



The Friends of the Porongurup Range are deeply concerned about the Porongurup National Park Trail Masterplan being proposed by the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (Parks and Wildlife) without consideration of its impact on the Park's fragile ecosystem.

**The Friends of the Porongurup Range** was established by a group of residents interested in the conservation of the Porongurup Range in 1991 and is now supported by over one hundred voluntary active and committed members with scientists and academics within our ranks. Amongst the Friends' environmental credentials, the organisation made conservation history in 2003 with the purchase of a 511 ha farming property 4kms north of the Porongurup National Park now called the Twin Creeks Conservation Reserve. Twin Creeks is a significant part of the Oyster Harbour Catchment Group's Ranges Link project which provides a vegetation corridor connecting the Porongurup to the Stirling Range and is incorporated in the wider southwest Gondwana Link Project.

### **Tourism**

It is understandable that the WA Government and local government agencies within the Great Southern Region wish to encourage tourism and promote the natural features of the region.

The Park is increasingly well recognised as a tourism destination among Western Australians. This is especially so since the Covid-19 pandemic has limited alternative travel options for West Australians.

However, increased human activity brings with it stress to the existing infrastructure such as the sanctioned felling of trees to reduce liability, damage to the vegetation, the spread of weeds, soil erosion, the potential to spread dieback and other plant and animal diseases, additional litter load and the risk of accidental bush fires.

Locking up the park is not an option. Good management and ongoing maintenance to minimize the negative effects by tourists on the delicate flora and fauna is critical.

The Castle Rock Granite Skywalk has been a significant tourism draw for the Porongurup with increased numbers of tourists. Nancy`s Peak and Devil`s Slide are also well utilized trails. Recent maintenance has been undertaken in these areas. However, Wansbrough Walk and Bolganup Heritage Trail require upgrades. More could be done to erect interpretative signage and ongoing maintenance to all trails without harm to the existing ecosystem. It would be preferable to publicise, utilize and protect these trails more effectively rather than try to establish new trails with their additional costs and associated environmental impacts.

### **Value of Biodiversity**

While walking trails create maintenance challenges, proposals to develop bike trails within the Porongurup Range would magnify the problems. A balance between usage and degradation of the eco system should be included in the Trail Masterplan to minimize impact. Professor Stephen Hopper AC (UWA School of Biological Sciences) asserts "that such landscapes, amongst the richest in biodiversity, will assist in understanding the evolutionary, ecological and conservation attributes of certain flora and fauna." His long-held theory is that the richest, most endemic ecosystems grow in the oldest, most infertile landscapes. <https://www.ourwaparks.org.au/worlds-richest-ecosystems-grow-on-ancient-soils/>

The Porongurup Range is an old climatically buffered infertile landscape. OCBIL is the acronym given for these landscapes; landscapes which may not have a reasonable chance to recover if they are eroded or overused. "The flora and fauna in areas that have been undisturbed for vast periods of time are highly sensitive and can be permanently damaged by societal activities." <https://www.ourwাপarks.org.au/worlds-richest-ecosystems-grow-on-ancient-soils/>

Prof Hopper suggests the introduction of mountain bike trails creates a challenge to 'devise new ways to slow the loss of biodiversity.' Central to opposition of new trails is the fragility of the internationally recognised unique botanical ecosystem of the Porongurup National Park.

## **Cultural and Spiritual Values**

*Borong-gurup - the place of totem spirits*

The Porongurup Range represents deep spiritual and cultural significance to Noongar First Nations People and features in their plant and animal totem story lines.

Dr Peter Twigg, with extensive cultural experience and interactions with indigenous groups in Western Australia, reminds us "Noongar understanding of and for the Porongurup should be paramount in any trail planning."

Dr Twigg continues: "To go directly against Noongar wishes and concerns belongs in the old, historical way of doing things. It cannot be a principle of the future. We should be asking of Noongars what can we now do? How do we better care for country? Can we play a role now in healing the land? Can we make a future characterised by respect? ...strategic regional infrastructure development can be matched with a community's desire for collaboration that highlights the need for protection and enhancement of the two key themes of biodiversity and cultural

values found at the beautiful Porongurup Range.” Dr Twigg urges the decision makers to “make history by resetting the relationship with Noongar people.” Dr Peter

Twigg submission January 2019: [Pathways to Trails](#) Great Southern Regional Trails DRAFT MASTER PLAN 2020-2029

## **In conclusion**

The quite recent tragic destruction of the Juukan Gorge Cave in the Pilbara, containing evidence of human occupation going back 46,000 years, is a timely and vivid reminder of how such culturally and scientifically important indigenous sites must be protected against any development.

The biodiverse and cultural significance and ecological fragility of the Porongurup National Park are different to the Pilbara, but wanton damage is unnecessary.

It is the strong opinion of the Friends of the Porongurup Range that bike trails should not be considered either by the Project Reference Group or the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

Dr Kingsley Faulkner AM

Friends of the Porongurup Range  
Project Reference Group representative  
Trails Concept Masterplan Porongurup National Park

8 December 2021

.