

Operational policy

Visitor Management

Horse Riding

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Environmental Protection Agency, (incorporating the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service). Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Policy subject

Where and under what circumstances does horse riding occur on Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) managed areas?

Purpose

This policy provides an overview of where horse riding for recreation or stock management purposes may be conducted on land managed by QPWS, and also explains whether an approval is required.

Definitions

QPWS managed areas (for the purposes of this operational policy) include the following areas:

- State forests or recreation areas (**forest recreation areas**) and other lands managed under the *Forestry Act 1959*;
- Protected areas (State land) managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* – national parks, national park (scientific), national park (Aboriginal land), national park (Torres Strait Islander land), national park (recovery), conservation park and resources reserve;
- Recreation areas (**RAM areas**) managed under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006* where the underlying land tenure is state forest or protected area (state land).

For the purpose of this policy QPWS managed areas do not include marine parks under the *Marine Parks Act 2004*.

Horse riding includes using a horse as a pack animal. Pulling a carriage with a horse is not defined as horse riding in this policy.

Gazetted roads are surveyed public roads as defined in section 93 of the *Land Act 1994*.

Background

The following legislative provisions are relevant to the presence of horses on QPWS managed areas.

Protected areas

Section 124 of the Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2006 (NC(PAM)R) states that a person must not take a live animal into a protected area or have a live animal under the person's control in a protected area; however, sections 124(2)a and 124(2)f specify that this does not apply to an animal brought into a protected area:

- under a stock grazing permit or travelling stock permit; or
- for use in mustering stock under a stock mustering permit; or
- with the chief executive's written approval; or
- if horse riding is permitted in a conservation park or resources reserve under a regulatory notice - to a horse brought into the conservation park or resources reserve for horse riding activities.

RAM areas

Section 121 of the *Recreation Areas Management Act 2006* states that a person must not take a live animal into a RAM area, or keep a live animal in a RAM area other than in accordance with the chief executive's written approval or a corresponding authority.

Forest areas

Under the *Forestry Act 1959* section 73 (1)(e), a permit to traverse is required to ride horses in state forests, timber reserves or forest reserves* (excluding forest recreation areas i.e. feature protection areas, state forest parks or forest drives).

Note: Forest reserves are an interim tenure under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (NCA) to assist in the process of transferring areas of state forest to protected area tenure. They are managed under the *Forestry Act 1959* until transfer to another tenure is completed.

Under regulations 4 and 5 of the *Forestry Regulation 1998*, horses can only enter forest recreation areas where regulatory notices indicate horses are allowed. Horses must be under control at all times and not cause annoyance to others.

Recreational horse riding

QPWS recognises three main styles of recreational horse riding:

- leisurely riding at slow speeds with goals related to looking, learning, exploring, peace and quiet and where the natural setting is critical for personal enjoyment;
- active or focused riding at higher speeds with goals related to personal skill, fitness, challenge and riding prowess, where the natural setting is a relatively minor component of the overall experience; and
- competitive events such as endurance rides where goals relate to speed, accuracy and route difficulty and where the natural setting is largely incidental to the activity.

QPWS accepts that both the ecological and social impacts of horse riding are affected by the style of riding, the size of the groups that use a site or trail, and the total number of horses that use a site or trail.

Policy statement

Recreational horse riding

Recreational horse riding may be permitted:

- 1) on gazetted roads and stock routes that pass through QPWS managed lands;
- 2) on specified trails in conservation parks, resource reserves and forest recreation areas where horse riding has been allowed by regulatory notice;
- 3) on specified trails in state forests, timber reserves and forest reserves under a permit to traverse; and
- 4) on designated parts of the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) in protected areas with the approval of the Chief Executive of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Horse riding is not permitted in RAM areas where it is inconsistent with the underlying tenure, and may only be permitted on other tenures in accordance with an approved management plan.

The appropriate style of riding, maximum group size and conditions of access to a site will be determined after considering:

- the tenure of the land;
- public safety (for both riders and other users);
- ecological sustainability;
- whether the activity is nature based;
- the appropriateness of the activity in the setting;
- the compatibility of the activity with other activities on the site;
- the effort required to manage the activity relative to the demand for the activity; and
- the sustainable visitation capacity for the area or trail.

In some areas, QPWS may exclude horse riding either temporarily or permanently.

Horse riding for stock management purposes

Horses are allowed on QPWS managed areas for stock management purposes when their use is approved as a condition of a lease or permit for stock grazing (under Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2006 (NC(PAM)R), section 89 and section 35 of the *Forestry Act 1959*;) or stock mustering (NC(PAM)R; section 91 and *Forestry Act 1959* section 72).

Landholders adjoining a QPWS managed area may also be allowed to use horses if taking part in a general muster under the NC(PAM)R, section 145 or *Forestry Act 1959*, section 72.

Approval mechanisms - recreational horse riding

Authority to ride a horse on QPWS managed lands will generally be conveyed by a permit or regulatory notice appropriate to the tenure, as detailed in the following sections. Authorities or permits to horse ride do not convey exclusive use of an area or trail unless specifically stated.

A group activity permit or a commercial activity permit may also be required; see the 'Other matters to consider' section below.

Specific provisions

Gazetted roads and stock routes

Horse riding is allowed on gazetted roads and stock routes passing through a QPWS managed area. These roads and stock routes are not part of the QPWS managed area. QPWS permits and other authorities do not apply.

As there is sometimes variation between the surveyed and physical road alignments, QPWS will clearly mark the appropriate route for horse riders to follow. Horse riders are responsible for riding in accordance with signage and must stay on the marked track, including for rest stops, campsites and water supply, as horses are not permitted to leave the gazetted road or stock route and enter a QPWS managed area unless the appropriate permit or other authority is obtained.

It should be noted that not all formed roads are gazetted. If a road through a QPWS managed area is not gazetted, the normal authorities and approvals outlined in this policy are required.

Conservation parks, forest recreation areas and resource reserves

Regulatory notices and signage will indicate where and how horse riding is allowed in conservation parks, resources reserves, and forest recreation areas. A permit is not required for these areas; however, riders must comply with the regulatory notice and ride only on designated trails. Notices may specify the times of entry, style (e.g. speed) and group sizes that apply.

State forests, forest reserves and timber reserves

A permit to traverse is required for horse riding in state forests, forest reserves and timber reserves. An applicant should obtain a permit application form from their local QPWS office.

Permits will specify the area to be traversed, the period over which the permit is valid and may specify conditions such as:

- the specific tracks or types of tracks available for horse riding;
- areas, tracks or activities to be avoided in the interests of safety;
- the obligations of horse riders to other users or stakeholders;
- requirements for horse riders to protect the area (for example, minimize the spread of weeds or pathogens, and minimize damage to tracks, water courses or assets);
- the maximum group size appropriate to the area;
- the appropriate style (e.g. speed) of use of the area; and
- appropriate times of entry to the area.

Bicentennial National Trail

Where the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) passes through a protected area, a permit allowing a horse to enter the area may be required. A written application seeking approval for horse access to a protected area along the route of the BNT should be sent to QPWS at least 30 days in advance. The applicant should provide his or her name and contact address, state the number of horses requiring access, and specify the route to be followed, the protected area to be crossed, and the start and finish dates for the trip.

If the application is approved, the approval will include conditions that state:

- specific tracks or types of tracks available for horse riding;

- obligations of horse riders to other users or stakeholders;
- requirements for horse riders to protect the area (for example, minimise the disbursement of weeds or pathogens, and minimise damage to tracks, water courses or built assets);
- maximum group size appropriate to the area;
- appropriate style (e.g. speed) of use of the area; and
- appropriate times of entry to the area.

Approval Mechanisms - Horse riding for stock management purposes

An applicant for a stock grazing or stock mustering permit wishing to take horses into a protected area must identify that they are a lessee, permittee or neighbour and their need for a permit in their application. Stock grazing permits have a maximum duration of 10 years and stock mustering permits have a maximum duration of 60 days (Nature Conservation (Administration) Regulation 2006, section 19).

Approval to use horses must be written as a condition of the relevant permit.

The Nature Conservation (Administration) Regulation 2006 specifies that horses must be restrained when not being used to muster stock.

Other matters to consider

Camping

Overnight camping may be permitted where the distance across the QPWS managed area would take longer than one day to travel. Camping at designated camping sites where horse management facilities are provided is preferred and camping permits are required. In forest recreation areas, horses cannot stay overnight unless in an area so designated by a regulatory notice.

When overnight camping away from designated camping areas is necessary, the following additional conditions will also apply:

- the maximum camping length of stay at any location may be shortened to reduce impacts,
- horses must be tethered at least 50 metres from any watercourse; and
- tethering points or picket lines are permitted providing regular relocation prevents concentrated ground and vegetation damage and the lines and leads do not damage natural anchor points (e.g. trees and rocks).

The erection of yards will not be permitted.

Management planning

If a national park is being declared over part of the Bicentennial National Trail, QPWS will negotiate access to and use of the BNT with the Natural Resources and Water, the lead government agency, and relevant recreational stakeholders.

The BNT route, gazetted roads and stock routes will be shown on maps in management plans.

Management plans for state forests, forest reserves, timber reserves, conservation parks and resources reserves will specify where horse riding is permitted and any access conditions. Community input will be considered by QPWS and trustees in the preparation of management plans.

Other permits

A group activity permit issued under either the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* or *Forestry Act 1959* is required for all organised horse riding such as club or competitive events, endurance rides and historic re-enactments.

A group activity permit may also be required for horse riding in large groups that will or may interfere with general public use of an area. QPWS will consider each situation on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the sustainable visitor/rider capacity of the location. Further information is provided in the *Operational Policy Group Activity Permits*.

When horse riding is being conducted on a commercial basis, the provider of that activity requires a commercial activity permit. Further information is provided in the *Operational Policy Commercial Activities*.

Reference materials

Nature Conservation Act 1992 and Nature Conservation (Protected Areas Management) Regulation 2006 and Nature Conservation (Administration Regulation) 2006;

Forestry Act 1959 and Forestry Regulation 1998;

Land Act 1994 section 93;

Operational policy *Approval to take a live animal into a protected area*;

Operational policy *Group activity permits*; and

Operational policy *Commercial activities*.

Enquiries

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Disclaimer:

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Approved By

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Signature

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Date

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