

To the NT Planning Commission,

RE Towards a Darwin Regional Land Use Plan 2014
Maintaining the Howard Springs Pine Forest Rural Activity Centres
Por. 055 2821, 430 Howard Springs Rd. Current zone type LAPRL1
Sec. 055 05623, 145 Howard Springs Road. Current zone type LAPCP

RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR COMMENTARY ON DARWIN REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN 2014

This response is submitted on behalf of the Top End recreational and sporting off road cycle community in relation to the future use of the abovementioned land area, commonly known as the Howard Springs Pine Forest. It requests consideration be given to rezoning the Pine Forest as open space /for public recreational use (or similar) so that it may continue to be used as an important off-road cycling venue in the Top End.

The Pine Forest has been a valuable recreational resource to Top End off-road cyclists for many years. It is bisected in an approximately east/west direction by the Howard Springs/Gunn Point Road. On the northern side there is approximately 10km of purpose built cycle tracks intersected by four wheel drive tracks/fire roads. On the southern side there is about 20km of purpose built cycle tracks intersected by a number of four wheel drive and fire tracks. The cycle tracks are highly circuitous/convoluted and thus make economical use of the land as a riding venue.

Over the past three years the Top End Mountain biking community has extended and maintained the extensive southern network and has constructed a number of obstacles that make the tracks more challenging for experienced riders while providing "B routes" for beginners. This construction activity is ongoing and has taken place almost every week over the past three years. The tracks are continually being extended and are very well used.

Many cyclists consider off-road cycling - which does not need to be "extreme" - to be far safer than riding on roads and cycleways where it can be challenging to avoid cars, joggers, and dogs etc. and where there are often speed limits (20kph is easily attained by many riders) which, though necessary for public safety, limit the enjoyment of many cyclists.

Off road cycling is a rapidly growing recreational and sporting activity throughout Australia. In the Top End it attracts male and female riders from junior school age to people well into their sixties. The off road cycling community in the Darwin and Palmerston area is large but its size is difficult to estimate. There are a number of formal and social groups that ride at least once or twice a week such as the Darwin Off Road Cyclists (DORC), the Top End BHASH and the Spokes Group. Many more people ride on an individual basis or with friends several times a week. The Pine Forest is utilised by off road cyclists every day of the year. Every weekend riders can be found there from dawn to dusk. It is also commonly ridden (and raced) at night, throughout the year.

The most utilised Top End off-road riding locations are the Howard Springs Pine Forest and Charles Darwin National Park (CDNP). These locations provide very different riding experiences with the latter being regarded as "technical" terrain, much of which can only be ridden by more experienced riders. The Pine Forest provides a unique environment that can be safely ridden by beginners where basic skills can be learned and fitness attained.

The Pine Forest can also prove very challenging at speed and for this reason, like CDNP, is used as a racing venue for the growing number of Top End riders affiliated through Darwin Off Road Cyclists to Mountain Bike Australia. The Pine Forest is almost exclusively utilised by two-wheel enthusiasts so there is little risk of

conflict with pedestrians/hikers/runners or antagonism over land use. In the southern section of the forest there is also little risk of collision with cars as there are no sealed roads bisecting the forest. The two main user groups are off-road cyclists and off road motor cyclists and these groups stick mostly to different tracks.

Importantly, the southern part of the Pine Forest is one of the few areas that can be ridden all year round. This is because the soils are relatively well drained and the tracks are resistant to erosion- even when being ridden in the wet. For example, at time of writing and since the beginning of January, this southern section has been almost the only top end off-road venue that can be ridden without being degraded/damaged .

While CDNP, and to a lesser extent Lee Point Reserve, provide readily accessible off-road cycling venues for Darwin residents, the Pine Forest offers similar accessibility to Palmerston residents. Re-zoning it for alternative development would destroy this venue in an area where there are few other alternatives – and none that are as extensive or well established.

We believe that preserving this land area for the present and future off-road cycling community would be a visionary example of modern land use and one that promotes a low cost recreational venue that promotes healthy lifestyles. It is a unique asset which could be incorporated into the Howard Springs Nature reserve as an example of a multi-use recreational facility for residents and visitors alike.

In summary, we advocate that the Howard Springs Pine Forest be preserved as a low cost recreational off road cycling venue for the following reasons:

- 1 The area already provides approximately 30km of well-established and well-used “purpose built” off road cycling tracks.**
- 2 The tracks are highly convoluted/ circuitous and thus make very economic use of the land as a riding venue.**
- 3 The tracks have been developed and maintained entirely at the cost of local cycling enthusiasts and are sustainable as such.**
- 4 The tracks provide a safe area to for beginner cyclists to learn to ride off-road yet are extensively used by experienced riders of all ages.**
- 5 Junior development and training of mountain bikers occurs on these tracks and has produced National junior mountain bike representatives**
- 6 Various circuits within these tracks have been used for many years as a formal safe racing venue that requires negligible coordination with other “vehicle/road” users.**
- 7 The tracks are well used on a daily basis, including at night.**
- 8 The area is possibly the only land that can be almost completely ridden in all seasons without damaging the environment.**
- 9 The area provide a convenient “ride to” venue for Palmerston residents yet is easily accessible by Rural and Darwin residents.**
- 10 The number of cyclists (including off road cyclists) in Darwin is increasing and the Pine Forest is already a popular alternative to increasingly congested multi-use cycle ways.**
- 11 The Pine Forest’s proximity to an existing reserve lends itself to being developed as an extended recreational area.**

This submission has been coordinated by the Darwin Off-Road Cycling Club on behalf of all members of the broader Top End off-road cycling community. A list of signatories endorsing it is attached.

Yours faithfully

Chris Hanson
President, DORC.

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