

6.21.2010

PUBLIC COMMENT

Fort Custer RA – Phase 2 – Long-Range Action Goals Plan

On Monday, June 21, 2010, the DNRE – Recreation Division held a “Public Input Open House” to review the proposed long-range action goals for the park, and gather public input and comment regarding those recommended actions.

The meeting was well attended, with approximately seventy (70) participants.

The following recorded comments are from the open house, e-mails, and phone:

Open House

(four stations + comment box)

(1) General Action Goals and Cultural Landscape Zone:

- Fifteen mile loop for dog sled.
- Horseman campground asap. More riders would come from Indiana & be able to ride. They would also bring more money to Michigan.
- Agree with separate trails for mountain bike and equestrian trails. Similar to separate trails/campgrounds at Ionia SP and Yankee Springs SP.
- Considerations: safety, sustainability of trails.
- Give hikers a separate trail so as not to be surprised by fast moving bikers.
- Would be nice to have a horseman’s campground. Separation of trails 50/50.
- Separation for safety of people. For less than ½ of 1% user group-lots of money.
- Put bike trails on flat areas for family use. It’s called the yellow loop.
- Promote education of native plants. Maybe set up small prairie example
- Provide a study to measure number of users by usage type on trails.
- Fix road.
- Separation of trail – completely agree. Decisions need to be made by all user groups to come up with a plan. All users stand to loose out. Much better to work together and all come out ahead. There are hundreds of users out there, many more miles of trail can & should be made.

(2) Primitive, Ecologically Sensitive, and Scenic Zones:

- Consider putting interpretive “spur” trails into some of these wetlands. Foot traffic primarily but consider a multi-use ??? ??? trail where possible. Make it an educational experience. Learn about the riparian zones.
- Consider channels around Beaver Lake to control the amount of water.

- Please note that Fort Custer horse friends now have approval to replace the bridge on the yellow trail on a volunteer basis. The steel I-beams are already laying in wait i.e. near location.
- State of Michigan parks if well managed (and fairly) the people of Michigan will have many years to enjoy peacefully their lands.

(3) Backcountry and Natural Resource Recreation Zones:

- Consider a hike in only rustic campground into 1 or 2 at these back country zones. Give people the opportunity to experience back packing.
- Need horse campground-brings out of state money—encourages family values-appreciation of nature.
- Definitely! Split biker & equestrian trails on a 50/50 basis.
- Stewardship prairie restoration-this needs to be minimal, people do not want to ride, hike or horseback under the blazing sun & heat. Needs to keep with the forest feel, much better experience & a lot less expense to the park at state level.
- Stewardship-clean up all existing trash and tree tops cut for prairie restoration. Any clearing of land should “leave no trace.”
- Trash includes old discarded toilets, sinks and other park infrastructure that has been discarded by dumping in the woods.
- No motorized use.
- A segment of the North Country Trail passes through recreation area land north of M-96 between Fort Custer Drive eastward into National Cemetery land. By our (NCT) agreement with National Cemetery officials, in order to gain this access, trail or National Cemetery land must remain foot travel only. Violations will jeopardize access for any users.
- Split trails based upon usage in terms of numbers of users. Measure traffic over 1-2 month period.
- Why waste money on stewardship that most users do not agree with. Why mess with Mother Nature to further someone’s political agenda?
- Fix road please-new pavement!
- Limit winter motorized travel to one park location so that trails remain snow covered and viable for hiking/snowshoeing/sleds.

(4) Developed Recreation and Visitor Services Zones:

- Please consider at least a 24-site equestrian campground.
- Consider a citizen financial review of park expenses.
- Please consider picket poles and hitching posts.
- Please consider equestrian use of modern campground.
- Event campground or equestrian-must consider the feasibility & cost for these and decide if it is, in fact, some thing that is cost effective compared to the actual use of it. And if created, a user fee should be part of having it.
- User groups need to be self-funded.
- Please consider equestrian camp for a fee would bring in a lot of extra money.

- Picket post for horses
- Within a 50 mile radius of Fort Custer there are 14 bike parks and only 4 horseback riding parks.
- How many more cyclists are there than horsemen? put the bikers on the flat & horse on hills and wooded
- 14 bike parks/4 horseback parks=# of mtn bikers/# of equestrians?
- Maintain integrity of trails built by specific user groups (i.e. MMBA) for use by that user group by restricting specific user groups, especially equestrians and allowing user groups (i.e. hikers) that have minimal impact upon the sustainability/destruction of the trail.
- We all have the potential to work together.
- Plenty of space for development of specific user group trails (i.e. snowmobiles, bikes, horses).
- Fix the road!
- Please consider a separate loop designated (in winter months) for cross country skiing only. Snowmobile use on a ski trail destroys it or cross country skiers by damaging the ski track and throwing sand on the track that damages our skis. Please designate separate loops for the snowmobilers.
- How will the R2R law be applied to this trail separation?
- What is wrong with leaving things as they are? We have only had 2 problems with bikers in 3 years. This tells me there are no real problems.
- If snowmobilers are in the park, keep them to outside edge of park. Keep inside for cross country ski & hiking. (safety issue)
- Why don't the equestrians ride Kellogg Forest or the Chef Center? We don't need an equestrian campground-utilize Ionia or Yankee Springs.
- Not enough miles. Bikers there too.

(5) Comment Cards from Open House

- Publicize more widely how and when decisions regarding execution of these plans get made for Fort Custer specifically. The public appreciates and deserves to be involved in the development of the public land they love to enjoy.
- The idea of splitting up the horse & bike trails is a good one. That is as long as the trails are divided equally. And neither group gets shoved into a bad area. I believe the horse trails have been at Fort Custer quite a bit longer than the bikers. And there is a lot of misinformation being put out to the public.
- Be nice to see each group treated equally.
- Thank you. Very well thought out plan.
- Understand there are horse people and bike people avoiding this area due to conflicts. Aggression has no place on public lands.
- Separate bike & horse trails. Have horse trail around the perimeter of the park & have the bike trails in the middle of the park.
- Separate trail head for horses. More trails w/campground to attract more out of the area horse people and to attract out of state money.

- Is it true the mountain bikers have purchased parts of Ft. Custer? If this is state land, how can this be?
- Separate the bikers & horses by time of day or even certain days. Bikers & other days horses on the trail. # 1 concern is continued use of park by & for mountain biking, kayaks, hiking. I grew up on Fort Custer & now raising my own family. I am part of MMBA but do not want to lose use of the trail because of arguments. We stayed on Fort Custer Drive because of the park. We have put many hours into the maintenance and cleaning of the park. Look for a day when all users accept the responsibility and appreciate the park.
- Horse people spend more money also live on large pieces of property and pay taxes.
- Separate trails similar to Yankee Springs is fine. The wider trails are what I use now. Horsemen's campground to spend overnight in would be nice too. Keep the tree and shade coverage as much as possible though. I have not had any problems sharing the trail with the bikes and am willing to continue to do that if that is the only way to have use of the trails but it appears the bikers do not like sharing trails with horses so I support separating the trails.
- As a horse user, I would love separate trails. The area west of the campground along the river would be wonderful.
- Mountain and horse interactions are best avoided. I think that separate trails for these 2 groups of users are absolutely necessary for everyone's safety and enjoyment. As a biker, I am committed to help maintain the trails and would gladly help the equestrians create a horse trail system.
- Have no problem splitting the trails up but only if they are split fairly, same amount of miles of trails, same amount of challenging terrain – horses can climb hills also and go thru water. Also same amount of woods not all open flat fields for the horses. If this can be done fairly then there should be no problems.
- In favor of keeping the equestrian and MTB trails separate. A clear east-west dividing line seems to make the most sense. From an equestrian standpoint having access to the river area would be great. The "blue" trail would possibly be nice. I understand the MTBR's built red and blue trails so they should keep those but let us build our own by the river.
- Came to Fort Custer when your trails first opened to horses and there were no bike in those days. I would like to see the trails separated for safety issues. As the horse people helped establish and maintain the trail and even division should take place to be fair.
- As a mountain biker I would like to see a separation of the bike and horse trails also. However, with the horse campground in Ionia and Yankee Springs-why is another needed? Keep in mind ??? built the trails and maintain them. Why not open up the river ??? ?? horses? Also the grasslands make no sense, it is hot & dry and no one wants to ride there.
- Yes, separate trails. Split park east/west. Equestrians can build their own trails on the east side. Everyone takes responsibility for creating and maintaining their own trails. Prairie restoration-no. This is a recreation

park. Not a land preserve. No one will want to use a trail in the hot sun. you will force more trails into the wooded areas, reducing the “natural feel” we all love. Hike in campsite along river would be great. Just a half dozen spots and a pit toilet and well.

- Why are there no trees in the grassland area that is trying to be restored? It doesn't look true and no one wants to be baked in the sun. This seems far fetched. Why not give the horse riders the trail along the river? The bikers don't use it and it will be quite scenic for them. The horse folks want a campground but Yankee Springs and Ionia are under utilized. Why would this be any different? I just do not want to loose any of the mountain bike trails that we have worked so hard to create. We are victims of our own success. I have been going to Custer riding since 1991.
- The horse people need a campground that bring ponies and horses to camp overnight. The horse trails were laid out by United Mich. Horseman many years ago. I rode them with Harriet Hagner. Varied terrain is the best for trail riding-so I hope they can keep the woods and hills for horses. I work on Yankee Springs trails which are 25 miles from where I live and work well to trail without bikes. The horses could have trails all around the perimeter of the park-give the bikers the center to make their moguls, etc.
- Appeared to be great focus on the concerns of mountain trail bikers at the stations I visited with little opportunity for input from other casual recreationists on the area. As a regular user of the Fort as a hiker throughout the year and as a fisher and hunter in the appropriate seasons, I have some concern regarding the possible monopolization of a tax-supported public recreation area for an unending series of mountain trail biking competitions to the detriment of general recreationists. I acknowledge that this group plays a significant role in maintaining “their” trails but must note that I and other hikers N.C.T. that passes across the recreation area, in the wake of storms and high wind events. As a resident of Battle Creek the area offers an opportunity to enjoy nature at its finest. From woodcock display flights in early spring, and wood duck, mallard, Canada goose, trumpeter swan and wild turkey broods later in the season, the Fort offers unexcelled “birding.” And the recent addition of an Osprey sighting provides the latest addition to the viewing. Further, I suspect a substantial percentage of the total annual vehicular traffic on the area is comprised of elderly couples slowly driving along paved roads “counting deer.” As a recreationist who has pulled up his share of invasive species and built dozens of wood duck boxes over more than a third of a century (think park managers from Leroy Bross, Bill Kosmider to Tony Trojanowski) seen lakes created and enlarged and watched the restoration of oak openings from mature black locust stands, I hope the projected plans for the future of the area include room for “my kind.”

E-Mail Comments

(Source removed)

- I am a disabled rider. I cannot ride a bike and the only way I can enjoy the trails is on horseback. If the Mountain Bikers are a problem I am all for separating the trails. If this is done, we should have separate trails of our own. I know that, being in a trail riding group, we have work bee's and create and maintain our own trails with DNRE approval. This has worked for us since the early 80's and has continued to work since.
- I have been involved with the mountain bike/equestrian conflict from day one. You see I ride regularly at Pontiac Lake Recreation Area. In fact I became aware of the problems at Ft. Custer and Melva Parker, President of the Fort Custer Horse Friends back in the late 1990's. The history is well known to all of us and I assume all of you. At that time mountain bikers began to come into the parks and ride the horse trails. The historical horse trails had been in existence usually from the 1970's. Equestrians rode them on a regular basis. They worked to maintain the trails by removing fallen trees and fixing stream crossings, etc. The mountain bikers told park management that these trails were abandoned because they were not trimmed for hikers or bikers. Equestrians really only care about head clearance and trees blocking trails, not low stuff around their horses' legs. The result was that the horse shoe markers that the DNR had installed on these trails disappeared and bikers began to tell equestrians that they were riding on bike trails. Back then the bikers wanted all the trails. Not very fair was it? They were successful in Holly Recreation Area in getting horses kicked off their historical trails in late 1999.

If I remember we all wanted separate trails, but back then the state's policy was basically multi-use trails, as land is limited. Mel Parker fought hard back then to keep the historical equestrian trails and have the bikers construct their own trails. The manager at Fort Custer insisted that all trails would be multi-use which the Michigan Horse Council and the Michigan Mountain Bike Association agreed: that yes, all trails should be multi-use. So the Ft. Custer equestrians accepted this and set about signing their trails to ride toward the bikes so the horses would not be freaked out by bikes coming up behind them. I have ridden with Mel at Fort Custer on several occasions and also attended their special use camping event each September. I have found the bikers there to be accepting of the horses and pleasant and polite when we pass each other. I know the equestrians make an effort to stay off the trails on their race days. I personally do not believe that races should be held on our public property. I hope the DNR gets a really good fee, because in my research for Pontiac Lake, Tailwind Enterprises has grossed as much as \$80,000 on one race.

I assume that the DNR is aware that the Southwestern Michigan Mountain Biking Association has made new trails with no authorization and management when notified did nothing. I guess it's ok for some people to disobey the rules. In my research back in the late 1990's there were many more parks that allow mountain biking than allow horse back riding. No new parks have added horse back riding and Holly Rec was taken away and before that Bald Mountain. Highland Trail Riders at Highland Rec have asked again and again to reopen an old equestrian trail, but all that has happened in the last 15 years is to take away a trail that was an equestrian trail.

Separate trails would always be desirable; however, to limit the horses to one small part of the park is unacceptable. Mountain bikers tend to be males between the ages of 20-40 with lots of energy and money to make improvements. That is wonderful, especially for the DNR, but that does not mean you should discriminate against equestrians who are primarily female and quite a bit older. I am now 70 years old and feel sad that I still have to battle for my right to enjoy my sport. Horse back riding is one sport that three generations can enjoy together, unlike the more physically challenging mountain biking. Even in the now defunct Southeast Michigan Trails plan from 1999, statistics showed that equestrians had lost over 500 miles of trails since 1980, I believe. To my knowledge, no new equestrian trails have been added to any state parks or recreation areas in the last 20 years, we have only lost trails.

If in fact the trails are to be separated at Fort Custer, then a parallel trail system needs to be constructed that will give equestrians access to the entire park with the same number of miles of trails. Please give them a campground and separate trail head. It's a beautiful park and many of us would come and camp there. We don't even mind sharing with the bikes, so the reported conflicts must be primarily on the part of bikers. As to who damages trails most, I suggest you go and do some research at Pontiac Lake. Walk the horse trails and then the bike trails. Our horse trails have almost recovered from the damage done by the bikes. Take your cameras and take some pictures.

Please don't discriminate against older females, who can still enjoy riding several hours and enjoying our beautiful state.

- Mel, will you please print a copy of this for the meeting tonight?

Good Morning Ron and Paul,

When we met on several occasions last year (once for my Oakland Press article with the Friends of Highland Recreation Area -- a group which I was instrumental in starting several years ago), you both said that I could contact you at any time if I had a concern. Well, I have a definite concern and am truly hoping you can help to resolve it.

I have just heard about the meeting Monday evening regarding equestrians at Fort Custer Recreation Area and I am unable to attend. But, I would like my opinion to be read aloud if possible....

I understand that horses may be removed from the historic horse trails. If true, this would be mighty sad. The equestrians have been extremely gracious in sharing the historic horse trails with the mountain bikers. Now, I am concerned that unjustified accusations and pressure from the Southwest Michigan Mountain Bike Association could result in the removal of horses and trail riders from the trails.

Unfortunately, I don't think these strong, healthy (and often aggressive) young (primarily) males realize how discriminatory their actions are. Shouldn't we be working together to protect the interests of all users?

Would you please remind the mountain bikers that trail riding is primarily a female driven sport -- from young girls age 5 to women age 85? Trail riders are pretty passive, ride more slowly (than bikers) and enjoy the natural environment. Many of our trail riders are handicapped, elderly, have developmental or physical disabilities or have special medical needs including heart or circulator conditions. Riding stimulates the brain and nervous system, provides muscle toning, balance and strength and has long been proven to be therapeutic. Riding a horse provides for many of us the freedom that a wheelchair cannot.

A personal friend of mine, Julia Fox, suffers from peripheral neuropathy and her walking is limited. But, the four good feet of her horse provides Julia with mobility -- and the ability to get good exercise, breath fresh air and to enjoy our state parks. Riding has "leveled the playing field" for Julia and allows her to enjoy our outdoors as much as someone hunting, fishing, hiking or biking.

I'm sure you already know the statistics -- Michigan's horse industry pumps 8 Billion dollars into our economy (www.HorsesCountInMichigan.com) . There are 155,000 horses in Michigan and about 80,000 use our trails. The MDNRE generally leans towards supporting hunting and mountain biking -- young, strong male driven sports. I sincerely hope that you agree that the time has come for the MDNRE to show that it does not discriminate against the minority -- equestrians, women, children and those with physical or mental disabilities.

For the SWMMBA president to misrepresent the standing of the equestrians is troublesome and refutable. I know several members of the Fort Custer Horse Friends Association personally and they are a generous, good natured bunch who volunteer at the park and work hard to maintain the trails. At this time, I am not familiar with any biking

association assisting the equestrian work bees for trail maintenance, but I do know that contrary to what has been stated, equestrians have assisted the SWMMBA. While I agree that new trails may be necessary, I believe, with the increased use of bikes on trails could cause a dangerous situation as their heads are down and they move at a very fast pace -- and have recorded accidents almost monthly. Therefore, if new trails are as justified as the bikers express, then perhaps it is the responsibility of the mountain biking association to develop their own new and exclusive trail system. They certainly tout the manpower to do so. Makes sense, doesn't it?

The demanding and demeaning attitude of the mountain bikers is worrisome. Bullying equestrians is not the answer. Being respectful of ALL other users, and particularly those with special needs, is the solution. I assure you that until new bike trails can be built, equestrians would be more than kind in continuing to share the historic horse trails.

Is there anything that I can do to help create a bridge of understanding? Should we be considering the creation of an inclusive "Friends" group at Fort Custer? Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please call me at any time.

Respectfully,

Sharon Greene
Member of Friends of Highland Recreation and the Highland Equestrian Conservancy

Phone Comments

(Source removed)

- (6/17/2010) call from an elderly (70's) trail user who walks the Fort Custer RA trails with his wife. Stated that he has not had any problems with horses, but has with bikes (hit several times).

Melva J. Parker, President
Fort Custer Horse Friends Association Comments on:

Fort Custer Recreation Area (Draft 4.20.2010)

PHASE 2 - LONG-RANGE ACTION GOALS

Long-range action plan providing specific action goals focused on the natural resources, historic-cultural resources, recreation opportunities, and the education-interpretation opportunities of each zone established in the "General Management Plan" for...

Prepared by:
Paul N. Curtis, Park Management Plan Administrator

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INTRODUCTION

This is "Phase 2", the 10-year 'Action Goals' phase of planning for Fort Custer Recreation Area. In this phase, the first action is to re-evaluate the General Management Plan (GMP) to assure that no conditions have changed that would cause a change in that overall guiding document. Having recently adopted the General Management Plan for this park, it stands as written.

PHASE 1 – GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

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GENERAL ACTION GOALS

The long-range action goals that apply to the park as a whole include:

- Complete the "Stewardship Plan" for the entire park (partially complete now):

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2010

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Wildlife Division

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Ecologist

- Implement the specific provisions of the (new/updated) Stewardship Plan.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park and Stewardship

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

- Acquire land within the 2004 NRC Boundary:

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Lands Management and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Lands Manager

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- Notify DOD (Department of Defense) that PRD is interested in acquiring their lands if/when they dispose of them:

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2010

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Lands Management

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Lands Manager

FCHFA supports.

- Identify opportunities to improve connectivity within and beyond park boundaries by both land and water (e.g. opportunities with Kalamazoo Valley Trail and potential for a water trail connection, etc.):

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

Connect trails through greenways in Fort Custer Industrial Park to Harts Lake and connect to Calhoun County Trailway System. Including Equestrians.

- Conduct a feasibility study for a new park entrance, east of the current location, to more directly access the Eagle Lake Day-Use Beach area:

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2018

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

- Develop a marketing plan for the park based on natural and cultural resources, and recreation opportunities:

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park, Operations, and METD

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Marketing Specialist

Advertise events in the park.

- Develop a cultural resources inventory of the park for interpretation, protection, and preservation:

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Cultural Resource Specialist

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- Update the Natural Features Inventory and expand to include aquatic systems:

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and MNFI

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Ecologist and designated MNFI staff

- Complete "Wildfire Plan":

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2010

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Park Manager

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Ecologist

- Prepare an "Emergency Plan":

TARGET DATE: Annually

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

- Develop a master "Site Development Plan" for the park:

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

Within a 50 mile radius of Fort Custer, there are fourteen parks for riding mountain bikes and only four for horseback riding. The first public meeting held on July 31, 1974 to provide input for planning Fort Custer was attended by 200 persons, equestrians requested trails and a rustic campground. Now 36 years later, equestrians are the only

group not accommodated with camping. Equestrian horse trailers have evolved into sophisticated units with living quarters that require electricity. It is time to move forward and build an Equestrian Trailhead and campground or allow the use of the modern campground by equestrians?

- Review all proposed earthwork activities for potential impact on historic/cultural resources:

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Cultural Resource Specialist and Park Manager

- Explore and develop revenue generating opportunities that are sustainable:

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Program Services, Operations, District, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Funds Specialist

Allow equestrians to use the modern campground during seasons of low use such as spring and fall to bring in additional revenue. FC could draw from surrounding states and northern Michigan.

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Backcountry Zone (B)

The character of this zone is natural with minimal evidence of human impact. The Backcountry Zone allows for low density trail usage, including bicycle and equestrian and slight modifications of the landscape (i.e. trail development) to accommodate that use. The delineated 'Backcountry Zone' areas within the park were identified to contain higher value natural resources and are actively being maintained/restored by Stewardship. The Backcountry Zone is the largest zone with 1,353 acres of the park (45%).

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The following action goals will be attained in the Backcountry Zone (B):

(B) Natural Resources

- Implement the specific provisions of the (new/updated) Stewardship Plan with particular emphasis on prairie restoration.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Unit Manager and Park Manager

How many acres included in this project? What is the projected cost and who is funding the project? Can funding priority be changed? What uses are compatible with this area? How does this project benefit the park?

- Retain farming of 157 acres as Stewardship transitions this land from farming to prairie.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Unit Manager and Park Manager

(B) Historic/Cultural Resources

- Review all proposed earthwork activities for potential impact on historic/cultural resources.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Cultural Resource Specialist and Park Manager

(B) Recreational Opportunities

- A designated snowmobile trail (Natural Resource Recreation Zone) impacts this zone.

TARGET DATE: NA

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Authorize equestrian use during off season for snowmobiles.

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- Evaluate and make recommendation on continuation of multi-use trails with input from user groups and the public.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2011

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

FCHFA opposes the separation of trails because it would mean loss of mileage and diversity of the park. FCHFA would consider an equitable separation of trails if a new equestrian campground and trailhead is built and construction of new trails is approved to replace loss of mileage.

(B) Education/Interpretation (E/I) Opportunities - develop and provide information on the following:

- Trail users and trail etiquette.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Trail users, METD, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Park Manager

Post trail etiquette signs at park office, campground office and entry booth. Provide accurate information on the DNRE web site designating use of the trails to prevent misunderstandings. Many people don't know horses are allowed on the trails. Information on the DNRE web site is buried. Mountain Biking is on the home page.

- The Department of Defense 'closed areas'

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: DOD, METD, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Park Manager

FCHFA supports opening the 'closed areas'.

(B) Management Focus

- Implement the Stewardship Plan for restoration.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship, DOD, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Unit Manager and Park Manager

How many acres included in this project? What is the projected cost and who is funding the project? Can funding priority be changed? What uses are compatible with this area? How does this project benefit the park?

Identify 'Universal Access' opportunities for hunting.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

Horseback riding provides access of trails to people with disabilities. Provide accommodations for those individuals such as Mounting blocks at the trailhead and along the trail. Trail riding is primarily a female driven sport, from young girls age 8 to women age 80. Many trail riders, men and women, are handicapped, have developmental or physical disabilities, or have special medical needs including heart or circulatory conditions, hip, leg, knee or foot problems, etc. making walking any distance difficult. Horses provide four good feet. Riding has been proven to be therapeutic.

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Assess current multi-use trail system and in collaboration with user groups, develop recommendations for future trail plan that meets users needs, complies with Phase 1 zoning, and is sustainable.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2011

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Trail users, Planning, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

FCHFA opposes the separation of trails because it would mean loss of mileage and diversity of the park. FCHFA would consider an equitable separation of trails if a new equestrian campground and trailhead is built and construction of new trails is approved to replace loss of mileage.

Coordinate with the Department of Defense to "clear" the military 'No-Entry' zones in this Backcountry Zone and open them to public use.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

FCHFA supports opening the 'no-entry'.

Promote volunteer partnerships to meet the resource goals.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Volunteer Specialist and Park Manager

Work closer and more cooperatively with all volunteer groups with more transparency.

Maintain a visitor experience that reflects a high degree of 'natural' feel, a significant sense of solitude, and a lack of man-made improvements.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

Need to assess man made obstacles on the trails in the Backcountry zone.

Target the training of "Outdoor Explorers" to meet the above cited specific E/I needs for this zone.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing
PROGRAM INPUT FROM: METD
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit

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(B) Development

- Implement recommendations for trails assessment, Universal Access hunting opportunities, and cabin location.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Target date is too far into the future for implementing trail recommendations.

- Replace bridge on trail near the two cabins.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

FCHFA has been working with the DNRE to get a replacement bridge designed and approved as a club project.

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NATURAL RESOURCE RECREATION ZONE (NRR)

The Natural Resource Recreation Zone is the second largest zone with 1,135 acres of the park (37%). This zone is utilized for active recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, snowmobiling, and trail usage (biking, hiking, mushing, equestrian, cross-country skiing, etc.). There is still an emphasis on resource quality over recreation, but in this zone higher levels of use are allowed. The 'Lakeview' and 'Trailside' cabins exist within this zone and overlook Jackson Hole Lake. The park's three lakes also fall under this zone classification.

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The following action goals will be attained in the Natural Resource Recreation Zone (NRR):

(NRR) Natural Resources

- Work with Fisheries Division on a muskie stocking plan for Eagle Lake.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship and Fisheries

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Ecologist and Fisheries Unit Biologist

- Investigate need for development of aquatic weed control plans for all three lakes in the Recreation Area.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship, Fisheries, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Ecologist

(NRR) Historic/Cultural Resources (NA)

(NRR) Recreational Opportunities

- Layout and build new designated snowmobile trail.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2011

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning, Stewardship, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

- Implement recommendations from trails assessment.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Why is implementation date different between backcountry and natural resources? Target date for BC is 12/31/20, NR Target date is 12/31/15. Target date is too far into the future for implementing trail recommendations.

- Provide improved trailhead parking to serve bike and equestrian users.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Return dirt trailhead to equestrians and allow mountain bike parking at the beach and pavilion paved lots.

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(NRR) Education/Interpretation Opportunities

- Trail users and trail etiquette.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: METD, Trail users, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Park Manager

Follow recognized posted trail etiquette. Provide accurate information on the DNRE web site designating use of the trails to prevent misunderstandings. Information is buried on the DNRE web site concerning equestrian trails and camps.

(NRR) Management Focus

- Promote the educational/interpretive opportunities in the zone.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

- Identify 'Universal Access' opportunities for hunting.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

Horseback riding provides access of trails to people with disabilities. Provide accommodations for those individuals such as Mounting blocks at the trailhead and along the trail. Trail riding is primarily a female driven sport, from young girls age 8 to women age 80. Many trail riders, men and women, are handicapped, have developmental or physical disabilities, or have special medical needs including heart or circulatory conditions, hip, leg, knee or foot problems, etc. making walking any distance difficult. Horses provide four good feet. Riding has been proven to be therapeutic.

• (NRR) Development

- Develop improved/expanded parking at trailhead.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning, Trail users, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Return dirt trailhead to equestrians and allow mountain bike parking at the beach and pavilion paved lots. Target date is too far into the future, this could be an immediate change.

- Implement recommendations for trails assessment and Universal Access hunting opportunities.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

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Developed Recreation Zone (DR)

There are six areas with this designation. In this zone, active recreation takes place in areas not designated for natural resource significance. The total area of the zone is 299 acres (10%), which includes a modern campground, two day-use and beach areas, and four boating access sites (two at one location).

The following action goals will be attained in the Developed Recreation Zone (DR):

(DR) Natural Resources

- For the entire zone, but with a focus on the campground, remove non-native invasive shrubs and trees (black locust, autumn olive, honeysuckle, pine, glossy buckthorn, etc.)

Don't remove natural shrubs and trees that delineate campsites. Provides privacy. Is it really necessary to remove the pine trees?

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship Unit and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Unit Manager and Park Manager

- For the entire zone, survey and map protected plants.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Stewardship Unit and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Stewardship Ecologist and Park Manager

(DR) Historic/Cultural Resources (NA)

(DR) Recreational Opportunities

- Overnight equestrian event camping.

TARGET DATE: Annual

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

We appreciate the opportunity to camp by permit, but really think it is time to move forward and provide a Permanent modern equestrian campground, can start with rustic.

There are only four areas to ride and camp with horses within a 50 mile radius of Fort Custer compared to 14 parks to ride mountain bikes in the same radius.

- Implement recommendations from trails assessment.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Target date is too far into the future for implementing trail recommendations.

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(DR) Education/Interpretation Opportunities

- Trail users and trail etiquette in signage/kiosk and programming messages.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: METD, Trail users, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Park Manager

Same as other zones.

- Interpretive programming and telling the story of Fort Custer.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: METD, DOD, and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Park Manager

Using what method? Signs can be targets for vandals.

(DR) Management Focus

- Promote the educational/interpretive opportunities in the zone.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

- Identify 'Universal Access' opportunities (facilities and programming) in the zone.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

- Review disc golf after first five-year period of this plan, and adjust zone designation if needed.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

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- Define area for overnight equestrian event camping and develop plan for that use.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2011

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

Permanent area for modern equestrian campground which has been proposed since 1996.

- Conduct a feasibility study for a new park entrance that will come into the park in the vicinity of the Eagle Lake Day-Use Area.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

- Identify location for future camper cabins (look at area off of Kalamazoo River access road).

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

Does current use support the need for additional cabins?

• **(DR) Development**

- Expand/upgrade the sanitary dump station and drain fields that serve the campground.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

- Implement Universal Access recommendations for the zone.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

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- Upgrade the electrical system in the campground, and include back-up generator.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner

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Cultural Landscape Zone (CL)

This zone identifies the entire recreation area as within the Cultural Landscape Zone. Recognition needs to be given to the fact that the recreation area was originally a military training base dating back to World War I. Prior to early European settlement, Native American Indians were present in this area. Territorial Road, which defines the southern border of the park, was originally an old Indian trail. The trail later grew to an east/west route for pioneers and later became a stage coach route. Over time, several old farmsteads were constructed throughout the park as the area eventually became settled. In 1917, Camp Custer was built for a military base. The State of Michigan acquired 2,899 acres in 1971 and an additional 96 acres in 1973.

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The following action goals will be attained in the Cultural Landscape Zone (CL):
(CL) **Natural Resources** ...(Same as underlying zones)

(CL) **Historic/Cultural Resources** ...(Same as underlying zones)

(CL) **Recreational Opportunities** ...(Same as underlying zones)

(CL) **Education/Interpretation Opportunities** ...(Same as underlying zones) plus...

- Tell the story of the Fort Custer, from time of Native American influence through its military training period of World War I and II.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: METD and Stewardship
RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Cultural Resource Specialist

Refer to disc titled "Fort Custer, As You Were".

(CL) Visitor Experience ...(Same as underlying zones)

(CL) Management Focus ...(Same as underlying zones) plus...

Implement education and interpretation recommendations.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: METD and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: METD Education Unit and Park Manager

(CL) Development ...(Same as underlying zones)

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Scenic Zone (S)

This zone recognizes that there are aesthetic qualities to be preserved and protected in the park. The Scenic Zone incorporates the Kalamazoo River frontage of the park, Eagle Lake, Whitford-Lawler Lake, Jackson Hole Lake and the hilltop picnic shelters on the north side of Eagle Lake. The total overlay acreage is 289 (9.5%) of FCRA.

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The following action goals will be attained in the Scenic Zone (S):

(S) Natural Resources ...(Same as underlying zones) plus.

Manage vegetation to enhance viewsapes of the zone.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

(S) Historic/Cultural Resources ...(Same as underlying zones)

(S) Recreational Opportunities ...(Same as underlying zones)

(S) Education/Interpretation Opportunities ...(Same as underlying zones)

(S) Visitor Experience ...(Same as underlying zones)

(S) Management Focus ...(Same as underlying zones) plus...

Develop and maintain viewsapes of the zone.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

(S) Development ...(Same as underlying zones) plus...

Any development in the zone must complement the viewing opportunities.

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Visitor Services Zone (VS)

This zone is located about 1 mile south of the park entrance. It consists of 6 acres (less than 1%) of the park. Included in the zone are the park headquarters building, contact station, old manager's residence, and shop yard behind the headquarters building.

The following action goals will be attained in the Visitor Services Zone (VS):

(VS) Natural Resources (NA)

(VS) Historic/Cultural Resources (NA)

(VS) Recreational Opportunities – (NA)

(VS) Education/Interpretation (E/I) Opportunities

All park educational and interpretive materials to be available in the office 'public space.'

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2010

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

Use the old manager's residence for a conference area to conduct educational and interpretive programs for campers, including a meeting area available for user groups.

(VS) Management Focus

Provide 'Universal Access' to the office from the parking lot and within the building.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Assure security of offices, facilities and equipment (including outdoor equipment).

TARGET DATE: Ongoing

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

Define adaptive re-use of old manager's residence (requires HVAC and restoration of water supply) or remove.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Use the old manager's residence for a conference area to conduct educational and interpretive programs for campers, including a meeting area available for user groups.

(VS) Development

Install screen fence around outdoor storage area for equipment security and improved visual impact.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: Park Manager

Construct cold storage building.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2020

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Implement needed Universal Access upgrades.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Restore HVAC and water supply for old manager's residence, and address other required upgrades for defined adaptive re-use, or remove.

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Install solar or wind turbine to power the contact booth (make highly visible to promote use of 'green' energy and as an education tool).

TARGET DATE: 12/31/2015

PROGRAM INPUT FROM: Planning and Park

RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM POSITION: District Planner and Park Manager

Considering the expense of wind and solar systems, is this an efficient use of monetary resources? Could this money be put to better use?

June 21, 2010

Mr. Paul Curtis
Management Plan Administrator
Department of Natural Resources & Environment
Lansing, MI 48909-7973

Dear Mr. Curtis:

My name is Merle Richmond and I have been involved with the mountain bike/equestrian conflict from day one. You see I ride regularly at Pontiac Lake Recreation Area. In fact I became aware of the problems at Ft. Custer and Melva Parker, President of the Fort Custer Horse Friends back in the late 1990's. The history is well known to all of us and I assume all of you. At that time mountain bikers began to come into the parks and ride the horse trails. The historical horse trails had been in existence usually from the 1970's. Equestrians rode them on a regular basis. They worked to maintain the trails by removing fallen trees and fixing stream crossings, etc. The mountain bikers told park management that these trails were abandoned because they were not trimmed for hikers or bikers. Equestrians really only care about head clearance and trees blocking trails, not low stuff around their horses' legs. The result was that the horse shoe markers that the DNR had installed on these trails disappeared and bikers began to tell equestrians that they were riding on bike trails. Back then the bikers wanted all the trails. Not very fair was it? They were successful in Holly Recreation Area in getting horses kicked off their historical trails in late 1999.

If I remember we all wanted separate trails, but back then the state's policy was basically multi-use trails, as land is limited. Mel Parker fought hard back then to keep the historical equestrian trails and have the bikers construct their own trails. The manager at Fort Custer insisted that all trails would be multi-use which the Michigan Horse Council and the Michigan Mountain Bike Association agreed: that yes, all trails should be multi-use. So the Ft. Custer equestrians accepted this and set about signing their trails to ride toward the bikes so the horses would not be freaked out by bikes coming up behind them. I have ridden with Mel at Fort Custer on several occasions and also attended their special use camping event each September. I have found the bikers there to be accepting of the horses and pleasant and polite when we pass each other. I know the equestrians make an effort to stay off the trails on their race days. I personally do not believe that races should be held on our public property. I hope the DNR gets a really good fee, because in my research for Pontiac Lake, Tailwind Enterprises has grossed as much as \$80,000 on one race.

I assume that the DNR is aware that the Southwestern Michigan Mountain Biking Association has made new trails with no authorization and management when notified did nothing. I guess it's ok for some people to disobey the rules. In my research back in the late 1990's there were many more parks that allow mountain biking than allow horse back riding. No new parks have added horse back riding and Holly Rec was taken away and before that Bald Mountain. Highland Trail Riders at Highland Rec have asked again and again to reopen an old equestrian trail, but all that has happened in the last 15 years is to take away a trail that was an equestrian trail.

Separate trails would always be desirable; however, to limit the horses to one small part of the park is unacceptable. Mountain bikers tend to be males between the ages of 20-40 with lots of energy and money to make improvements. That is wonderful, especially for the DNR, but that does not mean you should discriminate against equestrians who are primarily female and quite a bit older. I am now 70 years old and feel sad that I still have to battle for my right to enjoy my sport. Horse back riding is one sport that three generations can enjoy together, unlike the more physically challenging mountain biking. Even in the now defunct Southeast Michigan Trails plan from 1999, statistics showed that equestrians had lost over 500 miles of trails since 1980, I believe. To my knowledge, no new equestrian trails have been added to any state parks or recreation areas in the last 20 years, we have only lost trails.

If in fact the trails are to be separated at Fort Custer, then a parallel trail system needs to be constructed that will give equestrians access to the entire park with the same number of miles of trails. Please give them a campground and separate trail head. It's a beautiful park and many of us would come and camp there. We don't even mind sharing with the bikes, so the reported conflicts must be primarily on the part of bikers. As to who damages trails most, I suggest you go and do some research at Pontiac Lake. Walk the horse trails and then the bike trails. Our horse trails have almost recovered from the damage done by the bikes. Take your cameras and take some pictures.

Please don't discriminate against older females, who can still enjoy riding several hours and enjoying our beautiful state.

Sincerely,

Merle J. Richmond
Equestrians Enthusiast
Coordinator, Oakland Equestrian Coalition

CC: Mr. Ron Olson

From: lbuxton@summitpolymers.com (lbuxton@summitpolymers.com)
To: meltrailrider@sbcglobal.net;
Date: Wed, June 9, 2010 12:01:02 PM
Cc:
Subject: Fw: Separation of Trails at Fort Custer

I must concur that we equestrians have never "abandoned" Fort Custer. I myself have ridden there from approximately 1991 to the present day. I am a life member of the Michigan Sheriff Mounted Association and know many people who regularly ride at Fort Custer and have done so for years. You may quote me to the DNRE. Should you need a petition signed, please advise and provide a copy and I can help obtain signatures.

Horses use what trail is available to the extent of the rider's willingness to brave "adventurous" routes, rather than "grooming" an unnatural surface. Some prefer to walk sedately along a flat expanse, while others like myself enjoy the challenges of twists, turns, hills, water, bridges, logs as jumps and other natural "obstacles". We move off the trail whenever possible if we see a mountain biker coming; in many instances they politely move aside first. I have heard of no accidents involving horses and mountain bikes, and pride myself that my horses are trained to a level that a chance encounter with a bicycle is unlikely to result in injury to the biker if he/she maintains a respectful distance. (As in, if they rush up at 25-30 mph with a bike to within touching distance of my horse, they deserve whatever they get.)

Since Fort Custer is a State Park, would the DNRE allow the mountain bikers to set a precedent that could be applied to other State lands?

Regards,

Laura White Buxton
Kalamazoo County Sheriff Deputy, Mounted Division

----- Forwarded by Laura Buxton/Summit Polymers on 06/09/2010 11:26 AM

From: Abby White/Summit Polymers
To: Laura Buxton/Summit Polymers@SPIN
Date: 06/09/2010 11:14 AM
Subject: Fw: Separation of Trails at Fort Custer

From: Sharon L. Greene (sharonlgreene@gmail.com)
To: olsonr@michigan.gov; curtisp@michigan.gov;
Date: Mon, June 21, 2010 11:13:13 AM
Cc: merlerichmond@sbcglobal.net; meltrailrider@sbcglobal.net; sharonlgreene@comcast.net;
Subject: Tonight's meeting

Mel, will you please print a copy of this for the meeting tonight?

Good Morning Ron and Paul,

When we met on several occasions last year (once for my Oakland Press article with the Friends of Highland Recreation Area -- a group which I was instrumental in starting several years ago), you both said that I could contact you at any time if I had a concern. Well, I have a definite concern and am truly hoping you can help to resolve it.

I have just heard about the meeting Monday evening regarding equestrians at Fort Custer Recreation Area and I am unable to attend. But, I would like my opinion to be read aloud if possible....

I understand that horses may be removed from the historic horse trails. If true, this would be mighty sad. The equestrians have been extremely gracious in sharing the historic horse trails with the mountain bikers. Now, I am concerned that unjustified accusations and pressure from the Southwest Michigan Mountain Bike Association could result in the removal of horses and trail riders from the trails.

Unfortunately, I don't think these strong, healthy (and often aggressive) young (primarily) males realize how discriminatory their actions are. Shouldn't we be working together to protect the interests of all users?

Would you please remind the mountain bikers that trail riding is primarily a female driven sport -- from young girls age 5 to women age 85? Trail riders are pretty passive, ride more slowly (than bikers) and enjoy the natural environment. Many of our trail riders are handicapped, elderly, have developmental or physical disabilities or have special medical needs including heart or circulator conditions. Riding stimulates the brain and nervous system, provides muscle toning, balance and strength and has long been proven to be therapeutic. Riding a horse provides for many of us the freedom that a wheelchair cannot.

A personal friend of mine, Julia Fox, suffers from peripheral neuropathy and her walking is limited. But, the four good feet of her horse provides Julia with mobility -- and the ability to get good exercise, breath fresh air and to enjoy our state parks. Riding has "leveled the playing field" for Julia and allows her to enjoy our outdoors as much as someone hunting, fishing, hiking or biking.

I'm sure you already know the statistics -- Michigan's horse industry pumps 8 Billion dollars into our economy (www.HorsesCountInMichigan.com) . There are 155,000 horses in Michigan and about 80,000 use our trails. The MDNRE generally leans towards supporting hunting and mountain biking -- young, strong male driven sports. I sincerely hope that you agree that the time has come for the MDNRE to show that it does not discriminate against the minority -- equestrians, women, children and those with physical or mental disabilities.

For the SWMMBA president to misrepresent the standing of the equestrians is troublesome and refutable. I know several members of the Fort Custer Horse Friends Association personally and they are a generous, good natured bunch who volunteer at the park and work hard to maintain the trails. At this time, I am not familiar with any biking association assisting the equestrian work bees for trail maintenance, but I do know that contrary to what has been stated, equestrians have assisted the SWMMBA. While I agree that new trails may be necessary, I believe, with the increased use of bikes on trails could cause a dangerous situation as their heads are down and they move at a very fast pace -- and have recorded accidents almost monthly. Therefore, if new trails are as justified as the bikers express, then perhaps it is the responsibility of the mountain biking association to develop their own new and exclusive trail system. They certainly tout the manpower to do so. Makes sense, doesn't it?

The demanding and demeaning attitude of the mountain bikers is worrisome. Bullying equestrians is not the answer. Being respectful of ALL other users, and particularly those with special needs, is the solution. I assure you that until new bike trails can be built, equestrians would be more than kind in continuing to share the historic horse trails.

Is there anything that I can do to help create a bridge of understanding? Should we be considering the creation of an inclusive "Friends" group at Fort Custer? Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please call me at any time.

Respectfully,

Sharon Greene
Member of Friends of Highland Recreation and the Highland Equestrian Conservancy
248.887.3970

June 21, 2010

DNRE,

I am writing with concern about rights of equestrian riders at Fort Custer State Recreation Area. I have ridden my horse on the current system for the last 15 plus yrs and feel it would be a horrible injustice if horses were not allowed to continue to use all the trails at Fort Custer State Recreation area that they are currently using.

It has been brought to my attention that the South West of the Michigan Mountain Bike Association would like to have two different trail systems one for Mountain Bikes and one for equestrian use. I understand that there are times when bikes and horses may be at odds on issues, but being a state park it would seem we all should have the right to use the land and trail system.

Listed below are my main concerns and ideas.

- I would like to dispute the fact that the equestrian trails were abandoned in 1989, I was currently using them.
- If there was to be an equestrian campgrounds added to the current park system it would draw a large amount of horse people, to use the park. This could create increased business to the surrounding area. There are many different kinds of horse related events that would utilize a horseman's campgrounds bringing more people and money into the area.
- I do not feel that it is dangerous for biker/hikers and horses to use the same trail, if people are considerate of each other. I have ridden horses on the trails with the bikers and hikers at Fort Custer and have done so without any problems.
- There is no higher risk to horse back riding than there is mountain biking.

I would like to thank the SWMMBA for all the work they have put into the current trail system. They have done a great job. But I do not feel that enables them to be able to take the trails away from the horse riders. Please take my letter into consideration.



Abby White
Galesburg Mi