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American Trails
Successful Models in Developing
and Maintaining Private Equestrian Trail Systems
Thursday, July 30, 2020
10:00AM – 11:30AM Pacific

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>> CANDACE: Thank you for joining us for the webinar: Successful Models in Developing and Maintaining Private Equestrian Trail Systems. We are excited to work with Equine Land Conservation Resource on this webinar. My name is Candace Gallagher and I am the Director of Operations and Webinar Coordinator for American Trails. This is our 93rd webinar in the American Trails Advancing Trails Webinar Series. This webinar is being recorded, will include a closed caption transcript and learning credits are available. Contact us with any questions on those items. We will save time at the end of the presentation for attendee Q&A. We welcome you to send your questions at any time during today's presentation via the questions box. This webinar is free to the public thanks to a generous sponsorship from Arete Structures. I will invite you to click on the logo you see here. You guys will get a link to this logo in my follow-up email along with the recording and the transcript. Thank you also to the additional webinar partners that include, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. I am happy to introduce today's webinar presenters: Chelle Grald, Director of Communications with Horse Farms Forever. Landon Russell, Executive Director of the Walthour-Moss Foundation. Libbie Johnson, Volunteer with Foothills Equestrian Trails Association. As well as Holley Groshek, Executive Director of Equine Land Conservation Resource. Before I hand it off to Holley to get started, we have our Poll I wanted to share with you all first. It just popped up on your screen here. How often do you personally use private trails for equestrian use? So, you will see that. You have a few options to choose from. I know some people may not fit in these categories. But which fits you best in this instance. We will give you a few more seconds to answer this and we will share the results with everyone. We are going to close that poll and share it. Never is the popular answer. Coming in second a few times a year and weekly, monthly and daily. That is interesting information. Thank you all for sharing that information. Now I will give control over to Holley.

>> HOLLEY: Thank you, Candace. Before I do just a brief intro to Equine Land Conservation, I want to thank American Trails for letting us partner on another equestrian topic and to thank our sponsor and three speakers for making today's webinar possible. So, what you need to know in a nut shell about Equine Land Conservation, ELCR is a non-profit, education based organization. Our mission is to lead in the protection and conservation of lands for horses and horse related activities. We support those working locally to support equine access. All our resources and services are available to the equine community free of charge and to access our educational resources, just go to our website, ELCR.org -- and I'm not able to access that. There it is. There we go. This is our home page and if you scroll down, the home page here, you will see welcome to our resource library. We do have a significant amount of educational offerings available. To make this user friendly, we have offered two ways to access our resource library. You could

click here to frequently asked questions and you could find a question that is very similar to the issue you're facing and there will be a list of resources available for that topic. Or you can go down here to the bottom and we have what we call our six-core issue areas of land conservation. And you simply find the topic area that is most suited to your issue area. For example, today's topic, equine access to private lands. If you want to know more, you click here and you will find all the resources available in that topic area. I encourage you to check out our resource library and know what is available for future reference. With that, I'm going to turn it back over to you, Candace, so we could get started with our webinar. Thank you.

>> CANDACE: Great. Thank you so much. Before I give control over to the next presenter, I am going to be launching our second poll. If you are a landowner and were asked by a group to use your property for their trail system, which is most important to you? And you could select all that apply. And this is just in a scenario that if you were. Not if you are currently, but if you were in regards to an equestrian -- equine trail system. Great. We are getting lots of votes in so far. We will only keep this poll open for a few more seconds. And if there are other, if you want to share those -- if something you feel is really important, if you want to share those in the questions box, we invite you to and I can share those responses with everyone. Great. I'm going to go ahead and close that poll. Safety and liability are close. Maintenance and privacy and then 9% with other. Thank you so much everyone. And now with that, I am going to give control over to Chelle.

>> CHELLE: Okay. Candace, I don't see -- oh. There it is. Okay. Hi there. My name is Chelle Grald and I am, as Candace mentioned, the director of communications for Horse Farms Forever. But I am going to be speaking to you today about the Green Mountain horse association which is a trail system that I am intimately familiar with because I was the manager of that trail system for six years. I moved to Florida and now I'm with Green Mountain which is in Ocala, Florida. With that, let's get started. Come on. Here we go. All right. So, about GMHA. Green Mountain Horse Ocean is a really -- association is really old. It was started in 1926. They promote activities, all sorts of equestrian activities and are very active in trail preservation. They have a 65-acre facility located in Vermont, which is the center of Vermont on the eastern side and every year they offer events every weekend. Equestrian type events. The trail network is over 400 miles and it covers four towns. Something you may not know, the sport of competitive distance ride or endurance riding began at the green mountain. It went all the way through both world wars and it is still going. So, this trail system is a private -- is largely privately owned. And it really is accurately described as a mosaic of private trails and old town roads connected by dirt roads. And this is a very popular outdoor recreation area. What you see here in the picture is the Vermont 100, which is an ultra marathon that a thousand runners do every year. And there's an equestrian endurance race that happens with it. So, we have horses and human runners on the same 100-mile course for this event every year and they both love doing this together. The trails are also used for hiking, for running, for mountain biking. Certainly in the winter for snowmobiling and bird watching and just about everything else you can think of. The challenge of this sort of private trail system is there are a hundred landowners and they are very diverse. And the challenge really is how do you stay in touch with a hundred landowners. And how we do it at the green mountain

Horse Association is we have a pretty good database and a system where all of the trails and all of the events are planned out the beginning of the year. And those landowners are sent a letter, each one of them, which says to you, Mr. Landowner, this is -- these are the trails that we are going to be using on these days and, you know, if you have any issue with that, please let us know. And then we have a system of what we call land ambassadors which are volunteers, neighborhood folks who call up the landowners who live near them and check in with them personally. And just say, okay, you got your letter. You got any concerns? Are there any issues on your trail that we can help you with? So, it is a combination of form letters and personal contact. And the other way that we -- the way that we handle the diverse user base, the fact that there are lots of other events going on, on the trail over the course of the season, is we keep in touch with all of the groups. So we have mountain group, there are bike tours, running events and we all call each other basically the year before in the late fall and make sure none of our events are happening simultaneously so that we don't end up with crowds on the trails. Okay. So, how does GMHA use this trail system? 90% of the landowners give us permission by license, which is basically a signed permission form. And that permission form can be revoked at any time by the landowner. But it is perpetual unless they revoke it. Then about 10% of the trails we have under permanent easement. So, the landowner has given us a permanent right-of-way. Obviously, we would like to have more of those, but not every landowner -- it is not for every landowner. Not every landowner wants to do it in our area. And so, we are continuing to work this that direction. But right now, it is mostly signed permissions. There are 70 miles of that 400-mile trail system that are permanently marked for any time use. And you look at the picture. You can see these white arrows with numbers on them. And that's how the trails are marked. They have -- they are vinyl arrows with colored numbers and then there are maps at the trailheads that corresponds with those colors and they just follow the arrows. The remaining uses -- the remaining of the 400 miles are planned out and event specific. So, we run events that cover as much as 200 miles of trail in one weekend. And in those events, every single trail that we're using is planned out ahead of time and the landowner knows when we're coming through and where. There are two trailheads. One of them at our main 65-acre facility and the other one is at a separate 5-acre property that we bought and there is tons of local access. So, these trails, as you can imagine, they are all seconded by dirt roads. So, there are plenty of places that locals just hop on the trails and hop off the trails. They ride down the dirt road and they get on the trail. But as far as parking goes, there are two trailheads. Membership is required for any time use. You need to be a member of the green Mountain Horse Association and non-members can ride the trails when they come and anticipate in the events. There are ten organized events per year. And if you are not a member, you are anticipate that way. The challenge is monitoring this decentralized use. As you can imagine, people are entering an exiting the trails all over the place. So, the question would be how do you enforce making sure all these folks riding these trails are members. And the answer is we really can't. We need to depend on the honor system and we need to depend on the community to police itself. There are rules posted at the trailheads and we often get phone calls from locals who move into the area who want to know how to access the trails. And we are very clear about letting them know that they should contact the landowners and get private permission for any of the trails that are not marked by us. So, maps and markers.

This is an issue with private trails because if you publish maps and your trails are not to be used all the time, people will certainly use them whenever they feel like it. So, what we do is the members loops those 70 miles of permanently marked trail has a map and there are the nubbed arrows that I described in the previous slide. The full system, we have a very detailed map. But that is private to protect landowner privacy. And when we do specific events, we will print out a subset of those trails on that map so that the riders have a map that they can refer to. But we do not publish those for anyone to use. And again, we depend on the participants to not share those maps. However, you know and I know that everyone rides with a GPS and it certainly is possible for them to get tracks of our trails. We have found very little -- very little poaching of our trails and most people are pretty good about respecting the uses. So, when we do events, these little markers that you see with the puppy holding in his mouth our event markers, and you can see they have our logo on them and they are plastic and we staple them to trees in advance of the event and then within that week, we come back around and take them down. This way, if our marker is seen by a landowner and they have any concerns, they know that we were using the trail because they see our logo and they can contact us. So, putting our logo on it is a form of accountability. And then the 100-mile trail that is run every year for the 100-mile ride is permanently marked because it is just a lot of work to mark it. So, that trail is permanently marked and the landowners have given us permission to do that. So, the challenge, preventing unauthorized use of event-specific trail routes and really it is -- it's a matter of educating the riders who use the trail that these trails are not open to everyone at all times. And it is a matter of also reminding them that there are many gates that we open and close for these events that are locked any other time. So, if they were to go out and just explore around, they might find themselves having to turn around and come back. And history has shown us that people don't really want to get in trouble or get us in trouble. So, it has worked out okay. This is an example of a members loop map. So, you could see the number with the arrow up top. You can see the route shown and then a description and a trailhead and we tell them how long it is and about how long it will take to ride the trail. So, every one of our members loops, which range from five miles to about 15 miles are marked this way and maps are given out. So, maintenance. How does one maintain a 400-mile trail system owned by a hundred different people? And my reference here to tree ferries is one of the landowners, that's what he called them. I asked him once how he maintains his section of trail and he says I don't. He says the tree fairies come and take the trees away when I'm not looking. And he was very happy with that. And because there are so many users on these trails that use them for lots of different reasons, there are lots of folks who will come and do maintenance. Some landowners are very happy with that. Others are concerned by liability and want to do the maintenance themselves and require that they be the only ones doing it. Some landowners even build their own trails. They have their own bulldozers and they go out there and build trails and fix them and -- so, it is kind of a mixture of maintenance. The snowmobile users are one of the bigger maintenance partners that we work with because they get substantial grants from the state to do trail work. So, often they have quite a bit of money and are happy to build bridges and coverts and things that we need to keep the trails. So, the user groups share maintenance. Mostly we share it with the towns, the snowmobilers and the mountain bike groups. We also do organized work days. We check with the landowners ahead of time, they will

them where we are going to be and the ones that are okay with us clipping branches and clearing trees have us go out and do that. We have trail stewards who live in various parts of the four towns who's job it is to keep an eye on the trails and let us know what needs fixing. We have trail sweepers. So, when we do events, we will offer free lunch to riders who would like to come at the end of the event and go through and pick up the markers. And they will usually also do some trail maintenance if there's any that needs to be done. GMHA is a non-profit organization and we have a trail fund that many members donate to so we have money to do large maintenance projects when we need to. And our trails are closed from November 1st to Memorial Day. You can imagine Vermont has six months of winter. So, it is really important that we keep the trails closed during those months because that is when most of the damage would happen. So, what are the bigger challenges that have to do with maintenance aside from keep track of what each landowner wants and doesn't want? The biggest one is really the old town roads. So, in the state of Vermont there are a lot of ancient roads that are owned by the town and are open to public access. So, everyone uses them, including big jeeps and land Rovers and also bikes, snowmobiles, horses, walkers and runners and even hunters will sometimes take their cars out there in hunting season. However, the towns don't maintain those roads. So, oftentimes these roads end up -- and they are very important connectors for our trail system. Oftentimes these roads end up in really bad shape and no one wants to invest money in maintaining them. That's where we often will form a coalition with snowmobilers or some other groups. And sometimes the town will even kick in a little bit and sometimes we can get some grants to do some fixing of those roads. And we just cross our fingers and hope that some of the motorized users don't ruin them. It is an ongoing battle and it is made worse by climate change. Certainly these an awful lot of water running down those roads and that causes a lot of damage and makes it worse. So, that is the biggest challenge that we encounter with maintenance. Liability. So, before I get into how we handle liability, I just want to say this: It is a cultural thing. And the state of Vermont has a very long tradition of sort of a land-sharing ethic which is the reason for my title. It is culturally not cool to post your land as no trespassing. And it is understood that Vermonters share their land with their neighbors for recreation and hunting and things like that, within reason. But what has happened recently is landowner second homeowners have bought homes and they are more concerned about liability and more concerned about sharing the land. So, it often take as few years. It takes a while for folks who have moved into the state to begun to understand how, you know, I share my land. You share yours and we all get to enjoy it. Some landowners kick into that pretty quickly and others never do. And it's a concern for them all the way through. So, how do we handle this? The way I like to describe it is that the landowner in the statement of Vermont has three layers of protection. So, the first layer of protection is what the state provides and that is the equine liability and landowner statutes. So, equine liability statute basically says if you ride a horse, you do so at your own risk. And if you fall off, you take the risk of that. You can't blame that on the ground. You can't blame that on the land that you're walking on when it happens. Landowner statute most states have this robust landowner protection. Vermont's is as good as any and basically what that says is if you are a landowner and you offer the use of your land for recreational purposes without asking for any money for that, so, without consideration, you are free from liability unless there's some gross negligence. Like, you know, you dig a pit in

the middle of the trail for people to fall into. It would really take a lot. And anyone who is on your property is doing so at their own risk and that is understood. So, that's the first layer of protection. It's the law itself. The second layer of protection from when GMHA approaches a landowner is our member and participant waivers. So, all of our members who ride the trail, all of our people who participate in organized events and all of our volunteers have signed waivers that hold the landowner harmless. So, the landowner is mentioned in the waiver. So, that's the next thing. And then the third layer of protection is insurance. So, we have organizational insurance and event insurance that has \$1 million per event of coverage that protects the landowner should something happen either to one of our employees or to volunteers or to a participant. And our landowners have the option to be listed as additionally insured on our policy, which costs us some money, but we are willing to take that for that extra layer of confidence on their part. So, the challenge there is really just keeping up with the property transfers and the new owners. So, as some of these properties change hands, it is not as if every landowner gives us a call and says I just sold my property. So, we need to stay on top of that. We do that by making sure we are in touch with the real estate agents and checking the real estate listings on a regular basis to make sure there's nothing listed in our network and we visit the town offices on a quarterly basis and check in to see if there were any property transfers. And then, of course, if a landowner does contact us to tell us that they have sold their property, we ask them to make an introduction to the new landowner. They are usually more than happy to do that. And that usually works out really well. All right. What are the rules? The rules are pretty simple. Stay on trail. So, we actually put up little no-horses signs for the landowners on the trails that the landowners do not want them to stray on to. Particularly these are often trails that go near their home, their barn. They don't want -- very often, they don't want people hanging around near their house. So, we put up signs to keep them off. We ask that people don't ride alone, particularly in the fall, because the wildlife are very active. They sign a waiver. They carry a cell phone even though it doesn't often work. There are places it does work out there. You cannot ride with loose dogs. Helmets are required. No smoking or littering. Obvious thing. And this one is important. Be nice to everyone even if they don't deserve it. They are -- we have had incidents where riders have said unkind words to people driving by in cars or people burning a burn pile in the woods or riding an ATV in the woods and that person turned out to be a landowner. So, it is really important for the riders to know that every person they see could be a landowner and that it is really important that they be kind and not make assumptions. Landowners certainly can use their land anyway they would like to. And oftentimes the other person who you would encounter on the road is a property manager and that person is also a really important person to be a friend with. So, the challenge as you can imagine is enforcing and tracking. Enforcing the rules and tracking the riders because if you have a rider out on a members loop and they get lost, you may not know they are out there if they signed in from a remote trailhead. So, we try to keep in touch and we try to encourage the riders to ride with a cell phone so that they can keep in touch. Enforcing the rules is very difficult as you can imagine as decentralized as this trail system is. But we find that more often than not, the neighbors kind of keep an eye out and if they see someone riding with a dog or not wearing a helmet, we usually get a phone call. So, it is really kind of a crowd sourced enforcement.

>> CANDACE: So, appreciation? How do we show appreciation to our landowners? There's a banquet that is held in conjunction with the 100-mile ride that landowners are given a ticket to. They receive handwritten thank you notes. The riders are encouraged at our big foliage riding event to just share their delight with the trails in these notes and we package those up and send them to the landowners. And the landowners just love to hear from the riders. The landowners are also given subscriptions to our magazines and news letters so they know what is going on. And the land ambassadors stay in touch. They are neighbors that these folks know and they keep in touch with them and that probably makes more of a difference than anything. So, the challenge is staying in touch with all these folks and it's made harder by the fact that a lot of these folks who own this land, for them it is a summer home or it's a weekend home or it's a third home. It's not a house that they live in all the time. So, the landowner contact needs to be done when they are around, which is in the busy season. So, in the months from May to October. So, it makes it hard and that is why we have these land ambassadors. This is an example of a thank you note. At the end of the year, we package all those thank you notes up and send them out. We also make a video of them and post them online so that anyone who might have missed some of the thank you notes could read them. And we couple them with pictures and the landowners really appreciate that. Some resources to learn more about this trail system. There's our website and the new trail events manager is Hannah Bright and you certainly can call her and ask her any questions. If you want to learn about our easement program, the link is there for that. And then I wrote a series of articles and did a presentation for the American Endurance Ride Conference on trail markings specifically for equestrian trails. So, if you have any questions about some optimization of trail marking for your private trail system, there is my email and you are certainly welcome to get in touch with me and thank you very much for your time.

>> CANDACE: Thank you so much, Chelle. Before I give control over to Landon, I'm going to have another poll for everyone. It should pop up here. As a user of a private equestrian trail system, which features of the system are most important to you? And you can select all that apply. And this can just be in a hypothetical situation as well. If there are other that are of more importance than the ones you see listed here, we welcome you to send those options via the questions box to us. It looks like right now we are getting second and third options -- actually, the second option now is getting the most people voting for that one. We will give it a few more seconds before I close it. All right. There are the results for that question. 86% of you clearly marked with signage or maps, followed by amenities for the horses at the trailhead or on the trail. Wonderful. Thank you so much. Okay. And now I am going to give control over to Landon. Sorry. Hold on. Give me just a second here, Landon. I apologize. There you go.

>> LANDON: Okay. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Landon Russell. I'm the executive director of the Walthour-Moss foundation located in North Carolina. This is my 13th year with the Walthour-Moss Foundation and I thank you for including me in today's webinar and I'm excited to share with you all what we do with our easements here. Before I jump into that, I thought I would give you a brief history of the Walthour-Moss Foundation in our area. We are

located in southern pines 50 miles southwest of Raleigh and if you have heard of golf, you have heard of Pinehurst. That gives you an idea of where we are. We are a resort town founded back in the late 1800s. The way we became a horse area is prominent family in the early days brought fox hunting to the area and founded the Moore County hounds and they are still in existence today. Over a hundred years the Moore County hounds hunted the land that is part of the Walthour-Moss Foundation and they have become part of our organization. And so, how did we get here and how did we get to be the Walthour-Moss Foundation? Simply put, she was a Walthour-Moss. She married Will yam and they were married in the 1930s. They met at the horse show in North Carolina and built a farm in Southern Pines in the late 30s. In 1942, they took over the land the Boyds used for fox hunting and took over the Moore County hounds. They continued to amass a large land holding. As we headed into the 1970s, they wanted to seek a way to protect that land for the rest of the community. But he ended up dying before they could make that final dream come true, creating a foundation. But he had the forethought to make a bequest of 1,739 acres that was given upon his death. His wife outlived him for about another 30 years. In that span, she gave the foundation an additional 650 acres. When she passed away in 2006, left an additional 180 acres. And how we get to our 4,198, we have also had over the past 30 years, three separate land campaigns that raised \$10 million to purchase additional land. Most recently while we haven't been purchasing land, we have had multiple donations totaling about 400 acres. On that 4,100 acres, we have about 300 miles of trails. And our 300 miles of trails that we have people that access from all over North Carolina as well as South Carolina and people visit from around the country as well. And interesting to note is many of the trails on the foundation were there in the 1930s. They have been ridden on and the fox hunt have used them for well over 90 years. It is just an interesting thing to note. Today we are a non-profit organization. Our mission is to preserve open land, protect and improve wildlife, habitat and provide a place for people to ride. We are open to the public. Our trails are open to the public, sun up to sundown every day of the year and we are open for equestrian. So riders and coverage drivers and pedestrians. Hikers and walkers only. We don't allow bikes or motorized vehicles at all. As you can see on the screen just wanted to give you a show of what our 4,100 acres looks like. Everything outlined in green. Interesting to note the land here is a bit scarce on the north side. Here you can see how we are bounded by U.S. highway 1. And on the southern side that is the frat Fort Bragg facility. Which leads about how we came to gather equestrian access easements. With all these farms, a lot of them started large for us and as time went on, people didn't want farms that size anymore. And many of the places were sold. When you have 80 acres it becomes ten farms, people are paying quite a bit for their land and end up moving their fences to the property line. Like Chelle said for Green Mountain sort of similar here is motto has been you ride on my land and I ride on yours. When people move in you end up losing trails. Our burden of directors sought to protect first access to get into the foundation from all these farms that surrounded it and for the farms across the street. And then to also protect the bridle trails that were historically people had ridden on between farms. It only takes one road association, one vote to not allow horse traffic anymore. The board was really working to protect those accesses. So, to get started, honestly, we had a party. We asked board members and other neighbors to host little get-togethers around the various neighborhoods where we could get in front of them and

explain what we were up to and ask for the easements. It took off from there and we were able to start bringing easements in. We tried to make it as simple as possible to work with each landowner once they said they would like to grant an easement. There's no charge to the landowner to grant the easement. The foundation, the Walthour-Moss Foundation covers the cost of the survey. We cover the legal fees. We are fortunate to have a board member who donates those as an attorney. When they are ready to their easement, we go out and create the document. All of our easement agreements are recorded and they are very straightforward documents. They allow for pedestrian and equestrian use only. Note you cannot have any paved or unsuitable equestrian footing on them. And no fences or hedges or anything to block the trail. Again, once those are recorded, they are finished. We also have the option if a landowner would prefer not to grant an easement, they have the option to donate the land for access and that allows for possible tax donation as we are a non-profit organization. And we work with our local county governments and town governments to allow the splitting of the parcels. We are working to receive a rescission of the unified ordinance. The only thing in donating the land for the access versus granting the easement is that the owner actually is required -- must pay for the appraisal. Once it is finished and we have it recorded, we like to honor our donors with a recognition plaque, which actually helps mark the trails so people know which trails they can use. And majority of our trails, while they connect to the foundation, many are between farm fences or at the back of farms and there are a lot that connect farm to farm to the different road associations and over to the foundation. But like I said, we put up a little plaque. We will put up signs to let people know where the new accesses are and recognize them in our newsletter and perpetually in all of our brochures. So, for our maintenance, we are actually very lucky to have most of the landowners prefer to do their own maintenance of the easements. We pitch in with volunteers. We have a fund to help cover that but majority is done by the actual landowner. For liability, we are covered as a land trust and we have our easements listed out on there. One of the big reasons to accept the gifts of land is they can donate them in fee is that then the land becomes ours and the liability doesn't rest with the landowner anymore. That is one of the reasons we started to take the land gifts as well. For conflict resolution, we haven't had any direct conflict with us. But what I'm seeing more is there are many trails that people still use that don't have easements on them and people think they do. When those trails get closed, I start getting phone calls of why can't we ride here anymore and it has helped us get additional easements because people are seeing trails close. As -- the change of ownership is something we have to pay attention to as farms are selling. It is just a matter of educating people and letting them know what is going on. Again, we have been very fortunate that people have been gracious enough to grant these easements and to maintain them. As I mentioned, we started about 2006 trying to connect -- our first goal to connect the farms along the edge of the foundation to get direct access to there. And then secondary, we tried to get trails in these other areas, equestrian neighborhoods. And we have been thankfully quite successful. I would say we know longer have to ask for easements. People are calling us to grant them. We have had 92 granted to date since 2006 which covers approximately 15 miles of trail. You could see the accesses that connect from the various edges of the road in. And then all these are little equestrian neighborhoods or road associations that have granted easements to protect -- I think the largest take-away for us we take what we can get

when we can get it. Don't wait for ten people to all agree to give an easement. We take one at a time and eventually, they will connect. If one landowner doesn't want to do it, hopefully down the road if the land changes hands, the next one will. Our largest easement is 100 feet wide and runs about three quarters of a mile long. The smallest is just 70 square feet. We like to call our easement the fabric of our community. These easements that come in are weaving it together to help ensure it stays an equestrian neighborhood far in the future. So, with that, I would look forward to any questions anyone might have. I would be happy to answer and my contact information is on the screen.

>> CANDACE: Thank you so much, Landon. Before I give control over to Libbie, we have one final poll for everyone. How important is access to private trails for equestrian use to your community? Again, if it is other, I welcome you guys to send those items via the questions box. Again, I will give it a few more seconds just for people to answer, have time to answer. All right. I'm going to close that and share those responses. It is almost a tie between the first three. With the highest being of equal importance than access to public lands followed by less important than access to public lands. Then more important. So, kind of differing answers all across the board. So, thank you so much everyone for answering that poll. All right. Now I'm going to hand control over to Libbie, our final presenter.

>> LIBBIE: Hi, this is Libbie Johnson. I live in Tryon, North Carolina. We call it Tryon horse country. I'm a trail rider. I moved here for the trails so they are really important to me. Just a little bit of background. Tryon horse country is a horse community in the Foothills of North Carolina and a little slice of South Carolina since we sit on the state line. We tout our beginning in 1917 when Carter Tryon came to open it. In the following years he invited many of his friends from around the country to come here and ride. He was a fox hunter. He was one of the founders of the Tryon Hounds. To try I don't know -- Tryon riding and several horse shows still running today. The fox hunting here was a major draw because of its long season and plentiful quarry. This is where we originally got the trails that we have today. So, not all communities have access to public places to ride such as national or state or local parks. National forest, reservoirs, that kind of thing. And our little area doesn't have any public lands, but we did have all these trails on private lands. So, our private trail system consist of trails on privately owned land, whereby the landowners are giving permission to trail members to ride on their lands while obeying the rules and parameters of the system. And a public trail will allow any rider to come ride. A private trail system limits use to those who have agreed to the rules of the system and usually pay a fee for membership. So, for purposes of this webinar, I'm primarily going to be talking about our largest and oldest local trail system, which is called FETA. Not Feta. That's a cheese. We also have in Tryon horse country, CETA, which is Collinsville trails association which has many of the same rules that FETA does in place. It's a farm district and they have approximately 50 miles of trails. We also have the north Pacolet trail association, the equestrian nature trails, golden hills. All together it is about 250 miles of trails. But the FETA system, which is the one that you live here, anybody can join. You don't have to live directly on the trail system, has about 150 miles of trails on all kinds of terrain.

>> CANDACE: Libbie, I want to make sure you can advance your slides because we are still on your first slide.

>> LIBBIE: Oh. Okay. Well, I'm not understanding --

>> CANDACE: Try using the right arrow on your keyboard and that should --

>> LIBBIE: Yeah, I am.

>> CANDACE: There we go.

>> LIBBIE: Are we good now?

>> CANDACE: We are good.

>> LIBBIE: Okay. The history of our trail system is that it was originally established by the fox hunters in the 1920s. It was -- so, we had these trails in place for a long time. In 1993, a group of local landowners got together to preserve and jointly administer the historic equestrian trails in the area, and it has grown to be one of the most respected and often emulated trail systems in the country. We are organized as a North Carolina non-profit organization, a 501c seven, which is a non-tax-exempt recreational organization. And the FETA system has about 130 to 50 miles of equestrian trails, depend -- 30 to 150 miles of equestrian trails depending how you measure it. And the overall goal was to protect our trails as more and more people came in. Okay. So, the overview of this is that our FETA system is governed by 15-member board of directors. Not less than nine members. It is limited to a defined geographic area. We are limited to mounted riders or driving a carriage only. We don't allow hikers, bikers, atvs, dog walkers or others on the FETA trails. And, you know, there's been much discussion about that, but that's how we decided to do it. FETA's agreement with landowners is for equestrian activities only. And open to members and their guests and the guests have to sign a release agreement. Saddle tags are required on all riding members and guests must display a guest tag. And this is so we can keep up with, you know, who is on our trials and make sure that everybody has signed the acknowledgment of rules, is a member, has current coggims on file and signed the waiver. FETA trails belong to our landowners. They don't belong to FETA. So, the FETA rules don't apply to landowners riding on or otherwise using the trails on their own property. So, we don't dictate what they can do. Like I said, it is limited to mounted riders and carriage drivers. So, our trails are in remarkable condition on all types of terrain. We have got meadows, old logging roads. We have got very steep trails that you have to be careful -- a good rider to go down. All kinds of terrain. We follow good management practices to ensure that they do not become muddy or rutted or filled with holes, blocked by falling trees or branches. The condition of the trails are assessed daily for their use. So, there's a designated group of trail hosts that confers each morning to decide what trails will be open and what closed. A daily recorded message on the

FETA telephone hot line tells riders if the trails are open or if any particular trails are closed. All members are encouraged to call the FETA hotline before riding to see trail condition and always, members are encouraged to report trail issues, which enables our maintenance crews to stay on top of repairs. This updated communication keeps members apprised of condition and also alleviates damage which is important to us. Our hotline system works really well. Once people start riding on the trails, you know, they get with the program. An annual new members picnic welcomes new members and provides an opportunity for members to meet each other as well as get their questions answered. So, you know, easements is always a hot topic. We want to put permanent easements on as many of our trails as possible. And right now, we have about 2/3 of the FETA trails are protected by permanent easements. CETA and the north Pacolet trails also have a good portion of their trails in easements. One of the primary things about having private landowners is that you want to protect the privacy of them. So, none of our systems publish maps of the trails. We always get asked for that and of course, we don't want the maps to go on the internet and people just drive-up and hop in because they haven't signed our releases. So, our members learn the trails from other members or take orientation ride with experienced members. The trails that are not in permanent easements we have an agreement with the landowner. We have a landowner packet, which lays out what the expectations and responsibilities are for being a trail host. And of course, we are always working towards that permanent easement. And the permanent easement also protects us when property changes hands. That's a concern that everybody always has. So, right now, landowner appreciation is a big part of what we do because we know if we don't have landowner participate, we don't have trail use. We have about 200 participating landowners. We take really good care of them. We communicate with them often. We go to great, great lengths to work with our landowners to ensure that they have a good experience as a trail host. Landowner appreciation for us also includes frequently communication with a quarterly newsletter, a website, a daily trail status recorded message, a Facebook page and personal phone calls and an annual picnic for landowner appreciation that includes the members. We also encourage our riding members to write a thank you note to our landowners to let them know how much we appreciate this. Communication with landowners and riding members keeps everyone apprised of trail condition and assures landowners know that you have their best interests in mind. Members are frequently reminded to respect landowner properties and that without landowners, there is no trail system. For us, the combination of these practices has proven to be the cornerstone of good trail relations. So, maintenance and marking. Maintenance is a huge part of what FETA does. We have been really lucky in that we have a lot of people who have bought into the maintenance of our trails and they know how point it is to keep it safe for horses and riders. Trail expansion and maintenance is primarily performed by volunteers and landowners. Fewer than one third of the landowners are riding members. They are usually people who were riders early on and they quit riding but they have kept their property into the system. Or maybe they are people who bought on the trail system. They are not riders but they know that being on the trail system elevates the property value they have. So, FETA maintains the trails on non-riding landowner properties as well as several heavily used trails. Riding landowners are responsible to maintain their own trails and as a benefit, they receive a discounted membership. Trail maintenance is overseen by the trails chair on the board. That's a huge job. It's a major

responsibility of the management of the system and we want safe well-marked trails for horses and riders. Our equipment includes a motorized mule, tools, contracted workers, sometimes a couple of times a week or a grading contractor is needed or a tree company as needed. Volunteers are critical to our trail maintenance. When it is not kept up, it becomes overwhelming and dangerous quickly. We put this at the top of our priorities. We don't want a risk to riders and horses and landowners. Fortunately, we have a group of dedicated trail maintenance volunteers that actually enjoy their work. In recent years, we have had out of the ordinary storms and that is an understatement. With exceptional flooding that has been a real challenge to trail maintenance. Trails are marked with yellow diamond signs that say FETA on it. There's a few places where we have no FETA. Where we don't want people going up another trail that is not FETA. And that's to reduce confusion. Especially at trail intersections or forks in the road. That kind of thing. And we want to keep riders off trails and property that is not part of the trail system. The daily hotline that has a recorded message helps reduce maintenance by keeping riders off trails when wet or otherwise safe. And again, this system over the years has proven to be very good in keeping our trails up and safe. So, liability insurance and insurance are big concerns for private trail systems. Approximately half of FETA's budget is appropriated towards liability insurance. This is to reduce the risk to landowners. Landowners are listed as a named insured and this insurance is primary before the landowner's personal insurance. Fortunately, most of our landowners also carry umbrella liability coverage. So, clear rules and expectations have reduced our liability. However, members are often reminded and re-reminded of the rules. In North Carolina, there is a recreation land use statute for equine activity that also limits liability. However, FETA doesn't rely solely on the statute for its liability protection. So, over the years we have had rules that worked and rules that didn't work and some have been reworked. We want to -- we don't want to be rules intensive, but we also want to make sure that we protect our landowners and that we keep riders and horses safe. So, our rules are that only association members can ride on the trails and those members have all signed releases and have signed that they acknowledge and understand the rules. Guests are to be accompanied by a member and sign a release. Helmets are required with a secured harness. Occasionally we have somebody who says I have ridden on trails all my life. I have never ridden with a helmet. I don't want to ride with a helmet and we say nicely well we require helmets and if you don't think you can wear one, then you need to go ride somewhere else. We remind everybody to practice safe horsemanship on the trails. We often send out articles on trail riding and horsemanship. We ask that everybody treat other trail users with respect. Again this is be nice, be nice, be nice. We ask that everybody be respectful and quiet when they are close to residences and barns. Stay on marked trails. Obey the posted lines. Leave the gates as you find them. We ask you don't eat or drink alcoholic beverages, litter or smoke. And also we don't want you to take your dogs with you on the trail or pony horses. No more than six riders in a group. This is to protect the integrity of the trails. Don't ride on unmarked trails or unauthorized areas. We have a plastic FETA tag that changes every year with a number and a color on it. You have to have that tag displayed on your saddle and you have to have a decal on your towing vehicle to indicate that you are a current member of FETA. Boarders who are in the trail area must join FETA as riding members and their eligibility goes away when they leave that boarding barn or area. So, handling conflict. That's just what

everybody loves to do. We occasionally have conflict. We try to manage it really well. We hope that the rules that we have in place and the expectations limits conflict. And it does, but it occasionally rises its ugly head. Sometimes it's because mention who have refused to follow the trail rules, members who are found in violation of the rules are given a friendly reminder of the rules and asked to comply. But when that fails, their memberships may be rescinded. Trail use is primarily self-policed by other members. Riding mention know that we have something that's very rare and to keep the trail system viable, rules and property must be respected. And also, obeying the rules reduces the risk across the board. So, in the case of a personal dispute unrelated to trail use aides between a landowner and a member, a landowner may deny use of the trails. FETA doesn't get involved in these personal disputes. So, all in all, handling conflict quickly and fairly makes for a better experience for all. Landowners are appreciative that FETA governing board takes their participation protection seriously and works on behalf of the landowners. So, that's pretty much the way we do it in western North Carolina. And I appreciate your time and look forward to any questions that you might have.

>> CANDACE: Thank you so much, Libbie. And thank you also Landon and Chelle as well as Holley. This slide, which includes The presenter emails and there had been more links included in the follow-up email I will send you. But I will send you this slide as well as the next slide with more links in my follow-up email when I send along the link to the recording and the closed captioned transcripts. I invite anyone who has questions, you are invited to send them via the questions box. We will try to answer as many as we can. Otherwise, I will work with the presenters to answer them in writing and send out to everyone within a few weeks following the webinar. First question, Ruth think asks you, Libbie, her state of Washington has a recreational statute for landowners. Where can she get the sign such as the one you showed for North Carolina?

>> LIBBIE: For Washington state?

>> CANDACE: Or just where we could go to get more information? Do you know.

>> Can I answer that? Generally the state horse councils provide those.

>> LIBBIE: Yes.

>> I would check first with your state horse council and for a nominal fee you could purchase those signs.

>> CANDACE: Thank you so much. Quite a few people were asking about liability. You all touched on liability in your presentation. I know that Holley, you had some great information in regards to liability on your website. Can you explain that?

>> HOLLEY: Sure. Liability is really determined on a state by state basis. I can tell you most

states have two sets of laws. Either the activity statutes or the recreational use statutes. We found in the past for the horse men and women, it was difficult to gather that information and to interpret it. So, about six years ago, we put together a directory, it is called the directory of equine activity and recreational use statutes for horse men and landowner. It is available through our website if you go to the home page and click on the issue area for riding on private land, you will find that directory. If not, you can email me and I will send you a link to it. What it does is you can click on your state and it will take you directly to those statutes for your state. It actually helps give some information and analysis. For example, do you need to put one of the signs up that I think Libbie, you showed for your state and how you get those signs and also if you do -- if the landowner is compensated in any way, would that impact their ability to use the recreational statute.

>> CANDACE: Great. Ellen asks which website and just to confirm, Holley, you are talking about the ELCR website?

>> HOLLEY: That is correct. ELCR.org.

>> CANDACE: Thank you so much. Richard asks this question and I know during Libbie's presentation you showed an example of some of the trail surfaces. But prior to that he asked the question, are trails mostly dirt or compacted gravel or just if you could explain what type of surfacing works for the horses.

>> LIBBIE: Well, our trails are on all types of terrain. So, sometimes it is a -- you know, a nice gravel road. Sometimes it is the edge of a meadow. Sometimes it's, you know, a rocky area. There's a couple of short places where you have to ride along the road or cross a road. So, it's all kinds of footing. And when you become a member and you start to learn the trails, if there's a footing maybe that is not -- not that it is not unsafe. But maybe it is gravel or something and you don't -- your horse is unshod or something, you might want to ride on a different trail with a different footing. But as far as we try to keep all of the footing safe, which is why we don't allow riding when the trails are wet because we have a lot of clay in our soil here and that can make it slick.

>> CANDACE: Great. Thank you so much. Leslie asks are there specific insurance companies you recommend that deal in trail riding liabilities? I'm not -- if anyone has any information to offer of who you guys work with or have worked with.

>> CHELLE: Well, GMHA works with Farm Family Insurance. So, my recommendation would be to look at farm oriented insurance companies. But we just insured through a local agent, farm Family.

>> CANDACE: Thank you. Go ahead.

>> I was going to say I touched on this a little bit. As a land trust, the Walthour-Moss Foundation uses -- specific to conservation easements.

>> CANDACE: Great. Okay. Karen asks Chelle, are the GMHA trails closed to all members from November to Memorial Day or is it just equestrians?

>> CHELLE: It is just equestrians. We only -- we don't have jurisdiction over the other uses. So, we close it to equestrians to prevent them contributing to the damage. But that doesn't mean that hunters or motorized users or certainly snowmobiles would not use it.

>> CANDACE: Bob had asked is a scientific survey the best way to determine the need for equestrian facilities in a community? He works for a public agency and anything developed for equestrian purposes would undergo intense scrutiny as to its needs and the benefits of public dollars. So, again, he asks is a scientific survey the best way to determine the need for equestrian facilities in a community? Any comment, Holley, any suggestions on that one?

>> HOLLEY: I think I would encourage him to reach out to equestrian groups in the community. There could be some local horse councils. Even the state horse council can help locate different trail user groups. And sit down with them and interface with them because they are really I think have the most information about the equestrian community and the needs and desires. That would be my first step.

>> Can I add something?

>> CANDACE: Yes.

>> I think it is really important, we face this quite a bit in Vermont. It is really important to not look at this as a numbers game because coming from the right from the beginning, horses a minority user. On average, of all the trails in the U.S., the equestrian uses about 5%. So, there are lots of other reasons to encourage equestrian use and it doesn't start with, because there are a lot of horses that want to use the trails. It's important to think about accessibility. Equestrian use is a use that a person who has limited physical capability, who can't run a trail or bike a trail can use to get out and use a trail. A lot of equestrian users are older. They skew older and female. And that is -- you ask yourself, is that a population that you want to be able to access the wilderness or access the trails. So, looking at it specifically in terms of how many horses are going to use the trails is not necessarily a very full way to look at it. And also consider that because there are not a lot of horses, their impact is also lessened. So, don't look at horse use, it's impact on a one for one basis. Because if you are going to have 5% of your horses as compared to, you know, 70% hikers and 20% bikers, the impact of the horses is going to be quite minimal. So, those are some other things to think about.

>> Chelle, I want to add one other thing. What we see on a national level when we talk to land

managers is the equestrians as a group rate very high in contributing hours for trail maintenance. That is a good factor to consider too.

>> CANDACE: Elaine asks, Chelle, how is the GMHA a 501(c)(3) when trails are private and our trail donations to an entity which is not the 501(c)(3)?

>> CHELLE: GMHA is a 501(c)(3) which an educational focus and the trails -- the organization runs events and they don't just run events on trails. And they run a lot of educational equestrian events. So, the 501(c)(3) is to the organization. So, when you donate to the organization, you can -- that -- those funds are distributed so you can specifically -- the trails don't have to be public if the 501(c)(3) has an educational focus.

>> CANDACE: Harold asks this could go towards anyone but maybe Holley, I will direct it towards you. In regard to liability and maintenance, are there differences when a property manager grants use of the property versus an easement?

>> HOLLEY: Well, I guess if we look at Landon's example because they are a land trust, they kind of take the responsibility off the landowner. Correct me if I'm wrong, Landon. So, if you have the conservation easement on that, the liability kind of transfers to you. Correct?

>> LANDON: No. Sorry. My example was we have made it so that you can actually donate the strip of land that you might have granted an easement on. Deed the access over to us so that then we own it.

>> HOLLEY: But that impacts the liability. Right? It releases the liability on easement?

>> LANDON: It does because the association owns the land.

>> HOLLEY: The landowner no longer holds that liability when somebody is using that corridor, that trail.

>> CANDACE: Judith asks -- and this is a question for everyone because it may differ across the memberships. But what is the range of dues expected for your associations and do you have a requirement to contribute time to trail maintenance? So, I will start off with Chelle on that one.

>> CHELLE: So, the individual membership to the Green Mountain Horse Association is \$90 and there's no requirement to contribute time. It is strongly encouraged but not required.

>> CANDACE: Thank you. How about Landon?

>> LANDON: No. We are open to the public at no charge.

>> CANDACE: Okay. Great. Thank you. And Libbie.

>> LIBBIE: Our single adult membership is \$160 a year. It's \$235 for family membership and \$30 for non-riding supporter. We don't require time. However, again, it is encouraged and a lot of people are just happy to do it because they want to keep the trails going and in good shape.

>> CANDACE: Great. Thank you. Christina asks what is your take on owning your own tools? Who can use them, what tools do you use and what kind of training does a tool trail clearing staff have? Maybe we will direct that towards Libbie first.

>> LIBBIE: Um, well, I always have to laugh when we talk about trail maintenance because we have a group of guys that love nothing more than to get out in the woods with a chainsaw. It is a guy thing. And the trail system has some tools. People bring their own. As far as training on trail maintenance, I think it just goes from, you know, one person being on that committee over the years learning how to do it and that information is passed on. But there's nothing that we do as far as formal training on that. But we have had just wonderful, wonderful people working on trail maintenance and very few -- nobody has cut their leg off yet or anything like that. And they just love getting out there cutting trees down and clearing and fixing a bank that has collapsed or something like that. We are really lucky.

>> CANDACE: Thank you. Maybe Chelle you could answer that question if you have anything to add.

>> CHELLE: So, I was certified adds a trail master by the American Insurance Ride Conference. They have a very good four-day training with a lot of practical work and you also learn how to lead a work crew through that group. So, I worked with the volunteers, Green Mountain Horse Association had its own tools and atvs to get around. Some of the volunteers would use their own tools and we had one crew member at the association, a staff member who was forestry certified. So, he would do the heavy tree cutting and we made sure no one ever went out in the woods with a chain saw by themselves. So, anyone who was cutting anything with a chainsaw always had someone else with them.

>> CANDACE: Thank you. We have many more comments and questions that we'll not be able to address due to time constraints. However, I will work with the presenters to answer your questions in writing And I know Holley was interested in following up with anyone as are the other presenters. If we didn't get to your questions, we will work with the presenters to answer them following the webinar and you guys are also welcome to email the presenters yourself if you have a question you want answered as soon as possible. I want to again thank the sponsor of today's webinar, Arête Structures, as well as our other partners including the Federal Highway Administration, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. As well as Holley with the Equine Land Conservation Resource and our other presenters. And we hope you'll be able to join us for future webinars offered in our Advancing

Trails Webinar Series. I noted immediate upcoming webinars. If you miss any of our live webinars, they are available as recordings to download at any time in our online store. We also have postponed our 2021 Trails and Outdoor Recreation Summit, a partnership between American Trails and our international trails symposium institute along with outdoor recreational professionals. We have moved it from spring 2021 to fall 2021. The new dates are September 13-17, 2021. Visit www.2021tors.org for more information and to get on our mailing list. Thank you again to everyone for attending. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day and happy trails!

End of Webinar