

Annexure C: Off-Road Trail Grading Initiative

Overview

In 2004, a formal trail evaluation assessment initiative was started as a joint venture between:

- DriveOut Magazine;
- Participating trail owners; and
- A group of independent assessors nominated from the off-road industry.

In the first year, more than 60 trails were evaluated.

The framework that was developed has been continuously improved ever since, and although according to SAROOF it still requires fine-tuning and inputs from the industry, it provides a good starting point.

It is proposed that, in conjunction with DEAT, Nature Conservation and other relevant departments, the process and framework developed should be adopted.

The framework can be amended as required e.g. additional information, focus areas and standards can be incorporated in order to satisfy the minimum requirements of the EIA process.

The process developed envisages that, after a trail / route has been assessed for the first time, the information can be used to formally apply for approval of the 4x4 trail / route by DEAT. Should additional information be required- or areas of concern be identified, then a comprehensive EIA process can be initiated.

The “Trail Evaluation and Assessment Model” is divided into 5 sections with each section assessed, viz:

- **Section A: Essential Information** – This covers contact information of the owner, the evaluator, any trail grading information available, the cost of trail and general comments / recommendations.
- **Section B: Accommodation** – This section requires information on the type of accommodation that exists e.g. is there covered accommodation, formal camping and/or bush camping.
- **Section C: Trail Assessment** – In this section the trail is assessed on reception and access control, information provided, driving experience and trail maintenance.

- **Section D: Environmental Assessment** – This section evaluates aspects of the trail such as trail registration status, trail facilities, governance, specific rules and signage, implementation and procedure and practice.
- **Section E: Overall Experience** – Aspects that are taken into consideration for this section is the ability to maintain interest and driving experience, scenery, richness of fauna and flora, variety of attractions on offer, quality or appeal of camping or accommodation facilities, commitment to preserving / rehabilitating the environment, charisma or commitment of guides / owners, value for money and the wilderness or get-away-from-it-all experience.

In scoring, some sections count / weigh more than others.

The framework has been included below:

Destination Classification:

The destination / route / trail is classified as:

- Pristine;
- Natural; or
- Rural / urban.

PRISTINE:

1. Only contact with local population;
2. Only guided groups;
3. Pollution free environment;
4. Environmental policy in place;
5. Route rotation;
6. Vegetation – indigenous bush;
7. Natural water;
8. Natural swimming throughout year;
9. Natural drinking water;
10. Natural game; and
11. No farm animals.

NATURAL:

1. Only contact with local population;
2. Unguided groups (permit system);
3. Indigenous vegetation with some alien flora;
4. Man made dams;
5. Natural drinking water;

6. Alien fauna; and
7. Farm animals.

RURAL/URBAN:

1. Facilities open to all;
2. Alien fauna/flora;
3. Man made structures;
4. Swimming pools and picnic areas; and
5. Unguided groups.

Accommodation:

Assessment of accommodation includes:

What do we look for:

1. Covered accommodation
2. Formal camping (e.g. permanent tented camps)
3. Bush camping

What do we look at:

1. Overall impression (atmosphere)
2. Position / location
3. Views
4. Shade
5. Facilities: upkeep, condition, hygiene, comfort of bathroom, showers, baths, toilets, sleeping quarters, rooms, cooking area, kitchen.
6. Upkeep, condition, comfort and atmosphere of the social area / lapa
7. Braai facilities
8. Other noteworthy facilities

Trail Assessment:

The trail is assessed according to 11 criteria, viz:

- Trail type;
- Trail focus;
- Terrain;
- Experience required;
- Vehicle restrictions;
- Trail facilities;
- Trail grading (a difficulty assessment);

- Reception and access control;
- Information provided;
- Driving experience; and
- Trail maintenance.

Table 1: Trail Assessment Criteria

Category	Criteria
Trail Type	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Day trip 2. Weekender 3. Extended 4. Across the Border
Trail Focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scenic 2. Adventure 3. Eco-awareness 4. Educational 5. Challenging 6. Training
Terrain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mountainous 2. Coastal 3. Wilderness 4. Mud / slippery 5. Sand / dunes 6. Forest 7. Open plains
Experience Required	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Novice 2. Competent 3. Expert
Vehicle Restrictions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Suitable for 4x2 vehicles with diff-lock 2. Suitable for soft roaders (No low range & limited ground clearance) 3. Vehicles needs good ground clearance 4. Suitable for vehicles without diff-lock 5. Low-range essential / required 6. Quad bikes are welcome / only on special request? (Mark which)

Category	Criteria
Trail Facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guiding 2. Rescue 3. Shade 4. Water 5. Communication 6. Navigation 7. Fuel 8. Accommodation 9. Other
Trail Grading (Difficulty Assessment)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overall 2. Most difficult obstacle without an escape route 3. Most difficult obstacle with an escape route 4. What percentage of the trail is grade 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5
Reception and Access Control	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signage to find trail 2. Are guests received in person by the owner or his representative? 3. Friendliness 4. Efficiency (bookings / reception) 5. Reception facilities 6. Administration (indemnity forms, access register completed) 7. Does the owner know who is on the trail and who has left – at all times 8. Is assessment of vehicles done before visitors attempt the trail 9. Is experience of driver tested before attempting the trail
Information Provided	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information of general interest supplied 2. Information supplied of the trail specifically 3. Navigational information supplied (MAPS, GPS Maps, Waypoints) 4. Trail focus information supplied
Driving experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent was the trail objective / vision of the trail owners achieved 2. Scenic or other interests on the trail 3. Ability of trail to maintain interest of guests 4. Shade 5. Water / swimming available 6. Signage or guiding 7. Trail maintenance

Category	Criteria
Trail maintenance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overall impression / trail conditions 2. Erosion repair 3. Litter control 4. Cutting back of bushes to prevent scratches 5. Alien control

Trail Environmental Assessment:

The trail environmental assessment includes:

1. Trail registration status:

1. Has the trail been registered with DEAT?
2. Has the trail been inspected by Nature Conservation?
3. Has there been a formal application by the Land Owner or by a specialist consultant?

2. Land status:

1. Is the property or part thereof a World Heritage Site?
2. Is the property privately owned, or is it under the control of a National or Provincial Body?
3. Is the property or part thereof within the boundaries of an official Biosphere?
4. National / Provincial Nature / Game Reserve?
5. Private Nature / Game Reserve?
6. Any other official conservation / protection status applicable?
7. Is the property on a farm and, if so, is it a working farm or dormant land?
8. Are there any protected fauna & flora, archaeology features, caves, Bushman paintings etc. found on the property? If yes, please specify the nature thereof.

3. Trail facilities:

1. Is the route and facilities laid out in an environmentally friendly way?
2. Does the route reduce soil erosion? Are there erosion walls in place in steep sections and are these maintained?
3. Are the areas around the campsite and accommodation in good condition (vegetation)?
4. Are biodegradable products used?
5. Are separate bins available for waste? Is non-degradable waste, e.g. glass, tin, plastic and other synthetic material disposed of on the property? Are visitors required to remove their own waste?
6. Environmental Rehabilitation Policy Active?
7. Environmental Impact Assessment Conducted?
8. Environmental Information available?
9. Medical Evacuation Plan?

10. Fire extinguishers/Fire Buckets?
 11. Environmentally friendly waste policies?
 12. Environmentally friendly lighting?
 13. Secure parking?
 14. Secure environment?
4. **Governance:** (with regards to the following focus areas, are the governing structures, corresponding rules in place and is there appropriate signage / information to remind visitors thereof?)
1. Accommodation;
 2. Driving Experience / Trail;
 3. Environmental;
 4. Safety;
 5. Focus as defined in Section B (Trail Vision); and
 6. Specific Rules and Signage.
5. **Specific rules and signage:**
1. Speed limit on the route and roads;
 2. Banning of undue noise;
 3. Firearms and shooting forbidden;
 4. Collecting of firewood forbidden;
 5. Collecting of any animal, plant, insect or rock forbidden;
 6. Littering forbidden;
 7. Fires only in designated areas;
 8. Driving only on existing tracks and roads; and
 9. Is there a comprehensive map showing sensitive areas.
6. **Implementation, procedures and practice:**
1. Are the above procedures and rules actually applied?
 2. Are visitors briefed orally or on paper regarding the environmentally friendly approach on the property?