

**Minutes of the
Equine Trails Subcommittee
November 12, 2015**

The regular meeting of the Equine Trails Subcommittee (ETS) was called to order by Chair Mike Foote on November 12, 2015 at 1:39 p.m. at Constitution Hall in Lansing. Members present were: **Chair Mike Foote, Janet Holmstrom, Gabrielle Hume, Sarah Nicholls, and Kristie Walls**. The following Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff was present: **Kriss Bennett, Elissa Buck, Earl Flegler, Barbara Graves, Tim Machowicz, Ron Olson, Miguel Rodriguez, Anna Sylvester, and Paul Yauk**.

Sarah Nicholls moved the motion to approve the June 23, 2015 meeting minutes. Kristie Walls seconded and it carried unanimously.

Sarah Nicholls moved the motion to approve the revised November 12, 2015 agenda. Kristie Walls seconded and it carried unanimously.

Welcome and Introductions

Elissa Buck introduced herself as the Recreation Programmer for west Michigan, Parks and Recreation Division. She will help promote the equestrian opportunities on state lands. She is passionate about the equestrian field and is looking forward to helping out. Kriss Bennett added that Maia Turek is the statewide Recreation Programmer, and Stephanie Wirtz is the east side Recreation Programmer.

Business Items for Discussion

Gabrielle Hume – Southeast Lower Peninsula Report:

- Brighton – waiting for the state to decide what to do about campground. She has concerns about construction of mounting ramp there because it is missing a blocking rail and it does not have place to secure a horse. She can address concerns with Mike Donnelly.
- Waterloo - Horsemen's Assoc. did a repair on a culvert. Three skid steers were donated by members for their use. The value was \$3,373 at no cost to the state to do a major trail repair.
- Yankee Springs - kiosk - \$2,778; \$500 came from state matching grant funds. The fire pit was about \$2,000.
- Ionia – Culvert repair - over \$900 donated to the state.

In October alone, there were significant contributions by the equestrian community to the trail efforts and it would be nice to see them recognized for what they have contributed with little or no cost to the state.

Kristie Walls – Central Lower Peninsula Report:

- Sleepy Hollow - partnership grant for the bridge to the island – two weeks before the project work bee they were informed that the funding had been retracted. Tim Machowicz replied that it was his understanding that the money applied for had not been officially committed to them. They thought it was going to happen, as did he. Another project took precedence so the funds were retracted.
- Ft. Custer – only thing left open is 14007; \$1,000 for the mineral bunker. They will be building in the spring; the materials are ordered.
- Ionia - 5009 – horse trail segment relocation east of Hartwell Rd. is complete; 05013 – water crossing is complete; 05014 – segment between 8 and 9, horse trail re-route – said approved

but no funding is currently done (may be the wash-out); equestrian staging relocation – park is reevaluating, discussion needs to happen between Eric Pudelko and Kriss Bennett; 0702 – Sean Mulligan requested that be removed; 15001 – electric to five sites on equine campground – IHTA is excited to promote and invest in, but needs approval. Paul Yauk said they are working on it and he will report back to Kristie.

- Yankee Springs – Campground picnic shelters and the equestrian trail re-route have been done for a couple of years.

- Ionia Horse Trail Assoc. has spoken to Eric Pudelko and would like to get a WIP for a picnic pavilion at the equine campground, preferably in conjunction with the electric to the sites (if approved) and put in the same vicinity so they can have electricity to the pavilion. Kriss said Eric is the one who initiates them so he should be able to put it in.

- Yankee Springs - still putting on studies of a potential new modern campground across the road and the trail riders are mapping the existing equine campground for the potential of splitting a few of the larger sites and reconfiguring a little to get a few more sites in the campground. They maxed out several times last year.

Janet Holmstrom – Upper Peninsula Report:

- Spoke with Norm Seppi from Bark River area and they are working on putting in eight campground sites at the old DNR camp on Cedar River. They will have two 14 x 14 pipe pens and the other four will be pickets. They are having a work bee in September and are hoping to put in more trails. Received a grant and the Hannahville Tribe matched the grant. They were very complimentary on the partnership with the DNR.

- The Ontonagon Township Park campground on Lake Superior is open to camping with horses; however, there is not much area to ride there. If you go north you are going to hit shale, rocks, and boulders; the other direction you are going to hit the Ontonagon harbors. There is a hiking trail you can ride on but it is only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. She would like to see it connect with the two other campgrounds that are going in in Ontonagon County and have a loop between all three.

- The Simar Campground – she has not seen the design yet.

- Trail etiquette - Janet asked if there is a DNR rule for when an off-road vehicle meets a horse and if not, can they recommend one. Anna Sylvester said there is no rule, but a courtesy. Chair Foote said that they are talking about providing a trails etiquette set of rules at MTAC and that is a work in progress. He would like input from them to present to MTAC. Gabrielle will forward a copy of the Cook County, Illinois brochure.

- Lake Superior trailhead - Joan Duncan – proposed multi-use trail head, 8.2 acre parking lot for all users.

Paul Yauk said the communication company International Transmission Company (ITC) has been willing to work with us on trail routes whenever they have clear ownership or easements. He called Luba Sitar, who used to work with the Department for many years. She said they will partner with bicycle and walking trails but they have a concern with equestrians because of the occasional noise that may spook a horse. Chair Foote would like to contact them to try to get a better idea of where their concerns are. Paul will give Chair Foote the contact information for ITC. Joan Duncan said the contact person for ATC in the U.P. is Brett French.

Sarah Nicholls – Tourism

- The tourism industry held a meeting Monday to talk about the implementation of the statewide Tourism Strategic Plan. They are about halfway through the process. One of the objectives of the plan is to promote the state as a trails destination state.

- Had the third input session this morning in Lansing for the Equine Tourism Marketing Plan. She will be sending the input out to everyone on the initial invitation list to be shared for additional input. Hopefully they will have a draft marketing plan in the early spring with a second round of input and then a final presentation of the plan probably mid-spring.

Action Items

Equestrian Mapping Project/List of Amenities for GPS Mapping – Kriss Bennett gave a report from Megan LeMarbe. They have completed the initial mapping for: Pontiac Lake, Highland, Proud Lake, Brighton, Lakelands Trail, Waterloo, Pinckney, Ortonville, and the Polly Ann Trail in Oakland County. The Polly Ann Trail in Lapeer is scheduled for December. Maybury is scheduled for November. Accomplishments - 163 miles of designated equestrian trails mapped and vetted; mapped 1,990 trail signs and other amenities such as picket posts and water sources. Once Maybury is complete, the first draft of products such as PDF maps and GPS data will be presented to Parks and Rec with their approval and then it will be moved to their equestrian section of the DNR trails webpage. Megan also wanted to say that her and Sue and all the equestrian groups in all of the parks really helped. The next goal after southern Michigan is done is to move in chunks around the state and get all of the equestrian data cleaned up and organized.

Kriss and Paul will create a process for continuously updating things, such as trail re-routes, emergency closures, etc. That is the long term goal. If anyone on a trail sees an emergency situation, please let them know.

Review Trail Plan Spreadsheet – Chair Foote and Paul Yauk will work on this and send it out to everyone. The updates that they are going to put together are basically things that have been accomplished from pages 89 – 92 of the Trail Plan. The first action item on the next agenda will be to go over the Trail Plan spreadsheet.

Gabrielle would like to revisit the potential connector trails list. Chair Foote would like this added as an action item on the next agenda. Gabrielle gave an example of what the Addison Oaks Trail Riders have done in Oakland County, where you may have to use a mile of county road or a right of way to continue on a trail. That is what she calls a “connector”. That is what she believes the committee was supposed to be doing. Paul said they are going to need suggestions on where those should be. Kristie said all the ETS reps should be communicating with the groups within their regions to ask them where the opportunities are. Chair Foote requested a list be put together of potential areas that could have a connector. Kriss said if they can get descriptions of this, they can have the GIS people map it for them so they can see what the potential proposals are coming forward.

Trails Project List Update - Kriss Bennett went over the updated projects spreadsheet. She went through both the WIP list and the trail proposal database and pulled any new things that appeared and moved completed projects. One thing she cannot track is projects that do not show up in any of their databases. She requested that everyone let her know of any projects that they want tracked, or any corrections, be sent to her. Kristie requested a column in the spreadsheet that lists the region so it can be sorted that way.

Kriss updated the committee on some items the Trail Specialists sent to her:

Paul Gaberdiel - Headquarters Lake State Forest Campground has hitching posts and rings installed; identified four new sites and are working on the DEQ permit. They will build manure bunkers and mounting stands this winter for spring installation. They are working on the trail proposal that will make a connector from that campground to the trails. Anna Sylvester said they had to do a trail connector to the trails that is on forest land and that is the trail proposal that Kriss referred to.

Todd Neiss from the Cadillac district wanted everyone to know that along the Shore-To-Shore Trail on the Huron Manistee National Forest lands, the Wilbur Creek Bridge was completed in August. That was a grant for \$11,500 to the Forest Service and donated time to do the structure and materials.

Amy Swainston out of Bay City – they met with Forestry and equine groups MTRA, Shore-To-Shore, and GLDR, regarding timber cutting at 4-Mile Trail Campground to address the hazardous trees. Forest review for timber cutting was finalized last week. The next step will be marking those hazardous trees and specific language for setting up a sale with producers. Once those trees are harvested the post fire rings and tables will be placed out at the side camp.

Anna added that Big Oaks officially opened on October 1st, 2015.

Compiled List of Pros and Cons - Chair Foote will go over public comment on this today and at the next meeting will provide a list of pros and cons. He was having issues with his email. Do not send things to his m.foote123 account. He is setting up a new email strictly for ETS. He hopes to have it before the end of this month and will let Kriss Bennett or Barb Graves know so they can put it on the website.

Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee – Earl Flegler from Wildlife gave an update. The committee was established this summer and is a take-off of the Park's Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee. It is a select group of twelve people picked to establish a broader viewpoint than what they might do internally. The first meeting was a get-to-know-each-other along with an update on federal aid. Dr. Christine Hanaburgh spoke about the sources that fund state game areas. Their meeting schedule is aggressive, with the next meeting scheduled for January. Their charge is to examine the overall use of state game areas in southern Michigan, to look at funding and agreements on how they are used for acquisition of these lands, to look at the diversity of uses on the areas. Their product is to create a vision for the future use of these lands. He does not know when the final product will be due.

Gabrielle would be interested to find out if they are addressing wildlife from a citizen viewing standpoint, which is part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines, or if they are only addressing it from a game management standpoint. She is interested in hearing the different topics discussed.

Corral Policy - Anna Sylvester – Anna said she took the definition of corral that the ETS provided back to the eight District Supervisors who oversee park operations. The District Supervisors were agreeable to the use of electric tape. If it is acceptable to ETS they will go forward with allowing the electric tape in the picket area, with follow up to all park managers. She wanted the committee's feedback on allowance of electric tape as opposed to some elaborate definition of what a corral is and what a pen is.

Chair Foote took a statement from Gale Moore, who asked if steel corral panels were acceptable. Anna said no because there is a state rule that says you shall not put up a temporary or permanent corral on state land. Gale's concern was with miniatures because they are not affected by electrical fencing because of their thick hair, so they use 8' x 36" panels to contain miniatures. Anna recommended a special use permit in that situation. Chair Foote added that miniatures are becoming more and more popular. Anna agreed that the issue is worth looking into. Joan Duncan added that a lot of rodeo people haul 8' x 6' panels on their rigs because they do not know what kind of facilities they are going to find. Kristie asked why they could not look at rescinding the rule. Anna responded that because it is a legislative rule, that is why they are trying to find a work-around.

Chair Foote asked if it was possible to get a special use permit across several parks, rather than a single one. Anna replied that she can work with Elissa and ask the parks if they could accommodate that in their facilities. Chair Foote asked the committee to contact their groups and have them give input in to what they would prefer as their first, second, third choice and what they would accept. Answers will funnel through him and he will provide them to Anna.

Most attendees said they would be in favor of having corrals that are already set up on the site like some other states have. Anna said maybe it is something that they can look into.

Anna asked the committee if the electric tape solution was supported by the ETS. Her recommendation would be to accept the electric tape option right now and work towards other options later. She would prefer some kind of motion on record.

MOTION: Gabrielle moved the motion that the committee accepts the definition of corral that the department has provided. Kristie seconded and it carried unanimously.

Anna said their next step would be addressing the issue Gale brought up with miniature horses. Gabrielle suggested that go on the agenda for the next meeting.

Carsonite Signs – Anna Sylvester - Anna showed picture examples of multi-use signs that are used on the trails. The big signs are good for major intersections or trail heads and the narrow carsonite signs are used more as confidence markers along a trail. They are obtainable, and if it is through a state park, requests go through the Park Supervisor. If it is a forest recreation trail then go through the Recreation Specialist. If it is for a pathway (usually near state campgrounds) those would go through the Park Supervisor as well. They need to know you are interested in them and to make sure they can get the funding and collaboration to get them up.

Directions to Cedar River Campground – Anna Sylvester. Directions are now posted on the website. There was a state forest campground and pathway brochure dated around 2002. They have been working on a new one for the past eight weeks. She described it as a hard cover, pocket-sized brochure with a picture on the front of two people on a horse on the trail next to a lake. It will open up like a map.

Updates and Announcements

Chair Foote announced the tentative meeting dates for 2016, which are January 20, March 16, June 15, and November 17. Currently, all are scheduled to be at the MSU Diagnostics building.

Public Appearance

Pros and Cons of Non-Equestrians in Equestrian Campgrounds

Caryn Robinson – She obtained public opinion from fellow equestrians about the pros and cons of non-equestrians in equestrian campgrounds. The majority of responses did not favor mixing the two, and also said it was a safety issue. She will send Chair Foote the comments she received.

Chair Foote mentioned bringing in Kirk Lapham from Legal Affairs to speak about liability. Kirk gave a presentation at the last MTAC meeting that might be beneficial to this committee.

Kristie received feedback from four parks and all four agreed they do not want mixed camping. The horse campers are on guard all of the time, concerned that somebody is going to throw a Frisbee and the horse is going to spook and rip the picket down, or kick a kid. If the non-equestrian campers are diligent, they are not going to have their best time either because they are going to have to be on super diligence with their children and minimize their activities. They may not be able to play catch, they might not be able to race their bicycles, they might not be able to throw a Frisbee, or hit a whiffle golf ball, etc. She thinks it diminishes the whole point of going camping for both parties if the groups are mixed. It is not safe, it is not conducive to a good time, and she does not think it is going to increase the tourism factor. She knows a lot of people that will not be camping if there is a mix, which could result in a loss of revenue.

Gabrielle stated the same sentiments as Kristie. When you let non-horse people in, they are going to take the best sites and now you have a three horse slant trailer that is not going to fit on anything that is left. Her suggestion for a solution would be to create more campgrounds that are strictly rustic that do not have running water and electricity. That way, tent campers would have a better time without encroaching on the horse people. She stated that the horse groups for more than 50 years have been the ones who have cut the trails, created the campgrounds, scoped out how to get around swamps, etc., so they feel that entitlement because of the hard work they put in. They want others to enjoy the outdoors just as much as they do, but she thinks the entitlement is warranted. It is also a safety issue.

Chair Foote brought up the issue of uniformity of park rules. Anna replied that it has become more consistent over the summer. The state park policy was changed because a lot of equestrians wanted to bring friends with them to camp that did not have horses. They changed the policy to accommodate that but over time it has been interpreted differently. In Brighton, or even Elk Hill, where they were allowing people that do not have horses to make reservations was not the intent of the policy. They looked at it again this summer and she thinks most of those messages have been cleared up on the reservation system. It says you have to be a 'horse camper' or 'invited guest' to make a reservation. They are waiting for recommendation to continue with that or to allow it to be open to non-equestrians.

Chair Foote added that the Michigan Trails Advisory Council had discussed the liability issue from an overall trails standpoint. He wanted to know where it left equestrians. If somebody gets hurt by a horse, where does the liability lie?

Ron Olson stated that it would be on the parks. Chair Foote said maybe there needed to be additional rules that state 'do not approach a campsite unless you get permission', however, not everybody uses common sense. He thinks addressing the liability issue would make the equestrian community feel safer.

Ron Olson stated that they could probably have signs at entrances stating desired expectations, and that maybe one of the things they can do better at is communication; eliminate inconsistency in procedure among the parks. It would provide a training opportunity.

Chair Foote stated that if 90% of the people are concerned about liability issues, then they need to feel comfortable with what they are doing.

Ron Olson stated that since he has been with Parks they have never had a lawsuit associated with a horse activity, but they have had other things. If there were 10 lawsuits, that would be different. He thinks they are doing something reasonably well.

Gabrielle stated that they have not had any lawsuits, but they have not been mixing non-horse people with horse people either.

Kristie suggested an interim way to handle this would be when people register for the campgrounds, have a piece of paper printed out for campground etiquette.

Chair Foote suggested somebody talk to them about liability and maybe have them provide bullet points that they can refer to. Then they could get together with the DNR and let them know what they would like to see and then go from there.

MOTION: Gabrielle made the motion to recommend to the DNR to keep the separation of non-equestrians from equestrians in state park campgrounds. Kristie Walls moved the motion and Sarah Nicholls seconded. It carried unanimously.

Overnight camping for equestrians for just one or two nights - Joan Duncan suggested that all the state parks look for just one or two campsites that they could allow horses to camp there overnight (just to park) for people traveling across country. Could we advertise in the state parks? It would be limited basis, overnight camping available, no trails. She thinks that we could add that as a tourism invitation.

Gabrielle said that there are quite a few county parks in the state that allow horses to come in and camp. She suggests that we add them to the general state list of available facilities for our visitors for equestrians.

Janet requested a reminder email on items that they agreed to follow up on. Chair Foote said he will send a reminder email on items that they agreed to follow up on.

Janet Holmstrom moved the motion to adjourn. Gabrielle Hume seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 4:17 p.m.