

THE RESOURCE



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE EQUINE LAND CONSERVATION RESOURCE

The Future of the Conservation Easement

by Robert Banner for ELCR

Looking at the vast network of tools we have established for the protection of land, there is no more powerful tool than the conservation easement. Created in the early 1960s, conservation easements held by various land trusts now blanket sensitive areas hosting equestrian, historic, and scenic treasures. Together landowners and land trusts stand as a solid line of defense against the development of our precious open space.

Wisely, the conservation easement was developed to last in perpetuity. But, as the world faces a tsunami of change, the land trusts that hold and defend these easements are facing challenges. Are we ready for the next 10 years? 50 years? 100 years? And beyond?

Recently, the leaders of Virginia's conservation community weighed in to relate the challenges they face.

Continued next page...



Great Meadows in Middleburg, VA, with over 300 acres in conservation. Photo credit: Rob Banner

NO
LAND
NO
HORSE



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Threatened by the crush of data centers, transmission lines, and residential growth, Virginia's land (much of it hosting equine use for centuries) will be tested in the very near future. Rest assured, they are prepared. But what are their pinch points? What are their fears? Will the conservation easement stand the test of time?

Bob Lee led the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) as Executive Director for nine years, beginning in 2005. The VOF was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1966 and protects more than 860,000 acres. Lee explains that Virginia Senator FitzGerald Bemiss and attorney George Freeman set the agenda in motion, recommending formation of the VOF as a state land trust where the protections carry legislative teeth.

The Virginia model grew quickly. After VOF, more than 22 land trusts (15 accredited by Land Trust Alliance) followed, encouraging a dense network of protection across more than a million acres of Virginia. While the program is one of the nation's most successful, Lee warns that we must remain vigilant as we protect the conservation easement that protects us and our horses.

Lee points out that the Virginia Open Space Land Act authorizes conservation easements granted to public agencies, such as local counties and the VOF. Because these easements are held by government agencies, they are not subject to the eminent domain of other state agencies (Virginia Department of Transportation or public utilities); see Virginia Code 10.1-1704. While it is possible for an easement held under the Act to be released, the requirements for such a release by the VOF or another government agency are extremely rigorous and designed to replace any released easement with a new easement of equal or greater economic and conservation values.

The Virginia model mushroomed when the legislature voted to offer the most attractive reward of any state in the nation. In addition to federal tax deductions, Virginia offers landowners transferable state tax deductions called Land Preservation Tax Credits. Even if you don't have significant Virginia state tax, the credits may be sold to those who do. It's a very attractive reward, but Lee warns that the statute is subject to legislative change if we don't continue to offer the public a significant benefit in return.

Chris Miller is Executive Director of the Piedmont Environmental Council. Founded in 1972, the PEC covers nine counties and holds more than 12,400 acres in conservation easement. One of the most effective community-based environmental groups in the nation, PEC protects the open space, historic landmarks, and air and water quality, too. Miller knows the future will involve negotiating compromises between zoning, landowners, and land trusts in order to sustain local and state support.

As the world faces a tsunami of change, land trusts that hold and defend these easements are facing challenges. Are we ready for the next 10 years? 50 years? 100 years? And beyond?

Sally Price led the Land Trust of Virginia, which holds more than 200 easements in the popular land trust. She agrees with Lee and Miller, but her concerns are based around the legal costs of enforcing the protections imposed by those easements, especially as land changes hands. Will new owners fully understand the deed restrictions that come with their property? Or sue to change the restrictions? If the land trust does not have sufficient legal funds, the conditions they protect are at risk.

Marie Ridder is now 96. Over her dedicated and successful career, Ridder has worked for numerous federal and state agencies, the VOF, the PEC, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, too. She was one of the first conservation easement donors in Virginia. Clear as a bell, she agreed with the others. When I asked her advice for the future, she said, "Two words Mr. Banner: birth control!" Since all the problems addressed relate to a growing population, who can argue with her? Virginia's Loudoun County has exploded by more than 30% in 10 years. Simply put, more people from the city want more access to the countryside.

Sum total? While most leaders feel confident the protections of the conservation easement will stand the test of time, change is occurring quickly, and legal challenges are more frequent. Best advice? Be a part of the change.

About the Author: A lifelong horseman, Rob Banner has 28 years of experience with national horse publications, including serving as the former publisher of *The Chronicle of the Horse*. Today, he is Senior Project Officer at ACRE Investment Management in The Plains, Va. ACRE is a full-service natural capital asset platform for landowners to manage their land. He can be reached at rob@acre-investment.com.

Questions? Feel free to contact Robert Banner at robertbanner2@gmail.com

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EQUINE PLACES AND SPACES

SAVED: Burbank Rancho Equestrian Neighborhood, Burbank, California

Burbank Rancho equestrians, long concerned over the future of their historic neighborhood, rejoiced earlier in 2025 over news that a beloved local horse rental business would be saved by local conservationists, River LA and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). The two organizations, which focus on revitalizing and maintaining natural spaces along the L.A. River, announced on January 1, 2025, that they would purchase and maintain the land that housed Studio Horse Rentals, the last remaining horse rental business in the city of Burbank.

The two organizations will partner with Dario Perez, the Studio Horse Rentals owner, who rents his space on the land. The parcel is situated on South Mariposa Street near a historic equestrian bridge, and the business serves as a key stop on the route to Griffith Park's many horseback riding trails.

Read the article [here](#).

LOST: Rancharra Equestrian Center, Reno, Nevada

In July 2023, the leases of thirty-nine boarders at the Rancharra Equestrian Center in Reno were not renewed, and their horses had to be relocated to other stables. The Rancharra Equestrian Center, a privately held business, claimed it could no longer manage the Center's operating losses, which they have done for the past eight years. Despite aggressive attempts to market the facility to potential buyers, the business found no viable buyers, and developers instead applied for permission to knock down the facilities and rezone the property to allow for higher-density housing.

See the article [here](#).

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, or visit the Report an Issue page on our website.

SAVED: Rock Creek Horse Center, Washington, D.C.

The National Park Service (NPS) has approved the transfer of the concessions contract for the Rock Creek Park Horse Center, formerly held by Guest Services, Inc. (GSI), to Metropolitan Equestrian Team, Inc.

As the new concessioner, Metropolitan Equestrian Team, Inc., will take over providing equestrian and related services on May 21, 2025, including:

- Therapeutic riding programs
- Instructional camps
- Guided trail lesson programs
- Riding lessons

GSI had signed a 10-year concessions contract for the Rock Creek Park Horse Center, which was set to expire on December 31, 2028. The terms of the contract and the services offered are unaffected by the transfer to Metropolitan Equestrian Team, Inc.

Metropolitan Equestrian Team, Inc. is a non-profit with more than 15 years of experience providing academic and equestrian-related services and camps for public enjoyment of all ages. They operate at other locations in New York, New Jersey, and North Carolina.

Read the NPS update [here](#).

THREATENED: Gulfstream Park, Hallandale Beach, Florida

In August 2025, Gulfstream Park filed a lawsuit against the Florida Gaming Control Commission. The core issue is decoupling, a process that would allow the track to operate its casino without being legally required to hold a certain number of live thoroughbred horse races.

The lawsuit and related legislative actions are seen as a major threat to Florida's horse racing and breeding industry by many in the equestrian community, including the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders' and Owners' Association.

Read the article [here](#).



ELCR Education Corner

Recent additions and updates to the ELCR Online Resource Library

The ELCR Online Resource Library represents the largest available collection of resources, including articles, guides, tools and templates, and recorded webinars related to conserving horse lands. These online resources are available to the public free of charge. The online library can be accessed at www.elcr.org.

Horses Mean Big Business: 2023 WIHS Economic Impact Study

This is an executive summary of the economic impact report of the 2023 Washington International Horse Show (WIHS) on Prince George's County, Maryland. The Washington International Horse Show, one of North America's most prestigious equestrian events, was established in 1958. The 65th edition of the WIHS was held at the Show Place Arena at Prince George's Equestrian Center on October 23–29, 2023. Highlights from the economic impact study include

- Direct outlays to stage the WIHS and by all participants in and visitors to the Show in 2023 totaled \$5.837 million.
- The total impact of this spending on the Prince George's County economy in 2023 was \$8.560 million.
- As the direct spending associated with the WIHS was re-cycled through (re-spent in) the Prince George's County economy, it generated \$1.857 million in new personal earnings for workers residing within the county.
- The spending associated with the WIHS supported a total of 58.1 full-time, year-round equivalent jobs.

Read the full 2023 WIHS Economic Impact Study [here](#).

Recorded Webinar: Economic Benefits (and More) of Horse Trails in the American Economy

Advocating for horses in our communities is important if we want to keep horses close to where we live and work. This webinar examines the numerous ways the horse industry's recreational sector contributes to our local communities. The contributions highlighted include environmental benefits, creating destinations that attract visitors, enhancing our quality of life, providing breathtaking panoramic viewsheds, bringing us out into nature, providing exercise, and providing equine assisted therapies, not to mention the equine economic impact and so much more! The webinar also addresses how your community can leverage these benefits and advocate for investments in the space required that can get you the return in investment needed. This webinar is hosted by American Trails. Webinar presenters include Julie Broadway, President, American Horse Council, and Holley Groshek, Executive Director, Equine Land Conservation Resource.

The recorded webinar can be accessed [here](#).

The Future of the Conservation Easement

Conservation easements can be useful when it comes to protecting horse lands in perpetuity. But, as the world faces a tsunami of change, the land trusts that hold and defend these easements are facing challenges. This article asks, "Are we ready for the next 10 years, 50 years, or 100 years and beyond when it comes to defending conservation easements?"

This article explains how the leaders of Virginia's conservation community recently weighed in on the challenges they face. The Virginia Open Space Land Act authorizes conservation easements granted to public agencies, such as local counties and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Because these easements are held by government agencies, they are not subject to the eminent domain of other state agencies.

Read the full article here: <https://elcr.org/the-future-of-the-conservation-easement/>



ELCR's 2024 Annual Report Now Available Online

What you will find in ELCR's 2024 Annual Report:

- A letter from the ELCR Board President, Kenneth Haddad
- A list of articles, resources, and webinars developed in 2024
- Highlights of ELCR's FY 2024 Technical Assistance Program
- Highlights of ELCR's 2024 Advocacy Efforts
- Anson W.H. Taylor Jr. 2024 Memorial Scholarship Award Recipient
- Robert N. Clay Conservation Leadership 2024 Award Recipient
- ELCR 2024 Financial Report

Read the full 2024 Annual Report [here](#).

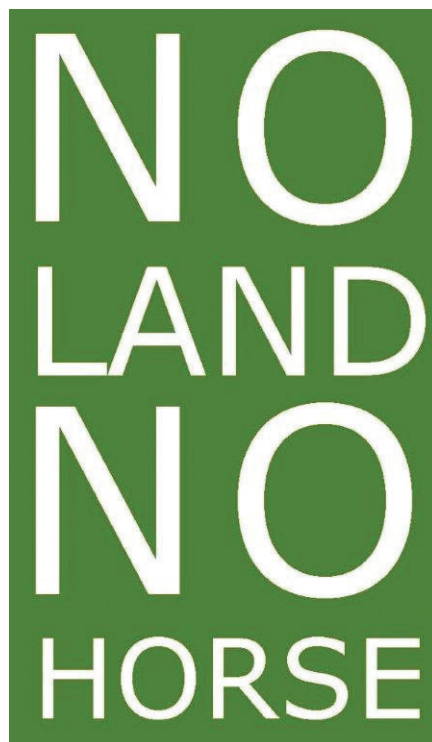
ELCR's 2026-2028 Strategic Plan Update

In addition to our everyday work here at ELCR, our staff and board of directors have devoted a great deal of time to the development of our 2026-2028 strategic plan.

Our new strategic plan will be more than a declaration of intent. It will serve as a roadmap for meaningful impact over the next several years. The plan will be shaped by the insights of a diverse range of stakeholders, who provided invaluable input through our strategic planning process, and will reflect a shared recognition of both the sense of urgency and opportunity we have heard. The plan will position us to confront the realities: horse lands will continue to fragment, public access will narrow, and the cultural presence of the equestrian world will further fade unless we act.

We envision a future where equine landscapes are understood, protected, and celebrated as essential infrastructure in our communities. We are confident that by working together aligned with our new strategic plan, we can ensure that horse lands remain a vital part of our national fabric—today, and for generations to come.

A special "Thank You" to our board members, donors, industry leaders, conservation partners, and stake holders that have provided their input during the strategic planning process. We look forward to sharing our 2026-2028 strategic plan with you soon!



Ways to Support ELCR

ELCR could not continue the good work it does without your support. Below are some of the many ways you can help support ELCR's vital mission of saving horse lands!

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. Consider a stock gift to ELCR [Donate stock](#).
4. [Become a monthly donor](#) and leverage a smaller monthly gift into a larger annual impact.
5. Remember a cherished loved one or equine companion with a [Memorial Tribute Gift](#).
6. Like and share ELCR on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#)—the more people we reach, the more cherished lands and equine heritage we can save!

Visit ELCR.org for more information or contact us at elcradmin@elcr.org.

ELCR's work is mainly funded by charitable contributions and memberships. Your gift combined with others helps us to expand our outreach, grow awareness about conserving land for horses, and continue our educational programming and technical assistance services. Please consider making an online gift at <https://elcr.org/donate/>.

ELCR works through our [Conservation Members and Partners](#) to raise awareness of issues driving loss of horse lands and to support local actions to keep land open to horses. Please consider becoming an ELCR member today at <https://elcr.org/join/>.

Thank You for Your Support!

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