around the trunks of the remaining trees, a process associated with collar rot that eventually kills the tree. Weeds love disturbance and mtb constitutes disturbance. Damage to the fungal networks is rarely considered, and the impact is not understood. If there are orchids in the area they will be the first flora to suffer from losing the fungal network in the soil. There are a few species of native orchid left in Redwood Park and one of these is classified as a threatened species.

In Jubilee Park mtb trails are open at night, thereby disturbing roosting birds, gliders, frogs, or other fauna. The same will almost certainly happen in Redwood Park, it has at least two threatened nocturnal species that we know of - *Petauroides Volans* and *Pteropus poliocephalus*.

Fast paced downhill mtb events and their associated spectator trampling causes erosion very quickly, much faster than walking tracks and gentle cycle touring. Erosion also leads to drainage problems with increased soil sediment in the waterways leading to decreased water quality due to runoff.

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