

# THE RESOURCE

## Live Oak Stud Welcomes the World

**For 25 years, the Weber family has opened their private farm to host top equestrian competition in Ocala, Fla.**

*By Jennifer M. Keeler for ELCR*

Driving onto the grounds of the stunning Live Oak Stud, it would be easy for visitors to believe they have been transported to a magical equine paradise. Across nearly 4,700 pristine acres, horses frolic in green pastures behind miles of black board fence as Spanish moss hangs elegantly from towering live oak trees. Since 1969, Live Oak Stud has been owned and loved by the Weber family who established a legendary Thoroughbred breeding and training operation over the rolling fields, as well as diversifying their farming operation to include sport horses, beef cattle, select crops, and a model composting facility. But early each spring, this exquisite private farm opens its gates to the world to conduct one of North America's elite equestrian competitions.

The Conservation Trust for Florida invited ELCR to visit Live Oak International, held February 25-28 in Ocala, Fla. as part of their Protecting Horse Country initiative, and ELCR Executive Director Holley Groshek was impressed with how Live Oak serves as a shining example of an increasingly rare private farm that also serves as a public competition venue. "The continued loss of private farms to development or restricting access to horses is having an increasing impact on competitions across the




Photo by Jennifer M. Keeler

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From left, Holley Groshek, Executive Director, ELCR; Busy Kislig-Shires Byerly, Assistant Executive Director, Conservation Trust for Florida; and Jamie Cohen University of Florida/IFAS Extension, at their shared exhibit space in the Vendor Village.

country as more and more horsemen lose their favorite places to show,” Groshek said. “We were so impressed with how the Webers ‘think outside the box’ and their approach in hosting this incredible event on their family’s property not only helps sustain the farm and preserve the agricultural land use, but it also benefits the entire community.”

Over the last 25 years, Live Oak International has grown in both size and reputation from a small regional driving show into what is now a Longines FEI World Cup qualifier for show jumping and host to U.S. National Championships for combined driving. “There certainly are logistical challenges in having hundreds of exhibitors coming onto your own backyard,” noted Chester Weber, a multiple medal-winning driver at the FEI World Equestrian Games and 13-time U.S. National Champion, who organizes Live Oak International with his sister, Juliet Reid, herself an accomplished show jumping rider. “But we’re a family of horsemen and women, and our vision for Live Oak is for it to be much more than just a regular horse show—it’s about excellence in equestrian sport.”

Weber explained that in addition to hosting international competition, the annual event has become part of an overall sustainability plan for Live Oak Stud. “It’s hard for big farms to sustain themselves, but from our experience I think it’s a possibility for a private farm to put on an event that can be rev-

enue-positive and part of a viable business model for that operation,” he noted. “While I can’t say that the elite competition that we choose to put on is a wildly profitable event, it has sustained itself and contributed back to the farm for a quarter century now, as well as raising a lot of money for the community and local charities.”

It’s the connection to the Ocala community that makes Live Oak International even more special. The event is heavily promoted throughout central Florida, and the lavish competition grounds pulse with a festival atmosphere. The crowds show their appreciation, turning out in record numbers almost every year to enjoy a family-friendly outing in the countryside. “In a time when horses are moving further and further away from our communities, people don’t have as much opportunity to see, touch and experience horses or gain an appreciation for how much they benefit our lives and communities,” said Groshek. “Not only do venues like Live Oak help the community have that experience, but they

also help keep our equine heritage, culture and industry alive.”

Weber agreed and noted that private farms can also consider hosting non-equine events such as music festivals or, in Live Oak’s case, a wildly popular 5K run, which was reported to have one of the largest turnouts in the state and raised \$50,000 for charity. As an added bonus, every one of the hundreds of participants was exposed to the beauty of a working horse farm, and many even chose to stay to watch the equestrian competition. “As an organizer, I feel like spectators and sponsors are as much our customers as the competitors,” Weber explained. “I believe it sets Live Oak apart from other horse shows, and it’s a model that works for us in drawing in the public, which is then exposed to horses, farming and equestrian sport.”



Chester Weber competing with his four-in-hand at the 2016 Live Oak International.

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Even with the show's resounding success, Weber is especially proud of how Live Oak's best management practices for the farm carry over to the competition itself. "The section of the farm where we hold the event is basically a cow field, even though recently we've added some permanent infrastructure," he said. "It's an amazing green-to-green story to see how each year the grounds start out as a cow field, get built up with temporary barns, amenities, and rings, host a spectacular event for thousands of fans, then almost all of it gets taken down and it quickly returns to green fields. It's remarkable but we are proof that it can be done."

Thanks to the Weber family's innovation and generosity in sharing their farm with the world, Live Oak Stud will remain open and accessible for equestrians and the public to enjoy the tradition and experience of horse sport, hopefully for generations to come. "When I first came to Ocala, there were still a lot of dirt roads around here, and I've seen a number of big farms like ours that have been divided into mini-farms or succumbed to development. A development even backs up to our farm now," Weber said. "But Live Oak is in a trust, and we've made Live Oak International an integral part of the sustainability plan to help keep it safe for the future. As a family we all share in horse interests and are doing everything we can to preserve the legacy of this land." ■



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This PSA was made possible by the American Quarter Horse Association's STEP program.



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## Equine Places and Spaces

### **NEW: Ligonier Therapeutic Center Pennsylvania**

Founders broke ground on the Ligonier Therapeutic Center in late August 2015, a new therapeutic riding center in Pennsylvania. Plans for the center feature a six-stall barn to start, as well as a riding arena and additional barns. The center will offer hippotherapy for special-needs children, which is a physical, occupational and speech-language therapy strategy that utilizes the movement of the horse as part of the program.

To find out more, visit: [www.goo.gl/r4OFDf](http://www.goo.gl/r4OFDf)

### **IN DANGER: Everybody Counts Physical Therapy New York**

Everybody Counts (EBC) Physical Therapy, a center offering hippotherapy in New York, is in danger of closing and facing foreclosure. EBC relies on donations and volunteers to keep the barn maintained and horses fed.

To find out more, visit: [www.goo.gl/KEiLpd](http://www.goo.gl/KEiLpd)  
or [www.goo.gl/qTbLWW](http://www.goo.gl/qTbLWW)

### **LOST: Showplace Farms - New Jersey**

Showplace Farms, a Standardbred training facility in Millstone Township, N.J., closed its doors on October 1, 2015, and the property was liquidated a month later. The farm operated for 36 years as a premier Standardbred training facility, located on 140 acres with the capacity to house 425 horses, and other amenities such as a track and a swimming pool for rehabilitating horses.

To find out more, visit: [www.goo.gl/q3wPtX](http://www.goo.gl/q3wPtX)

If you are aware of an equine-related place that has been lost, saved or is in danger, please let us know about it. You can contact us at 859-455-8383 or [info@elcr.org](mailto:info@elcr.org), or visit the Report an Issue page on our website. ■

## ELCR Honors Recipients of Conservation Awards

Bob Sanford of Bahama, N.C. was honored as the 2015 recipient of the Robert N. Clay Conservation Award on September 11, 2015. The award, named in recognition of Robert N. Clay's equine land conservation leadership in the Thoroughbred industry, is a combined effort between ELCR and the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA).

Mr. Sanford was selected as this year's recipient of the Robert N. Clay Award because of his commitment to equine land conservation and ensuring access to public land. He frequently tackles equine land conservation on the legislative front, fighting and succeeding for legislation in North Carolina that impacts issues of the equine industry. He untiringly fights for positive change regarding legislative action, education and health issues that represent the equine community's contribution to recreation, agriculture and economic well-being.

Mr. and Mrs. C. Martin Wood III of Monticello, Fla. were honored as the recipients of the Anson W.H. Taylor Jr. Award on January 29, 2016. This award, named for the late preservationist, land conservator, family man, foxhunter and equestrian Anson W.H. Taylor Jr., was established by the ELCR board of directors to recognize individuals and organizations that have made an outstanding contribution to preserving land for equine use through their extraordinary generosity of time, effort, and expertise.

Mr. and Mrs. Wood were selected for this award due to their outstanding contribution to conserving land for equine use. Both have extraordinary accomplishments in conservation, and this award specifically recognizes their passion for foxhunting, associated land conservation, and providing access to this equine activity. Martin and Daphne Wood have placed the majority of their own land into conservation easements and singularly gained access to adjacent private lands for equine access through foxhunting, believing land conservation can benefit both the natural resources and outdoor use so important to the equine community. ■



ELCR Vice President, Dan Rosenberg (right), presents the Robert N. Clay Conservation Award to Bob Sanford.





## ELCR and USPC Join Forces for Journey to Tryon, N.C.

**T**he Equine Land Conservation Resource recently joined forces with the United States Pony Clubs (USPC) to place boots on the ground in Tryon, N.C for the purposes of meeting with local equestrian and conservation organizations.

ELCR and USPC's shared history made the combined effort for this occasion a natural choice. In 1996, members of the USPC's Task Force for the 21st Century identified loss of equine land as the greatest threat to the future of the organization and to equestrians in general. ELCR developed as an offshoot of the Task Force, establishing the organization dedicated to preserving land for equestrian use.

**While many of these issues are recurring themes throughout equine communities nationwide, the opportunity to speak directly with local residents of an area brings priceless insight.**

ELCR takes great pride in our responsibility to represent and support equestrian communities across the nation. Land is conserved and protected at the local level, and it is these local equine communities that ELCR works to serve and assist. Situated in the heart of the Bluegrass right next door to USPC at the Kentucky Horse Park, we stay abreast of the issues and battles that communities across the nation are fighting to conserve our horse lands, but special insight comes from the opportunity to enter an equestrian community and listen to their challenges and achievements from the grassroots level.

Eager to take full advantage of the time spent in the area, the voyage to Tryon was brimming with exciting festivities. A roundtable discussion was hosted at the Foothills Equestrian Nature Center, inviting area equestrians and conservationists for an open dialogue regarding the issues and obstacles that the region often encounters when confronting equine land conservation.

The culmination of the visit to Tryon was a reception held at the esteemed Legends Club at the Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC) hosted by ELCR and USPC, followed by "No Land - No Horse and Why We Should Care", a public

conservation regarding the importance of equine land conservation. Panelists and guests were welcomed by Mark Bellissimo, managing partner of TIEC. Moderated by ELCR President Ken Haddad, panelists included Jim Cogdell, owner of The Fork in Norwood, N.C., Colby Connell, Chief Marketing Officer of the United States Equestrian Federation, and Roger Smith, a founding partner of TIEC.

Discussion topics included methods of land conservation, how other areas of the equine industry could garner support for the issue of equine land conservation, the importance of establishing respect from equestrian users regarding their access to both public and private horse trails and riding venues, and how ELCR can further support education regarding these issues. While many of these issues are recurring themes throughout equine communities nationwide, the opportunity to speak directly with local residents of an area brings priceless insight. Information garnered from the visit to Tryon, as well as visits to other communities, will yield valuable understanding to ELCR and USPC as we vigorously work to keep equine land open for the next generation. ■



*"No Land - No Horse and Why We Should Care" panelists (left-right) Jim Cogdell, Colby Connell, and Roger Smith with moderator Ken Haddad at the Tryon International Equestrian Center.*

# Saving our Horse Lands Is a Local Issue

For 15 years, Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) has worked primarily at the national level to sound the alarm about the loss of land used for horse-related activities, and also to provide educational materials and resources necessary to support the labors of protecting local equine lands. Our efforts have aided in the protection of over 200,000 acres of land and more than 1,200 miles of trails. Although ELCR has had remarkable success in helping individuals, organizations and communities at the local level, far too often we are not made aware of problems until it is too late.

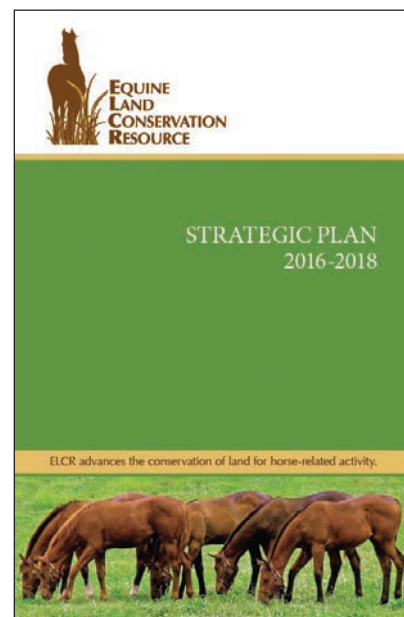
Land is conserved at the local level, starting with the individuals and organizations that appreciate the area and call it home. In order to more carefully address this detail, the ELCR board of directors has worked extensively to formulate a three-year strategic plan with the goal of more proactively identifying and assisting with local issues so as to accelerate the conservation of local horse lands.

In order to help more directly engage and support local land conservation efforts, the plan outlines how ELCR will focus on building and nurturing a national network of local organizations, learning from one another and becoming united by a shared commitment and approach to strengthen and support local equine and conservation efforts. This network is intended to forge alliances among local horse and conservation organizations, and act as a unified voice on behalf of the horse, responding to crisis and shaping public support and policy regarding equine land conservation.

It is anticipated that the strategy of focusing and partnering more proactively at the local level will result in a wide array of positive outcomes, such as the following, ultimately accelerating the conservation of our horse lands:

- Increased number of individuals, organizations and businesses engaged in horse-related activities, locally and nationally united in efforts to protect the land necessary to ensure the future of horses in America
- Increased inclusion of horse community interests in issue debates and more readily reflected in local policies and projects
- Increased access for equine activities on public and private land resulting in an expanded number of acres of land and miles of trails conserved for horse activity through the work and collaboration of local network members
- Greater awareness among horse people and non-horse people about the benefits of horses

ELCR has diligently sounded the alarm about the loss of equine land, and we are excited about this next step in our efforts to support equine land conservation in communities across the country for the future benefit of our equine industry, heritage and culture. The ELCR 2016-2018 Strategic Plan document is available at [www.elcr.org/strategic-plan](http://www.elcr.org/strategic-plan). If your organization is interested in learning more about this initiative and the network, please contact us at 859-455-8383 or [info@elcr.org](mailto:info@elcr.org). ■





# Legislative Updates

## Recreational Trails Program Reauthorized

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) was successfully reauthorized this past December after numerous obstacles and extensions. The program was ultimately reauthorized as Congress passed a multi-year highway bill known as the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or FAST Act. The bill reauthorized RTP for the next five years and continued the previous amount of funding at \$85 million annually.

The RTP was created in 1991, applying the "user-pay/user-benefit" philosophy of the Highway Trust Fund, returning federal gasoline taxes paid by off-highway recreationists. RTP is the foundation for state trail programs across the country, funding the construction and maintenance of trails for equestrians, as well as other user groups. Project categories eligible for funding are many and varied, giving states the flexibility they need to administer state trail programs.

The program was previously reauthorized through the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), signed in 2012, with dedicated annual funding of \$85 million for Fiscal Years 2013 and 2014 as a set-aside from the Transportation Alternatives Program. With the expiration of MAP-21, efforts to reauthorize RTP were underway for most of 2015. Congress worked on various versions of a national surface transportation bill throughout the year. Several attempts were made to eliminate RTP from the bill, however these attempts were unsuccessful. It is an important victory that RTP has been reauthorized. Governors still have the option to opt out of the

program, however, so it is still important that riders stay vigilant of any attempts to eliminate the program in their state.

## Conservation Easement Tax Incentive Made Permanent

Also this past December, we witnessed an encouraging and strong bipartisan action as the Senate and House passed a bill to make the tax incentive for conservation easement donations permanent. The president signed the bill into law on December 18, 2015, setting the incentive to apply retroactively to January 1, 2015. This incentive is considered to be some of the most important conservation legislation in 20 years, and encourages landowners to place conservation easements on their land to protect significant natural, scenic, and historic resources.

The incentive grants certain tax benefits to landowners who sign a conservation easement. These private, voluntary agreements with local land trusts permanently limit the use of the land in order to protect its conservation value, predominately protecting the land from development and exploitation of its natural resources. Lands placed into conservation easements can continue to be farmed, or otherwise used for specified purposes outlined in the signed agreement. First enacted as a temporary provision in 2006, the incentive is responsible for conserving more than 2 million acres of land.

To learn more about using the conservation tax incentive, visit [www.goo.gl/h072NB](http://www.goo.gl/h072NB) ■

## Working together to save our horse lands - Become a Conservation Member today

Land loss may affect different regions and equine disciplines in different ways, but it clearly represents a significant threat to all equestrians. As members of the equine community the future of the equestrian landscape is in our hands. Land is saved locally, so it's imperative that horsemen and horse enthusiasts act as stewards of horse lands in their own communities. Being aware of threats and knowing how to address them allows us to ensure that future generations can enjoy access to the equestrian landscapes and lifestyle that we enjoy. ELCR provides information, tools, templates, and one-on-one technical assistance to help individuals and organizations keep land open for horses in their communities. Membership dues support programs and services such as:

- Access to current articles and videos on equine land conservation organized into the six key topic areas featured on our site

- Development of templates, sample letters, guides, and other tactical tools to help busy people effectively engage in local land use planning
- Access to best practices and guidance for managing conversations and relationships with private landowners and public land stakeholders in order to create or support access for horses and horse-related use
- Development of tools and handbooks for local land trusts working to include equine-related properties in their conservation agendas
- Access to forums and webinars covering specific issues such as conservation easements, best management practices, and building sustainable trails.



Participation in our Conservation Membership Program allows you to actively demonstrate your support for equine land conservation. Join today by completing the form on the back page of *The Resource*, or to join online at [www.ELCR.org](http://www.ELCR.org). ■



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