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TAMS Centenary Trail Consultation  
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**Friends of Mt Majura  
Comment  
Proposed Centenary Trail (CT) feasibility study and Ground truthing report (GT)**

**Executive Summary**

Given that the primary objective of Canberra Nature Park (CNP) is nature conservation, Friends of Mount Majura request the following:

- (1) That the CT minimise the construction of new tracks in the CNP and there should be no new track alignment which leads to fragmentation of critically endangered ecosystems or impact on declared species. In particular, a new track should not be constructed on Mt Majura and we endorse the Mt Ainslie Weeders ParkCare Group's proposal for a track alignment which will have minimal impact on sensitive areas;
- (2) That a detailed draft management plan be subjected to consultation with nature conservation groups, including ParkCare groups, before work commences on the CT;
- (3) That the draft management plan include ongoing costings so that a decision to proceed with the CT is accompanied by a commitment to sustained funding for conservation management in relation to CT;
- (4) That the proposed CT management board include high-profile conservation expertise with a right to veto any future actions and activities that potentially affect the conservation values of the nature reserves.

Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) welcome the opportunity to comment on the CT project and the proposed alignment of the route.

**Mt Majura Nature Reserve**

As part of CNP, Mt Majura has been set aside for the conservation of the natural environment. The nature reserve provides habitat for a number of rare, declining and endangered species and contains significant remnant Yellow Box - Red Gum Grassy woodland, an ecological community which is

declared endangered under ACT legislation and critically endangered under the Commonwealth EPBC Act 2007. The ACT Planning and Development Act 2007 and the Management Plan for CNP (1999) provide for a variety of other uses that are compatible with the primary objective of nature conservation, these are education, research and low key recreation.

## **Friends of Mt Majura**

The Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) ParkCare group is a network of people with a strong interest in the conservation of Mt Majura nature reserve (Appendix 1, FoMM Objects). We have a strong track record of promoting the reserve and of working towards the provision of the infrastructure that supports the sustainable use of the reserve. In the past five financial years, volunteers contributed on average 3380 hours per year towards conservation of Mt Majura nature reserve.

We organise activities, such as working bees, aimed at restoring the ecological integrity of the reserve by removing weeds and planting seedlings of plants native to the area and on erosion control. We work with schools and community organizations to encourage an interest in and respect for the local environment.

We organise an annual program of walks and other activities designed to encourage interest in the Mt Majura nature reserve and the plants and animals for which it is home. The highpoint of the year is National Tree Day which we celebrate by inviting people to come and help us to plant new trees, bushes and ground cover. This year over 150 people helped planting of 600 native seedlings.

FoMM took the lead role in negotiating an agreement with Village Building Company that provides residents of the new development "The Fair," at the foot of the north-west slope of Mt Majura, with an environmentally sound access to the reserve. More information on our activities is at [www.majura.org](http://www.majura.org).

## **Centenary Trail Establishment Issues**

The CT aims to showcase Canberra's landscape and cultural assets. Significant parts of the CT are situated in CNP. We recognise the potential of the CT to provide visitors the opportunity to experience the natural beauty and rich diversity of our nature reserves.

The way in which the CT is designed and implemented is critical to ensuring the ongoing health of the CNP. We are concerned that in the development of the feasibility study and in the GT, ParkCare was not consulted. The reports do not demonstrate that the CT project is consistent with the primary management objective of CNP and that it will deliver a net improvement in the conditions of CNP.

The alignment and future management of the CT must be very carefully considered to avoid negative impact on the conservation values of CNP. FoMM and the Mt Ainslie Weeders ParkCare Group worked out principles for the CT consistent with the Management Plan of CNP. We consider the application of these principles essential for an environmentally sustainable CT in tune with community expectations (Appendix 2, Guiding Principles, FoMM / Mt Ainslie Weeders working group on CT, June 2011). The principles concern the route alignment of the CT and management issues.

We agree with the Feasibility study that the CT should make use of existing tracks. We add that the CT should avoid steep slopes likely to be subject to erosion and should minimise damage to vegetation and soils.

The Feasibility report (p44) suggested the introduction of foreign material such as crushed rock for sections of new constructed track where soils are unstable. New track construction in unstable conditions should be avoided altogether. The introduction of crushed rock will not provide stability. Parts of Casuarina trail close to the Mackenzie Street nature park entrance provide an example of failed stabilization using crushed rock.

We see value in educational signs to interest travellers in the environment and are pleased that this will be a feature of the CT. We hope that the CT will also be used to promote responsible (minimal impact) bushwalking and biking and will refer to the appropriate Codes of Conduct. We believe that each registrant for the trail should be given a copy of the Codes, tailored for the CT, and that Parks and Conservation Service should be adequately staffed and equipped to ensure that the Codes are adhered to. The Codes should be based on the well-recognised Bushwalker's Code ([www.bushwalking.org.au/.../Confed-Bushwalking%20Code%202004](http://www.bushwalking.org.au/.../Confed-Bushwalking%20Code%202004)) and the Official IMBA Mountain Bike Rules of the Trail.

The promotion of CT and increase of access to nature reserves will intensify the recreational use of CNP on top of the "natural" increase of local visitors. It is foreseeable, that Mt Ainslie and Mt Majura will attract a large portion of CT visitors. While we welcome responsible walkers and cyclists, we have experience of the minority who abuse the resources of the CNP. We are particularly concerned about increased numbers of bike riders, given the closeness of the Majura pine plantation with its challenging slopes and other attractions. There is a real danger that increased visitor numbers will lead to the development of short cuts and illegal track creation that will severely compromise the conservation of the nature reserves. There are already many examples of erosion caused by inappropriate usage. We are concerned that once lost, areas of high conservation value cannot be reconstructed. We can only slowly expand healthy areas.

### **Centenary Trail Maintenance and Management Issues**

The Feasibility report suggests that it would be possible to use ParkCare volunteers, amongst others, in the maintenance of the CT to reduce operational costs. For FoMM, the tasks in hand are already greater than we can tackle and there are no spare resources for such additional work.

In FoMM's view, the resources available to the Parks and Conservation Service to manage CNP are inadequate at present to deal with the damage caused by inappropriate use and rules cannot be enforced. Maintenance and the presence of Park Rangers along the CT route will be an important safeguard for the CNP and dedicated new funding is required to manage use and mitigate the impact of CT on conservation values.

The Feasibility report proposes the establishment of a CT Management Board with representation of user groups and industry. Should such a board be established, there must be representation of high-level conservation expertise with the right to veto actions that have the potential to compromise the conservation of the natural environment in CNP.

We note with alarm the expectation that the existence of the CT will enhance the opportunities for high intensity events. A number of areas in Canberra such as Mount Stromlo were designed for this purpose and developed with significant capital investment. There should not be a spillover into the CNP, a dedicated conservation area. Participants in these events are concerned with personal performance not the nature park. It is not appropriate to risk the quality of the CNP for such events. One safeguard is to continue the present system of permits for use of the CNP and to ensure that these are managed by those responsible for the environmental aspects of the CNP in consultation with the rangers responsible for the areas affected. There should never be large scale night-time events on the CNP parts of CT.

## **Centenary Trail Proposed Route Alignment**

### **Mt Ainslie**

In accordance with the principles, we object to the construction of the proposed new bike trails through intact and remote areas of Mt Ainslie. These areas are important refuge habitat for wildlife and provide food habitat for the listed Glossy Black Cockatoo. We support the submission of the Mt Ainslie Weeders ParkCare Group with suggestions for a trail that makes use of existing access routes rather than the new track alignment proposed in the GT report.

### **Mt Majura Casuarina Trail**

The GT rightly points out that walkers will be able to use the existing Casuarina Trail with the option of going up to the summit of Mt Majura and enjoying the views from there. It notes that money was recently invested in upgrading the track and that consequently this trail is in good condition. This is true for the upgraded part of the trail but some of the proposed CT will use track which was not upgraded. The repair and maintenance requirements of these parts of the track should not be overlooked. The Casuarina Trail is in constant use by joggers, walkers and family groups. The pressure on the track will continue to increase as the population of north Canberra increases with the enormous growth of apartments and other medium and high density homes, many in walking distance from the reserve. The CT will add to this impact.

### **Mt Majura Proposed Upgrade of Informal Path in Remnant Grassy Woodland**

The GT proposes an upgrade of an informal path through grassy woodland behind Mackenzie Street between

- 35-15.31.73s 149-09.55.16e;
- 35-15.20.92s 149-10.02.84e; and
- 35-15.06.41s 149-10.15.00e

(Appendix 3, Map of proposed alignment and suggested alternative routes. The red line on the map indicates the proposed CT alignment).

FoMM opposes the use of this path which bisects an area of remnant grassy woodland and is one of the better examples of this critically endangered ecosystem. The area is only 100 to 200 meters wide and would be further fragmented by this proposal. Towards the Hancock Road end, the track is very close to the transmission line easement. Putting in the proposed track would effectively widen this easement and reduce the conservation area significantly. There are two gully crossings which would need bridging or sealing in some way. The widening of the track would involve the destruction of mature trees with well developed understory.

We value this area of bush and have invested time and energy in a number of working bees to remove woody weeds and Cootamundra wattles.

Unfortunately mountain bikers have been using the track without permission. FoMM and members of the wider community have lodged complaints with the land manager about this inappropriate use to no effect to date.

Upgrading this informal path is completely unnecessary as two alternatives are available close by (Appendix 3, Map of proposed upgrade and suggested alternative routes):

1. There is a trail on in the powerline easement (blue line on the map). For most of its length it has been formed for 4WD maintenance purposes. The surface is stony and the vegetation on either side has grown up to less than a metre since ACTEW last cleared it. In December there are many plants in flower and there are views of both Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie. This track ends at a deep gully and gives way to a winding footpath which joins the Old TSR track. Cyclists use this track although it is not a formed road. The 4WD track would need to bridge the gully to enable it to become part of the CT.
2. A more straightforward approach is to use the fire trail to the East (Hackett Houses track, yellow line on the map). This is a formed track in good condition. The track is in parts close to the back of houses but affords good views. The bush on the upper side is of good quality. No investment is required for this route to become part of the CT. The track crosses the Blue Metal Road and connects with the Casuarina trail. It may be an advantage to offer a detour into the suburb at the Blue Metal road junction. The suburb offers a supermarket, cafes and a restaurant. Hackett will also be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2013 and a potted history could be provided if this were used as a rest stop on the CT.

Use of the fire trail Hackett Houses track is FoMM's preferred option. We recognise that CT aims to avoid 'back of houses' routing but this must be considered as the environmental cost is too high in this case and the additional distance involved is minor. This also means that no new tracks are needed on Mount Majura for it to be included in the CT.

We suggest that the grassy woodland path (proposed for upgrade in the GT report) be closed and rehabilitated. This would restore this small area of good grassy woodland. An example of a successfully closed and rehabilitated path is close by, between the Majura dams and the entry point to the Majura Pine plantation. This path was heavily degraded by mountain bike riding.

FoMM looks forward to meeting with TAMS on site in January to look in detail at these proposals.

## **Appendix 1**

### **FoMM Objects.**

The objects of FoMM are

1. To promote the wellbeing of the natural and cultural heritage protected within the Mount Majura Nature Reserve (MMNR) through
2. Encouraging greater awareness and understanding of the heritage values of the MMNR among FOMM and the wider community;
3. Encouraging the use and enjoyment of the reserve by the community in ways which are consistent with the maintenance and enhancement of the heritage values of MMNR;
4. Cooperating with Territory Government and other agencies (authorities) and interested groups in the sustainable management of MMNR;
5. Identifying threats to the integrity of the heritage values of MMNR, to raise community awareness of, and to seek remedies for these threats;
6. Organising activities to promote the wellbeing of MMNR including, among other things, working parties, and public talks and walks; and
7. Using any other means thought appropriate by FOMM from time to time to achieve the first objective.

The objects of the Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) are listed on the Member page of the FoMM website (<http://majura.org/fomm-members/>) and the FoMM membership form (<http://majura.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/dual-membership-form-2005-fomm.pdf>).

## **Appendix 2**

### **Guiding Principles.**

**FoMM / Mt Ainslie Weeders working group on CT, June 2011.**

## **Guiding principles for the proposed Centenary Trail**

### **Overarching Principles**

- 1) Canberra Nature Park exists to conserve the natural environment. (Schedule 3, Planning and Development Act 2007)
- 2) Where conservation allows, the Nature Parks should be open to Canberrans and visitors to enjoy for low key recreation, study and appreciation of the natural environment.

### **Principles for the Centenary Trail**

- 1) The Centenary Trail must be designed in a way which maximizes the safety of the people who will use it.
- 2) The trail should make use of existing tracks.
- 3) Tracks that have previously been closed and rehabilitated as part of ecological restoration projects should not be reopened.
- 4) The trail should not be sited on steep slopes that are prone to erosion.
- 5) The trail should be located to minimize damage to sensitive areas such as water courses and known habitat for threatened species.
- 6) Construction of links between existing tracks should be done in a way that minimizes damage to vegetation and soils and should be offset by rehabilitation of informal tracks.
- 7) Educational signs should explain the values of remnant bushland and how these can best be conserved (including information about threats such as invasive species and feral animals).
- 8) Promotional materials should make clear conditions for bringing animals into the reserve, prohibitions such as dumping of rubbish, lighting of fires and collection of plants.
- 9) Sufficient resources must be allocated over the long term, to maintain the trail and to manage negative impacts such as erosion, weed incursion and short cuts.

## **Appendix 3**

**Map of proposed alignment and suggested alternative routes.**

