

# THE RESOURCE



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE EQUINE LAND CONSERVATION RESOURCE

## On the Right Track: How a Community-Based Land Use Advocacy Organization Is Making a Difference in Central Florida

By Jennifer M. Keeler for ELCR

**Long after the immediate threat of a toll road being built across precious Marion County horse farms has passed, Horse Farms Forever’s work to preserve Florida’s equine heritage goes on.**

Every spring for the last 30 years, many of North America’s top equestrians have gathered in Ocala, Florida, for Live Oak International, the country’s most prestigious and charismatic combined driving and show jumping competition. Held on the picturesque grounds of the Weber family’s 4,500-acre Live Oak Stud, this annual event is like no other and attracts the largest spectator turnout in Marion County, Florida.

But not long ago, the future of both the international equestrian event and the farm itself was in jeopardy. On May 1, 2018, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) unveiled its proposed route plans for a new toll road called the “Coastal Connector,” which would run from the Suncoast Parkway along the western part of the state northeast to Ocala and connect with Interstate 75, paving right through the heart of historic horse farms like Live Oak Stud.

“One of the original proposed paths of the Coastal Connector would have not only gone straight through the grounds of our farm and competition venue, but also split my personal home in half as well,” said Chester Weber, co-president of Live Oak International and 17-time

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Photo credit: Horse Farms Forever

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National Champion driver. "It was potentially devastating not only to my family, but also to fellow farm owners and our entire local equine industry."

## Rallying Cry

In response, Weber was one of several Ocala-area landowners who rallied together to form a group called Horse Farms Forever (HFF), which immediately took action to lobby against the threat. Their efforts, combined with those of community and local government leaders as well as a tremendous grassroots public campaign, sent the issue straight to then-Florida Governor Rick Scott's desk. As a result, just four months after first unveiling their plans, the FDOT announced it was abandoning the project.

With the imminent danger of the Coastal Connector now past, HFF leadership realized that growth issues in Marion County would continue to affect farms in the future. "We agree that growth is good, but most importantly it should be inside the urban growth boundary," said Busy Shires Byerly, who now serves as HFF's Director of Conservation Strategies. "We want Ocala to have a vibrant downtown and be an exciting place to live. But horses and horse farms are the most important part of the identity, economy, and quality of life. Without them Ocala is just another town, and if we don't take action, it could all be gone in 20 years."

## Balancing Act

With the horse industry's economic impact in Ocala estimated at \$2.6 billion or almost 20% of the economy, over 22,000 jobs are directly related to the equine industry. Marion County is also home to the largest horse population of any county in the U.S. with over 80,000 equines residing on almost 200,000 acres dedicated to over 1,200 farms and the horse industry.

But business is also booming in Florida. Almost 100 people relocate to Florida each day, and Marion County has one of the highest growth rates in the nation for a county of its size, with a population that is expected to increase to 500,000 residents by 2030. The majority of current growth is outside the city limits of Ocala, and this sprawling growth pattern threatens the county's agricultural lands, its rural economy, the region's water quality, wildlife habitat, and Marion County's unique quality of life.

All of this means that even with the Coastal Connector in their rearview mirror, HFF still has plenty to do. "Our mission is to educate, inspire and advocate for the preservation of horse farms, with a focus on a long-term strategy to preserve the character and culture of the horse industry in our area," Byerly explained.

With the high growth rate in Marion County, farmland is constantly threatened by developers seeking exemptions to build both hous-



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

ing and commercial development within the Farmland Preservation Area, which was created by the Marion County Commission in 2005 in northwest Marion County, the heart of the area's signature horse farms. Unfortunately, in recent years more than 2,000 acres within this area have already been lost to urban uses.

## Making New Strides

Community research studies are just one of the many valuable projects HFF has in the works, all part of their mission to preserve the Ocala area's equine heritage and set the stage for a strong strategic plan. Today, working with an eight-person Board of Directors and three staff members, all supported by a plethora of both individual and corporate members, HFF is poised to continue to serve Marion County's horse industry.

Byerly outlined how HFF is hoping to help protect Ocala's equine identity and economy by learning from the example of other communities like Lexington, Kentucky, which has successfully faced growth issues impacting horse farms. "The goal is to have a similar Rural Land Management Plan as part of the update of Marion County's 2025 comprehensive plan," said Byerly. "This would designate how we're going to plan for the future of agriculture, while at the same time balancing economic development and urban population growth. We need to protect our iconic horse farms and irreplaceable soils."

Founded by the efforts of local horsemen and women, Horse Farms Forever continues its work protecting horse farms and the equine industry in Florida and now serves as a successful example for other communities. "It takes time to win the battle, and you also have to have a broad base of support including landowners, industry organizations, and elected officials," Byerly concluded. "I grew up on a horse farm that my family still owns, and what motivates me every day is helping farm families pass their land on to the next generation without having to worry if their beloved family farm will become a housing development."

The full version of this article is available at <https://bit.ly/2N1HeKR>





## Horse Farms Forever Honored with the Robert N. Clay Conservation Award

Equine Land Conservation Resource is pleased to announce that Horse Farms Forever (HFF) of Marion County, Florida, was recognized as the recipient of the 2020 Robert N. Clay Conservation Award. The award, established in 2014 as a partnership between Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA) and ELCR to help increase awareness of the importance of land conservation to the Thoroughbred industry and to serve as an inspiration to others within the industry, is presented annually at the TOBA National Awards dinner.

The nonprofit Horse Farms Forever was founded in 2018 to preserve the character and culture that horses, horse farms and the Farmland Preservation Area (FPA) bring to Marion County, Florida. The catalyst was the Florida Department of Transportation's threat



HFF team (L to R) Michelle Grald, Director of Communications; Sara Fennessy, Executive Director; Busy Shires, Director of Conservation Strategies; Bernard Little, President.

to put a toll road through the heart of the county's most pristine horse farms and the FPA. The organization is focused on raising awareness about protecting horse farms and advocating for the protection of the FPA from the threat of unplanned growth. Since 2018, HFF has helped to strengthen the FPA's boundaries and prevented development and roadway threats from encroaching into the Farmland Preservation Area.



HFF President Bernie Little, left, accepts the Robert N. Clay Conservation Award from ELCR President Ken Haddad at the HFF 2020 Conservation Summit in Ocala, Florida.

HFF is also working with community leaders and landowners to establish a Rural Land Management Plan as part of the county's comprehensive plan to help protect the nearly 1,200 horse farms in Marion County. In addition to protecting the land for farms, these new policies will help protect the horse industry, which contributes over \$2.6 billion to the county's economy and employs more than 20,000 people.

"We are pleased to work with and support the efforts of Horse Farms Forever and others to protect Marion County's unique equine heritage and industry," said ELCR President Ken Haddad. "Local advocacy groups, like Horse Farms Forever, are not only key to protecting local horse lands but they can also serve as successful models for other communities working to protect equine access to land. We applaud the commitment of Horse Farms Forever to help preserve the unique character and culture of the Horse Capital of the World for the benefit of this and future generations." Ocala/Marion County trademarked the phrase Horse Capital of the World in 2001.

Horse Farms Forever ([www.horsefarmsforever.com](http://www.horsefarmsforever.com)) is dedicated to preserving the open spaces and beautiful places that make Ocala/Marion County the Horse Capital of the World. For more information, see the article on HFF on the front page of this newsletter or go to <https://bit.ly/2N1HeKR>

Thanks to our corporate friend:



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# EQUINE PLACES AND SPACES

## **THREATENED:**

### **Del Mar Horsepark, California**

On 65 acres, Del Mar Horsepark is the last available venue in San Diego County that offers facilities and enough land capable of hosting shows year-round. It is the region's only public equestrian sports facility and the last remaining public riding school. The Friends of Del Mar Horsepark report that without public notice or governing board approval, the 22nd District Agricultural Association (22nd) canceled the horse park's 35 horse shows scheduled for 2021 that would have generated over \$1.75 million, and the riding school is facing eviction. To prevent the horse park from being turned over to developers, supporters are encouraged to make their voices heard by contacting California government leaders and by signing and sharing this petition at <http://chng.it/qR2kp8zgB9>.

## **GAINING GROUND:**

### **Kings View Farms, Florida**

Thanks to a devoted following of local families and resources from ELCR, a horse riding stable business called Kings View Farms is being allowed to expand from 12 horses to 20. At a committee meeting in January, Ormond Beach, Florida city commissioners voted to allow a special exception for the expansion of the business after a series of local residents told the commission how valuable riding lessons at Kings View have been for their children. The approval changes the property's land use category from "agricultural" to "riding stable" and includes a requirement that stables be constructed for any new horses before the horses are brought onto the property. Based on an old rule of thumb of one horse per acre, Commissioner Rob Littleton had initially been prepared to vote against the special exception because he was concerned that Kings View is too small. But after reviewing some of ELCR's resources suggesting a more nuanced approach to how many horses a parcel can support than a simple number-per-acre calculation, his mind was quickly changed. Commissioner Dwight Selby summarized the support for Kings View Farms' expansion for two reasons: "Number one, animals that otherwise probably would not be alive today are being saved, but more importantly, lives are being changed because of what you're doing."

## **THREATENED:**

### **Steady Strides Riding Center, Arizona**

The nonprofit Steady Strides Riding Center (SSRC), which provides therapeutic horseback rides to those with disabilities, is in desperate need of a new home after being informed that its property is being sold. In late January, SSRC learned they would have to vacate their current leased facility by May 1, but SSRC currently has nowhere to relocate. Melanie Roeder, co-founder and head trainer, said it's a challenge to find a facility that can house their 20 horses and fit their needs in order to serve those with a disability, such as a wheelchair ramp that helps individuals mount the horse. If they do not find a place by May, they'll face an uncertain future and have to suspend services to the many riders who depend on them for therapy. For more information and how to help, visit: <https://www.steadystridesriding.org>

**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.**

*Thanks to our corporate friends:*



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**Equine Network and its fine family of equestrian print and online publications:**

American Cowboy, Arabian Horse World, Discover Horses, Dressage Today, EquiManagement, Equine.com, EquiSearch.com, EquiShopper, EQUUS, Horse & Rider, HorseBooksEtc.com, Horse Journal, HorseLinkMagazine.com, MyHorse.com, Practical Horseman, Spin to Win Rodeo, and The Trail Rider

## E-bikes on Public Lands: What Equestrians Should Know

By Randy Rasmussen, BCHA Director of Public Lands and Recreation

Public debate is likely to intensify in 2021 regarding the appropriate role of motorized electric bicycle (e-bike) use in outdoor recreation, including the appropriate role of electric mountain bikes (e-MTBs) among backcountry trails. This is a condensed version of an article that appeared in the Winter 2020-21 newsletter of Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA). To access the full version of this article, go to <https://www.bcha.org/blog/2021/01/15/bcha-public-lands-update-on-e-bikes-for-2021>

### Final Rules for E-bike Use Issued by DOI Agencies

The e-bike industry continued its aggressive push to open public land trails to e-bike use, driven primarily by an objective to increase e-bike sales across the nation. They chalked up one such success in 2020 via the Department of Interior (DOI), which in early October announced final regulations for e-bike use by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These new policies provide a green light to local agency managers who seek to authorize e-bike use on trails where traditional bicycle use is currently allowed (for details, see BCHA's Summer 2020 newsletter). In short, the new policies treat e-bikes as a non-motorized trail use, akin to a regular bicycle—a reversal of policy that previously (and rightfully) recognized that e-bikes operate via an electric motor.

### Draft Directives for E-bike Use on National Forests

Now the good news. It appears that the U.S. Forest Service is unlikely to match the fervor by which DOI agencies rushed to facilitate and expand access for e-bike use on non-motorized trails. In late September, the Forest Service issued "draft directives" that clarify how and by what criteria e-bikes are to be managed on national forests. The draft directives were circulated as part of a 30-day public review and comment period. BCHA researched, prepared, and submitted detailed public comments on the draft directives.

### E-bikes and the Lincoln National Forest

BCHA chalked up a significant victory in their efforts to ensure an open public process and rigorous environmental analysis under NEPA

(National Environmental Policy Act) by the Lincoln National Forest, located in southern New Mexico. BCHA and BCH New Mexico submitted a detailed public comment letter in August on the agency's draft Environmental Assessment, documenting concerns over safety, user conflict and the potential to displace traditional non-motorized trail users. In September, the District Ranger issued a Draft Decision Notice withdrawing a portion of an otherwise good recreation management plan that would have authorized e-bike use alongside hiking and equestrian use on a new trail system. The detailed public comments BCH developed for this proposal can be used as a template for other BCH chapters who might find themselves facing a similar situation.

### E-bike Proposals Coming to a Forest (or Park, or BLM Lands) Near You?

Equestrians need to be prepared for the moment when their federal land management partners announce a proposal to authorize e-bike use on otherwise non-motorized trails. In many places, it will be assumed by agency trail planners that equestrians will simply accept and learn to accommodate e-bikes on shared-use trails. In other places, agency planners will ask local equestrian representative what trails they might be willing to concede to e-bike use.

But in the short term, do not expect agency decision makers to fully understand concerns about safety and user conflict shared by traditional trail users like horsemen. We will need to make the case at the local level and be prepared to document those concerns.

To access the full version of this article or to learn what you can do to monitor developments by federal land managers in your area, go to <https://www.bcha.org/blog/2021/01/15/bcha-public-lands-update-on-e-bikes-for-2021>







Mrs. Mary Glover Smith

## ELCR Remembers Longtime Donor Mary Glover Smith

We at ELCR were saddened to learn recently of the passing of Mrs. Mary Glover Smith, who had been a longtime supporter of ELCR's mission to save horse land for nearly 20 years. Mary was born May 26, 1925, in Cleveland, Ohio, and died on September 28, 2020, in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the age of 95.

Mary attended Hathaway Brown School and was selected the co-Honor Girl of her graduating class. Her college education began at Wellesley College and was later completed at National College of Education, Evanston, Illinois, after marrying her high school sweetheart Craig. She taught first grade at Winnetka Public Schools in Illinois and at The Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

In her youth, Mary was a talented figure skater before developing a passion for horses later in life. She became a skilled dressage rider and for many years she owned and managed Logan's Corner Dressage Center, where her goal was to always maintain the barn and horses to Pony Club standards. In addition to serving as a District Commissioner for the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club Pony Club, Mary also filled numerous roles with the National Pony Club including as Secretary on the Board of Governors and also on the Advisory Council.

Mary will be deeply missed by her husband of 75 years, the love of her life, Craig Richey Smith, their four children Timothy, Craig, Patricia and Marcia, and seven grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren.

Our deepest sympathies are with Mary's family, and we join them in remembering Mary and celebrating her long and well-lived life.



### ELCR Education Corner

#### Recent additions and updates to the ELCR Online Resource Library

##### **New Article: Private Equestrian Trail Systems: Viable Options for Fragmented Landscapes**

*by Chelle Grald for Equine Land Conservation Resource*

Many parts of the U.S. do not have the luxury of access to large tracts of public land for recreational trails. In these communities, private trail systems can play a vital role in equestrian recreational and competitive pursuits. Private trail systems are by nature unique, and there are strengths and challenges common to most. This article takes a closer look at three well-established and successful private trail systems in the Eastern U.S. For each of these private equestrian trail systems, the article explores how it was formed, who it serves, logistics of rules and maintenance, questions of liability, and conflict resolution. <https://elcr.org/private-equestrian-trail-systems-viable-options-for-fragmented-landscapes>

##### **New Article: Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 - Overview and Implementation**

This article provides a good overview of the key provisions in the Great American Outdoors (GAO) Act, along with the overall framework that will facilitate implementation of this new law. <https://elcr.org/great-american-outdoors-act-of-2020-overview-and-implementation>

##### **New Webinar: Sustainable Equine Management**

ELCR will be partnering with Daily Acts and Bay Area Barns and Trails to bring you a Sustainable Equine Management Webinar on March 6, 2021, focusing on innovative, eco-friendly and cost-effective strategies to caring for horses and the land they live on. Register at <https://dailyacts.org/events-cal/webinar-sustainable-equine-management-2> (A link to the recorded webinar will also be available on the ELCR website.)

##### **New Webinar: Great American Outdoors Act Webinar**

Equine Land Conservation Resource will be partnering with the American Horse Council and Back Country Horsemen of America to present an educational webinar on March 11, 2021, detailing how the equine community can work with federal agency staff to determine their plans for 2021-2025 and try to influence decisions regarding priorities for deferred maintenance projects. To register, email [info@horsecouncil.org](mailto:info@horsecouncil.org) by March 8, 2021. A link to the recorded webinar will also be available on the ELCR website under the Equine Access to Public Lands Issue area.



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

### Great American Outdoors Act and Implications for the Equestrian Community

In early August, the “Great American Outdoors Act of 2020” was signed into law, prioritizing deferred maintenance projects, including trails and land conservation projects – thereby addressing two of the equine industry’s top legislative priorities.

In addition to providing input for the draft bill in February, the horse industry sent more than 1,000 letters to Congress to urge passage of the bill.

The GAO Act presents significant opportunities for our equine community. Equine Land Conservation Resource will be partnering with the American Horse Council and Back Country Horsemen of America on educational programming on the GAO Act and how the equine community can work with agency staff to determine their plans for 2021-2025 and try to influence decisions regarding priorities for deferred maintenance projects. The first webinar on this topic will be on March 11, 2021. A link to the recorded webinar will also be available on the ELCR website under the Equine Access to Public Lands Issue area.

For more information on the GAO Act, go to <https://elcr.org/great-american-outdoors-act-of-2020-overview-and-implementation>



**What would YOU do with \$9.5 BILLION to fix the Nation's trails?**

In early August, President Trump signed the “Great American Outdoors Act of 2020” into law, prioritizing deferred maintenance projects, including trails, and land conservation projects – thereby addressing two of the horse industry’s top legislative priorities. **The GAO Act promotes outdoor recreation, public access, and public health.**

**WHAT: GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT WEBINAR**  
**WHEN: March 11th, @ 1:00pm EST**  
**SIGN UP: E-mail [info@horsecouncil.org](mailto:info@horsecouncil.org) to register by no later than March 8th.**

## How YOU Can Support ELCR

### There are so many ways you can help support ELCR’s vital mission of saving horse land!

1. Join ELCR as a Conservation Partner.
2. Make a gift in honor of friends and family who also love our equine friends and way of life.
3. Donate stocks to ELCR.
4. Become a monthly donor and leverage a smaller monthly gift into a larger annual impact.
5. For federal and state employees, contribute to ELCR through the CFC or SECC.
6. Shop on Amazon Smile and select ELCR as your charity ([smile.amazon.com/ch/52-2139677](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/52-2139677)).
7. Remember a cherished loved one or equine companion with a Memorial Tribute Gift.
8. Like and share ELCR on Facebook—the more people we reach, the more cherished lands and equine heritage we can save!



### Spotlight on Monthly Donors

Becoming a monthly donor can make a big difference for nonprofit organizations like ELCR, especially during unforeseen challenging times such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Monthly giving allows ELCR to have funds we can plan for and count on to continue our mission to save horse land even when much is uncertain. This method of giving also allows donors to leverage a smaller monthly payment into a larger donation that will have even more impact, along with an increased year-end tax deduction. The extension of the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) enacted in 2020 also allows for greater tax benefits for charitable contributions as well (more information at <https://bit.ly/3jsSl6q>). Just think—the same \$5 or \$10 you might spend on coffee or lunch on an average day could easily be earmarked once a month for saving horse land! Becoming a monthly donor is easy and ELCR invites you to join us by contacting us at [info@elcr.org](mailto:info@elcr.org).



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*If you prefer to donate online, visit [www.elcr.org](http://www.elcr.org).*

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