



Electric bikes on public conservation land



Guideline



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Contents

1.	Purpose	3
2.	Terminology and definitions	3
3.	Background	3
4.	Process	4
5.	The Departments approach	5
6.	Principles	6
7.	About this document	8

1. Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to:

- define electric bikes for the purpose of their management on public conservation land; and
- guide the development of Conservation Management Strategies (CMSs) and National Park Management Plans (NPMPs) regarding electric bike use on public conservation land so that the Department's approach is consistent throughout New Zealand.

2. Terminology and definitions

Electric bike (also commonly known as e-bike) – An electric power-assisted bicycle is a pedal cycle to which is attached one or more auxiliary electric propulsion motors having a combined maximum power output not exceeding 300 watts.

Note: Any cycles with motors (electric or combustion) over 300 watts are classified as a motorised vehicle as per the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) definition and therefore are only allowed where a motor vehicle is allowed.

Off-road biking – The activity of riding bicycles on trails where users are separated from vehicles.

Shared use – Two or more activities can be undertaken in the same place.

3. Background

Riding electric bikes is an emerging recreational activity in New Zealand. The level of demand for them, and actual use of them, is unclear at this time, however use of them on trails on public conservation land already occurs in some places.

The Department lacks a consistent approach to managing electric bike use on public conservation land across New Zealand.

What are electric bikes?

An electric bike is a bicycle which has one or more auxiliary electric propulsion motors attached to it allowing the user to use much less energy to move the bike. This provides an easier riding experience.

There are a large range of models on the market ranging from around 200 watts to 10,000+ kilowatts.

Electric bikes fitting the legal definition under the Land Transport Act 1998 and associated regulations:

- Are pedal assisted (meaning that you have to pedal to generate energy).
- Emit no odour, gas, vapour or smoke and are noiseless.
- Range from commuter bikes, road bikes and mountain bikes.
- Will assist a rider for approximately 20 – 40 kms after which most batteries need to be recharged from a power point (some can re-charge whilst peddling).
- Equates to a fit rider pedalling strongly. Electric bikes with this output can be ridden on flat ground at up to 40 kph for sustained periods.

Benefits

- Electric bikes may enable people with lesser riding experience and fitness to explore and enjoy public conservation lands.

Considerations

- Electric bike technology is rapidly developing.
- It may be difficult to tell what the wattage of an electric bike is. Some bikes over 300 watts may exhibit the effects of motorbikes and some may look like a motorbike (these are generally the very high powered types).
- More experienced mountain bikers may be negatively impacted upon should less experienced riders with extra support of an electric bike pass them whilst riding. A range of opportunities and experiences needs to be provided to those who want places set aside to do them under their own steam.
- Electric bikes have potential to enable less experienced bikers to go faster and venture further afield into remote areas with a lack of access to support emergency assistance.
- Conflicts are no greater than with conventional mountain bikes. Adverse effects can occur between most recreation activities however, much research in this area has shown that perception of conflict is much higher than the reality.

Note

- There is a lack of information about electric bike users, the experiences they seek and the impacts of electric bike use on tracks and other users.
- Under current regulations any electric bike over 300 watts is considered a motorized vehicle and can therefore only go where these are provided for e.g. roads.

4. Process

The following process should be used to guide the development of CMSs and NPMPs so that our approach is consistent across the Department.

- 1) Consider key principles (see section 6) in relation to each biking trail. This will provide us with a list of proposed trails where we should and shouldn't allow electric bikes.
- 2) Test the key principles and outcomes (list of trails) through the CMS and NPMP processes. This will allow for public discussion and consultation.

Note: The use of electric bikes should continue to be considered on a case by case basis in CMS documents and policies as these are reviewed into the future. This could result in electric bikes being allowed on all trails open to cycling and mountain biking, only on some of those trails, or only on roads.

5. The Department's approach

The Department's approach to electric bikes in CMSs and NPMPs is to:

- Enable lower powered electric bikes (≤ 300 watts) on lower graded¹ off-road biking tracks and cycle ways so that families and those less physically able can enjoy our places.
- Treat higher powered electric bikes (>300 watts) as motorbikes as these are an inappropriate fit with other off-road visitors.

The Department's approach to managing recreation is to be driven by an understanding of demand without impacting negatively on historic, cultural or natural heritage values. We will do this by providing quality accessible opportunities that meet people's expectations as part of the wider Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. Electric bikes are a legitimate form of recreation and demand for places to use them appears to be increasing. The Department needs to be responsive and agile to ensure it is able to meet the demand of our visitors in appropriate ways.

Electric bikes enable a wider range of users to both recreate and access places on public conservation land. The increase in the number of people using these bikes is a positive for the Department and outdoor recreation generally as it is encouraging those who are less fit and able to get out and enjoy public conservation land. We should not be trying to stop this activity from occurring but rather focus on managing it effectively.

Minor impacts and adverse affects can occur between most recreation activities however, much research in this area has shown that perception of conflict is much higher than the reality. There are thousands of kilometres of shared use tracks in New Zealand both on and off public conservation land where the majority of users are able to co-exist. Therefore, only where there is evidence that high levels of conflict is occurring should the Department take further action.

Responsible use of bikes and electric bikes can be promoted and managed through good information such as the mountain bikers' code.

¹ Typically grades one and two tracks.

The [Conservation General Policy](#) (2007)² and the [General Policy for National Parks](#) (2005)³ states further guidance on how electric bikes should be treated and should be used in conjunction with the electric bike guidelines.

6. Principles

Decisions around providing for electric bike use in CMSs and NPMPs need to be made on the same basis as for other recreation activities. The purpose and outcomes for the place/track/trail, the compatibility with other recreation activities and experiences and the impacts on the natural, historic and cultural heritage values need to be considered.

The following principles should be used to guide the development of CMSs and NPMPs so that our approach is consistent across New Zealand.

The Department will consider allowing electric bikes where:

1. Impacts on natural, historic or cultural heritage values can be managed.
An assessment of the natural, historic or cultural values can be undertaken to make a judgment as to the impact that electric bikes may have on these environments.
2. Demand is evident and likely to be sustained.
Signals for demand may include the local community, industry or visitors requesting use of electric bikes on trails. Users may also be already using electric bikes on trails where they are not permitted.
3. No known conflicts occurs with other users or conflict is able to be mitigated or managed.
The correct mix of recreation activities e.g. bikers and walkers on trails needs to be considered.
4. There is enough capacity on the trail.
Issues are less likely to occur on lower use tracks. Should the existing level of use not be of concern it may be appropriate to consider providing for electric bikes here.
5. Where trails cross more than one land owner or manager, the approach for electric bikes is agreed by all owners/managers.
This will ensure a seamless riding experience for the user.
6. Lower grade⁴ biking trails and cycle ways.
These types of trails may allow those that are less experienced or physically able an opportunity to recreate on public conservation lands whilst in a more typically safer front country setting than some of the higher grade trails which may venture further into the outdoors.

² Conservation General Policy (2007) p37-8.

³ General Policy for National Parks (2005) p40-1.

⁴ Typically grades one and two tracks.

7. Access roads or anywhere motorised vehicles are allowed.

Under current regulations any electric bike over 300 watts is considered a motorized vehicle and can therefore go where these are provided for.

The Department will consider not allowing electric bikes where:

1. Impacts on natural, historic or cultural heritage values cannot be managed.
An assessment of the natural, historic or cultural values can be undertaken to make a judgment as to the impact that electric bikes may have on these environments.
2. Demand is not present or is unlikely to be sustained.
Signals for demand may include the local community, industry or visitors requesting use of electric bikes on trails. Users may also be using electric bikes on trails where they are not permitted. If there is no demand, it is not likely to be necessary to allow electric bikes on these trails.
3. Conflicts occur with other users that cannot be mitigated or managed.
The correct mix of recreation activities e.g. bikers and walkers on trails needs to be considered. The Department may have received complaints from the public regarding current use should normal bikes already be provided for on the trail.
4. Non- power assisted bikes are not allowed.
Use of electric bikes should only be considered in places where normal bikes are provided for as these trails are built to the required standard.
5. Higher grade⁵ biking trails.
As electric bikes are typically used by those less fit or physically able, higher grade biking trails may not be well suited to the user.
6. There is not enough capacity on the trail.
Issues are less likely to occur on lower use tracks. Should the existing level of use be of concern it may be appropriate to consider excluding electric bikes here.
7. Where trails cross more than one land owner or manager, the policy for electric bikes is not agreed by all owners/managers.
This will create a fragmented riding experience for the user.

⁵ Typically grades three and above tracks.

7. About this document

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Approved for use

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Amendments

AMENDMENT DATE	AMENDMENT DETAILS	DOC VERSION	AMENDED BY
23 March 2017	Changed CMP to NPMP – oversight in first version	1.1	Fiona Hall Tinaka Mearns