



**Western Cape  
Government**

Environmental Affairs &  
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**BETTER TOGETHER.**

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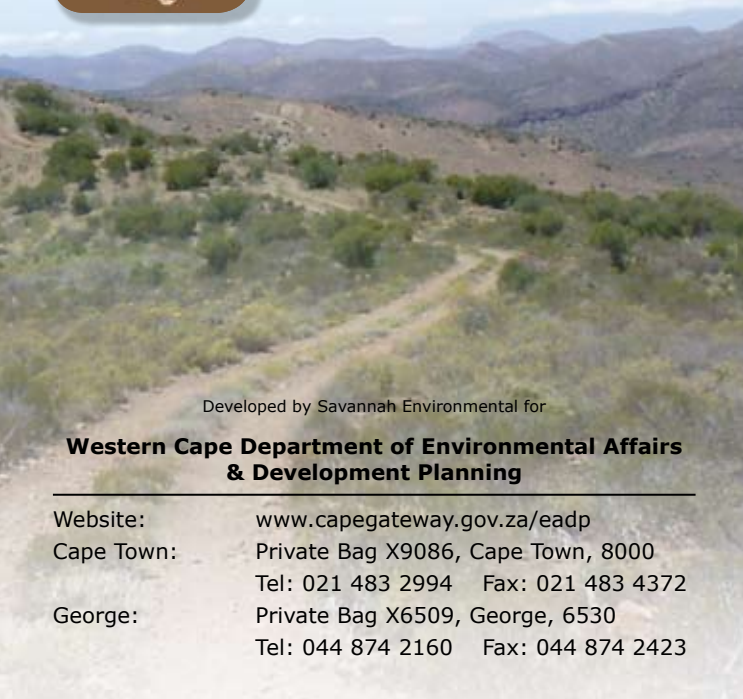
# **Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Use of Off-Road Routes and Trials**



This practical guide was developed by the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP), in collaboration with key stakeholders.



Its purpose is to guide and encourage sustainable use of off-road routes and promote ethics and environmentally-responsible behaviour of new recreational trail users, and reinforce environmental awareness in regular users.



Developed by Savannah Environmental for

**Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning**

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PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
 OF THE WESTERN CAPE:  
 DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
 AFFAIRS AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING  
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- A properly selected and mounted winch can be an invaluable tool and can help reduce the potential for environmental damage. If possible, winch between vehicles, not to an external anchor. If you have to winch from a tree, protect the trunk from damage by the winch cable.

**Respect the environment and rights of others**

Do all you can to help conserve our environment for yourself and future generations. In order to have minimal impact on this environment, it is important to:

**Obey route & road restrictions**

- Obey laws and regulations relating to ORV use.
- Comply with instructions and cautions as indicated by signage on the route – including speed limits.
- Adhere to travel restrictions – these are in place to protect natural resources, reduce disturbance of wildlife, and provide other recreational opportunities.
- Light fires only in fireplaces provided, or as directed by signs.

**Be mindful of the environment you are in**

- Respect the cultural, heritage and natural values of public and private land by obeying restrictions that may apply.
- Avoid sensitive habitats such as wetlands and riparian areas.
- Respect all flora and fauna. Stop and look, but never disturb or remove.
- Keep noise to a minimum so as not to disturb local wildlife, especially during breeding seasons.
- Prevent the spread of noxious weeds by cleaning your vehicle before you begin the route and once you have completed it – seeds can be moved between sites when caught in the tread of tyres, or in mud caked on to your vehicle.
- Be careful with fire at all times of the year – this environment is sensitive. Don't light fires on hot and windy days.
- Ensure that a fire is never left unattended and is completely extinguished (cool to touch) before you leave the rest area.
- Keep your vehicle mechanically sound and clean to reduce the environmental impact. Leaking oil or fuel may foul/contaminate watercourses and land, particularly

- during prolonged stops. Excessive exhaust emissions pollute the air.
- If you brought it in with you, take it back out with you. Don't leave anything behind. Keep the environment clean and never litter. Do more than your share. If you see litter on the route, pick it up.
- Use provided ablution facilities. In emergencies, be sensitive to the environment and ensure all waste is buried.

**Encountering other users**

- Be courteous to other trail users and landowners, and be sure to close gates behind you.
- Respect the rights of other users on tracks and at rest areas.
- Give way to faster traffic and yield to oncoming traffic if they are travelling uphill.

**Be a responsible off-road route user**

Travelling off-road routes is a wonderful way to see natural and unspoilt areas, and to experience nature.

- Foster an appreciation for those who maintain and financially support the trails.
- Do not allow inexperienced drivers to drive your vehicle as they may cause irreparable damage.
- Keep a safe distance between vehicles. Enter tough spots one vehicle at a time.
- Wait for the vehicle in front of you to make it successfully to the top of a hill before proceeding. They may be unable to make it and will need to reverse down.
- Record and report any 'hot-spot' or problem areas encountered – that is, areas which have suffered erosion damage, environmental disturbance or degradation. Provide details to the route owner for remedial action.
- Don't mix driving with alcohol.

**Enjoy the experience**

Keep in mind that as there are not textbook answers for every problem, the ingenuity, resourcefulness, skill and common sense of the user must prevail. Drive as slowly as possible, but as fast as necessary. Common sense and common courtesy will help ensure that what is here today will be here to enjoy tomorrow.



# Environmental Ethics & Sustainable Use of Off-Road Routes & Trails

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR RECREATIONAL TRAIL USERS  
 PROVINCIAL GUIDELINES FOR THE WESTERN CAPE





This brochure provides practical guidance to the users of motorised off-road vehicles (or ORVs), including 2- and 4-wheel drive vehicles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), quadbikes and motorcycles, as to the use and enjoyment of off-road routes and trails in a sustainable and environmentally-friendly manner.

When using off-road routes and trails for recreational purposes you, as the user, play an important role in maintaining the natural environment for everyone to enjoy. No matter which mode of travel you choose, it is important to remember that we all have a responsibility to the environment, to the trail tread, other users and ourselves. 'Minimum impact' and environmental protection principles should be practised by all.

The relationship of each trail to the surrounding natural and cultural environment is unique, and decisions and actions taken must be trail specific. Careless operation of your ORV can cause damage to the environment and may result in irreversible damage or ultimately loss of species. Good practises on the trail and at rest areas preserve the environment and our privilege of continuing to enjoy the off-road routes throughout the Western Cape Province.

Do all you can to help conserve our environment for yourself and future generations.

### **Understand the Environment of the Western Cape**

The Western Cape Province is one of the world's most biologically rich environments. It is home to 3 globally recognised centres of plant diversity - the Cape Floristic Region (CFR), Succulent Karoo and Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany centres. The Province is dominated by the CFR, the defined area of which is less than 90,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Yet this region contains the highest density of plant species in the world (more than 9000 plant species - nearly 3% of the world's plant species), 70% of which are found nowhere else (known as endemic). Unfortunately, the CFR also has the highest concentration of threatened plants in the world. The CFR includes the fire-prone Fynbos Biome and a portion of the Nama Karoo Biome. The region is also home to high faunal diversity and endemism in both its terrestrial and aquatic communities. The rich biodiversity of the Western Cape Province is due to an extensive and complex array of

habitat types derived from the diverse topography - rugged mountains, through lowlands, to coastal dunes - as well as climatic diversity - with the western parts receiving most rainfall in winter.

### **Educate yourself, and be prepared before you go**

As a user, you should be aware of what the possible impacts of using an ORV in the Western Cape environment could be. Educating yourself and others regarding the potential impacts you can have on the environment, the advantages of responsible driving as well as appropriate environmental ethics is critical to sustainable trail use.

#### **Have you...**

- Attended an accredited training course which covered environmental ethics?
- Joined a four-wheel drive club where you can learn from experienced drivers?

#### **Do you...**

- Fully know and understand the limits of your vehicle?
- Recognise the limits of your own skills - it is important that you stay in control of your vehicle at all times.

#### **Are you...**

- Prepared with sufficient recovery equipment, as well as tools, supplies and spares for roadside repairs?
- Familiar with the local ORV laws and regulations, and any relevant restrictions of the route you plan to travel?

### **Plan your trip**

Prepare yourself and your vehicle for the trip.

- Never travel alone.
- Obtain information on the route which you have chosen:
  - Is the route dry and suitable for travel?
  - Does the route have restricted periods of operation (times of day or seasonal)?
  - What is the grade or difficulty rating of the route?
  - Is your vehicle compatible with the route conditions?
  - Does the route comply with relevant environmental standards and laws?
  - Has the route been subject to a routine monitoring and maintenance plan?
- Be aware of and prepared for changes in elevation, terrain and weather conditions.

- Ensure that your vehicle is adequately equipped to complete the route with minimum damage to the environment (e.g. winches, tow straps, tree straps, sand ladders, mud racks etc).

### **Travel with minimal impact**

Many driving techniques owe as much to safety as they do to limiting damage to the environment (and to vehicles). Minimal impact ORV driving techniques will enable our future generations to share the beauty of the environment and minimise damage to the environment. Good driving leaves less impact.

#### **Use a map**

- Keep a clear map of the route with you. Use reliable GPS co-ordinates if available for the route.
- Use maps or signs to stay on open and maintained routes. Don't assume a side route is drivable simply because you see tracks of other vehicles - these may have been made by misinformed drivers or deliberate violators.
- Follow the stipulated route direction.

#### **'Stay on the Trail, or Stay Home'**

- Adopt minimal impact driving practices.
- Keep to existing tracks and trails, and drive only where permitted. Don't create new routes, take short-cuts or expand existing trails. Adopt the "Stay on the Trail, or Stay Home" philosophy.
- Avoid unnecessary widening of the trail by driving according to the limits of the tread width and route conditions. Avoid causing irreparable damage by cutting corners on bends, turns or at junctions.
- Remove obstacles from the route - don't unnecessarily create new tracks by driving around them. Detour from the formal route only to pass immovable obstacles which cannot be safely negotiated with your vehicle.

#### **Ride Responsibly**

- Drive as slowly as possible, but as fast as necessary. In driving slowly, you will have more time to select the best route to follow.
- Plan your route, allowing for sufficient time on the trail and allow for unforeseen events. Unnecessary speed causes extensive environmental damage, and poor planning often necessitates unnecessary speed.

- Avoid slipping or wheel spinning when ascending or descending steep grades - these actions lead to surface erosion.
- Repack rocks and/or surface material where these may have been displaced from the travel surface.
- Minimise damage to soils by avoiding steep routes during wet weather.
- Avoid using trail sections which are muddy. Where it is not possible to avoid these areas, drive through as straight as possible at a steady speed. Do not create new tracks around muddy areas.
- Under no circumstances should you turn around on a hill.
- Take responsibility to prevent rutting the trail tread or adjacent areas.
- Other than in areas specifically designated or designed to test vehicle and driver capabilities over obstacles, follow techniques aimed at minimising environmental impact. Obstacle driving techniques should not be practiced in areas not designated or designed for that purpose.

#### **Crossing sensitive areas**

- Cross rivers and streams only where low-level river crossing signs are clearly marked. Always check the depth of the water.
- Drive slowly and steadily into the water, creating as little disturbance to the river bed as possible.
- Green ribbons of vegetation found along banks of rivers or other waterbodies are called riparian areas. As the vegetation can help stabilise banks - avoid riding in these areas as wheel ruts are easily made and disrupt their functioning.
- Stay out of wetlands.

### **Getting out of trouble**

Important considerations in staying out of trouble, and in recovery situations include:

- Engage the appropriate gear for the conditions of the route.
- If your vehicle gets stuck, stop before you cause irreparable damage.
- Lower your tyre pressure to improve traction: you can often drive away with little or no impact or surface damage.
- At low tyre pressures, keep speed down and avoid sharp turns and heavy braking.