

# Western Australian **Hiking Trail** Management Guidelines

## Executive Summary

This Executive Summary should be read as an extension to the WA Hiking Trail Management Guidelines and not as a stand-alone document.



Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**  
Department of **Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries**

## Western Australia is abundant with ancient trails that have been used by Aboriginal people over thousands of years. We acknowledge and value the heritage, culture and spiritual connection of Aboriginal people with the lands and waterways through which trails pass.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) have partnered to develop *the Western Australian Hiking Trail Management Guidelines* (guidelines) to provide best practice guidance to any trail proponent.

### The vision

Hiking trails across WA are sustainably designed and developed for the right users, in the right areas, for the right reasons.

High quality trails will enhance awareness and protection of cultural, natural and heritage values, underpinned by strong partnerships and community ownership.

The document is intended to assist groups developing a hiking trail project to:

- Understand hiking and the differing user types and their needs.
- Support trail development using principles of sustainable planning, design and construction techniques.
- Provide a consistent approach to hiking trail classifications, development, maintenance and management across WA.
- Ensure consistent use of the Trail Development Process for all trails.

Hiking continues to grow in popularity across Australia. It has minimal start-up costs for participants and caters for a range of abilities.



### These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Trail Development Series.

For dual and multi use trails, it is recommended to consult both these guidelines, the WA Mountain Bike Management Guidelines and other activity specific guidelines. This ensures that the needs of all users are adequately addressed.

The guidelines refer to bushwalking and trail running as hiking.

Hiking =  +   
bushwalking + trail running

The guidelines provide an understanding of hiking, including user demographics and tourism markets. They emphasise the importance of collaboration and engagement with Aboriginal people and stakeholders, and provide a strategic and legislative context, along with relevant policies and guidelines.

Co-design with Aboriginal people through meaningful consultation, engagement and leadership strengthens partnerships and provides significant benefits to trail planning and the trail user experience.

The guidelines outline principles for sustainable trail development, detailing trail models and systems, visitor communication strategies, user safety, accessibility and protecting environmental values. They also cover essential aspects of trail design, such as alignment, clearance corridors, soil types, surface treatments, cross sections and water management techniques.

Supporting facilities and structures including overnight accommodations, bridges, crossings, boardwalks and lookouts, are explored. As trail projects transition from development to operation, the roles and responsibilities of trail operators evolve, encompassing governance, funding, resource allocation, maintenance, and trail adoption. The guidelines also highlight key considerations for hosting events on trails.



## Who are these guidelines for:

- Trail planners, designers, builders and maintenance teams.
- Land managers and landowners.
- Trail clubs, associations and ‘friends of’ groups.
- State trails and outdoor recreation bodies and organisations.
- Training providers for trail design, construction and maintenance.



Ngurrangga Tours, near Karratha. Photo: Tourism WA.




**Table 1: The principles and advice in these guidelines align with each stage of the Trail Development Process.**

Stage	Key guidance provided in this document
1. Trail proposal	Understanding hiking, strategic and legislative considerations and stakeholders.
2. Framework	Agreement on trail significance, design objectives, management models, user types, required facilities and structures, walking trail classification, building standards and relevant stakeholders, partners and collaboration.
3. Site assessment	Principles on location of control points, facilities, trail alignment, understanding landforms, topography, habitats, soil types and landscape features, environmental and heritage values and protection.
4. Concept plan	Principles on trail design and alignment corridor, water management, structures, visitor communication, interpretation and signs.
5. Corridor evaluation	Confirm location of facilities and trail alignment using control points and design elements.
6. Detailed design	Principles on design and building methodology and standards, protection of natural features and restrictions, water management, disturbance footprint and structures.
7. Construction	Principles for developing construction techniques, standards and construction ready plans and specifications, trail sign plans and standards.
8. Management	Principles on governance, business models, trail management plans, events, design and building for sustainability.


## Walking Trail Classification System

DBCA’s Parks and Wildlife Service has adopted a walking trail classification system to categorise trails in a systematic way. The system provides standardised, concise information regarding the difficulty and characteristics of trails so that users can make informed decisions about whether a trail suits them.

The system also provides a framework for trail managers to design and maintain trails to suit the trail experience and user group. The system is generally consistent with the *AS 2156.1, Walking Tracks – Part 1: Classification and Signage, 2001* and closely aligns with the Australian Walking Track Grading System.

				
Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5
Easiest	Easy	Moderate	Difficult	Extreme

**Other land managers are encouraged to adopt this system for consistency across Western Australia.**



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**Cover image:** Cape to Cape Explorer Tours, Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park.  
Photo: Tourism WA.

The guidelines provide general advice and aim to ensure hiking trails are developed to meet the needs of users, protect natural and cultural values and meet high sustainability standards.

Every trail will be different and given the variety of situations and locations, each trail project needs to be considered based on its own merits.

Trails in WA are located on various land tenures. Most trails however are on land managed by local government or Parks and Wildlife Service. Policies and information pertaining to lands managed by local governments and Parks and Wildlife Service are provided for general information.