

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

5 November 2008

Dear Member

I'm pleased to provide the first President's Report, outlining the activities and achievements of your Association.

It is now just over a year since the RTRA started accepting public memberships and for a fledgling organisation we can point to a number of successes.

Of course, what we are trying to do – put trail bike riding on a sustainable footing in Western Australia - is a big task and in the overall scheme of things we have only just begun.

But it is important that we celebrate all of our small victories, because each one of them contributes to the overall objective and moves us that little bit further along our path.

Before going on, it's worth reviewing the objectives that have been set for the Association. These are what give us the guidance to set priorities and decide on projects.

The RTRA was formed around four key objectives:

1. To protect and extend quality, safer off-road riding opportunities for Western Australian recreational trail bike riders of all ages.
2. To promote and encourage safety and responsible riding attitudes, including minimising noise and trail damage.
3. To actively pursue the needs of trail bike riders with government agencies, councils, landowners and other stakeholders.
4. To improve the perception of trail bike riding as a recreational activity amongst stakeholders and the broader community.

All of these objectives head towards the concept of recreational trail bike riding as a sustainable family activity.

Embedded within these objectives is the need to change both the way trail bike riders are perceived by the non-riding community and 'the authorities', and the way we as riders and the industry respect the environment, our fellow trails users and our neighbours.

Twelve months on, I think the harder part is changing the behaviour of the riders and the industry.

I'll come back to that aspect in a moment, but first, let's review what has been achieved over the past 12 months or so.

Membership

I would like to thank all those members who jumped on board early to support the RTRA and our efforts. You understand the long term repercussions and seriousness of the issues and don't just stick your head in the sand hoping it will all go away.

From a standing start a year ago we now have 807 family memberships, representing approximately 1,500 riders.

This is an excellent start, but with an estimated 50,000 bikes in WA we still have a long way to go!

Political Recognition

This is the main reason why RTRA was established – to be able to say to the government “There are a lot more trail bike riders out there than you think – and it's about time our needs were heard”.

Key achievements:

- Department of Sport and Recreation acknowledges beneficial physical attributes of recreational trail riding – sees it as a legitimate activity
- Department of Environment and Conservation recognising trail bike riders as legitimate users of State Forests and wanting to work with us cooperatively.
- Joint agency funding of State Trail Bike Strategy
- Trail bikes being considered for the first time in the State Trails Strategy – the overall master planning for trails of all types in Western Australia, as well as regional master plans such as the Peel Trails Strategy.
- State Trail Bike Strategy receiving the endorsement of both Labor and Liberal Governments
- RTRA invited as a stakeholder to Policy 13 (Water Source Protection) review
- RTRA Secretary invited to join government Off Road Vehicle Advisory Committee
- Trail bike riding is on the government radar in a balanced way – they still want to clamp down on “hoon/illegal behavior” but they acknowledge we need more places to ride.

Future Projects

- Participation on Joint Agency Implementation Committee
- Meeting with various Ministers and local MPs.
- Member-based campaign to approach local parliamentarians for support of State Trail Bike Strategy

Advocacy

Protecting existing riding areas from closure builds on the political recognition and strength of membership. In 2008 RTRA turned the tide of Off Road Vehicle Area closures.

Key achievements:

- The State Trail Bike Strategy – the ‘master plan’ for a sustainable future
- Repelled a concerted effort by Gingin Shire Council to have the popular Lancelin Off Road Area closed. A combination of rider petition and behind-the-scenes work saw the Minister for Local Government reject Gingin’s request to close the area.
- Succeeded in re-opening the Kwinana Off Road Vehicle Area, against the wishes of the Town of Kwinana Council.
- Encouraged the Department of Environment and Conservation to allocate funds to significantly upgrade Gngangara and Pinjar Off Road Vehicle Areas.
- Successfully intervened to prevent the forced cancellation of the Des Nobles Two Day Enduro, brokering a deal between the Trail and Enduro Club and the Department of Environment and Conservation.
- RTRA is currently assisting members to fight town planning regulations that would prevent them from even riding on their own property.
- Lobbied all major political parties during the State Election and kept members informed of their policies regarding trail bikes.
- Adventure Activity Standards – took a lead role in the development of these standards to ensure that the interests of recreational riders were properly represented and to avoid overly restrictive ‘standards’ from imposing an unreasonable burden on ride groups.

Future Projects

- Water Source Protection Policy review – to open up access to some of the excellent hills areas that are currently off-limits.
- Identify and secure more ORV Areas (metro and regional) – to provide more options for riders of unregistered bikes (including under-aged and quad riders)
- Push for trails-based ORV opportunities – to expand the concept of an Off Road Vehicle area beyond the square patch of wasteland that is the current paradigm and create opportunities for family-based trail riding on real trails.
- Assistance for potential commercial operators seeking development approvals
- Push to have trail bike trails qualify for funding under Lotterywest Trails Grants

Member Services

One of the challenges facing the RTRA in growing our membership base is that most of our objectives are long term, and many of our most important activities are not only behind-the-scenes but also quite sensitive in their dealings with government agencies and politicians.

This means that we can't provide the same level of 'instant gratification' that people get when they join a health club, a social club or an event-based organisation.

While we would hope that our members recognise this and support our longer term objectives, we do need to provide members with some more tangible benefits if we are to grow our member base beyond the core of 'true believers'.

For this reason we are working to expand the number and range of member services, always keeping our main focus on the real objectives of the Association to ensure that wherever possible, member benefits also play a significant role in the pursuit of those objectives.

Key Achievements:

- KTM Capel Trail Bike Rally – our first event specifically for recreational riders – exceeded all our targets and delivered an excellent day's riding to the nearly 300 entrants – many of whom joined RTRA specifically for the event. The event was a major effort and many hundreds of volunteer hours were required to make it happen. We are very grateful to all the people who volunteered their time to make the event such a success. Special thanks to Event Coordinator Jeremy Connor who brought it all together and made a personal effort that went above and beyond what was expected.
- RTRA Web Site and eNewsletter – the RTRA web site and e-Newsletter keep riders up to date with the activities of the Association, and also with useful information and news of other influences that affect trail bike riding in WA. These communications tools are often leveraged by reference in other online forums.
- Riders' Rights – Confusion over what is and isn't legal led us to research and publish a simple reference guide. We will continue to add to this as new information comes to hand or if legislation or regulations change.
- Advice and assistance for members facing court over Water Catchment and ORV Act infringements – although not providing a legal service we have provided advice on the law, and possible defence to actions, to several members facing court appearances.
- Ranger Reporting System – Prompted by reports of some rangers making threats that weren't supported by the law we created the Ranger Reporting System to monitor who is being told what, how, and by whom. This system also helps monitor 'blitz' actions so we can pass on timely information to members.

Future Projects:

- Group offers – eg insurance, discounts
- Ride events – Create broader opportunities for recreational rides, including quads and kids.
- Increased member participation in projects

Education, Awareness and Attitude Shift

Changing attitudes is a long term goal. But if we are to create a sustainable future for trail bike riding we must be effective in encouraging riders to take a responsible attitude to the environment and other trails users, and helping non-riders to understand what it is that we do and why we are so passionate about it.

Key Achievements:

- Media comments – RTRA is the voice that radio, TV and newspaper journalists turn to when there is a trail bike related issue. Prior to RTRA there was no one to put across the riders' views.
- Representing trail bike riders at government and community forums - Helping decision-makers understand the distinctions between competitive and recreational riding, between circuit riding and trail bike touring and between different rider demographics – helping them to distinguish between trail riders and 'vandals on trail bikes'
 - National Tracks and Trails Conference
 - WA Trails Seminar
 - SE Regional Recreational Advisory Group
 - North Metropolitan Recreational Advisory Group
 - Shire of Murray
 - Ellenbrook Community Consultation meeting
- Contribution to Adventure Activity Standards – ensuring that these Standards, which could become pre-conditions of DEC permits, are relevant
- Gngangara Cleanup Day – A by-product was the removal of 500 bags of rubbish. The real objective was to position trail riders (and RTRA members specifically) as community-minded and environmentally aware. This single activity strengthened our relationship with DEC and the City of Swan and played a major role in securing substantial funding for the improvements of these areas.
- Participation in online forums – gently introducing topics and comments to encourage riders to think about the actions that help and hinder our cause

Future Projects:

- Multi-media education campaign (as per State Trail Bike Strategy recommendations)

Key Challenges for the next 12 months

There are dozens of challenges for us in the next 12 months – they key ones are:

- Driving behavioural change amongst those trail bike riders who act in a way that damages the reputation of trail bike riders and the activity
- Getting the backing and involvement of manufacturers and retailers
- Working with the State Government to implement the recommendations from the State Trail Bike Strategy
- Continuing to improve the current off-road vehicle areas and lobbying for the development of one to service the southern suburbs
- Arguing the case for access to outer water catchment areas under reasonable conditions
- Run two recreational riding events – the KTM Capel Trail Bike Rally and an event for all family members
- Increasing our membership base

I would like to close by thanking all those members who have supported the Association by contributing to surveys and petitions, attending public meetings and workshops, contributing time to initiatives such as the Gnangara cleanup day and generally spreading the word to other riders about the work of the Association. Thank you all.

Finally I would like to thank our inaugural committee members who have put in enormous amounts of time and personal effort and stood up when it counts. I appreciate your continued support.