

# Taking the Reins

The Western Australian Recreational Horse Trail Strategy



**ATHRA THE AUSTRALIAN  
TRAIL HORSE RIDERS ASSOCIATION**

October 2015

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## Photo Acknowledgements

Photos in this document are courtesy of ATHRA clubs and committee members.

## Definitions

**Recreational** - the activity is generally unstructured; undertaken by individuals or informal groups; is undertaken for enjoyment and is not undertaken as part of an organised competitive event.

A **trail** can be a corridor, route or pathway with strong linkages with the natural environment, open space networks and cultural heritage. Land based trails typically have a trail corridor that is distinguishable from the surrounding landscape. There is normally a visible trail surface, pathway or series of signs, trail markers or landmarks<sup>1</sup>.

**Horse trail** - is either specifically designated for horse riding or is multi-use and does not preclude horse riding. The Rider Survey undertaken as part of this strategy identified that horse riders used the following for recreational riding:

- firebreaks
- road verges
- designated horse trails
  - bridle trails
  - rail trails
  - old stock routes
- gazetted gravel roads
- multi-use trails
- beaches

**Horse riding** - this term will be used throughout the document but should be read as horse riding and horse driving to denote the riding of a horse and/or the driving of a horse carriage or horse led vehicle.

**WA Horse Council** - the peak body representing the non racing horse industry in WA.

**ATHRA** - an association of trail riding clubs, providing governance, policies, insurance and resources support to clubs. ATHRA is a member of the WA Horse Council representing recreational trail riding.



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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Recreational Trails: Guidelines for the planning, design, construction and maintenance of recreational trails in South Australia, Government of South Australia, p1.

# TAKING THE REINS - A STATEWIDE STRATEGY FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

*Taking the Reins* is the first state wide strategy for horse trail access in Western Australia. Its aim is to ensure that Western Australia takes advantage of the opportunities and benefits that horse trail riding presents, whilst at the same time addressing existing challenges.

This Strategy has been developed to provide clear guidance and structure for decision makers, land managers, trails planners and the horse trail community. It is a coordinated, structured approach to horse trail access, development and management, driven by an overarching vision.

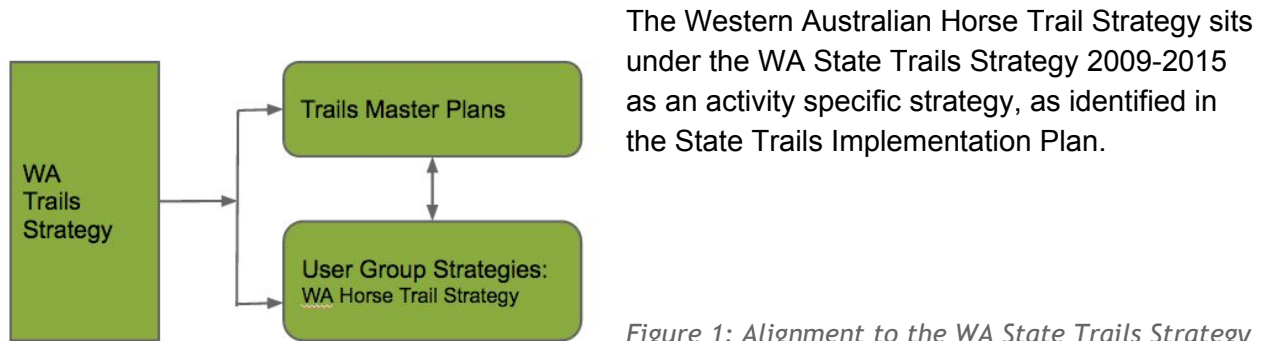


Figure 1: Alignment to the WA State Trails Strategy

By its very nature, recreational activity is less coordinated and structured. *Taking the Reins* maps a framework for all horse trail community members to work together with a shared and unified plan.

## The Process

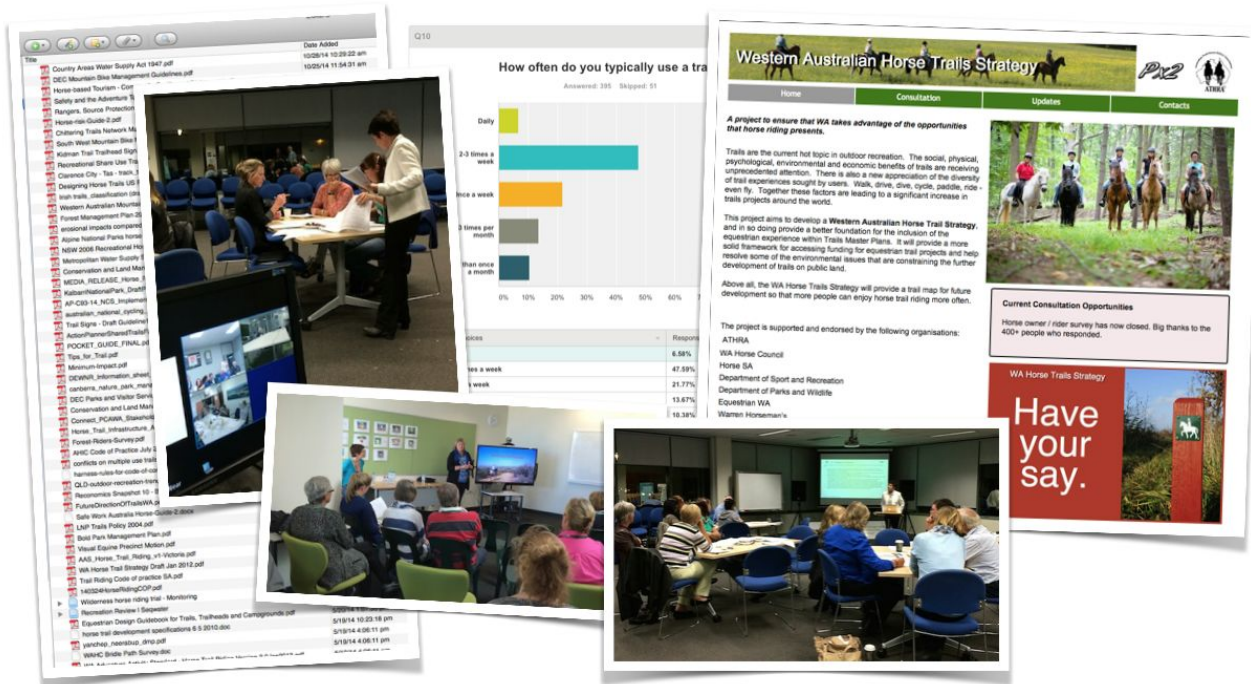
The Australian Trail Horse Riders Association, with funding from the Department of Sport and Recreation and support from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, commissioned PX2 to develop this strategy. The following activities were undertaken:

- An extensive literature review and desktop audit of local, national and international horse trail plans, strategies, frameworks, environmental reports and legislative and policy overview.
- A rider survey with 446 responses from across the state - this is the first survey of horse trail users undertaken in Western Australia and the great response from the community resulted in the collection of valuable data. (Report available as a downloadable technical paper.)

- Development of supporting discussion papers, with consultation and feedback from key stakeholders. These papers include the following and are available for download from [www.athra.com.au](http://www.athra.com.au):

1. Horse Trails - Activity Overview and Benefits
2. Legislative and Policy Overview
3. Environment
4. Horse Trail Classifications
5. Education and Information
6. Trails Gap Analysis
7. Economic
8. Rider Survey Report

- Rider workshops held in Perth, Geraldton, Bunbury and Albany to formulate strategic priorities and actions.
- Analysis of the Trails Audit undertaken by ATHRA members in 2014





## THE ACTIVITY

**Horse riding is a recreational activity that has strong cultural and heritage associations for many West Australians. It is a popular and enjoyable way to experience natural environments.**

This strategy addresses the recreational use of trails permitted for horse use including:

**Horse trail riding** - where participants ride outside of enclosed areas for pleasure, challenge, experience and educational outcomes.

**Endurance riding** - a more active and intensive form of recreational or competitive horse riding. It typically involves riding horses in planned and organised events, generally on loop trails with distances of approximately 80 kilometres.

**Horse trekking** - long-distance point to point riding involving the use of either pack horses or support vehicles to carry overnight camping equipment and supplies, or cloverleaf style which involves self catering and overnight camping.

**Harness driving** - hitching the horse to a 2 or 4 wheel vehicle and driving on the trails.

Trails are well known to provide social, physical, health, environmental, cultural and economic benefits. In this regard horse trails deliver the same benefits as walk and cycle trails. Horse trail riding can have positive effects on people's physical and mental health and sense of wellbeing. It facilitates participation and interaction between diverse community members and provides opportunities to experience natural and cultural heritage environments.

Participants undertake recreational horse trail riding for enjoyment and fun, exercise and fitness for self, exercise for the horse, nature appreciation, linkages to cultural heritage, social aspects, adventure, training for competitive events and sightseeing.

However there are also significant challenges in meeting the demand for horse trails in Western Australia. Competing demand from other trail activities for a reduced trails inventory and limited recreational funding puts pressure on the horse trail community to be organised, effective and efficient in its actions. The growing popularity and diversity of trails use is also increasing the potential for trail user conflicts. There are concerns from land managers about environmental impacts that need to be addressed and mitigated. Also the unstructured nature of the activity and reliance on volunteers makes it harder for the horse trail community to implement and sustain a long term development plan.

*Taking the Reins* aims to ensure that Western Australia takes advantage of the opportunities and benefits that horse trail riding presents, whilst at the same time addressing existing and future challenges.





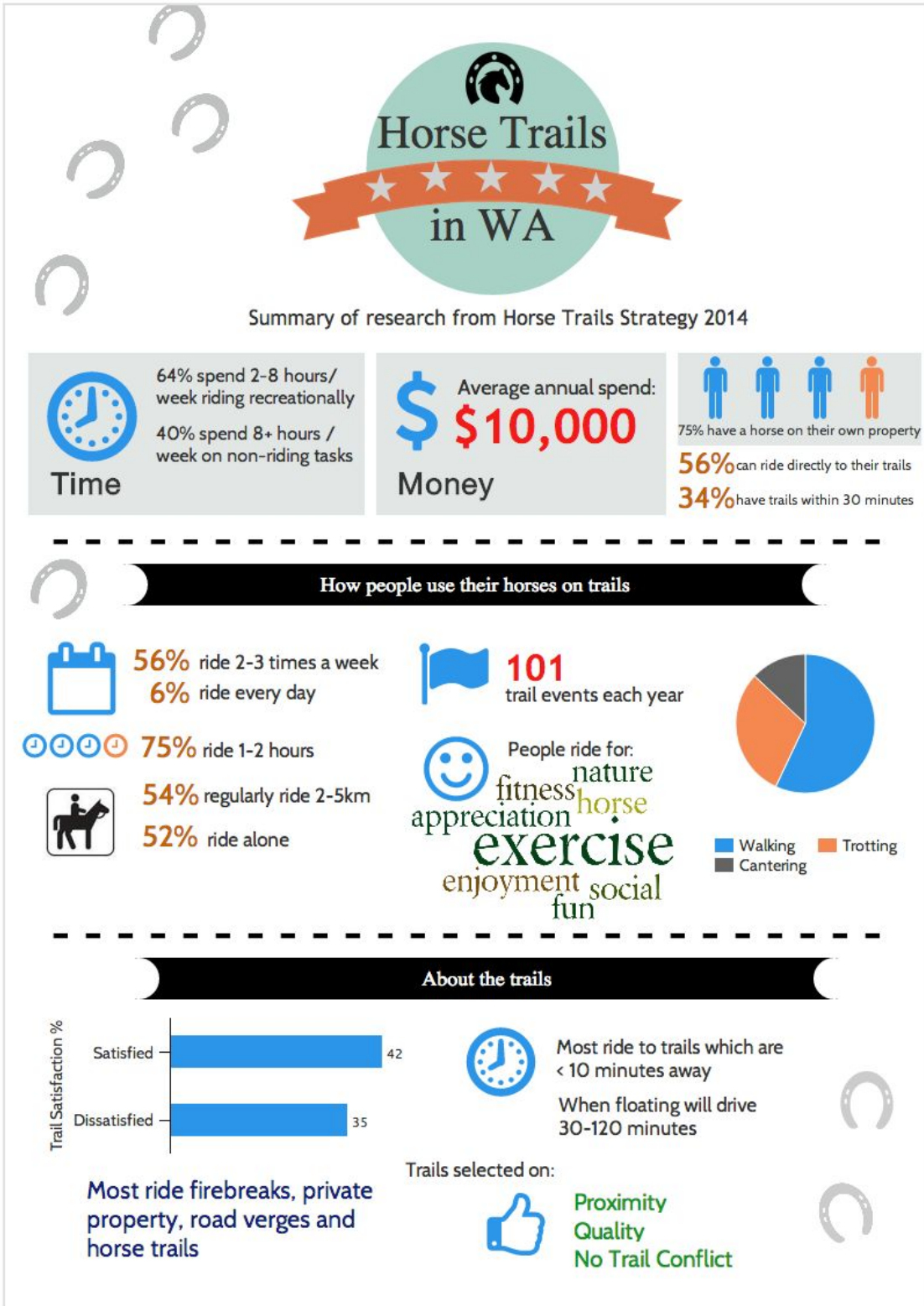


Figure 2: 2014 WA Horse Trail Strategy - Rider Survey key findings

# STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

## OUR VISION

**Our vision is for Western Australians to have the opportunity to enjoy diverse, quality horse trail experiences now and into the future.**

History has a way of reminding us that we can never take things for granted. Against the backdrop of growing population, expanding urbanisation, emerging forms of recreation, time pressures, conservation pressures and government fiscal constraint we need to recognise that our heritage of recreational horse trail riding needs our attention if it is to survive, let alone thrive, into the future.

Our attention is focussed by a Vision, which articulates five concepts:

- Western Australians - In all areas of the state, of both genders, all ages and skill levels.
- Diversity - A recognition that riders seek a range of experiences - in style, location, length, difficulty and landscape.
- Quality - The combination of factors that create a satisfying experience.
- Now - An awareness that there are things about recreational horse trail riding that need immediate improvement.
- The Future - The commitment to future generations of riders.



The Strategy to achieve this vision is made up of a series of interlinking principles and priorities.

The following model has been developed to visualise the component parts.



Figure 3: Strategic Model

The Strategy is guided by the following enduring principles:

### OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE - SUSTAINABILITY

*'Sustainability: The ability to maintain a certain rate or level'.*

We would be doing future generations a disservice if we did things that could put the future of horse trail riding in jeopardy or if we failed to do things necessary to protect the future of horse trail riding. While environmental sustainability may spring first to mind, this also refers to organisational and economic sustainability as well as sustainability of trails and facilities and of the riding experience itself.

## ENABLING PRINCIPLES

The broad Enabling Principles recognise the interrelationship between horse trail users and other stakeholders and the necessity of good relationships in achieving our vision.

- Collaboration - To achieve our vision horse riders cannot work in isolation. There is a need to engage and work in partnership with many stakeholders such as land managers, regulators and policy makers, industry, clubs and associations as well as the broader trails community.
- Cooperation - A step beyond collaboration, *cooperation* involves give and take. There is a need to understand the perspectives of land managers, environmental interests and other trails users as they need to understand horse rider needs - and be prepared to work together.
- Respect - Collectively there is a need to operate with mutual trust and respect between riders, trail users, motorists, land managers and advocates. Respect for trails, facilities and the environment are necessary.

## SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES

Supporting Principles are the high level needs from which we can proceed to develop strategic priorities. These include:

- Safety - In trail design, safety of others, road safety, safe skills, safe processes, personal safety.
- Quality - Of the experience, facilities, the trails, education, information. Protection of the environments in which the trails are located
- Recognition - Of riders' needs, diversity, sector size, legitimacy and value. In turn we need recognition from recreation policy makers, urban planners, land managers and trails planners.
- Capacity - Of trails, facilities and the sector to meet rider needs now and in the future.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Five strategic priorities and objectives address a specific area of need. A series of priority actions then provide direction for the implementation of the Strategy.

1. **Trails Inventory** - A statewide network of diverse, well located, sustainable, managed, maintained and connected trails that meets the demand and range of experiences sought.
2. **Trails Access** - Easily located trails, with current and accurate trail information, that are readily and safely accessed.
3. **Infrastructure and Facilities** - Facilities and associated infrastructure, suitable for horse use and appropriately maintained.
4. **Education and Advocacy** - Enhance a mutual understanding of, and respect for, horse trail riding and other trail activities to maximise safety, enjoyment and trail harmony and minimise impacts.
5. **Management and Governance** - Establish a strong, sustainable and coordinated approach to the management and governance of horse trails and horse riding.



## CHALLENGES

Recreational horse trail riding has a long and significant history in Western Australia but the future cannot be taken for granted. There are a number of challenges that must be overcome to not only safeguard the current participation levels but to re-energise the activity and position it for a stronger future with higher participation levels.

This Strategy focuses on solutions to the following key challenges:

- A lack of information about where horses can be ridden, trail locations, how to access the trail and details about the trails such as difficulty, suitability, surface and distances.
- Legislation, regulations and policy that determine where horses can and cannot be ridden.
- An under supply of suitable trails that are near to horse agistment, that are horse specific and that are connected without having to ride on roads.
- Access to trails and connections to trails that are considered unsafe or not horse friendly. Trail access routes via roads and verges along roads are considered dangerous and detract from the enjoyment of the experience.
- Inadequate float parking at trailheads.
- A lack of trail maintenance resulting in a degraded trail and a degraded experience.
- Environmental considerations - overcoming, minimising or mitigating against verifiable environmental impacts.
- Competing demands for trails from other user groups resulting in loss of trails for horses and trail user conflicts.
- Safety concerns with trail user conflicts and motorised vehicles on trails, mostly trail bikes; with unleashed dogs on trails, rubbish, traffic, over crowding and incompatible multi use.



- Competing demands for land - urbanisation, conservation, water source protection, mining, construction of infrastructure such as roads/ highways and rails. Many historical horse trails or areas such as beaches have either become prohibited or have had many constraints of use applied.
- Competing demands for recreational facility funding - other trail user groups are actively seeking funding for a variety of projects. With finite funding available this creates greater competition and horse trail advocates need to work harder to secure an equitable share.
- Funding constraints on land managers - the currently tight financial environment is putting additional pressure on land managers who are being asked to do more with less resources. This has a natural flow-on effect on trails projects, maintenance and visitor management.
- Horse riding clubs and associations operate mostly in isolation, leading to ineffective use of limited resources and a fragmented approach. This is hampering trail access advocacy and the horse trail community's ability to impact trail closures and policy decisions.
- The WA Horse Council and ATHRA are constrained by a lack finances and resources. This limits the work they can do, the projects they can manage and implement and therefore the impact they can have in taking advantage of any opportunities and addressing challenges.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## 1. TRAILS INVENTORY

**Objective:** A statewide network of diverse, well located, sustainable, managed, maintained and connected trails that meets the demand and range of experiences sought.

There is no horse trail riding experience without trails. Through the rider survey and subsequent workshops riders have expressed concerns about the lack of trails that have been designated for horse riding. According to the participants, horse trails need to:

- Have diversity of length and character in order to provide variety and to cater for different types of riding experience and rider competence.
- Be in places that are both close enough to be practical, and remote enough to provide the nature-based experience that is sought by riders.
- Be maintained and managed, so that they remain viable and are predictable for riders.
- Be connected, so that riders can enjoy a continuous trail experience and where possible be accessible from home or agistment property.
- Be protected from conflicting use by motorised vehicles.

### The Trails Significance Hierarchy

Trails can be defined in terms of their significance as a state/icon, regional or local.

*State/icon trail* - attracts international and interstate visitors.

*Regional trail* - attracts interstate and intrastate visitors with measurable tourism and/or economic benefits for the region.

*Local trail* - is developed considering local elements only and primarily attracts local users.

### Key Focus: The State Equestrian Trails Register

Before priorities for establishing new trails and upgrading existing ones can be identified, there is a need to establish a clear overall picture of where the trails (formal and informal) exist, where former trails existed, what facilities they provide and their current condition. The State Equestrian Trails Register should be the 'single source of truth' about horse trails in WA and should be maintained by ATHRA and regularly updated. It is not intended that the full Register would be publicly visible.



<b>Priority Actions - Trails Inventory:</b>	
1.1	Compile a comprehensive State Equestrian Trails Register of horse trails, noting trails significance, experience offered, formal and informal trails, current and former (that might be candidates for re-opening), future prospects.
1.2	Initial review of Trails Register to develop a priority list of trails that could be improved based on the deficiencies identified in the audit and key concerns raised by riders.
1.3	Annual review of the Trails Register to ensure the horse trails inventory is responsive to quality, sustainability and rider requirements in terms of location and type.
1.4	Create a process between DPaW, other land managers and ATHRA for explicit consultation when existing horse trails and areas (including beaches) are under review. This can include for reasons of management / maintenance, environmental or prospective repurposing for other trails user groups.
1.5	Develop grant application templates for accessing grant funding for trails planning and development.
1.6	Implement the established WA Trail Development Process for the planning, design, build and maintenance process and standardised best practices for sustainable horse trails. Rollout via management and governance hierarchy.
1.7	Develop a pilot sustainable horse trail for the purposes of demonstration, evaluation and research.
1.8	Develop an 'adopt a trail' program for clubs and groups with maintenance plans and trail inspection program for existing sanctioned horse trails based on the trail significance hierarchy. Work with the trail managers to implement.
1.9	Develop and deliver training to volunteer maintenance groups on sustainable horse trail development and maintenance.
1.10	Monitor national and international environmental impact research in order to utilise findings that might support the relaxation of current restrictions as well as minimal impact best practice.
1.11	Develop a means by which trail use can be monitored - eg trail counters, regular rider surveys, sustainability indices. Apply techniques appropriate to level of trail significance.

## GAP ANALYSIS

Throughout 2014, ATHRA members compiled a comprehensive audit of over 30 popular horse trails in Perth, the South-West and Great Southern region. A total of 573km of trails were included in the audit, with 360km of those GPS mapped. The detailed audit considered 33 separate characteristics of the trails, including length, facilities, accessibility and parking, signage, maintenance, difficulty and provision of information.

The audit added significant detail to the trails identified in the Equestrian Tracks and Trails Study of 2006 and provides a solid platform for expansion into a statewide register of trails. Notably, 24 of the trails identified in the 2006 study were no longer available for horse riding in 2014. Generally this was either because of urbanisation of previously peri-urban areas or by management plans not providing for horse access. In several cases the trails still exist but are now designated as walk or walk / cycle paths.

It should also be noted that the audit did not include the many informal, unmarked 'social trails' such as forest tracks and firebreaks that add to the overall riding inventory.

Among the key points:

- Less than 40% of trail kilometres are horse-only trails. 60% are multi-use.
- 60% of trails are considered to have inadequate trail marking.
- 27% of trails are considered 'Easy', however this represents only 10% of trail kilometres.
- Just over half (53%) of trails are considered well maintained.
- 53% of trails have Management / Maintenance Plans, however not all of these are current. Of the trails with management plans, 75% are considered well maintained.
- 37% of trails have a defined trailhead, however of these only a minority are considered up to expected current standards.
- 40% of trails have well maintained float parking. 40% do not have any float parking. The Audit did not estimate float capacity, but anecdotally most cater for 2-3 floats.

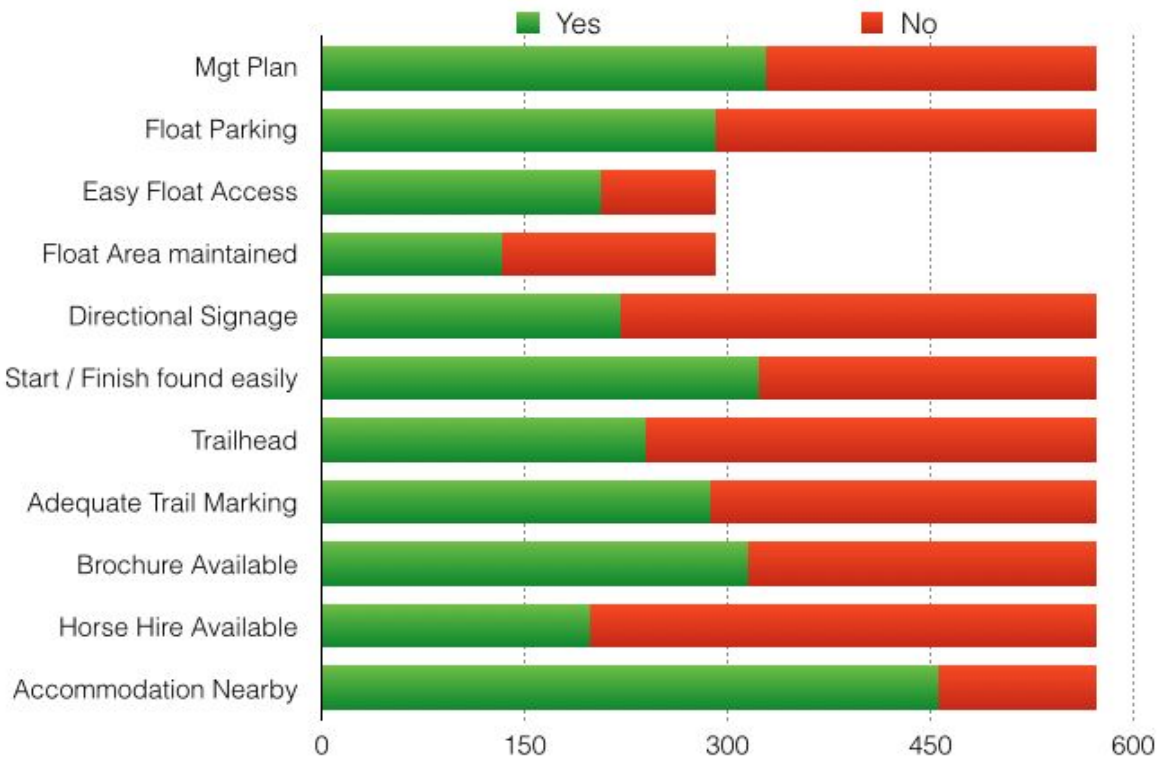


Figure 4: Gap Analysis

Details of the 2014 Audit are included as Discussion Paper 6 - Trails Audit.

## 2. TRAILS ACCESS

**Objective:** Easily located trails, with current and accurate trail information, that are readily and safely accessed.

If a trail is not known, cannot be found, or can not be easily accessed, then it will fail to make a contribution to the trails inventory. Riders report difficulties in finding trails and a lack of information about the trail limits their desire to try them. This priority is about ensuring that those trails that do exist can be fully utilised.

To inform their riding decisions, riders need specific data either before, at the start or during a ride. This can also include interpretative information which seeks to engage, inform and possibly entertain by revealing the meanings and relationships of the cultural and natural heritage to the trail user.

- Horse riders want to know where to ride and details about the trails themselves such as trail classification, suitability, surface, distances and amenities.
- Other trail users need information about user etiquette for shared trail use with horses.
- Trail information is needed in the form of on trail, on road and interpretative signage; maps and brochures and trail classifications.

### Key Focus: Trails WA

There is a need to maximise the use of existing trails by ensuring that riders know their locations and characteristics. Trails WA is the logical medium through which trails can be promoted and detailed trail information can be made available to riders. Trails WA was established in 2012 to raise funds and carry out projects to further the development and promotion of trails in Western Australia and its web site has all of the functionality required to inform riders about the location, access and facilities of trails. By supporting Trails WA in its quest to be the central source of trails information, ATHRA would be both embedding horse riding deeper into the Western Australian trails community and gaining access to a sophisticated and well promoted trails database facility at no additional financial cost.

Priority Actions - Trails Access:	
2.1	Utilise TrailsWA as the primary repository for trail location information - promote the website and horse trail information to the horse trail community. Plan for continual improvement and addition of trails and information.
2.2	The WA horse trail community, land managers and trail managers to endorse, implement and communicate the existing ATHRA model as a standardised horse trail classification system (below).
2.3	Establish a reference panel to review trail information prior to publishing on TrailsWA and to review trail inspection reports for implications on difficulty gradings etc.

2.4	Identify opportunities for linkages, loops and connections for existing trails that create a cohesive ride experience of 1-4 hours.
2.5	Advocate for safer parking and riding access routes on a per-trail basis and according to the trail significance hierarchy.
2.6	Develop and progressively implement standards for trailhead and route signage, including road signage where required.
2.7	Create an incident reporting system for road safety issues, near misses and trouble spots. Work with Department of Transport and Main Roads for the evaluation of the data and implementation of mitigation strategies.

## TRAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Trail classification provides guidelines for users to help them make an informed decision before setting out on a trail. This information can:

- Encourage users to choose and make use of trails that match their ability level.
- Help ensure that trail users have an experience that meets their expectations.
- Manage risk and helps to minimise discomfort or injury to trail users.
- Assist in trail promotion

The ATHRA model of trail classifications has been reviewed by the Reference Group and research respondents and endorsed by the Strategy Steering Committee.

	Easy (Class 1)	Moderate (Class 2)	Difficult (Class 3)
<b>Description</b>	Most suitable for novices, social groups and others seeking a relatively short distance trail requiring a basic level of skill and horse and rider fitness. Most likely to be fire roads or wide single tracks (bridlepaths) with a gentle grade (not exceeding 10%) and a relatively obstacle free, hardened natural surface. Likely to be shared-use and frequent encounters with other users including cyclists, walkers and runners can be expected.	Most suitable for individuals and smaller social groups seeking a short to medium distance trail requiring a moderate level of skill and fitness. Most likely to be a combination single trail and/or fire road with obstacles, variable surfaces, and a moderate slope. Likely to be shared-use so encounters with other users including cyclists, walkers, runners and horse riders should be expected.	Suitable for individuals and small social groups seeking a very challenging trail requiring a high level of skill, fitness, and basic navigation skills. Most likely to consist of challenging single trail and/or fire road with many obstacles, variable surface, and steep sections. Some trail routes may not be marked at all. May possibly be shared-use so encounters with other users possibly including cyclists, walkers, vehicles and other stock should be expected, however, many of these trails may be located in remote areas and encounters with others is expected to be minimal.
<b>Trail Surface</b>	Generally a natural surface (topped with dolomite or compacted surface if desired). Hardened surfaces like concrete or asphalt to be avoided due to concussion on horse legs and poor traction with metal horseshoes. Hardened surfaces may be utilised on Rail Trails or other tracks where horses would generally only walk.	Generally a natural surface is desired and may include sections of rocky ground, sand, clay or gravel. Obstacles such as rocks, logs and gates that require dismounting are likely. Shallow ford crossings are acceptable. (Note: rainfall conditions vary widely - seasonal conditions may water depths significantly)	Usually a variable surface with sections of rock, sand, clay gravel, etc. Obstacles may include challenging rocks, logs, Fording creeks
<b>Trail Width</b>	Minimum Tread : 1500mm Note: Short sections of narrower tread (.60 m to 1.2 m) are acceptable at ground level, 1.5 metres is required at the height of the riders' stirrups. Minimum corridor width: 3000mm Minimum height: 3700mm	Minimum Tread : 1500mm Minimum clearing: 1500mm Minimum height: 3700mm	Minimum Tread : 300mm (1500mm recommended at the height of the riders' stirrups) Minimum clearing: 1500mm Minimum height: 2500mm
<b>Trail Gradient</b>	Desired gradient 0 – 10% Maximum 10% Maximum sustained pitch 5% Out slope 4% maximum	Maximum 15% Maximum sustained pitch 10% Out slope 4% maximum	Maximum 20% (Max. sustained pitch 10%.)

Figure 5: ATHRA horse trail classifications

### 3. INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

**Objective:** Facilities and associated infrastructure, suitable for horse use and appropriately maintained.

Sometimes few dedicated facilities are required to satisfy the recreational horse trail rider. At other times, lack of appropriate facilities can render a trail unusable. For example, if there is nowhere to park a horse float at a trailhead, or the area is insufficient to saddle a horse, all but those riders who can ride to the trailhead are effectively excluded.

This priority focuses on ensuring that trail opportunities are not lost through poor planning, development and maintenance of ancillary infrastructure.

Priority Actions - Infrastructure and Facilities:	
3.1	Initial review of Trails Register to develop a priority list of trail infrastructure and facilities that could be improved based on the deficiencies identified in the audit and key concerns raised by riders.
3.2	Develop grant application templates for accessing grants such as Lotterywest trails grants, Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) funding, local government, environmental protection and other grants as appropriate.
3.3	Develop concepts and design best practice 'templates' for infrastructure and facilities according to trail significance hierarchy. To consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● User satisfaction</li> <li>● Appropriateness of capacity</li> <li>● Risk Management</li> <li>● Durability and ease of maintenance</li> </ul>
3.4	Engage with Main Roads and Local Government Authorities to promote the installation of horse-friendly road crossing points, signage and horse holding bays at high priority crossings.
3.5	Develop a mechanism to capture rider / owner infrastructure and facility requests to ensure a continuous flow of potential infrastructure improvement projects. This should capture both missing / damaged infrastructure and suggestions for future improvements.
3.6	Develop agreed standards for design of float parking facilities that meet the needs of horse riders. Work with land managers to adopt and implement the designs.



## ENVIRONMENT

All human and animal activity has some impact on the environment. Land managers responsible for balancing recreation and conservation rely on a variable concept of 'acceptable limits' to determine what activities should be permitted on an area by area basis.

Horse riders have indicated an awareness of the impacts that they could cause and are open to taking practical steps to minimise those effects.

A common framework with particular relevance to the management of recreation in natural areas is *the five E's*:

**Engagement** - Rider behaviour is an essential ingredient in environmental sustainability. Getting riders *engaged* is the first and most critical step - ie understanding the issues and willing to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

**Engineering** - *Engineered* solutions are generally the most effective way of changing behaviours as they most directly influence what people can or can't do. Properly designed and maintained trails are an example of an engineered solution. Many horse trails in current use have not been properly designed with environmental sustainability as a primary consideration. New trails, properly planned, constructed and maintained, may be able to be located in areas that may have not previously been suitable.

**Education** - Is less direct than engineered solutions, requiring a change in the will of the rider for effect but can have positive outcomes via a riders' Code of Conduct, environmental guidelines and associated resources.

**Enforcement** - As with any activity, there are always a few who are less aware and whose unthinking actions create a disproportionate amount of reputational damage to the activity. Enforcement on trails is unreliable and often impractical so land managers can't accept policies that rely on all of the riders doing all of the right things all of the time. The result is that some classes of conservation estate have restricted or prohibited access despite the case being made that responsible riding would be unlikely to cause negative impacts.

**Evaluation** - Plays an important role in guiding future decisions. Scientific research that is not local may be of less value in shaping the attitudes of land managers than on-the-ground projects that can be physically monitored and reviewed locally.

## 4. EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

**Objective:** Enhance a mutual understanding of, and respect for horse trail riding and other trail activities to maximise safety, enjoyment and trail harmony and minimise negative impacts.

Many of the main challenges for recreational horse trail riding centre around a general lack of education and information for trail horse riders and other trail user groups. On-trail conflict is seen as an issue and much of this conflict develops when information provision and education is inadequate.

Riders also require information and understanding to adopt an environmental ‘minimal impact’ mindset which will guide them to make the right choices and help safeguard the environment and the future of the activity.

This priority focuses on helping horse trail riders, other trails users, road users and trail developers to understand each others’ respective needs to minimise any negative impacts that each activity has on the other, and on the environment.

There are 3 main focus areas for education:

1. **User etiquette for shared trail use**  
Actions centred around working with other trail user groups to create an educational campaign for “Sharing the trail”.
2. **Minimise impact and enhance environmental care**  
Actions to further develop and distribute messages and materials to promote minimal impact trail use and an environmental code of conduct.
3. **Road safety**  
Actions to develop resources to promote responsible, considerate and courteous riding on the roads and driving of motor vehicles around horses.

### Key Focus: Sharing the Trails

Recreational horse trail riders form part of a larger eco-system of trails users. Inevitably there are times when horse riders must share trails with other users and in these situations mutual respect is the most important factor in on-going trail harmony.

Conflict on trails can best be defined as “goal interference attributed to another’s behaviour”<sup>2</sup>. The objective is trail sharing in which conflicts are minimised or avoided.

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<sup>2</sup> Conflicts on multiple use trails, Federal Highway Administration and the National Recreational Trails Advisory Committee.

Conflicts can be with trail users engaged in the same activity, in different activities, with animals, trail managers, road users and land managers. As the urban footprint expands it can be expected that more precinct planning and multi-use trails will occur. Managing and minimising trail user conflicts will become even more critical.

Trail harmony helps maintain user safety, provides for high-quality user experiences and protects natural resources by reducing impacts. Information and education efforts are almost universally supported as an essential strategy for providing opportunities for high-quality recreation experiences via promoting trail etiquette for trail sharing.

Priority Actions - Education and Advocacy:	
4.1	Strengthen relationships between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Horse trail clubs and ATHRA</li> <li>- ATHRA and DPAW</li> <li>- ATHRA and local government / land managers / road managers</li> <li>- ATHRA and other trail user peak bodies</li> <li>- AHTRA and the trails community via DSR, DPAW, Trails WA and the Trails Reference Group</li> </ul>
4.2	ATHRA to work with Department of Transport, Main Roads, Office of Road Safety and others to develop a road safety education program for horse riders, road users and road managers regarding horse safety and required driving and riding behaviours.
4.3	Take a lead role in proposing a ‘Share the Trails’ program that would encompass all trails users via their respective peak bodies and associations of influence. Develop a memorandum of understanding between user groups, supported by education materials to promote trail harmony and reduce trail conflicts. Expand the existing ATHRA “Sharing the Bush” guidelines.
4.4	ATHRA to develop Horse Trail Riding Management Guidelines in conjunction with DPAW and the horse trail riding community to actively facilitate and manage horse trail riding on DPAW estate.
4.5	Ensure horse trail riders are represented on trail and land management reference groups.
4.6	ATHRA to actively advocate the benefits of horse trail riding, environmental impact mitigations and an understanding of the activity to government, planners, land managers, trail groups, other stakeholders and the wider public.
4.7	Engage with trails and land manager policy makers to consider and include the needs of horse trail riders in relevant policies such as urban planning, road planning, trails planning, land usage, environmental protection and water catchments.
4.8	Continue to promote the importance of horse trails to Australian and Western Australian cultural heritage.
4.9	The WA horse trail community to endorse, implement and communicate standardised horse trail Code of Conduct.
4.10	Develop a proposal for a rider education package on environmental care and seek grant funding and industry support for its development and distribution. Base this around ATHRA’s 16 environment rules.



## HORSE TRAIL ADVOCACY

Strong and focused horse trail advocacy is required to address the guidelines of respect and recognition. Advocacy is most effective when there is a clear and single representing body, therefore the WA Horse Council, via ATHRA is recommended to lead and coordinate advocacy initiatives on behalf of the horse trail community. This will require the strengthening of relationships between ATHRA, horse clubs and other associations, land managers, state and local government and other trail user groups as well as greater representation with trail decision makers.



## 5. TRAILS MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

**Objective:** Establish a strong, sustainable and coordinated approach to the management and governance of horse trails and horse riding.

To meet the vision of this Strategy and the guiding principle of sustainability, a coordinated and sustainable approach must be taken to the management and governance of this Strategy and its actions, of the trails themselves and of the activity as a whole.

The WA Horse Council (WAHC) currently oversees all horse activities and represents all aspects of the equestrian industry in Western Australia. The purpose of the Council is to unite the Western Australian equine industry to give it a strong voice in all matters that affect horses and their owners.

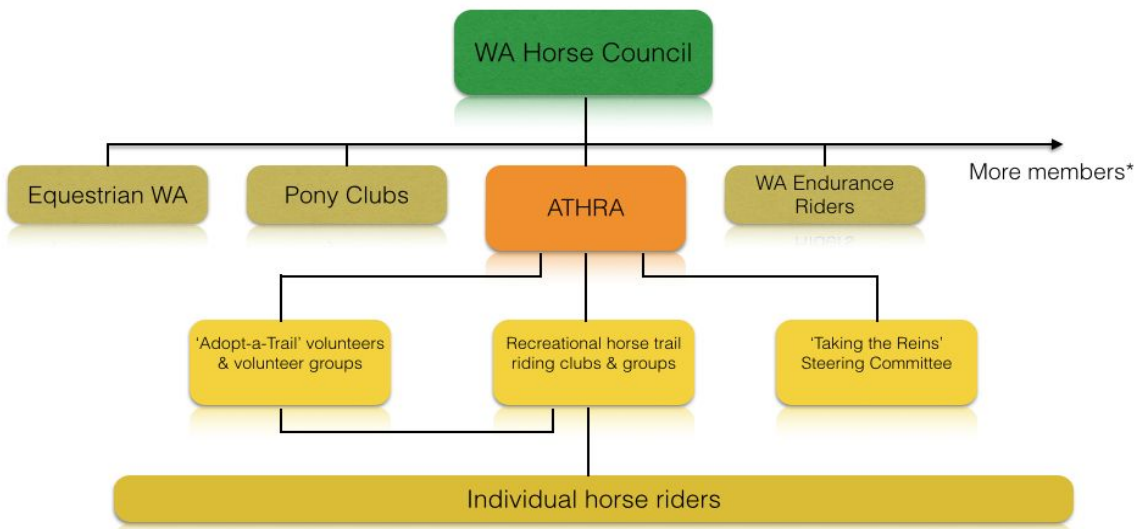
ATHRA is the only organisation in WA with a specific focus on recreational horse trail riding, advocacy and access issues and to represent non-commercial recreational trail horse riders. ATHRA is a member of the WAHC and has reciprocal memberships on each executive committee. Both organisations are part of national bodies and so can draw on broad expertise and experience.

### Key Focus: Governance Structure

A formalised and endorsed structure is required to coordinate all efforts across multiple stakeholders. Currently each entity tends to operate in isolation or with limited interaction. To maximise the efficient use of resources, advocacy impacts and delivery on the vision we need to build the capacity of the horse trail community. By working together with agreed roles and responsibilities we can ensure the horse trail sector is unified and credible.

It is proposed that the WA Horse Council is the peak body with ATHRA having specific responsibility for recreational horse trail riding and carriage of implementation of this strategy. Individual clubs and riding groups should be encouraged to affiliate with ATHRA, and riders encouraged to join ATHRA affiliated clubs and groups to provide links to riders.

Neither organisation receives funding and both rely exclusively on volunteers. This places ATHRA in particular at risk and vastly limits its ability to oversee implementation of this strategy. Funding and paid resources are required to build the capacity of both ATHRA and the WA Horse Council.



\* WAHC has more club & association memberships. These shown have horse trail relevance.

Figure 6: Proposed governance structure

Priority Actions - Trails Management and Governance:	
5.1	The WA Horse Council to be endorsed as the peak body with ATHRA having specific responsibility for recreational horse trails and riding and carriage of the WA Horse Trails Strategy via the WA Horse Council.
5.2	The WA Horse Council and ATHRA develop a Memorandum of Understanding for management and governance of horse trails and review their constitution and objectives.
5.3	The WA Horse Council and ATHRA to work with DSR to develop a plan for strengthening both organisations and setting them on a funded and sustainable platform with resources capable of taking carriage of managing the implementation of the strategy.
5.4	Strengthen ATHRA's reach into clubs and individuals as a conduit for bringing together the horse trail community - for the purposes of communication, volunteering, advocacy and trail management and to strengthen the horse trail riding community.
5.5	Upskill local clubs and horse trail riding groups to take a broader on-the-ground role such as identification of the need and demand for trails, preliminary planning, local advocacy, sharing with other trail users, maintenance and volunteer management.
5.6	Foster a relationship between ATHRA and funding entities to improve project access to funding opportunities.
5.7	Engage with the commercial sector to create funding opportunities, sponsorships and other means of support.
5.8	Develop a Horse Trail Volunteering Plan for the recruiting, managing, training and retaining of volunteers.
5.9	Establish a Steering Committee to implement the WA Horse Trails Strategy with associated reference group, implementation plan and agreed roles and responsibilities. Include WA Horse Council, ATHRA, DSR, DPAW, Water, local government and a club representative from each main region.
5.10	Establish methodologies for monitoring, evaluating and updating the WA Horse Trails Strategy.

## IMPLEMENTATION

There are many organisations that need to work together to deliver the vision, objectives and actions outlined. ATHRA will take the lead role coordinating the next stage of the process, with the implementation plan and the responsibilities of all entities are outlined in the table below.

Priority	Objective		Actions	Responsibility <sup>3</sup>	Priority
1.Trails Inventory	A statewide network of diverse, well located, sustainable, managed, maintained and connected trails that meets the demand and range of experiences sought.	1.1	Compile a comprehensive register of horse trails, noting trails significance, experience offered, formal and informal trails, current and former (that might be candidates for re-opening), future prospects.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (i)	High
		1.2	Initial review of Trails Register to develop a priority list of trails that could be improved based on the deficiencies identified in the audit.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (c) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	High
		1.3	Annual review of the Trails Register to ensure the horse trails inventory is responsive to quality, sustainability and rider requirements.	ATHRA (r)	Medium
		1.4	Create a process between land managers and ATHRA for explicit consultation when existing horse trails and areas (including beaches) are under review for management / maintenance, environmental or prospective repurposing.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	High
		1.5	Develop grant application templates for accessing grant funding for trails planning and development.	ATHRA (r) DSR Lotterywest (c)	High
		1.6	Implement the established WA Trail Development Process for the planning, design, build and maintenance process and standardised best practices for sustainable horse trails. Rollout via management and governance hierarchy.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	Medium
		1.7	Develop a pilot sustainable horse trail for the purposes of demonstration, evaluation and research.	ATHRA (r) DPaW, LGAs (i)	High
		1.8	Develop an 'adopt a trail' program for clubs and groups with maintenance plans and trail inspection program for existing sanctioned horse trails based on the trail significance hierarchy. Assist trail managers to implement.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (i) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	Medium
		1.9	Develop and deliver training to volunteer maintenance groups on sustainable horse trail development and maintenance.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) Clubs (i)	Medium
		1.10	Monitor national and international environmental impact research in order to utilise findings that might support the relaxation of current restrictions as well as minimal impact best practice.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i)	Low
		1.11	Develop trail use monitoring - eg trail counters, regular rider surveys, sustainability indices. Apply techniques appropriate to level of trail significance.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i)	Low

<sup>3</sup> r (responsible), a (accountable), c (consulted), i (involved)

Priority	Objective		Actions	Responsibility	Priority
2.Trails Access	Easily located trails, with current and accurate trail information, that are readily and safely accessed.	2.1	Utilise TrailsWA as the primary repository for trail location information - widely publicise the the website and horse trail information to the horse trail community. Plan for continual improvement and addition of trails and information.	ATHRA (r) Trails WA (i)	High
		2.2	The WA horse trail community, land managers and trail managers to endorse, implement and communicate the existing ATHRA model as a standardised horse trail classification system.	ATHR (r) Clubs (i) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	High
		2.3	Establish a reference panel to review trail information prior to publishing to TrailsWA and to review trail inspection reports for implications on difficulty gradings etc.	ATHRA (r) Trails WA (i) DPaW (i)	Medium
		2.4	Identify opportunities for linkages, loops and connections for existing trails that create a cohesive ride experience of 1-4 hours.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (i) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	Medium
		2.5	Advocate for safer parking and riding access routes on a per-trail basis and according to the trail significance hierarchy	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i) Main Roads (i)	Medium
		2.6	Develop and progressively implement standards for trailhead and route signage, including road signage where required.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i) Main Roads (i)	High
		2.7	Create an incident reporting system for road safety issues, near misses and trouble spots and work with Department of Transports and Main Roads for the evaluation of the data and implementation of mitigation strategies.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i) Main Roads (i) DoT (i)	Low

Priority	Objective		Actions	Responsibility	Priority
3. Facilities & infrastructure	Facilities and associated infrastructure, suitable for horse use and appropriately maintained.	3.1	Initial review of Trails Register to develop a priority list of trail infrastructure and facilities that could be improved based on the deficiencies identified in the audit and key concerns raised by riders.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	
		3.2	Develop grant application templates for accessing grants such as Lotterywest trails grants, Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) funding, local government, environmental protection and other grants as appropriate.	ATHRA (r) DSR (i) Lotterywest (c) LGAs (i)	High
		3.3	Develop concepts and design best practice 'templates' for infrastructure and facilities according to trail significance hierarchy. To consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User satisfaction</li> <li>• Appropriateness of capacity</li> <li>• Risk Management</li> <li>• Durability and ease of maintenance</li> </ul>	ATHRA (r)	High
		3.4	Engage with Main Roads and Local Government Authorities to promote the installation of horse-friendly road crossing points, signage and horse holding bays at high priority crossings.	ATHRA (r) Main Roads (i) LGAs (i)	Medium
		3.5	Develop a mechanism to capture rider / owner infrastructure and facility requests to ensure a continuous flow of potential infrastructure improvement projects. This should capture both missing / damaged infrastructure and suggestions for future improvements.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (i)	Low
		3.6	Develop agreed standards for design of float parking facilities that meet the needs of horse riders. Work with land managers to adopt and implement the designs.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (i) LGAs (i)	High

Priority	Objective		Actions	Responsibility	Priority
4. Education & Advocacy	Enhance a mutual understanding of, and respect for, horse trail riding and other trail activities to maximise safety, enjoyment and trail harmony and minimise impacts.	4.1	Strengthen relationships between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Horse trail clubs and ATHRA</li> <li>ATHRA and DPAW</li> <li>ATHRA and local government / land managers / road managers</li> <li>ATHRA and other trail user peak bodies</li> <li>AHTRA and the trails community via DSR, DPAW, Trails WA and the Trails Reference Group</li> </ul>	ATHRA (r) All other stakeholders (i)	High
		4.2	ATHRA to work with Department of Transport, Main Roads, Office of Road Safety and others to develop a road safety education program for horse riders, road users and road managers regarding horse safety and required driving and riding behaviours.	ATHRA (r) Main Roads, Dept of Transport, Office of Road Safety (i)	Medium
		4.3	Take a lead role in proposing a 'Share the Trails' program that would encompass all trails users via their respective peak bodies and associations of influence. Develop a memorandum of understanding between user groups, supported by education materials to promote trail harmony and reduce trail conflicts. Expand the existing ATHRA "Sharing the Bush" guidelines.	ATHRA (r) Trails WA (i) Trails Reference Group (i) Other trail user groups (c)	High
		4.4	ATHRA to develop Horse Trail Riding Management Guidelines in conjunction with DPAW and the horse trail riding community to actively facilitate and manage horse trail riding on DPAW estate.	DPAW (r) ATHRA (c)	Medium
		4.5	Ensure horse trail riders are represented on trail and land management reference groups.	Trails Reference Group (r)	High
		4.6	ATHRA to actively advocate the benefits of horse trail riding, environmental impact mitigations and an understanding of the activity to government, planners, land managers, trail groups, other stakeholders and the wider public.	ATHRA (r)	High
		4.7	Engage with trails and land manager policy makers to consider and include the needs of horse trail riders in relevant policies such as urban planning, road planning, trails planning, land usage, environmental protection and water catchments.	ATHRA (r) LGAs, DPaW, Department of Planning, DoW (c)	Low
		4.8	Continue to promote the importance of horse trails to Australian and Western Australian cultural heritage.	ATHRA (r)	Low
		4.9	The WA horse trail community to endorse, implement and communicate standardised horse trail Code of Conduct.	ATHRA (r)	High
		4.10	Develop a proposal for a rider education package on environmental care and seek grant funding and industry support for its development and distribution. Base this around ATHRA's 16 environment rules.	ATHRA (r) DPaW, DoW (c)	High

Priority	Objective		Actions	Responsibility	Priority
5.Trails Management & Governance	Establish a strong, sustainable and coordinated approach to the management and governance of horse trails and horse riding.	5.1	The WA Horse Council to be endorsed as the peak body with ATHRA having specific responsibility for recreational horse trails and riding and carriage of the WA Horse Trails Strategy via the WA Horse Council.	WAHC (r) ATHRA (i)	High
		5.2	The WA Horse Council and ATHRA develop a Memorandum of Understanding for management and governance of horse trails and review their constitution and objectives.	ATHRA (r) WAHC (i)	High
		5.3	The WA Horse Council and ATHRA to work with DSR to develop a plan for strengthening both organisations and setting them on a funded and sustainable platform with resources capable of taking carriage of managing the implementation of the strategy.	ATHRA (r) WAHC (i) DSR (i)	High
		5.4	Strengthen ATHRA's reach into clubs and individuals as a conduit for bringing together the horse trail community - for the purposes of communication, volunteering, advocacy and trail management and to strengthen the horse trail riding community.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (i)	Medium
		5.5	Upskill local clubs and horse trail riding groups to take a broader on-the-ground role such as identification of required trails, planning, local advocacy, sharing with other trail users, maintenance and volunteer management.	ATHRA (r) Clubs (i)	Medium
		5.6	Engage with the commercial sector to create funding opportunities, sponsorships and other means of support.	ATHRA (r) Industry (i)	Medium
		5.7	Foster a relationship between ATHRA and funding entities to improve horse trail project access to funding opportunities.	ATHRA (r) Funding entities (i)	High
		5.8	Develop a Horse Trail Volunteering Plan for the recruiting, managing, training and retaining of volunteers for each region.	ATHRA (r) DPaW (c) DSR (c)	Medium
		5.9	Establish a Steering Committee to implement the WA Horse Trails Strategy with associated reference group, implementation plan and agreed roles and responsibilities. Include WA Horse Council, ATHRA, DSR, DPAW, Water, local government and a club representative from each main region.	ATHRA (r) Stakeholders (i)	High
		5.10	Establish methodologies for monitoring, evaluating and updating the WA Horse Trails Strategy.	ATHRA (r) DSR (c)	High



## ABOUT ATHRA

The Australian Trail Horse Riders Association (ATHRA) was formed in January 1972 at Gatton in south-east Queensland. ATHRA's role has evolved substantially since it began because of the demand for recreational horse riding. The Association's responsible approach is well recognised in the recreational horse industry and it is now well established across all states and territories and is gaining momentum.



ATHRA has gone on to become a comprehensive association of trail riding clubs. ATHRA provides support to clubs in various ways by providing governance, policies, insurance and many other resources. It has a Board of Directors that sets governance, manages insurance and conducts an annual National conference. Regional Managers oversee the activities of their allocated affiliated clubs and deploy ATHRA governance and policy. The Association is run on a volunteer basis and is a non-profit organisation.

ATHRA has a long history in Western Australia, with several clubs being affiliated with ATHRA for many years. In 2010 ATHRA developed its own state branch and then Regional Managers in 2011. In this short time, ATHRA has developed a strong profile and has focused on creating partnerships with Government, non-government and other key stakeholders to put horse trails and access issues on the agenda in WA.

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