

**Submission
No 198**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mr Mark Rex

Date received: 1/08/2012

A submission of fact and opinion by an individual,

I regularly take part in recreational use of national parks and state forest by means of a 4WD and a registered off road motorcycle.

Over the 20 years I have utilised this states forests for recreations and I have noticed a staggering amount of land area and existing trails being closed to public use. This, I feel, is limiting my ability to legally recreate in the way I wish to, and the way of life for many other Australians who recreate in the same way as I do.

As with any recreational sport or outdoor activity in OUR State forests and National parks, a code of conduct is always encouraged and practiced throughout the community within the activity. This conduct can be generalised as a practice of principals whereby 'minimal disturbance and impact to the natural area in which we tend to use'. A non-profit organisation has our conduct in mind and can be freely accessed at: <http://www.treadlightly.org/>

“Travel responsibly on designated roads, trails or areas; Respect the rights of others, including private property owners, all recreational trail users, campers and others so they can enjoy their recreational activities undisturbed; Educate yourself prior to your trip by obtaining travel maps and regulations from public agencies, planning for your trip, taking recreation skills classes and knowing how to operate your equipment safely; Do your part by modelling appropriate behaviour, leaving the area better than you found it, properly disposing of waste, minimizing the use of fire, avoiding the spread of invasive species and restoring degraded areas.”

Treadlightly.org

Of course, various 'green' groups and government bodies claim that 4WD vehicles and off-road motorcycles are seriously damaging the natural environment and can be concluded as the main reason behind the closure of land area and tracks. These groups have convinced the NSW government to side with a minority (I refer to those who wish all forests to be exclusion zones or bushwalking only) and not allow the majority to responsibly recreate on our own public land.

The reasons cited for why 4WD and off-road motorcycles are damaging the environment (mainly noise pollution and erosion) are severely over-exaggerated. Noise pollution would be a problem in small forests on the edge of cities and towns. However, the vast majority of users like me are well out of hearing range and have the code of conduct in mind when recreating. These parks cover an area of approximately 20,000 hectares, and being so close to Sydney and Newcastle, have been used for many years for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities. Any such closures would result in a mere “sweeping the problem under the carpet” solution, and such recreational activities will move to another part of the States forests and National parks.

While the trails used by off-road 4WD vehicles do suffer from erosion, it is of an insignificant quantity in comparison to that created naturally by wind and rain. I agree the trails often look badly eroded, but compare this volume of eroded material to the volume over an entire forest. This is not to mention the erosion after a natural occurrence like a bushfire or landslide - these volumes of eroded material would be in the thousands times more than that created by recreational users.

“In any case, erosion is a natural phenomenon. Although we would not want to initiate erosion, it should not be used as a pretext for keeping people out. National Parks belong to all the people, not a handful of bureaucrats, and we should all have access.”

MP Peter Whelan. 25/02/11

Education plays a big role in all aspects of daily activity, whether driving on a road, or in a national park. Education and a standard of conduct would more likely be accepted and adhered to by the majority of recreational users than a closed gate on a once driven off-road track.

Given the expanding knowledge and research of our bushland environment, it can't be said that our recreational usage is the ONLY fact in the slight degradation of the parks and forests. But with more focus on educating and regulating the conduct and usage of the parks and forest tracks already available, we could almost definitely see a reduction in in degradation and a sustainable network of recreational off-road tracks available to the users who have a passion for these activities.

You as the government need to NOT lock us out of our own land, but help us to create a smaller footprint from our activities whilst we enjoy our right to participate.

Kind regards,

Mark Rex