

Parks for Nature – that IS the Attraction

By Maggie Shanklin

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Q&A hosted by Oyster Harbour Catchment Group with support from the Friends of the Porongurup Range has held at the Porongurup Hall on 9th January 2020. Over 100 community members were given the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to the recently announced GSCORE Great Southern Regional Trails Draft Master Plan including proposals for walk, bike, horse, motor cycle and mountain bike trails to be located in many Great Southern shires.

The specific concern to the Porongurup community is stated in GSCORE's plan: *A high priority, regionally significant "Mountain Bike Trail Network" is proposed for the Porongurup National Park.*

The panel included Lenore Lyons, GSCORE Executive Director; Nick Walls, Albany Mountain Bike Club President; Peter Grigg, Amazing South Coast Executive Officer; Peter Hartley, DBCA Albany District Manager, Parks & Wildlife Service; Noongar man Larry Blight and Prof Stephen Hopper, UWA, Conservation Biology; and chaired by Marie O'Dea.

After a short introduction by each panel member they answered questions from the audience.

In 1926, the significance of the ecological value of the Porongurup Range was recognized when the first parcel of land was purchased by the State and set aside as a reserve. Declaration as a national park followed in the early 1970s following the acquisition of adjoining Porongurup land. The Park was National Heritage listed in 2008.

Since then, the ecology of the natural world has been stressed to break point while nature tourism and recreational pursuits have increased putting enormous pressure on land previously set aside for high conservation values, natural history and cultural sensitivity. The Porongurup Range is important for its endemism and richness in its array of plant species; it is also part of the traditional lands of the Noongar people, the spiritual place of their ancestors and totems.

The Porongurup community sense a threat of competing interests and compromised principles in the GSCORE proposal which includes the development of mountain bike trails. National parks are meant to provide a place for the conservation and preservation of nature but the trend is to cater to well-financed corporate interests who seek out national parks for incompatible recreational activities including high impact outdoor sport.

Our conundrum – how does the Porongurup find a balance between leisure outdoor activities and pursuits in natural settings and protect the Porongurup National Park at the same time? The Community is receptive to proposals for mountain bike trails on private lands, in reserves or crown land in an effort to balance economic, environmental and conservation concerns. After closing remarks by Lucia Quearry, a show of hands indicated a general consensus that the Porongurup community is definitely against the development of mountain bike trails within National Heritage Listed Porongurup Range National Park on ecological, environmental, conservation, natural history, and cultural grounds.