Sustaining Equestrian Trails

By Denise Y. O’Meara for Equine Land Conservation Resource

Here’s a wellness aspect you may not have considered – the condition of your horse trails. A poorly designed or maintained trail can lead to that most dreaded situation, denial of equine access.

To remain available to horseback riders, trails need respectful treatment. From design to maintenance, from concept to long-term preservation, careful thought and actions are paramount for equestrians to sustain trail access.

The relationships that you have with landowners and managers need to be nurtured and maintained too. Lack of respect for these relationships will likely lead to angry people and closed trails.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Whether public or private, trail landowners and managers have a stake in the value and condition of their land. Trail abuse by equestrians makes them very unhappy.
2. Land owners and managers are always concerned about liability. A lack of understanding about liability protections can prevent a trail from ever being built or close one to use.
3. Horses are tough on land. The torque of pointy feet leads to churning of soil and plants, creating conditions for erosion.
4. Stormwater runoff makes trail erosion possible. Once erosion starts it needs to be corrected quickly. Clay soils are especially prone to erosion.
5. Rider behavior on the trail can result in enjoyable outings. Or it can undermine trail owner/manager relations. Contributing to erosion by riding off the trail, riding in wet weather conditions, leaving trash behind, not watching out for other users, and not reporting trail damage are examples of bad rider behavior.
6. Community planners make decisions about land use in your trail areas. In fact, they probably already have. Research current and future decisions that may affect access to your trails. Without this knowledge, you may miss the chance to prevent trail closings and to help guide recreational and equine accessible trail planning in your community.
A combination of bad rider behavior, poor landowner/manager relations, degraded trail conditions, and uninformed equestrians, will eventually lead to trail access loss. Trail Gone. No New Trails. This Means You.

**SEVEN STEPS TO PRESERVING EQUINE TRAIL ACCESS**

**Existing Trails: 7 steps to preserving existing trail access.**

1. Start with assessing the condition of existing trails. Are they too steep? Do they have ruts that make people ride outside of trail edges? Are surfaces washed away? Is soil and plant loss contributing to erosion? Are stream crossings too dispersed, stream banks eroded? If these conditions exist, talk to the land owner or manager about improving trail alignments and slope conditions. A professional trail designer can help create an improvement plan and/or make the needed trail changes.

2. Initiate a riding club or organization if you don’t belong to one already. This will give you several advantages:
   - Provides an advocacy group for your trail needs
   - Identification of leaders who will drive action
   - A regular source of information
   - Capabilities for participation in planning
   - Help developing rules for trail behavior
   - A resource for riders facing new or recurring trail challenges.

3. Reach out to landowners and managers! Develop friendly relationships and work to keep them. Help private landowners to understand liability protection through state recreational liability laws and liability insurance, which may be provided by your riding club through group or individual policies.

4. Learn about easements. Educate your club or organization members. Approach private land owners about creating a trail easement across their property. This will help to assure long-term access and connectivity in your trail system.

5. Participate in the community planning process through your local planning or town council office. Comprehensive plans express how the community wants land to be used in the future. Learn how your community’s plan addresses equestrian uses. Ask if an equestrian trails plan can be added to the comprehensive plan, or if an existing plan can be adjusted to include your specific trail needs.

6. Create a set of trail user rules and regulations. Use riding liability waivers. Limit access if that is needed or required. Get to know and cooperate with other users, if any, to avoid conflicts.

7. Volunteer for trail maintenance activities. This is good for safety, owner/manager relationships, and reducing costs for needed improvements.

**New Trails: 7 steps for developing a new trail, starting with your own land.**

1. Create a trails plan. Consider soil conditions, vegetation, wetlands, streams and ponds, slopes, etc. A professional can help design your trail alignment surface.

2. Look for funding. Sources may include farm/equine operation income, loans, donated materials, and volunteer labor. Can you derive income from your trail?

3. Check your own liability insurance. Research your state’s recreational liability laws.

4. Look for outside trail connections, including adjacent parks, trail easements, open fields and roadways. Get permission to traverse these areas and check them for safety and condition.

5. Familiarize yourself with community land use plans. See number 5 under Existing Trails.

6. Develop good relationships with adjacent land owners or managers, especially if you are looking to connect your trail to their land.

7. Pursue easements for private land trails. You should work with a land use attorney specializing in trail easements.

Now that you have a new trail and some potential trail connections, circle back to Existing Trails above for how to keep them.

To review more resources related to this article, check out the online version at www.elcr.org/sustaining-equestrian-trails/.

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*Thanks to our corporate friend:*

![Kentucky Performance Products](KPPusa.com)
Not long ago I shared ELCR’s strategic plan detailing how we will accomplish our mission by expanding our national network and placing greater emphasis on working more directly with local organizations. Recognizing that conservation occurs at the local level, our plan focuses on identifying communities with the greatest horse land challenges and partnering with local equine land and advocacy organizations actively working to address these issues.

We have identified over 600 local organizations that are working on equine advocacy and/or equine land issues and have partnered with the University of Kentucky to conduct the first comprehensive survey of these organizations. The survey will identify model organizations, best practices and community successes and failures, as well as emerging common issues and challenges.

Information gleaned from survey responses will help us expand our local partnerships and inform and fine-tune our educational programming and one-on-one counseling and technical assistance services. To date, response to the survey has been strong and we look forward to sharing the survey results with you later in the year.

The survey is the first step in building a national network of local action organizations advocating on behalf of horses and horse lands in their communities. We are confident that this plan of action will generate greater impact on the conservation of our endangered equine places and spaces, increasing the land saved for equine-related activities.

We are excited about taking this next step here at ELCR as we continue to provide the educational programming and technical assistance that the equine community has come to depend on when working on horse land issues. To support the implementation of our ambitious three-year plan we have launched the Gaining Ground capital campaign.

How you can help...
The good news is that we are well on our way to meeting our campaign goal of $375,000, with about 50% of our goal reached to date but we need to raise the balance to achieve the goals laid out in our strategic plan.

HELP US MEET THE CHALLENGE! Two special donors have provided challenge grants to help us reach our goal. For every donation we receive during this special campaign, that donation will be matched up to a total of $90,000.

On the next page, find out how you can join us in Gaining Ground for horses in our communities across the country!

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ELCR and USDF Partner for Equine Land Conservation Achievement Award

ELCR, in partnership with the United States Dressage Federation (USDF), is pleased to announce the inaugural Equine Land Conservation Achievement Award. The award will recognize an individual or organization for outstanding achievement in protecting land or access to land for equine use. USDF’s Regional Group Membership Organizations (GMO) will nominate individuals, organizations or agencies that they feel have exhibited exceptional land or facilities advocacy or protection related to the dressage community with local or nationwide impact. The award will be presented at the Adequan/USDF Annual Convention awards ceremony on Saturday, December 2, 2017, in Lexington, Kentucky.

USDF Executive Director Stephan Hienzsch says that the organization is “very pleased to partner with ELCR on this award to help increase awareness of the importance of land conservation in the dressage community and to serve as inspiration to others within our discipline.”

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Upcoming Webinars

ELCR and My Horse University will be co-presenting these upcoming webinars:

- **Fall 2017 Topic**: Equine Trail Building & Maintenance
- **Winter 2018 Topic**: Planning & Zoning Issues
- **Spring 2018 Topic**: Horsekeeping Best Management Practices

Further information will be made available on our website at www.elcr.org, and through My Horse University at www.myhorseuniversity.com
Our Vision: A country that fully recognizes the benefits that horses provide, and local communities that have access to the resources they need to conserve land for horses.

The Challenge: The Horse-Human connection is Losing Ground in our communities.

What benefits do horses contribute to our communities? Our personal relationships with horses give us the benefits of health and well-being. The community derives economic, aesthetic, and environmental benefits from horses and horse lands. The presence of horses in the community can create a unique brand and recognizable local identity, while providing remarkable views that increase property values, promote tourism and enhance the overall quality of life. Can we afford to keep losing ground without losing our individual and community character?

According to the USDA Forest Service, we are losing open space, forest, farm and ranch land in this country at an alarming rate of 6,000 acres per day to development and private restricted purposes. If we do not stem the loss of equine land now, we will soon lose all the benefits of our historic relationship with the horse. The challenge is great, but with your help, Equine Land Conservation Resource can make a difference by supporting local communities and organizations working to maintain their equestrian lifestyle and industry.

Our Strategy: Engage and Strengthen local land conservation efforts.

For the past 15 years, with the support of our donors and Conservation Partners and through our educational campaigns, resource materials and technical assistance, we have aided in the protection of more than 200,000 acres of land and more than 1,200 miles of trails.

Much has been accomplished. But a series of community-based town hall meetings, along with feedback from our partners and others requesting our assistance, have clearly indicated that ELCR must do more and do it now.

In response, the ELCR Board of Directors has formulated a three-year plan to identify and assist communities in staying ahead of land loss issues and to accelerate the conservation of local horse lands in order to protect the future of the horse in America.
Our 2016-2018 Strategic Plan details how ELCR will enhance its existing capacity to be more actively engaged at the local level. ELCR will expand its existing national network of both equine and conservation organizations to include more local action organizations. This expanded network will act as a unified voice on behalf of the horse both in response to crisis and in shaping public support and local policies. The local organizations, united by a common goal, will have the opportunity to learn from one another, sharing successes and failures that will ultimately strengthen local equine land conservation efforts. The local action organizations will help inform ELCR and shape its programs and services and will disseminate educational materials, expertise and other resources to support horse land conservation activities at the grassroots level.

The Difference We Can Make: Results and Impact

With your campaign support, ELCR can begin this next phase of our work to help ensure the future of horses across America through local engagement and active support of grassroots organizations.

Through implementation of our three-year plan, we will:

- Expand the number of individuals, organizations, and businesses united in local efforts to conserve the land necessary to ensure the future of horses in America.
- Build and support a stronger national network of equine and conservation organizations by using a pointedly local focus. We will work with members in the network to conserve horse lands and to communicate the values horses bring to their local community members.
- Develop the expertise needed to work with local governments and development interests to include horses in their plans.
- Increase the public/private acres of land and miles of trails accessible to horses through our support of local action organizations working on land-related issues in their communities.
- Gain the support of horse enthusiasts and decision makers and raise the interest of other community members by demonstrating the value and pleasure of horses in those communities.

For every donation we receive during this special campaign, that donation will be matched up to a total of $90,000.

Your Investment in the Future

Our campaign goal for expanding our national network, which will employ a more local focus by partnering on specific local equine advocacy and land-related community projects is $375,000. Your investment now will not only support network-building and program development but also lay the foundation for the future.

With your help, we can turn the tide on land loss. Help us meet the challenge; two special donors have provided challenge grants to help us reach our goal. For every donation we receive during this special campaign, that donation will be matched up to a total of $90,000. Through this plan we can ensure that horsemen and women everywhere are aware of the threat of land loss, are educated on what it takes to prevent it and are supported in their efforts to conserve and protect their local horse lands for the benefit of generations to come!

Goal: $375,000

So far we’ve reached… ABOUT 50% OF OUR GOAL

Join us by supporting Gaining Ground today!

https://elcr.org/gainingground/
Equine Places and Spaces

NEW: Shangri-La Therapeutic Academy of Riding | Tennessee

The Shangri-La Therapeutic Academy of Riding (STAR) has been serving the East Tennessee community for 29 years out of a facility in Loudon County. The 501(c)(3) organization received an email in February about a family who wished to donate their 47-acre equine facility in nearby Knox County to STAR. The new addition to the program provides a refurbished farm house, office building, 13 stalls, an old barn with a loft, a round pen, a large covered arena, hay fields and a lake. With the addition of this facility, STAR will be able to expand their outreach to inner city groups, establish stronger ties to the University of Tennessee and reach out to those in counties farther east.

To learn more, visit www.rideatstar.org and www.goo.gl/S2eXSZ

THREATENED: Lawton Stables | South Carolina

The historic Lawton Stables in the heart of the beautiful resort island of Hilton Head, South Carolina, is facing an equine land loss threat. Since the 1970s, Lawton Stables has served residents and visitors alike by providing pony and trail rides, a home for a locally loved Clydesdale, and a small animal farm. Due to the proposed expansion of Sea Pines Resort—more specifically the relocation of the Sea Pines Racquet Club and Smith Sterns Tennis Academy—the stable is expected to lose eight acres. This would leave only six acres on which to house the current 48 horses. Lawton Stables say that the expansion of Sea Pines Resort has value, but a horse stable and adjacent tennis courts are incompatible. Sea Pines residents will have the final say. Ballots will be cast in September to decide whether the expansion will proceed.

To learn more, visit www.goo.gl/9WrsB7

THREATENED: Ramapo Equestrian Center | New York

The city of Ramapo, New York faces tough decisions in terms of balancing their finances versus supporting a popular equestrian facility. The Ramapo-owned Equestrian Center is being threatened by the city as they analyze their finances and choose programs worthy of support. The facility houses 67 horses and is operated by three different organizations, including a private riding and competition program; Full Circle Centered Activities (a therapeutic riding program for special needs); and Veteran Angels Foundation (for military personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress). Supporters argue that horses and programs at the Ramapo Equestrian Center can be lifesavers and that the city should look at the greater good that happens through the programs at the equestrian center.

To learn more, visit www.goo.gl/pbboke

REBORN: Foothills Equestrian Nature Center | North Carolina

As development continues at the Tryon International Equestrian Center, the Foothills Equestrian Nature Center (FENCE) in Tryon, North Carolina is finding new ways to define itself from its larger neighbor. FENCE was founded in 1985 as a nonprofit nature education and outdoor recreation center that also provided facilities and events for horse enthusiasts of all skill levels. The 384-acre site includes up to seven miles of hiking trails, a therapeutic riding program, a nature room, music programs, three competitive riding rings and 300 horse stables. With the opening of the Tryon facility in 2015, the board members of FENCE had to re-examine what they were doing and provide new activities. The facility is rebounding by bolstering its nature programs and offering new shows, including a western riding event. The board of FENCE believes the two facilities will coexist well together and even bring in more visitors for the new nature programs offered.

To find out more, visit www.fence.org/about and www.goo.gl/5LZ7sx

Marx Chosen as Conservation Scholarship Recipient

Jodelle Marx of St. Helens, Oregon has been selected as the recipient of the 2017 Anson W. H. Taylor Jr. Memorial Scholarship. Jodelle was chosen for her academic accomplishments as well as her achievements in Pony Club, but it is her appreciation of the importance of land conservation that made her an outstanding candidate for this scholarship. She is a member of the Columbia Winds Pony Club in Oregon. Jodelle will begin attending Pacific University this fall, majoring in psychology.

ELCR partnered with the United States Pony Clubs to establish the Anson W. H. Taylor Jr. Memorial Scholarship in 2006 to honor Anson Taylor for his work and dedication to youth and land conservation. Mr. Taylor was a founding member of ELCR, as well as a devoted supporter and past president of USPC.
Jill Montgomery Receives AHC’s 2017 Van Ness Award

From the American Horse Council – The American Horse Council (AHC) recently presented the 2017 Van Ness Award to Jill Montgomery of Pueblo West, Colorado, during the organization’s annual meeting in Washington, D.C. in June.

Each year, the AHC presents the Van Ness Award to an individual who has shown leadership and service to the horse community in his or her state. It is awarded in memory of Mrs. Marjorie Van Ness, one of the founders of the New Jersey Horse Council. Mrs. Van Ness was one of the organizers of the AHC’s Coalition of State Horse Councils.

“Jill Montgomery has devoted more than 31 years of her professional life to the horse industry and has an incredible influence on keeping equine activities accessible and enjoyable for everyone,” said AHC President Julie Broadway. “She continually seeks to educate and inform both horse owners and the public of the joys and benefits of horses, and is always working to ensure a favorable environment for the equine industry in the state of Colorado.”

Jill Montgomery has been a Colorado Horse Council member for over 20 years, and has served on the Board of Directors for the Animal Welfare Council, as well as the Colorado Horse Council as Vice President and Chair of its Legislative and Regulatory Committee, and is a current Certified Horsemanship Association Region 9 Co-Director. She is a founding member of the Colorado Unwanted Horse Alliance, as well as the former Executive Director of the American Youth Horse Council.

“This is a wonderful surprise, and I feel honored and grateful for this prestigious award,” said Ms. Montgomery. “I am humbled to be listed in the company of past recipients and with whom this recognition is named. I want to thank the AHC and all of those that thought of me enough to put my name forward for this honor. I have been blessed to work with many outstanding individuals in the horse industry, and my accomplishments are a reflection of the inspiration I gain from them.”

Read the American Horse Council’s full story at https://goo.gl/Uwu52F.
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If you prefer to donate online, visit www.elcr.org.