



NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

# Wollemi National Park

Horse Riding Management Plan for South-east Wollemi National Park



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Cover photo: Horse riders at Wheeny Creek Camping Area, south-east Wollemi National Park. Blue Mountains Trail Horse Riding Club/DPE

Published by:

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ISBN 978-1-922840-03-5  
EHG 2023/0017

First published in October 2022; reprinted January 2023 with corrections to Map 2

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# Background

## History of horse riding in the Hawkesbury region

Horses played a prominent role in farming and transportation in the colonial-era history of the Hawkesbury region. Horse husbandry, horse riding on private property and trail riding through bushland on public land continue to be a central element of the lifestyle enjoyed by many people who live in the area. Horse riding also has significant heritage value for many horse riders, and horse riding on historic trails in national parks provides for the maintenance of these cultural traditions.

Australia's first annual competitive endurance ride, the iconic Tom Quilty Gold Cup, was held for the first time in 1966 within this area, using trails that are now part of the Wollemi National Park. Other endurance riding events, including the Q60 endurance ride, are synonymous with the Hawkesbury and have traversed the south-eastern parts of Wollemi National Park for many years.

The *Hawkesbury Destination Management Plan and Action Plan 2017–2021* and the *Hawkesbury Regional Open Space Strategy* acknowledge the strategic significance of enhanced horse riding opportunities and facilities within the Hawkesbury Local Government Area. The south-eastern portion of Wollemi National Park near Wheeny Creek and Mountain Lagoon is relatively accessible for visitors from the Hawkesbury region and has been a focus for horse riding for many years (see Figure 1).

The opportunity to participate in endurance riding events and to ride trails within Wollemi National Park attracts people to the park and generates economic benefits for the region. It also provides opportunities for people to enjoy the park and realise the physical health and wellbeing benefits derived from spending time and exercising in natural areas.

## The legal basis for horse riding in national parks

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NSW) describes the purpose of national parks as being:

to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or phenomena, that provide opportunities for public appreciation and inspiration and sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment,

so as to enable those areas to be managed in accordance with the following management principles:

- a. the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes
- b. the conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value
- c. the protection of the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations
- d. the promotion of public appreciation and understanding of the national park's natural and cultural values
- e. provision for sustainable visitor or tourist use and enjoyment that is compatible with the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values



- f. provision for the sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values
- g. provision for the carrying out of development in any part of a special area (within the meaning of the *Hunter Water Act 1991*) in the national park that is permitted under section 185A having regard to the conservation of the national park's natural and cultural values
- h. provision for appropriate research and monitoring.

Management principle (e) highlights that visitor or tourist use and enjoyment that is sustainable and compatible with the conservation of the park's natural and cultural values should be provided. This also means that visitor activities that are not sustainable and not compatible with the conservation of the park's values should not be provided.

The National Parks and Wildlife Act and National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2019 (NSW) enable the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to permit horse riding in a park by setting aside a road, track, trail, way or area for this purpose. These areas may be set aside through the adoption of a plan of management and/or through notices displayed in the park. NPWS can also give consent for horse riding in areas that are not set aside for that purpose, including with written notices.

NPWS can permit horse riding only if it is consistent with the objects and management principles set out in the National Parks and Wildlife Act and with the plan of management.

## Wollemi National Park Plan of Management

The *Wollemi National Park Plan of Management* was adopted in 2001 under the National Parks and Wildlife Act and sets aside several specific areas for horse riding and overnight horse-based camping on the western side of the park.

In the south-east of the park, however, more detailed planning was required to identify appropriate areas for horse riding. The *Wollemi National Park Plan of Management* included a commitment to prepare a horse riding management plan for the Wheeney Creek and Mountain Lagoon area of the park (this plan) that identifies authorised horse riding routes in conjunction with user groups. The Wheeney Creek and Mountain Lagoon area is shown in Figure 2. This area is comprised of 5 precincts reflected in the tables and detailed maps.

Horse Riding Management Plan for South-east Wollemi National Park

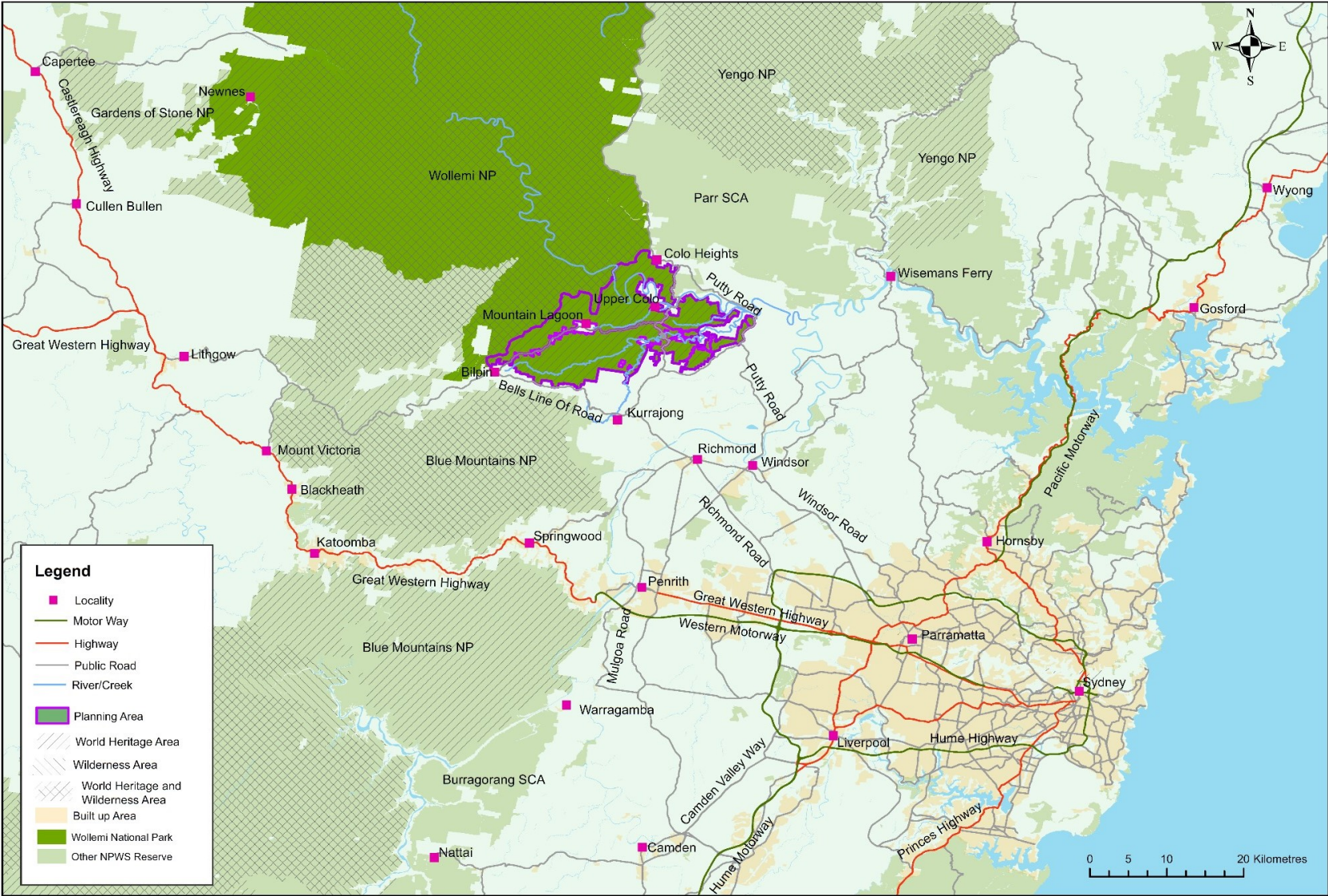


Figure 1 Regional overview

Horse Riding Management Plan for South-east Wollemi National Park

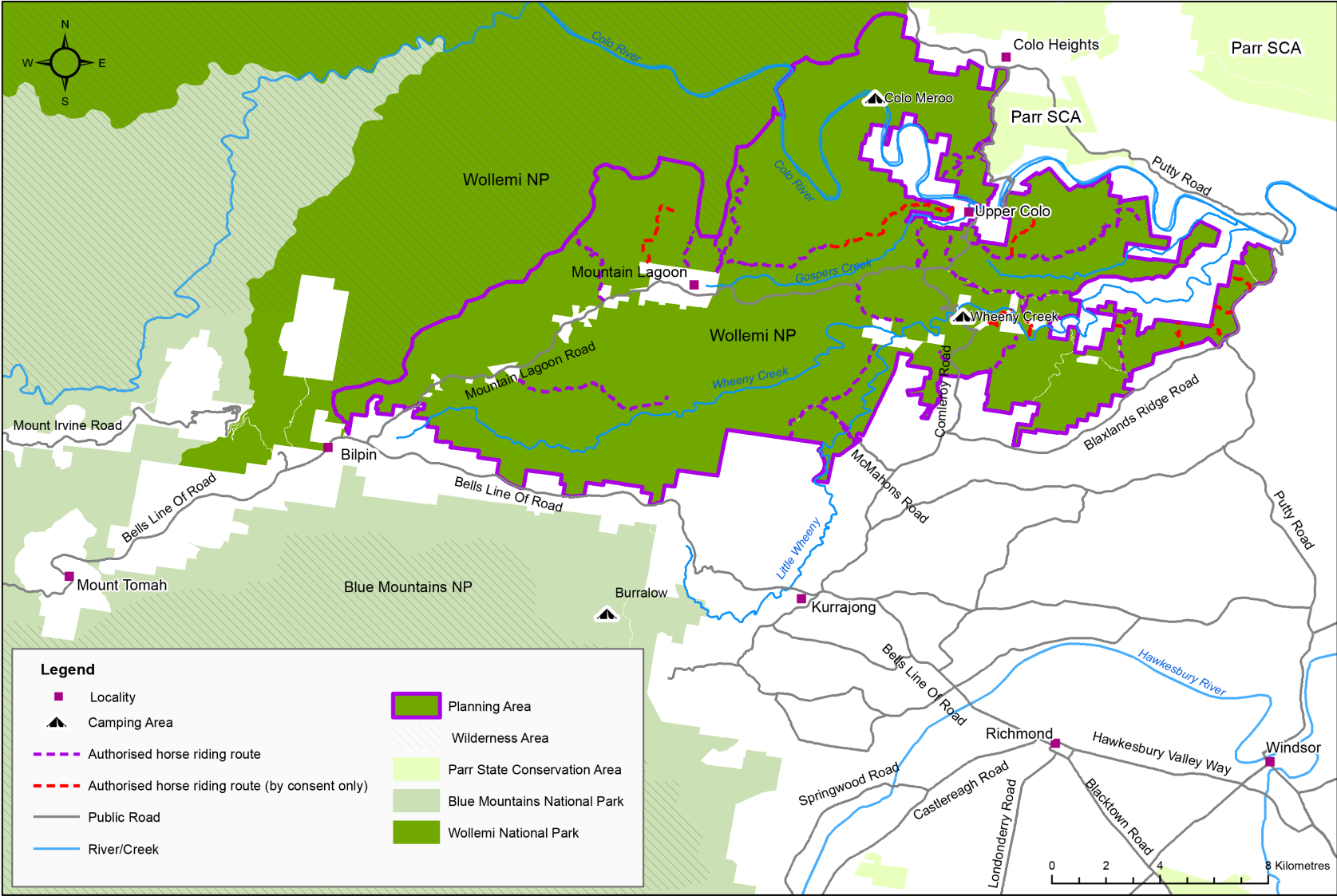


Figure 2 South-east Wollemi National Park, Wheeny Creek and Mountain Lagoon area



# Authorising horse riding routes

## Evaluation of proposals

In 2012, NPWS (then part of the Office of Environment and Heritage) developed the *Strategic Directions for Horse Riding in NSW National Parks* to guide the provision of improved horse riding opportunities in parks. This document was supported by the *NPWS Horse Riding Policy*, which was revised at the same time.

One of the NPWS's responses to the strategic directions and the commitments in the plan of management was the development of the draft horse riding management plan for south-east Wollemi National Park. Its goal was to identify appropriate horse riding routes within this area to facilitate a range of quality horse riding experiences that include competitive endurance events and trail horse riding. The planning process involved reviewing the following route types:

- Public roads – These are located outside the park boundary and are managed by relevant roads authorities. They are available for horse riding.
- Park roads – These provide public vehicle access for park visitors. They are located within the park boundary, identified in the plan of management and managed by NPWS. They are available for horse riding.
- Management trails – These are built and maintained for NPWS management operations. They are otherwise not available for public vehicle access. They can be made available for horse riding when set aside for this purpose.
- Bridle or 'informal' trails – These are unconstructed and unmaintained trails that have been historically used for horse riding but have not previously been identified as NPWS assets or set aside for horse riding. They are available for horse riding when set aside for this purpose.

As an initial step in the development of this horse riding management plan, potential horse riding routes such as management trails and bridle trails were identified by interested horse riders. NPWS evaluated each potential route by applying a set of decision-making criteria based on policy, the horse riding strategy and private property rights. The application of this decision-making framework identified those routes that are:

- accessible via public and park roads
- accessible via management trails that continue to be maintained by NPWS for management purposes
- not likely to impact on any known Aboriginal cultural heritage sites
- not likely to have a significant impact on threatened species or ecological communities
- not likely to have an adverse impact on the safety or enjoyment of other visitors.

## Consultation on evaluation and draft plan

A draft horse riding management plan identifying routes meeting these criteria was prepared. This draft plan was reviewed by a statewide Horse Riding Reference Group, National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council, the Blue Mountains Regional Advisory Committee and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Advisory Committee. These committees provided feedback that informed a draft plan for public exhibition.

The draft plan was on public exhibition between 18 December 2020 and 14 March 2021, to provide interested members of the public an opportunity to provide feedback on the potential

authorised horse riding routes. Eighty-three submissions were received on the draft plan during this period, including 73 from horse riding advocates. All submissions were reviewed and carefully considered by NPWS.

Feedback highlighted that some proposals in the draft plan were broadly supported by the community and therefore were appropriate for progression. Many submissions did not support the closure of routes that had been used by riders in the past. Some feedback also sought further consultation on this issue.

In response to the issues raised during the exhibition process, this final plan provides scope for further engagement between NPWS and representatives of the horse riding sector. To facilitate a cooperative relationship between NPWS and horse riders, a single point for engagement will be established. The intended outcome of this formalised relationship is to develop a mutual understanding of:

- opportunities to improve horse riding experiences in the Wheeny Creek and Mountain Lagoon area
- risks to horse riding opportunities
- the criteria that must be used to support decisions about recreational access
- the responsibilities of horse riders authorised to ride in the park
- the historic and potential future impacts of off-track recreation in the Wheeny Creek and Mountain Lagoon area
- the legal and financial factors that NPWS must consider before authorising recreational activities in parks
- management options that must be considered to address horse riding challenges and opportunities in the future.

## **Routes authorised for public access**

The routes that may be authorised listed in Table 1 will be identified for public access in the park by the installation and maintenance of notices at the relevant park entry points. These routes are also illustrated in Figures 3 to 7 of this plan.

Submissions received during the public exhibition period did not raise objections to these routes becoming authorised for horse riding.

**Table 1 Routes that may be authorised for public access**

Precinct and route name	Route type	Length (km)	Access to trail
<b>Mountain Lagoon</b>			
Cabbage Tree Creek trail	Management trail	1.9	Sams Way
Cora Creek trail	Management trail	1.4	Sams Way
Gospers Ridge trail	Management trail	4.4	Sams Way and T3
North Wheeny Gap trail	Management trail	5.7	Mountain Lagoon Road
Prickle trail	Bridle trail	2.0	Mountain Lagoon Road
T3 trail	Park road	5.1	Sams Way
Tootie Creek trail	Management trail	2.9	Mountain Lagoon Road
<b>Upper Colo</b>			
Gees Arm North trail	Management trail	7.1	Comleroy Road
Gospers Lookout trail	Management trail	1.7	Mountain Lagoon Road
Powerline 2, 6, 7, 8 & 9 trails (to park boundary only)	Management trails	3.5	Colo Heights Road
Powerline 10 trail	Management trail	1.2	Comleroy Road
<b>Wheeny Creek</b>			
Convict trail <sup>1</sup>	Road reserve	0.8	Gees Arm South trail
Gees Arm South trail	Public road	4.9	Comleroy Road
Livingstones north trail	Bridle trail	1.9	Ruins trail
Powerline 12 trail	Management trail	0.6	Comleroy Road
Ruins trail	Road reserve	1.0	Comleroy Road
<b>Blaxlands Ridge</b>			
Ironbark Ridge trail	Park road	3.0	Kirkwood Road on Blaxlands Ridge Road
<b>Kurrajong</b>			
McMahons trail	Management trail	2.7	McMahons Road and trail on Crown land parcel <sup>2</sup>
Blue Gum trail	Management trail	3.3	McMahons Road and McMahons trail <sup>2</sup>

1. From Gees Arm South trail to private property boundary (see Table 2).

2. Future access may be affected by the outcome of a current Native Title claim.

## Routes authorised by consent

Organised competitions and other organised horse riding activities (commercial and non-commercial) may be authorised to use the routes listed in Table 1 and Table 2, through a written consent from NPWS. Access to the routes listed in Table 2 is authorised via an agreement between the landholder and event/activity organiser.

NPWS assesses proposals for events, club rides and commercial tours to ensure that proposals are sustainable, compatible with the conservation of the park's values, and consistent with goals for the safety and enjoyment of other park users. Consent may also be provided for maintaining event routes, training for events, and rides that are organised by registered community groups or businesses. NPWS works with event organisers and businesses to ensure that authorised activities are carefully managed.

During the public exhibition period, there were no objections raised about horse riding routes for organised group activities within the park. However, many submissions expressed the view that these routes should be open for general public access as well.

**Table 2 Routes that may be authorised by consent**

Precinct and route name	Route type	Length (km)	Access road
<b>Mountain Lagoon</b>			
Long Ridge trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	4.5	Sams Way
<b>Upper Colo</b>			
Ferrari trail	Management trail	2.0	Comleroy Road and Gees Arm North
Wards track <sup>1</sup>	Bridle trail	5.0	Sams Way, T3 and Gospers Ridge; Upper Colo Road
<b>Wheeny Creek</b>			
Boongarie trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	1.7	Comleroy Road
Convict trail <sup>1,2</sup>	Bridle trail	1.0	Gees Arm South and upper section of Convict trail
<b>Blaxlands Ridge</b>			
Lot 126 and 129 access trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	0.3	Blaxlands Ridge Road, Ironbark Ridge trail
Lot 14 access trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	1.4	Blaxlands Ridge Road
Lot 12 access trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	1.0	Blaxlands Ridge Road
Lot 11 access trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	0.7	Blaxlands Ridge Road
Lot 2 access trail <sup>1</sup>	Management trail	1.9	Blaxlands Ridge Road

1. Access via private landholder agreement with event/activity organiser.

2. This lower section extends through private property from the Convict trail described in Table 1.



## Consideration of future horse riding proposals

The network of authorised horse riding routes within the Wheeny Creek and Mountain Lagoon area of the park may be revised to improve opportunities for horse riders, to prevent impacts on park values, to avoid conflict between horse riding and other activities, and to facilitate park management activities (e.g. fuel reduction burning, weed management and infrastructure maintenance).

NPWS will undertake a rigorous assessment process in accordance with the relevant plan of management and policies; and other legal, environmental or visitor safety considerations before authorising any recreational activity in a park.

Following collaboration with a representative horse riding body and a thorough evaluation and assessment process, NPWS may consider authorising horse riding on routes that fulfill all of the following criteria:

- Criterion 1     **Visitor experience** – The route provides an enjoyable experience and does not compromise the safety and enjoyment of other visitors.
- Criterion 2     **Access** – There is existing legal access to the beginning of the route.
- Criterion 3     **Sustainability** – The route is in an appropriate location where park values are protected, and ongoing use is ecologically sustainable. Consideration will be given to:
  - 2a) consistency with the *Wollemi National Park Plan of Management*
  - 2b) risks to Aboriginal cultural and shared heritage values
  - 2c) risks to threatened species and ecological communities
  - 2d) risk of soil erosion
  - 2e) risk of weed invasion or plant pathogen spread
  - 2f) risks to the maintenance of water quality.
- Criterion 4     **Cost-effective use of resources** – The creation of any new assets is minimised; and resources are available to facilitate construction, any supporting infrastructure and ongoing maintenance.

NPWS will continue to monitor the condition of all authorised routes and may consider closing routes that are assessed as no longer meeting these criteria. Closures may be applied on a seasonal, ongoing or temporary basis (e.g. after wet weather, fire or other incidents).

Riders must follow authorised trails and are encouraged to abide by the *Code of Practice for Horse Riding in Parks*. The code includes guidelines to help avoid and minimise any possible impacts on the park's natural and cultural values.

NPWS communicates up-to-date information for visitors about permitted activities and closures via the NPWS visitor website. Information may also be communicated via signage within the park.

NPWS welcomes opportunities to continue to work with a single point of contact for horse riders to identify opportunities to improve horse riding experiences, monitor levels of horse riding, identify and monitor any trails showing signs of significant erosion or other impacts arising from off-track recreation, and monitor levels of weed introduction and spread.

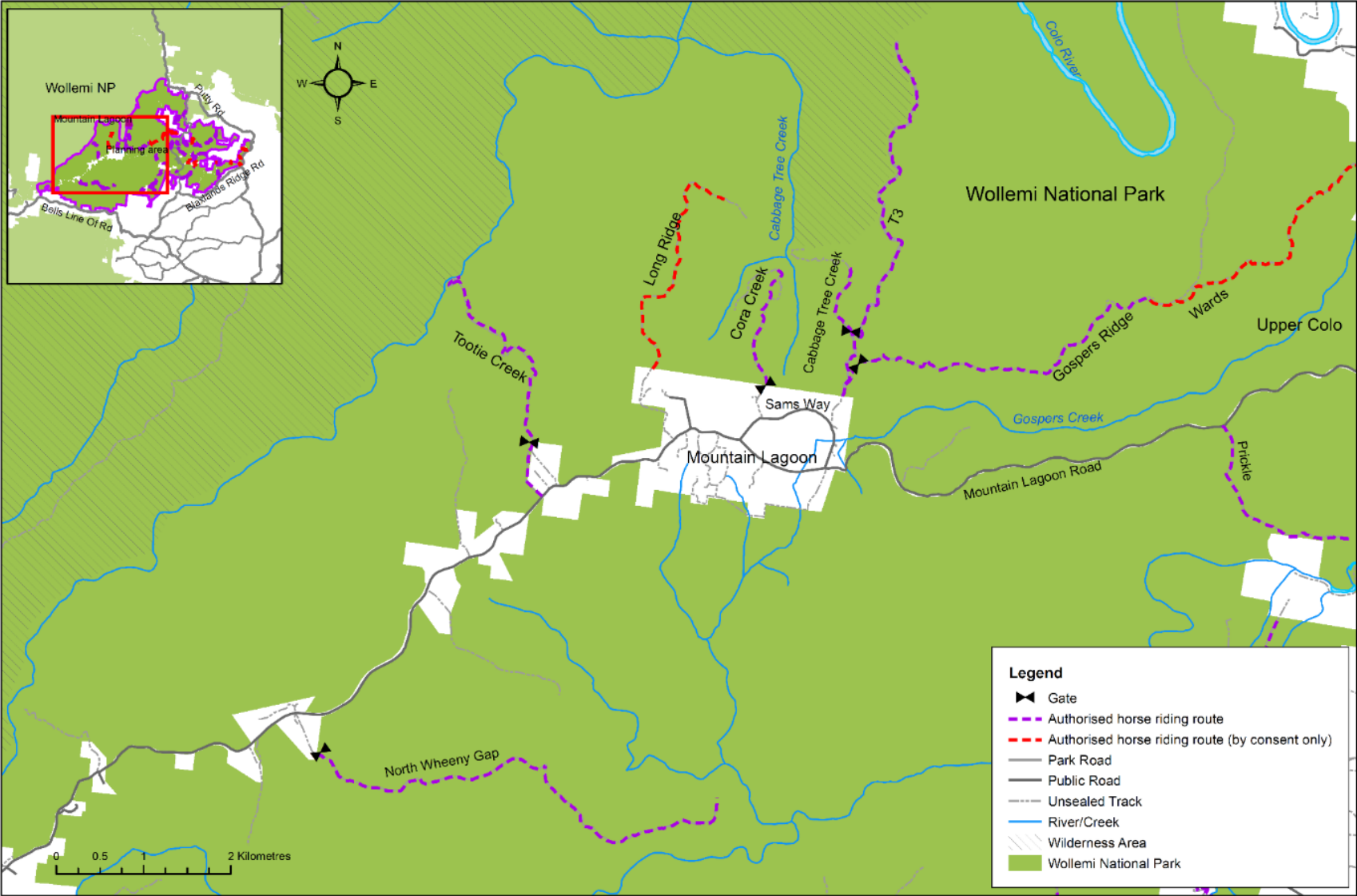


Figure 3 Authorised horse riding routes: Mountain Lagoon precinct

Horse Riding Management Plan for South-east Wollemi National Park

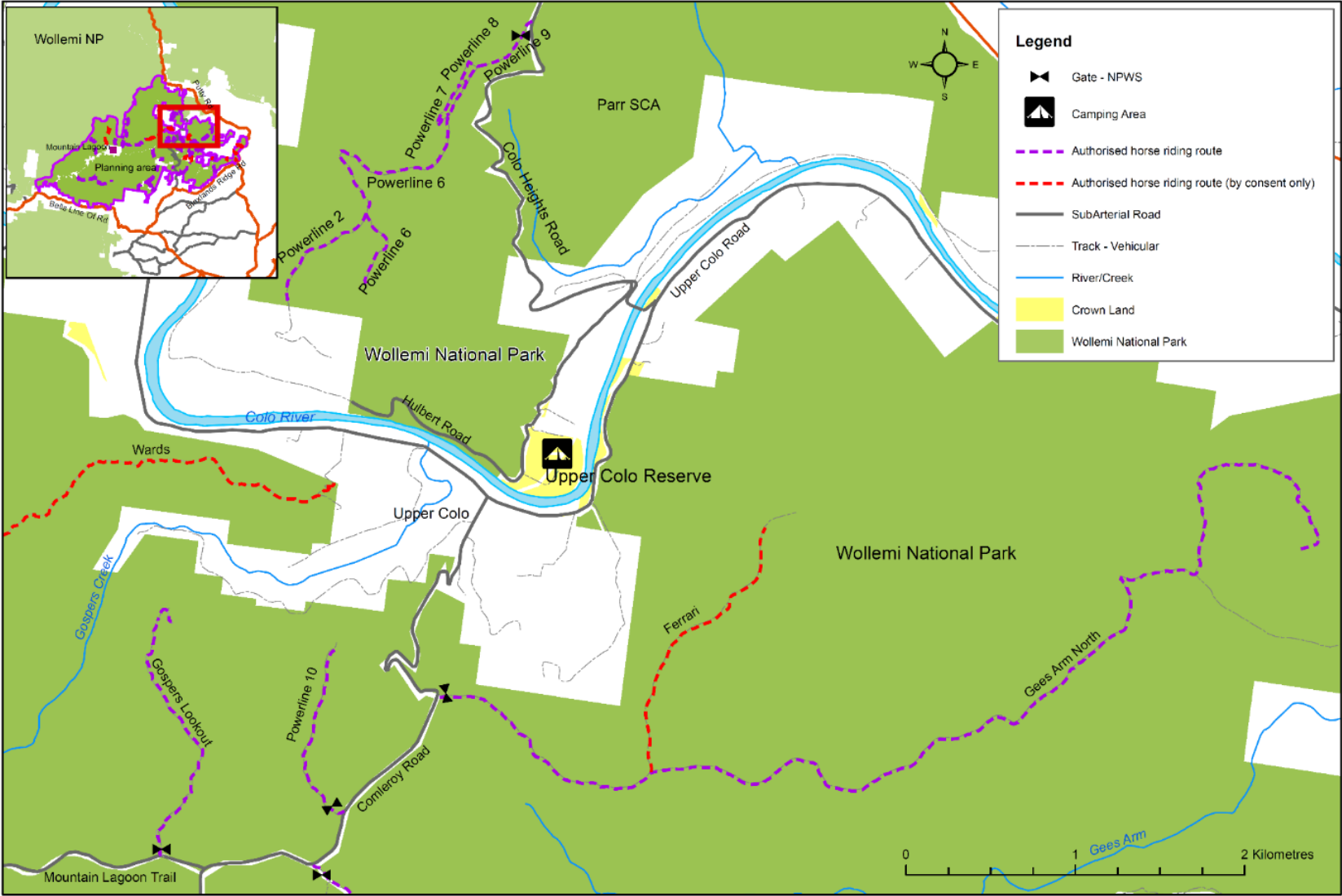


Figure 4 Authorised horse riding routes: Upper Colo precinct

Horse Riding Management Plan for South-east Wollemi National Park

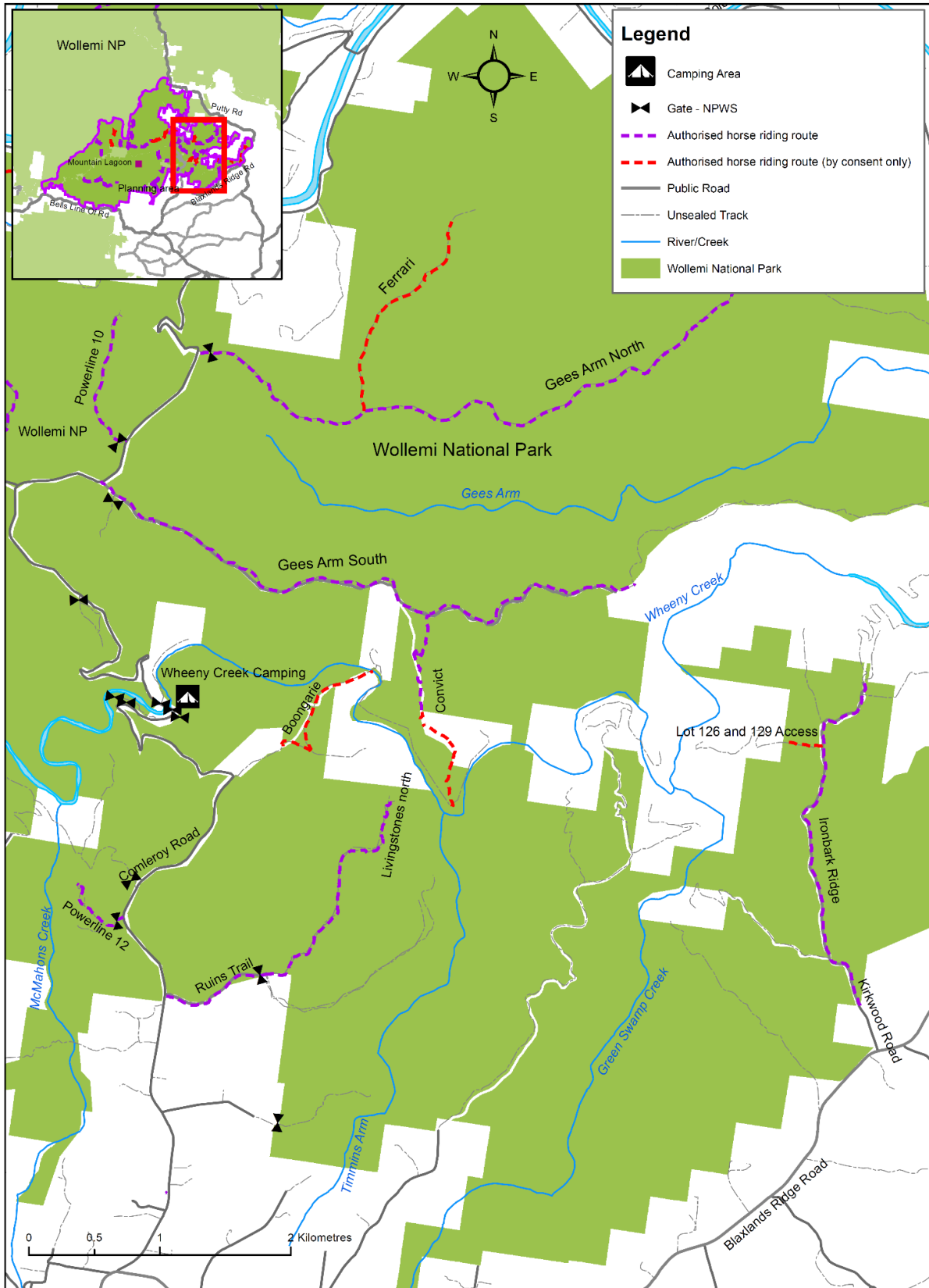


Figure 5 Authorised horse riding routes: Wheeny Creek precinct



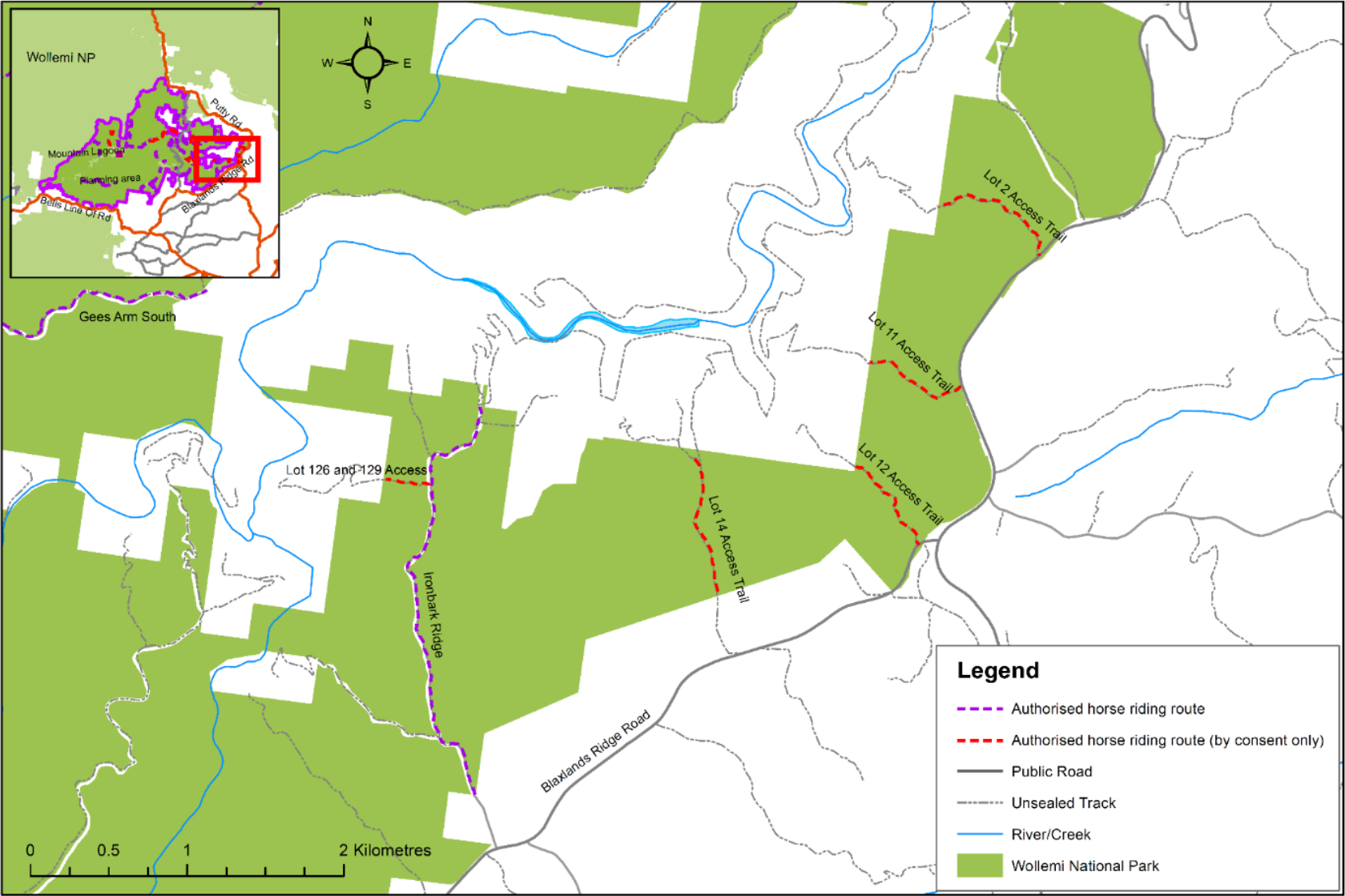


Figure 6 Authorised horse riding routes: Blaxlands Ridge precinct

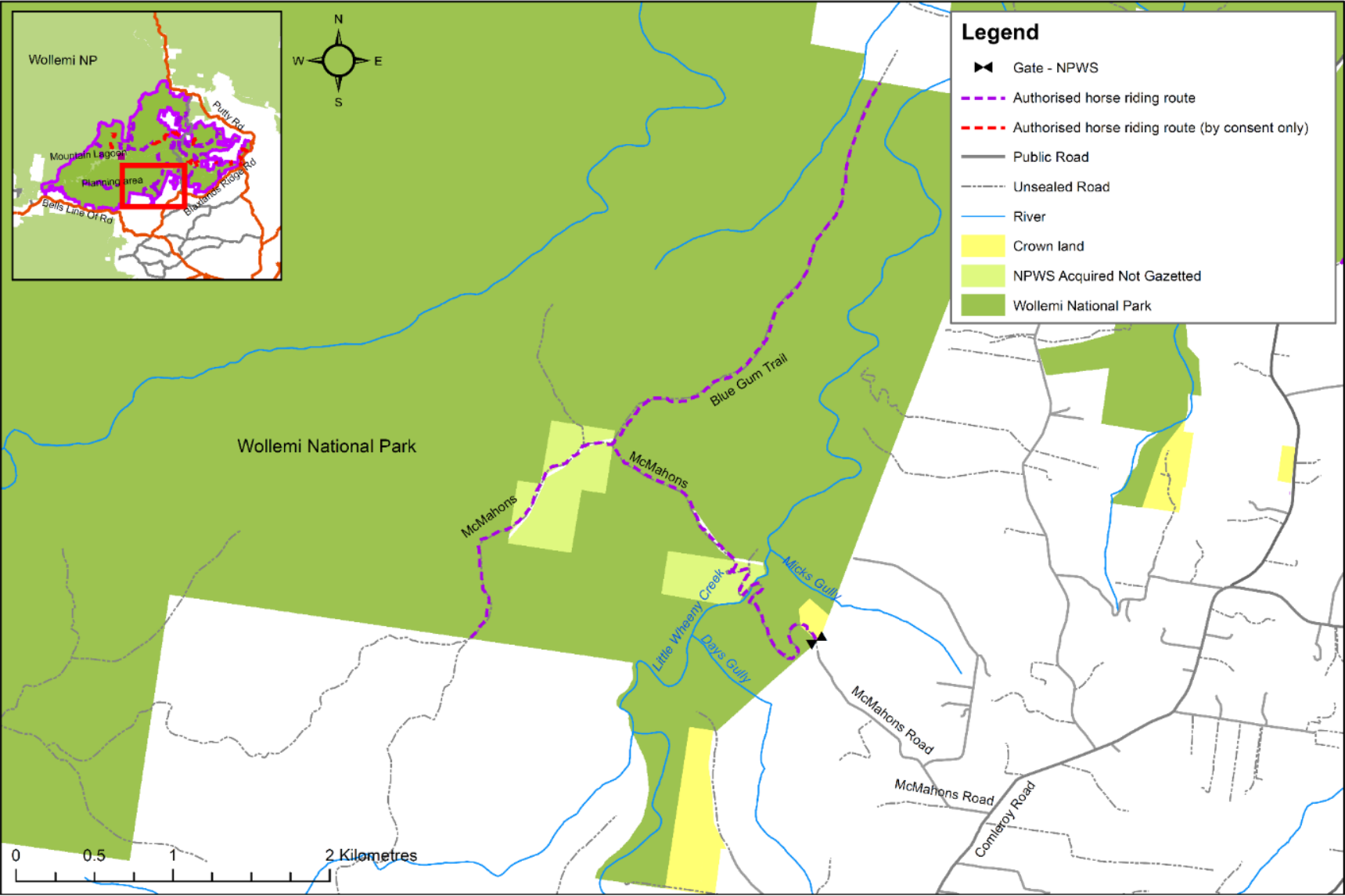


Figure 7 Authorised horse riding routes: Kurrajong precinct

## More information

- [Code of Practice for Horse Riding in Parks](#)
- [Hawkesbury Destination Management Plan and Action Plan 2017–2021](#)
- [Hawkesbury Regional Open Space Strategy](#)
- [NPWS Horse Riding Policy](#)
- [NPWS visitor website](#)
- [Strategic Directions for Horse Riding in NSW National Parks](#)
- [Wollemi National Park Plan of Management](#)