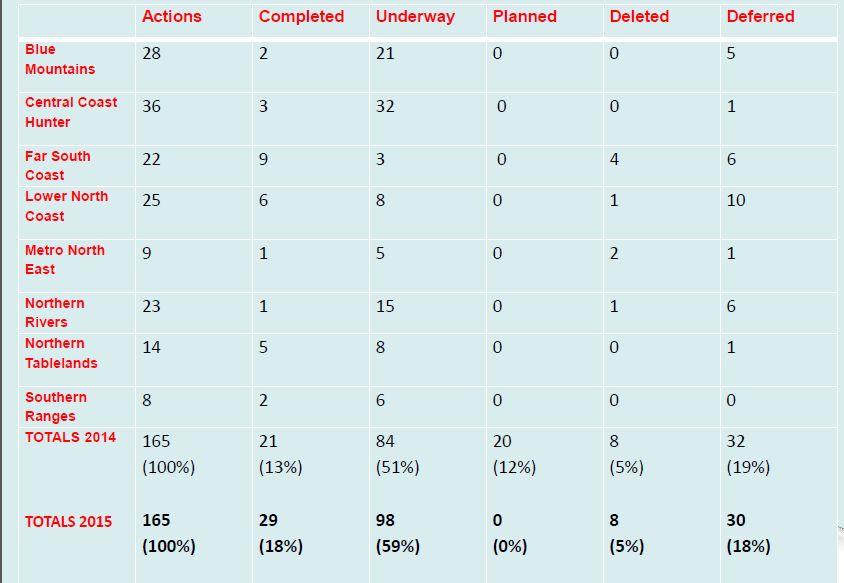
Track Preservation Report 2015 AGM – 6 February 2016

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Over the past three years we have seen the release of the “Strategic Directions for Horse Riding in NSW National Parks” which reflected the end of the “anti-horse riding” attitude of the National Parks and Wildlife Service; the identification of 8 “priority Regions” for the expansion of horse riding opportunities; a series of workshops with horse riders to identify and prioritise those opportunities; and the development of detailed horse riding action plans which fed into each NPWS Region’s 12-month work plan.

This is a summary of the status of those actions as at November 2015.



With the exception of Northern Tablelands and Far South Coast, most of the “Completed” actions are small things such as changing access gates to allow horse entry. The majority of the initiatives are classified as “underway” which can mean anything from “we’ve just started thinking about it” to “it’s almost finished”. “Deleted” means that when the proposal was assessed, it turned out not to be feasible; deferred means it will probably never happen.

Small wins include the gradual inclusion of horse riding information on the new-look National Parks website; the revision of the Parks Facilities Manual to provide guidelines on horse-friendly facilities including access gates, trail standards and horse float parking; and the rewriting of the horse riding paragraphs in the Plan of Management template to remove derogatory references to horse riding impacts and instead provide more positive wording that is consistent with the approach taken to other recreational activities.

The biggest barrier to progress is the number of Plans of Management that need to be amended. There has been a lot of talk about NPWS progressing some of these as a “bulk amendment” but so far no action. There are other Plans of Management, such as for Blue Mountains National Park, which are due for a complete revision and which have been delayed for reasons not specifically associated with horse riding.

The 2 year trial period for horse riding on a small number of nominated trails in wilderness areas is drawing to a close, and as we feared, horse riding on those trails will cease until further notice. NPWS will then collect more data in Spring 2016 to close off the monitoring of the impacts of the trial. The final results of the monitoring and the conclusions drawn from it will be compiled into a report which will be presented to the Minister for the Environment who will then make a decision based on the outcomes of the monitoring plus advice from anyone else he chooses to consult. Past experience has shown that government ministers are unbelievably slow to make decisions or take action on anything that does not carry with it an immediate political advantage, so we are not expecting to have news any time soon.

As at November 2015 the statistics on usage of those wilderness trails were:

Kosciuszko: 35 riders on 15 occasions.

Deua/Monga: 79 riders on 8 occasions.

Mummel Gulf: 0 riders.

These numbers are pretty much consistent with what we expected which at least means that the results of the monitoring will reflect the likely true levels of usage should riding be reintroduced into wilderness areas. It’s no surprise that there were no horses using the Mummel Gulf trails, as these were never requested by horse riders.

From time to time I am asked about reintroducing or improving horse riding in specific parks in areas which were not selected as “priority regions”. The Strategic Directions document clearly provides for this situation – it is up to local horse riders to raise their proposal with the Regional Manager, who should at the very least provide a fair hearing and a reasonable discussion. If you have tried this in recent times and feel you are being fobbed off or ignored, I can then escalate it to the state-wide Horse Riding Consultative Group which meets quarterly.

I am delighted to say that I have been joined on the Horse Riding Consultative Group by fellow endurance rider Charlie Gauci, who last year held the Track Preservation portfolio on the NSWERA State Management Committee. This will make it easier for me to avoid allegations of conflict of interest when considering Plan of Management submissions in my role as a member of the National Parks & Wildlife Advisory Council, as in future Charlie will be the signatory on submissions from NSWERA. It will also allow me to pass on some of the knowledge that I have accumulated over 20 years of negotiations with NPWS.

Watch out for an article in the February/March edition of Outback magazine, which describes the battle we have fought to maintain and recover access to trails in National Parks.