

STATEWIDE TRAIL NETWORK PLAN

(Equestrian Chapter)

I. Acknowledgements

The Equestrian Chapter of the Statewide Trails Network Plan is the outcome of a collaborative effort involving the Equine Trailways Subcommittee (ETS), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA). A key contributor to the recommendations found herein are the equestrians (EQs) themselves, who provided valuable input in an EQ survey and at the five EQ focus group meetings held around the state.

DNR/ETS “**EQUESTRIAN PLANNING TEAM**” includes:

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In the conduct of data gathering, fact checking, surveys, and focus groups, we had the assistance of the full ETS membership, which in addition to those on the Planning Team above, included: Joni Gleason (UP), Dick Kleinhart (NLP), and Mike Foote (SWLP). Other DNR staff also assisted the Planning Team, including: Dustin Corr (PRD), Valerie Frawley (Wildlife Division), and Jennifer Olson (Wildlife Division).

II. Introduction

In March of 2010, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) of the DNR, initiated an internal assessment of equestrian (EQ) opportunities and needs for use of PRD lands in state recreation areas in southern Michigan. This assessment led ultimately to a recommendation to develop a statewide EQ plan for the DNR to address all state (DNR)

lands. To help move that process forward, an application for planning assistance was submitted to the NPS - Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program seeking planning assistance, and that was approved.

On April 1, 2010, the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) and the Equine Trailways Subcommittee (ETS) were established with enactment of Public Acts 45 and 46 of 2010. These acts defined EQ use on state lands and charged the ETS, MSTAC, and the DNR with the responsibility of developing recommendations for a trail network system for the state. A specific timeline was established that required the ETS to make their recommendation to the MSTAC by June of 2011. MSTAC is now developing a trail plan that considers all trail users.

The ETS 2011 Report can be found at:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/2011RecReportETS_Final_030212_378261_7.pdf . The ETS provided 46 recommendations summarized under the four main goals that follow:

- Identify and promote a statewide network of high quality pack and saddle trails and related facilities/businesses in such a manner that Michigan becomes widely known as a state that both welcomes and promotes saddle and pack equine recreation.
- Establish effective collaborations and partnership to identify, develop, and maintain a generous set of safe, financially sustainable and ecologically sound equine trail recreational opportunities on public and leased private lands spatially distributed across the state.
- Develop an informed group of equine trail users who share a common interest with the DNR, and other land managers and other trail users in assuring the availability of and access to high quality pack and saddle trails and related facilities.
- Develop partnerships and collaborations with the DNR, and other land managers, and with other trail users for support of, expansion of, and maintenance of Michigan trails and related facilities as well as minimization of user conflicts and illegal use.

The DNR is working jointly with the MSTAC to accelerate this process by collaborating on the final plan recommendations concurrently. This report builds on and refines the recommendations from the ETS 2011 Report. This report has several sections: a description of the existing trail system and how the type of state land influences equine riding opportunities; a vision statement for 2016; a report on rider characteristics, concerns, and perceived needs; identification of opportunities for business related development; identification of opportunities for private sector development; a discussion of barriers and threats to equine activities on state lands; and a list of overall 5 year goals and recommendations.

III - Description of the Existing Trail System

The DNR has initiated a comprehensive inventory of EQ trails and facilities on state lands; it is anticipated that this inventory will be completed soon and updated regularly. The goal is to make this inventory available to the public in a comprehensive, searchable geo-spatial format.

To understand why EQ use is where it is and issues for expansion, it is important to recognize that different types of state lands have different rules and regulations with respect to EQ use.

The manner in which designated trails were established on public land varies significantly based on the parcel's land use and ownership history. Some trails began as animal trails that evolved into hunter pathways, and are now used by recreationalists for various trail purposes. Work and forest roads, originally developed for logging and mineral extraction, may also serve as recreational trail corridors that provide access into remote areas. This situation is the case for many of Michigan's snowmobile and ORV trails and even some hiking and riding trails within state forests. Abandoned roads and rail corridors developed by previous generations are now providing new trail opportunities. Maybury State Park for example was once the site of a tuberculosis sanitarium. The sanitarium's abandoned roadways have been repurposed to provide trail opportunities for hikers, bikers and horseback riders. The State of Michigan is also actively pursuing idle rail corridors for trail use and has many Rail Trail corridors that offer multi use opportunities. There are also trails that have expressly been developed for a specific trail purpose and function. These trails have been purpose-built and benefit from careful consideration of the natural resources, socio-economic considerations, and trail user input into their design, construction, and maintenance.

EQ use of trails differs depending on their location on state land. Section 72115 of PA 45 of 2010 acknowledges and defines these differences as follows:

State Parks and Recreation Areas

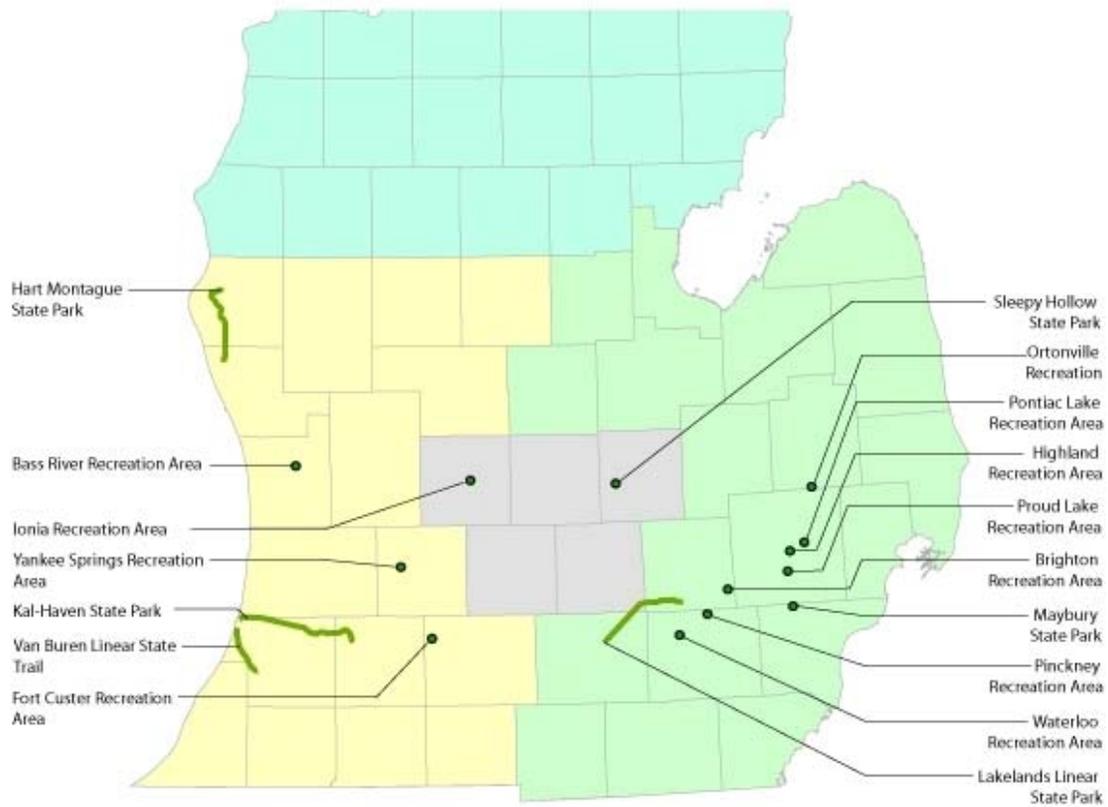
EQ use in state park and state recreation areas is allowed only on "designated EQ" trails. The designation of uses is made by the DNR program managers in consideration of a wide variety of environmental factors and legal requirements. The designation of an existing trail and/or the development of new infrastructure are often guided by DNR Management Zone Plans that have been developed for state parks and recreation areas. The establishment of these plans involve public participation and a careful review of each park's unique conditions, including legal mandates, funding sources used for land acquisition, and the natural features that could impact use, such as; soil, terrain and hydrology. This comprehensive analysis provides prescriptive guidance as to what recreation uses will be allowed in certain areas and has become a valuable tool when the DNR responds to demands for additional facilities.

Within state parks and recreation areas with designated EQ trails and campgrounds, the DNR relies on partnerships with user groups to implement new trail development and to provide long-term assistance in the maintenance of EQ trails. It is DNR objective that all existing EQ trails have a user group in place to help maintain it before new trail corridors are approved for development.

State parks and recreation areas with EQ facilities are all located in southern Michigan (see Exhibit 1). They are:

Exhibit 1

State Parks and Recreation Areas with EQ Facilities		
State Park and Recreation Areas:	No. of Campsites	Trail Miles:
Bass River Recreation Area	N/A	6.0
Brighton Recreation Area	18	18.0
Fort Custer Recreation Area	N/A	20.7
Highland Recreation Area	25	11.0
Ionia Recreation Area	49	15.0
Maybury State Park	N/A	10.0
Ortonville Recreation Area	25	6.5
Pinckney Recreation Area	N/A	8.0
Pontiac Lake Recreation Area	25	17.0
Proud Lake Recreation Area	N/A	9.5
Sleepy Hollow State Park	N/A	10.0
Waterloo Recreation Area	25	12.0
Yankee Springs Recreation Area	25	9.0
(Linear Trails)		
Hart Montague Linear State Park	N/A	4.0
Kal-Haven Linear State Park	N/A	14.0
Lakelands Linear State Park	N/A	13.0
Van Buren Linear State Trail	N/A	14.4
Total	192	198.1



LEGEND

- State Parks and Recreation Areas
- Linear Trails

ETS REGION

- Upper Peninsula
- Northern Lower Peninsula
- Southeastern Lower Peninsula
- Central Lower Peninsula
- Southwestern Lower Peninsula



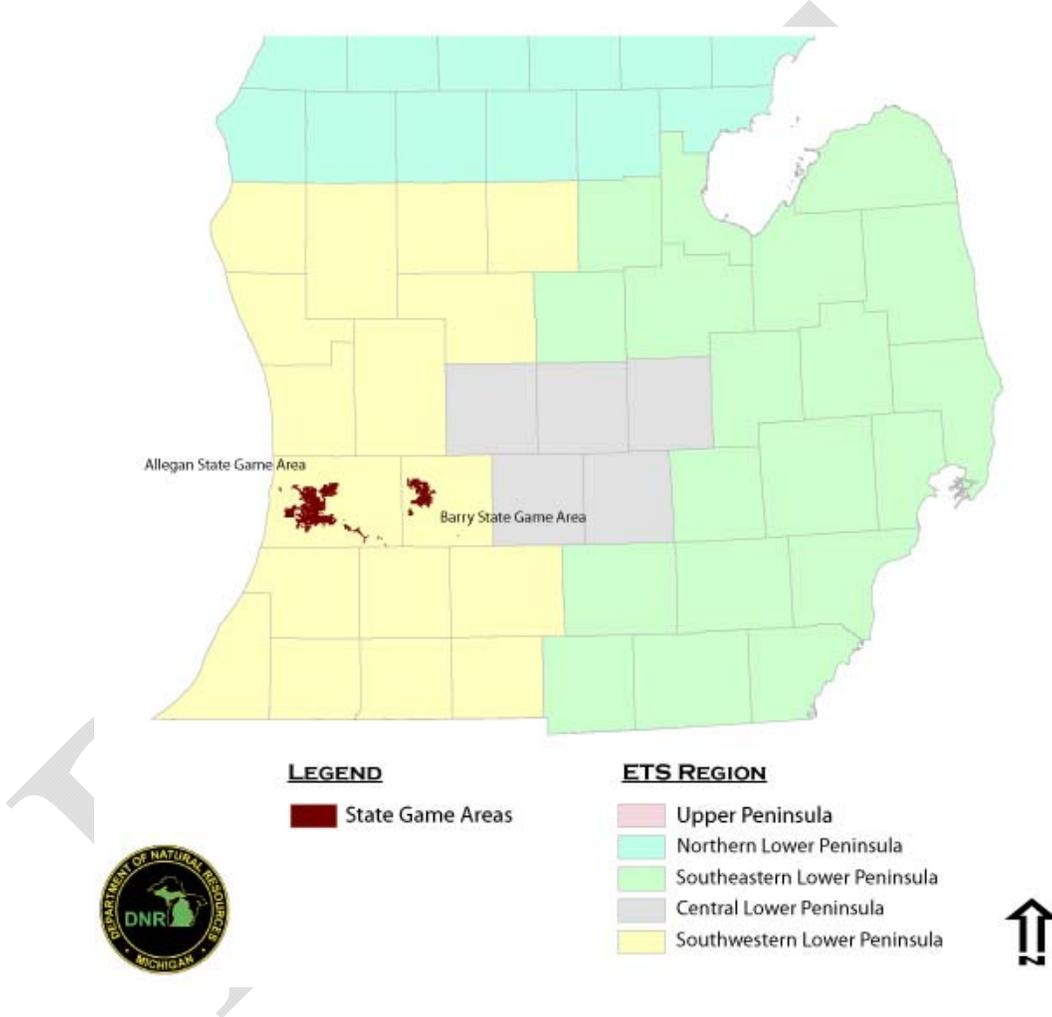
State Game Areas

Equine use on state game areas is only allowed on roads that are open to the use of motor vehicles, trails, bridle paths, and campgrounds designated for such use by DNR Administrative Rule 299.922. This Rule has been in place in the majority of state game areas since at least 1954. Allegan and Barry State Game Areas currently have limited trails open to equine use. State game areas that have EQ facilities are shown in Exhibit 2.

State Game Areas with EQ Facilities		
State Game Areas:	No. of Campsites	Trail Miles:
Allegan State Game Area*	28	50.0**
Barry State Game Area	N/A	9.0**
Total	28	59.0

* Designated campsites and trails managed by Allegan County Parks and Recreation. Campsites are located at Pine Point Campground and Equestrian Park (12 sites) and Ely Lake Campground and Equestrian Park (16 sites). Note: a third campground, Silver Lake Campground, is located on county land.

** Trails connect to facilities on adjacent public property managed by others



State Forests

EQ use on state forest land is allowed unless restricted by statute, deed restriction, land use order, or other legal mechanism. Trails on state forest lands are typically designed and developed for a specific use type(s), but allow multi-use trail activities until such time that the DNR determines that a use must be restricted due to user conflicts, environmental damage or legal obligations. Management for “permissive use” maximizes trail opportunities for recreational users, but can polarize users when DNR managers determine restrictions are needed due to increased use. The method for restricting equine use on existing

trail corridors has now been defined in statute and includes providing adequate rationale and public notification.

Motorized Trails: All designated motorized trails on state owned land allow for non-motorized trail activities along the same corridor. When these corridors cross onto other public lands or private land, the trail purpose reverts back to its single use permitted. Although these other uses are not specifically restricted from state owned corridors, the DNR has not evaluated the appropriateness of these uses on these corridors. All non-motorized use groups, including EQs, should use these corridors with caution. Detailed snowmobile maps can be found at: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10365_14824-31074--,00.html ORV maps can be found at: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10365_15070-38330--,00.html

Linear Trails (primarily rail-trails): . The State of Michigan owns and manages nearly 1,000 miles of non-State Park linear corridors. They can be divided into two primary groups: unimproved or improved corridors. All unimproved linear corridors are open to the public in their acquired “as is” state or condition unless otherwise closed or restricted by a Land Use Order of the Director (LUOD). As the corridor is planned, designed, and improved once funding has been secured, specific uses may be established based on the physical conditions of the corridor, user demand and interests, adjacent land uses and other relevant factors.

Corridors are typically improved for a primary use or uses while allowing for other compatible recreational uses. Improvements may or may not include pavement. Nearly all linear trails are available for horse use; however the condition of the corridors will vary. Most of the miles in the Upper Peninsula are maintained for motorized recreation as the primary use(s). Improvements along these corridors include signage required by the motorized program; clearing, brushing, culvert and bridge work and involve little if any surface modifications.

Rail corridor in the Lower Peninsula is typically improved with the primary use as non-motorized with snowmobile use allowed in the winter where there is adequate snowfall. Improvements often consist of clearing, brushing, signage, bridge and culvert work and surface improvements such as crushed limestone or paving to meet ADA requirements. Linear trails owned by a local unit of government or friends group that are connected to state owned linear trail may establish different use types than if it were a state managed trail.

Pathways: Pathways are generally looped trails located in a wooded setting, usually with a single start and end point within a specific area. All designated non-motorized pathways have banned motorized use from their corridors, but allow other types of non-motorized trail use until such time as a use must be restricted. Thunder Valley Equestrian Pathway in Marquette County (11 miles) is the only pathway built thus far with the primary use designated for EQ riding. The remaining pathways were built as hiking or cross country ski corridors. Very few of these pathways have had to restrict secondary use access. Those pathways restricting equine use are shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3

State Forest Pathways Restricting EQ Use

State Forest Pathways:	County	Trail Miles:
Blueberry Ridge Pathway	Marquette	12.7
Cadillac Pathway	Wexford	11.3
High Country Pathway*	Cheboygan, Montmorency, Otsego, Presque Isle	73.8
Pickerel Lake Pathway	Otsego	2.1
Shingle Mill Pathway	Otsego & Cheboygan	12.0
Total		111.9

* Restricted only within the boundaries of Pigeon River Country

The remaining 47 pathways are maintained as hiking or cross country ski trails. Like motorized trails, they have not been thoroughly inventoried to determine if secondary uses, such as equine use, are appropriate for their corridors. A phone survey was conducted of local DNR staff to provide preliminary information on these trails and to help identify corridors that have good potential for accommodating horseback riding. Those pathways identified with good potential are shown in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4

State Forest Pathways With Good Potential for EQ Use		
State Forest Pathways:	County	Trail Miles:
Buttles Road Pathway	Montmorency	5.7
Canada Lakes Pathway	Luce	11.0
Cedar River Pathway	Menominee	9.4
Chippewa Hills Pathway	Alpena	7.6
Indian Lake Pathway	Schoolcraft	6.0
Merriman East Pathway	Dickenson	7.8
Muncie Lakes Pathway	Grand Traverse	11.5
Ogemaw Hills Pathway	Ogemaw	13.6
Paradise Pathway	Luce	8.1
Peters Creek Pathway	Mackinac	1.4
Pine Bowl Pathway	Chippewa	4.0
Pine Valley Pathway	Lake	8.3
Spring Brook Pathway	Charlevoix	4.1
Total		98.5

The remaining pathways have conditions which are not conducive for EQ riding as identified by DNR staff.

Trails by Others: The other trails on state forest land, such as the North Country Trail, Midland to Mackinaw Trail and the Michigan Shore-to-Shore

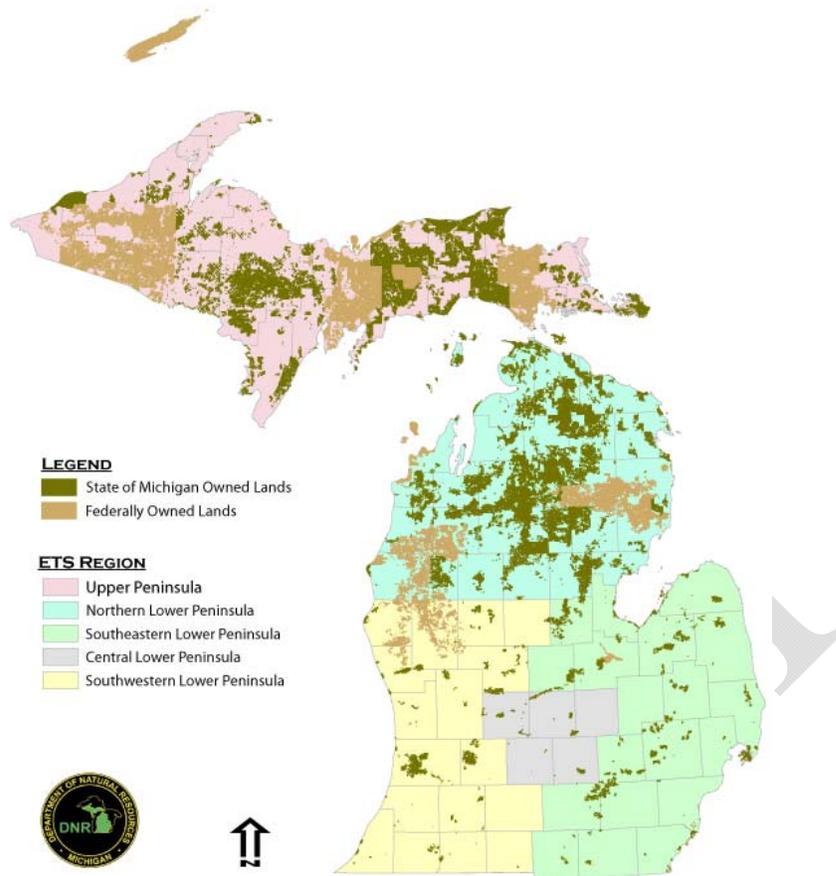
Riding/Hiking Trail were initiated and developed by others for a specific trail activity. Only the Michigan Shore-to-Shore Trail is open in its entirety to EQ use. Like the motorized trails, these trails cross a patchwork of land ownership and jurisdictions. The DNR and other land owners have given these trail managers approval to develop and maintain the trail on their lands.

Other Public Agencies

Important providers of EQ trails and campgrounds outside of state lands are those on federal lands and lands administered by local units of government. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is the primary federal land owner in Michigan. On USFS lands, horse and pack animals are allowed on lands, trails, and campgrounds unless designated as closed to equines. Lands administered by the National Park Service prohibit "The use of horses and pack animals outside of trails, routes, or areas designated for their use" (Federal Code of Regulations), such as the Alligator Hill Trail within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

In southern Michigan, where state and federal forests do not exist, county and regional park systems add to EQ trail and camping opportunities. Key examples include Oakland County Parks, the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA) Metroparks, and Allegan County Parks.

DRAFT



IV. VISION

Vision Statement

There is a generous, diverse, enjoyable, safe, financially sustainable and ecologically sound network of high quality public and private equine trails and camping facilities within the State of Michigan. Michigan is known as a state that welcomes and promotes equine trail recreation. Equine trails, trailheads, and camping facilities are dispersed throughout the state in such a manner that from any point within the state, there will be day riding opportunities within a two hour drive, overnight equestrian accommodations within a four hour drive, and Signature Equestrian Centers within an 8 hour drive.

For a more detailed vision refer to Text Box 1.

(Insert Text Box 1)

Textbox 1. Expanded Vision Statement.

In 2018, Michigan is known as “The Trail State” that welcomes the trail rider. Both Michiganders and tourists recognize and appreciate the reputation of Michigan with respect to trail riding and camping. This reputation is bolstered by the abundant and diverse choices of high quality trails, pathways, trailhead staging areas, and equine campgrounds available to the equestrian on federal, state, county, and private lands.

The rider’s choice, and the planning of the ride, is facilitated by an interactive regional map, accessed through a single internet portal that accurately relates riding and

camping opportunities and characteristics in each region. At each location, there are downloadable maps of trails that can be printed or put into global positioning devices. Riding associations are clearly identified on the internet portal site and they also provide Global Positioning Service (GPS) data to load directly into handheld devices. There is also available for purchase a hardcopy book of 2018 maps and characteristics of Michigan equestrian trails and campgrounds.

The 2018 rider can select from enjoyable looped, or point to point, trails and pathways. Many of these trails and pathways connect, so that it is possible to ride long distances. All trails and pathways are clearly signed and are connected to high quality campgrounds and/or trailhead staging areas. In southern Michigan, the system of EQ trails utilizing state park and recreation area trails, rail-trails, and other connectors provides a unique riding experience with changing topography, scenic views, and access to local amenities, all of which are located in close proximity to the state's most populous areas. One particularly popular trail system stretches from Jackson to Pontiac Lake Recreation Area, and Plans are being implemented to provide a connecting trail that reaches from Jackson west to Lake Michigan along this same corridor. Communities along this popular set of trails, praise the system as a treasure significant to their community well being.

Throughout the state, there are "trail towns," which connect directly to the trails, that welcome and provide for the needs of equestrians. More and more trail towns are being self-identified each year, and it is easy for a community to assess what is needed to be attractive to the equestrian via internet materials specifically dedicated to "becoming a valued trail town".

Equestrians are well informed about the guidelines and regulations that assure safe and ecologically sound experiences. All are informed about "Leave no Trace" camping and riding guidelines. The equestrian community is positively engaged in partnership with agencies, businesses, and other trail users to assure the ecological and financial sustainability of the state-wide trail network. Equestrians effectively self-police themselves, so the need for law enforcement of various trail and campground regulations is quite minimal. There is a conflict resolution and mediation process administered by a partnership of the DNR and the newly created Michigan State University Mediation Center that is well used by various trail users, and that keeps disputes and conflict to a minimum.

It is easy for the agencies to communicate with the trail riding community via internet (e.g. email, twitter, etc.) and because a single association represents the majority of the associations' interests. This single association also provides considerable benefits to their members in the form of consultation, trail map books, GPS data, conflict resolution advice, and facilitation. This single association also stands ready to answer questions from new riders be they Michiganders or tourists, and offers youth incentive programs, and seminars on pertinent trail riding topics.

There are clear processes developed for the nominating and selection of new trail and campground opportunities or addressing problems with existing facilities. Equestrians feel that they are a valued part of the process and decisions that guide the future of the equestrian trail system.

_____Text Box ends here_____

The vision for a quality equestrian system is based on the data gathered from focus group meetings, surveys, the ETS 2011 Recommendations Report and the USDA Forest Service (Hancock, et.al, 2007).

The ideal design components that define “high quality” trails, trailheads, campgrounds and a “Signature Equestrian Center” include the following:

Trails

1. Will be easily accessible from trailheads or campgrounds and well marked.
2. Signage will include trail maps, trail indicators and confidence markers.
3. Will consist of both linear and looped trails with the majority being looped trails between 10 and 30 miles in length for day rides, more for multi-day locations.
4. Will have watering sites along the trail corridor, ideally every 10 miles.
5. Surfaces will be firm without wet organics, slick rocky surfaces, or easily eroded soil types. Alignments will avoid steep hills and fall line construction that are difficult to maintain.
6. Trail tread shall be a minimum of two feet wide for single track trails, and a minimum of 10 feet wide for side-by-side and cart/carriage driving. Adequate turning radii on turns and curves will be provided for cart/carriage driving trails.
7. Shall be groomed to retain a 10 foot overhead height clearance and an additional two feet either side of the trail tread for side clearance.
8. Paths shall traverse a variety of terrain and vegetation to enhance the riding experience.

Trailheads

1. Adequate parking for at least 3 car-trailers that are a minimum of 28 feet wide and 55 feet long.
2. Access roads and parking spaces provide a minimum of 35' turning radii for easy maneuvering of large rigs.
3. Are level, with well maintained access road and parking surfaces that reduce the risk of equine injuries while in transit.
4. An information kiosk that explains the rules, regulations, etiquette policies (i.e. where to dispose of manure), emergency contact information and a trail map.
5. Access to drinkable water.
6. Shall provide restrooms and mounting blocks.
7. Shaded equine picket or corral areas.
8. Provide direct access to trails.

Campgrounds

1. Have either an Information Station (un-staffed) or a Registration Office (staffed) to explain the registration process, site rules, regulations, and information about the trails.
2. Roads and campsites provide a minimum 35' turning radii for easy maneuvering of large horse trailers and campers. Access road is well maintained to reduce risk of equine injuries while in transit.
3. Campsites are flat, level and have adequate clearance around camper and horse trailer to allow easy access and work space for equine care activities. Minimum length of campsite/trailer parking shall be 55 feet.

4. Adequate equine picket or corral areas that will accommodate the maximum number of equines allowed per campsite. Each campsite will have shade for equines when at rest.
5. Sanitary facilities meeting the minimum requirements for licensed campgrounds will be provided.
6. Each designated site will contain a fire ring and picnic table, and the campground will have one community fire circle.
7. A minimum of one manure bunker for every 10 sites shall be provided with adequate isolation from campsites.
8. Mounting blocks will be provided near all common areas, including restrooms and water supply locations.
9. The siting of campgrounds will avoid areas that contain plants toxic to horses.

Signature Equestrian Centers

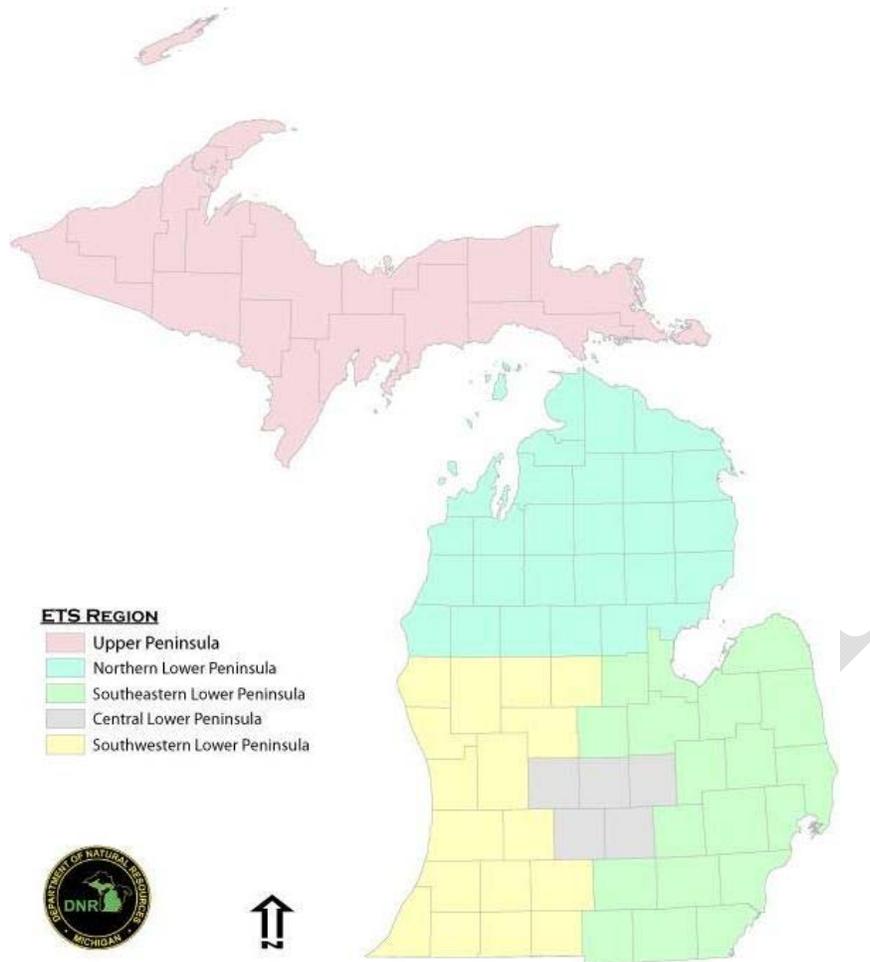
1. Contains at least 3 different choices of camping opportunities
 - a. Rustic.
 - b. Semi-Modern.
 - c. Modern.
2. Offers variable riding experiences for both the day rider and overnight guests.
 - a. Multiple loops providing a minimum total of 75 miles of trail of varying distances between 10-20 miles in length.
 - b. Range in difficulty with varying terrain and vegetative cover
 - c. Provides varying widths for single file riding, side by side riding and horse and cart driving.
3. Offers variable picket and corral/stall containment areas for equines during overnight stays.
4. Offers enclosed corral riding area.
5. Provides wash racks for equine cooling and grooming.
6. Provides non-horse related recreation and entertainment on site and/or nearby.

V. EQ's Characteristics, Concerns, and Perceived Needs

Statewide Opportunities

The statewide opportunities listed below are based on Focus Group meetings and an Equestrian Trail User Survey, all of which were conducted in August and September of 2012. A Focus Group meeting was held within each of the ETS Regions (Exhibit 6) and a total of 55 individuals representing various equine associations participated. The Equestrian Trail User Survey was distributed statewide electronically through user groups, and garnered 574 responses from individual horse riders. Summaries of the responses received from these efforts are found in the appendix.

Exhibit 6. **ETS REGIONS**



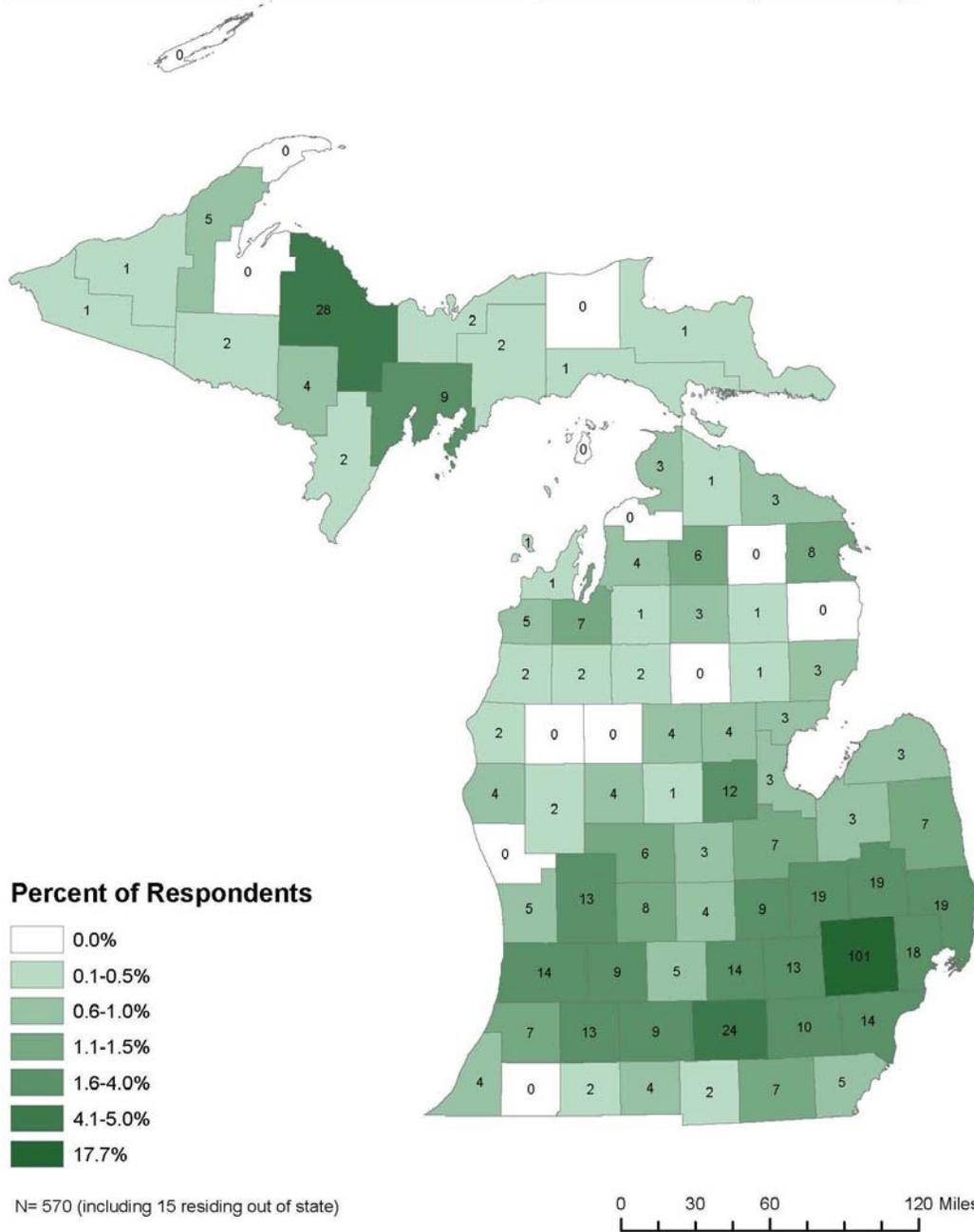
Other surveys were referenced, including the ETS Trail Survey found in the ETS 2011 Recommendation Report, the DNR's Trail Survey of all trail users conducted in August 2012, and other states' research related to demand for EQ trails and campgrounds.

The following opportunities are based on data analysis of the surveys and focus group meetings cited above.

Demographics of Equestrian Trail User Survey Respondents

Exhibit 7.

Number and Percent of Respondents by County



The 2008 University of Kentucky Study (Pagoulatos, 2008) found that most Kentucky trail riders are found in urban areas around major population centers. As Exhibit 7 illustrates, out of the 574 responses to our Equestrian Trail User Survey, approximately 50% of participants were from the more populated Southeast Lower Peninsula and 18% from the Southwest Lower Peninsula. The remaining respondents came from the Northern Lower Peninsula (19%), the Upper Peninsula (10%) and Out of State (3%). These results correlate directly with population densities in the state.

According to the DNR's 2012 Trail Survey, when a respondent's EQ use increased it was mainly due to greater interest from friends and family. Most survey participants were over the age of 50 and were female.

Participation in the five focus group meetings held around the state did not match those of the state's demographics. The focus groups with the greatest participations were those held in the Upper Peninsula and in the northern Lower Peninsula. These meetings were equally attended by both genders. Many of the attendees were representing their associations in these focus groups.

Priorities

When asked to make a choice, the majority of riders participating in either the focus groups or answering the Equestrian Trail User Survey would prefer to see the number of EQ trails and campground facilities offered in the state increase over improving existing EQ trails and campgrounds. However, many also had concrete ideas of improvements that would expand existing trail lengths, and achievable maintenance initiatives that would improve the existing system.

Location

An analysis of where riders live and where their primary riding location is (Exhibit 8) shows that Southeast Lower Peninsula Michigan riders travel the most extensively outside of their region to access riding opportunities. It also reflects that riders from other regions are not proportionately frequenting EQ facilities in Southeast Lower Peninsula. Exhibit 8 shows that the favorite riding destination for respondents is in Northern Lower Peninsula region. This result was supported by information gathered at the Focus Group meetings as well. One possible explanation is that EQs ride either near their home (day use or multiday) or they travel north of Clare for a multi-day riding experience. In the 2011 ETS Survey, when asked if there were adequate amounts of accessible trails and equine facilities such as campgrounds near their homes, most indicated that there were not. Further research would need to be conducted to determine if this impression is accurate and, if so, how these riding choices should influence the type and location of future investments in EQ trails, trailheads, and campgrounds.

Exhibit 8.

Comparison of Respondent's Primary Residence and Riding Location			
ETS Region	Respondent's Residence	Primary Riding Location	Difference
Upper Peninsula (UP)	10.2%	11.2%	1.0%
Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP)	11.6%	23.5%	11.9%
Southwest Lower Peninsula (SWLP)	17.9%	18.2%	0.3%
Central Lower Peninsula (CLP)	7.0%	9.3%	2.3%
Southeast Lower Peninsula (SELP)	50.7%	37.8%	-12.9%
Out of State	2.6%	N/A	N/A

This and previous surveys consistently found that respondents also desire more riding opportunities near their homes. This finding was supported in Focus Group meetings, but those attending in low population areas, such as the UP, were concerned that their

input would be silenced by the number of riders living near larger urban centers. All regions should be reviewed for growing their single day riding opportunities consistent with the Vision objectives.

Trails

While most participants of the focus group meetings and surveys currently ride a variety of surfaces and locations, most prefer to ride on loop trail systems, away from motorized traffic and other user groups, and which offer variable scenery and terrain. Shade was also cited as extremely important in the DNR's Trail Survey. For improved riding experiences, 3 to 5 loops at a given site were recommended.

Trailheads

The four most important trailhead amenities identified in the Equestrian Trail User Survey include 1) water for equines, 2) adequate car and trailer parking, 3) generous vehicle/trailer turn-around space and 4) shade. The next item of importance 5) hitching posts and/or picket poles for equines received significantly less interest than the top rated items.

Campgrounds

According to the ETS 2011 Survey, 85% of EQs camp overnight. As identified in the Equestrian Trail User Survey, the four most important campground amenities that need improvements are 1) develop pull-through sites, 2) enlarge campsites for larger trailers, 3) provide electricity at campsites and 4) plant shade trees. Providing showers (Item #5) and replacing the vault toilets with a modern toilet building (Item #6) also scored very closely with #4) shade trees. Converting hand pumps to a pressurized water system was ranked 8 out of the 22 available options. This lower ranking was supported later when 74% of the respondent's indicated that hand pumps were adequate to meet their watering needs within a campground. Many respondents indicated that they travel with their own water supply that will last them a couple of days within a campground.

Ride Duration and Length

The majority of participants of the focus group meetings and the online survey indicated that day riding was the most common EQ experience they participated in, traveling up to 2 hours to do so. Multi-day riding from one camping location was second with the majority of participants traveling up to 4 hours to get to their EQ facility location. Overall, the surveyed EQs will typically travel up to 4 hours for a quality riding experience.

For day rides, the majority of participants (44.9%) ride between 5 to 10 miles, although another 40% ride for 10 to 20 miles. For multi-day ride experiences, the majority of riders (51.5%) ride between 10 to 20 miles per day. When developing new trail experiences, this result indicates that daily trail lengths of 5 to 20 miles either in a looped system or between campgrounds/trailheads are ideal.

Communication

Analysis of survey data and focus group comments indicate a need for better communication between EQ organizations and the DNR. The top three opportunities for improvements in communication include:

1. A statewide map, guidebook and website listing (with maps) of all EQ trail facilities (campgrounds, trails, trailheads).
2. Better signage at all EQ facilities clearly identifying directions (including confidence markers), rules, regulations, emergency contacts, legal restrictions and maps.
3. More DNR communication and education with EQ partners. From past experience, it is assumed this communication would be about issues such as existing facilities and trails, expansion plans, maintenance issues, trail etiquette, trail conflicts, land management plans including timber harvest plans, and limitations because of land characteristics and/or funding sources

Maintenance Fees

According to the DNR's 2012 Trail Survey, 80% of EQs would support an annual maintenance fee for purposes of trail maintenance. The ETS 2011 Survey results also support this initiative; however, respondents in the Southeast Lower Peninsula showed the greatest opposition to fees. These results suggest an opportunity to investigate and implement these types of fundraising mechanisms in support of EQ trails.

Southeast Lower Peninsula Opportunities

While EQs in the Southeast Lower Peninsula take advantage of riding opportunities in other parts of the state, the focus group participants (8 total) preferred to stay closer to home when riding. When compared to the rest of the state, riders from this area prefer day rides that are on looped trails. This result could be a reflection of the greater number of looped trail riding and camping opportunities offered to the riders in this region. It should also be noted that only a few participants from other focus group indicated a desire to travel to Southeast Lower Peninsula for their riding opportunities.

Survey data defining desired trail lengths and demographic information for this area indicate a need to increase EQ trail connection opportunities in this region. Specifically, connector trails are desired between state recreation areas. The top three locations for riding in this region are Proud Lake State Recreation Area, Highland State Recreation Area and Waterloo/Pinckney State Recreation Area.

Central Lower Peninsula Opportunities

Central Lower Peninsula focus group EQs (6 total) mainly ride at Ionia State Recreation Area (located in the Southwestern Lower Peninsula region) and Sleepy Hollow State Park. When compared with the rest of the state, riders from this area are more likely to travel for multi-day rides. Many riders, from this region, have an interest in traveling to the Northern Lower Peninsula for a "quality" trail riding and camping experience. This focus group population desires: more trails within the region, improved trail signage, more trails in Sleepy Hollow State Park including connection of Sleepy Hollow State Park trails to Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail, and on the Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail development linkages where EQ use is currently not allowed.

Southwest Lower Peninsula Opportunities

While focus group EQs (7 total) in the Southwest Lower Peninsula currently ride primarily at Yankee Springs State Recreation Area, Hungerford Lake Federal Recreation

Area, and Silver Creek (Allegan State Game Area), many prefer to travel to the Northern Lower Peninsula for multi-day riding experiences. These riders shared the desire for more trails and campgrounds in their region. Users in this region specifically identified campgrounds with larger sites and longer trail lengths than what is currently being offered. Focus group participants mentioned the desire for a more modern, better designed campground, as well as the addition of a children's trail that circles the campground, and connector trails between existing loop trails.

Northern Lower Peninsula Opportunities

Current use in this region by focus group participants (19 total) primarily occurs at Pigeon River Country State Forest and the Michigan Shore to Shore Hiking and Riding Trail. EQs from this region shared many of the same trends in the statewide opportunities listed above. The primary desire of participants in the Northern Lower Peninsula focus group was centered around the expansion of EQ opportunities (state and federal) in the region and, specifically, to open more riding and camping opportunities within or near the Pigeon River Country State Forest and west of I-75. More well-marked looped trails associated with existing and new campgrounds were also requested. Other desires included a modern campground facility to attract riders from other regions (Wisconsin and the Lower Peninsula) and more trails in state forests. In the survey, multi-day riding trended higher than single-day riding. Northern Lower Peninsula EQs also desired better communication with the DNR in developing new facilities.

Upper Peninsula Opportunities

The primary concern of the focus group EQs in the Upper Peninsula (15 total) was to increase the riding opportunities in their region. Although many of the focus group participants indicated that the majority of their riding and cart/carriage driving occurs within the region, there was a strong desire for more state-owned EQ trail and camping opportunities here. Also worth noting, when compared to the rest of the state, riders in this area preferred to ride on forest roads. Various sites for repurposing closed or under-developed campgrounds and trails were identified. Among these sites, the federal Pine Marten Trail has popular EQ camping use that provides a good opportunity for expansion. Specific trail improvements desired included longer trails as well as wider trails to accommodate for side-by-side riding and cart/carriage driving. Riders here also supported obtaining riding information from the internet as opposed to other forms of communication.

VI. Opportunities for Business Related Development

Business related development can compliment and enhance the trail user's quality of experience. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- Tack shops accessible to EQ trails and campgrounds
- Large animal veterinary services
- Horse boarding (e.g. B&B for horses) and grooming
- Stables with horses to rent, and related services
- Rider boarding (e.g. B&B, motel/hotel, campgrounds for people)
- Restaurants, ice cream shops, fuel, grocery, and general merchandise (This is also supported by data in the DNR's Trail Survey)
- Outfitters or guides to support large group rides, etc.

- Entertainment and recreation opportunities in which EQs may participate when not riding (e.g. movies, golf, fishing, swimming, etc.)

Many such examples already exist, and current business owners and entrepreneurs just need to be made aware of the EQ market that they can serve. Others represent untapped possibilities.

VII. Opportunities for Private Sector Involvement

The opportunities for private sector involvement in support of EQ trail and camping use in Michigan are many. Examples include:

- Festivals and events that promote EQ trail riding
- Support for EQ groups and associations
- Marketing and branding
- Transient boarding facilities near trails
- Fundraising
- Endowment programs (identified in 2011 ETS Recommendation Report)
- Partnerships with land trusts (e.g. Equestrian Land Conservation Resource and Trust)
- Snowmobile trail private easement agreements (potential for EQ use)
- Support and promotion of 'Trail Towns'

(Insert Text Box 2 for Trail Town discussion)

Textbox 2. Trail Towns

There are many communities that are interested in becoming trail town. Trail towns are those that are a destination on a distance trail and which cater to various trail users. There is existing information about how a community can successfully become a "trail town" - see the information available on the Land Information Access Association (LIAA). The LIAA has assisted the "Up North Trails Initiative" in Michigan by providing information for trail towns in a 22 county effort that included cooperation with the Northeast and the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments as well as stakeholders. The LIAA produced a trail town manual, see http://www.liaa.org/downloads/north_central_state_trail_town_manual.pdf. Additionally, Pennsylvania has a trail town initiative and their manual of guidance can be found in the appendix to the LIAA North Central State Trail Town Manual.

EQs can help identify the best way for a trail town to take advantage of those local business community opportunities. For example, many trail riders have their own live-in trailers, but would welcome a business that provided corrals, showers, and meals. Or, an EQ friendly, traditional Bed and Breakfast along a distance trail might be a welcome choice for trail riders. Identification of these local business, with good maps to locate them, could occur through an interactive map and inventory of trail towns catering to EQs. The Discover US Heritage Route 23 website www.us23heritageroute.org of interactive maps and inventory is a model for how to connect a variety of business types, campgrounds, recreational experiences, and towns for a visitor's recreational trip planning.

_____(TEXT BOX ends here)_____

IIX. BARRIERS (Threats)

Barriers to EQ activities in the state of Michigan were identified from the online survey and focus group meetings. These barriers act as road blocks for proposed EQ improvements in Michigan.

Land Restrictions

There are many sources of funds that are used to purchase state lands for public purposes. Three primary sources of funding that include restrictions with respect to EQ related recreation on the acquired lands are (1) Pittman Robertson Wildlife Restoration Funds (PR), (2) Dingell Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Fund (DJ) and Licensed Fee Acquired Lands (LF).

PR/DJ Grant Acquired and Managed Lands: DNR lands which are PR/DJ acquired and/or managed are distributed in a checker board pattern across the state. Many of these areas are desirable to a variety of recreation users. Horseback riding is not prohibited on PR/DJ land. However, when it does occur, the intensity and frequency cannot interfere with the primary purpose of hunting and fishing. For example, PR/DJ funds cannot be used for enforcement of use restrictions or other non-PR/DJ purposes on PR/DJ lands. Should the US Fish and Wildlife Service determine that the state is not adequately managing the frequency and intensity of EQ use on these lands; and if a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, future PR/DJ funding is jeopardized. Since these funds have been significant—\$23.5 million in 2012, careful management of EQ (and other non hunting and non fishing activities) has been a state concern.

Licensed Fee Acquired and Managed Lands: Some DNR lands were acquired and/or are managed through hunting and fishing license fees. A provision of the PR (1937) and DJ (1950) Acts is that states must assent to only use state license fees for fish and wildlife services. Michigan passed Assent in 1939. The state acceptance for these provisions is found in Section 324.40501 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act 451 where it states “...*funds accruing to this state from license fees paid for by hunters shall not be used for any purpose other than game and fish activities under the administration of the DNR.*” If this restriction is strictly interpreted then horseback riding may be restricted on these lands.

Collaboration

EQ organizations identified that their working relationship with the DNR varies between management areas. Consistent policies and procedures are needed to help ease these working relationships. Many users have expressed an interest in developing more trails and are frustrated with the lack of response from the DNR when approached.

User Fees and Approvals

Confusing fee rates, the method of achieving approvals, and the time required for approval for use of EQ trail camps were identified as problems that needed resolution. Respondents expressed the frustration over the dissimilarity of state camping fees

compared to the amenities they offer. The lack of clear registration directions at un-staffed campgrounds were also cited as problems.

Travel Information

A lack of information on trail locations (maps) and trail conditions are barriers to attracting trail riders to Michigan. Additionally, 40% of EQs polled in the DNR's 2012 Trail Survey indicate that the state has poor promotion of available EQ experiences.

Coordination

A lack of coordination and cooperation between EQ riding associations and groups was identified as a barrier to garnering approval, funding, and implementation of more EQ trails and campgrounds in Michigan. (Note: The list of EQ associations and groups found in the Appendix totals nearly 80 individual groups statewide)

Education

Focus group comments and survey data show that the lack of information on how to use EQ trails causes barriers to a quality riding experience. Cited were the lack of trail signage, maps, information regarding rules and regulations, fee collecting procedures, and proper trail etiquette including "leave no trace" practices. Trail users cite that poor trail etiquette results in user conflicts.

Perceived Threats

Gas Prices/Distance From Home: Threats identified for the EQ community include high gas prices, which threaten to prevent EQs from traveling greater distances to their favorite destinations.

Out-of-State Facilities: Another potential threat to the EQ economy in Michigan is riders traveling out-of-state for their EQ experiences. Many EQs in the Upper Peninsula identified going to Wisconsin for their quality riding experience while others in the Southwestern Lower Peninsula cited trips to Indiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky, or Tennessee for their quality riding experience.

Use Conflicts: EQs identified that opportunities have diminished for them statewide due to real and perceived conflicts with other users. Regionally, user conflicts were higher in the Upper Peninsula and the Northern Lower Peninsula with ORV users when compared to state-wide average. Conflicts with hunters in Southeast Lower Peninsula were higher than the state-wide average.

Some recreation area users in the Southern Lower Peninsula also had conflicts with mountain bikers, though the survey indicated state-wide that EQs had few interactions with other user groups while trail riding. Focus group meeting feedback perceived that other user groups did not want equines using the trails, and that trail closures could result. These perceived concerns include the inability to hear EQ users when they approach, the unpredictability of equines, manure left behind, and erosion of trail surfacing from equine use.

EQs expressed that other users do not know how to behave around equines and that there are safety concerns with mixing non-EQs with EQs in the same campground.

Equity of Use: Minimal campground facilities have been created to serve EQ users. While EQs can only camp in these given facilities, other users are not necessarily restricted from equine campgrounds. In addition, the lack of EQ trails forces EQs to ride on trails not designed or built for them. The EQ user is asking for parity of facilities in line with other user types.

Maintenance and Construction: Although many EQ facilities are constructed and maintained by EQ associations and groups, larger projects may be difficult for these groups to accomplish. Examples of these activities may include access road improvements, severe erosion control and major tree clearing. While groups are willing to perform some of these tasks, these activities require special equipment, certifications, and/or licenses.

IX. Overall Goals (Next 5 years)

1. Complete comprehensive EQ trails and facilities inventory
2. Improve and expand DNR EQ trails and facilities
3. Promote EQ trails and facilities to users and businesses
4. Collaborate with partners and governmental agencies to improve communications, expand riding opportunities and to maintain trails and facilities
5. Identify and pursue stable funding to develop and maintain equine facilities
6. Develop a conflict resolution process

X. Recommendations

In partnership with the ETS and equine riding community, the following goals and recommendations were developed. The first three recommendations under each goal are the highest priority.

Goal #1 - Complete comprehensive EQ Trails and Facilities Inventory and Analysis

1. ***As part of the internet portal development, provide an online trails database that includes comprehensive geospatial data, descriptions, and pictures of public EQ trails, trailheads and campgrounds including those "permissive use" trails that are identified as suitable for EQ use. [Primary lead: DNR]***
2. ***Once the inventory is adequate, provided a gap analysis of where infrastructure needs must be pursued to achieve Vision goals (e.g. abandoned county roads, utility corridors or user created trails). [Primary lead: DNR]***
3. ***Prioritize potential projects by geographic area in consideration of state lands and existing state facilities, and where trails and facilities can be enhanced and/or expanded for equine use. [Primary lead: DNR]***
4. Develop guidelines and assess the suitability of ORV trails, snowmobile trails (undeveloped) rail-trails, and existing pathways for EQ use. [Primary lead: DNR]

5. Inventory and publish EQ trails and facilities on other public lands such as county parks, municipalities and federal lands. [Primary lead: DNR]

Goal #2 - Improve and Expand DNR EQ Trails and Facilities

6. ***Open opportunities in our state forest, parks and game area's to allow horseback riding. In those state lands where equine trail use has been curtailed due to management constraints (e.g. land funding restrictions) identify similar equine trail opportunities in close proximity to the closed trails, campgrounds, or trailheads.***
7. ***Expand riding trails at non-linear state parks and recreation areas with EQ facilities so riders have access to a minimum of 10 miles of trail. Look for opportunities to configure trails so multiple loops are provided including connections to other trails nearby (including neighboring states). [Primary lead: DNR]***
8. ***Investigate opportunities to re-purpose existing or reopen closed U.P. state forest campgrounds for EQ use, with the objective of designating 2 or more EQ campgrounds with access to 20 miles of loop trails and/or connectivity to existing equine trails in the Upper Peninsula. [Primary lead: DNR]***
9. Investigate and provide designated trail riding opportunities in several dispersed locations in the Upper Peninsula that will provide a minimum of 10 miles of well marked trails and basic trailhead amenities for day rides. [Primary lead: EQs]
10. Develop and implement the process to identify and connect existing EQ trails with particular attention to Southeast Michigan state parks and recreation areas. [Primary lead: EQs]
11. Using existing or new state forest EQ campgrounds north of Clare and south of the Mackinaw Bridge, identify opportunities for loop riding trail development that would provide a minimum of 20 total miles of riding opportunities per campground. [Primary lead: DNR]
12. Identify opportunities for designation of EQ trails in State Game Areas. [Primary lead: DNR]
13. Conduct a demand analysis to determine the need for a Signature Equestrian Park(s). [Primary lead: ETS/MSTAC]
14. Based on positive demand analysis results, identify potential locations for Signature Equestrian Parks and provide pros and cons for each. [Primary lead: DNR]
15. Develop uniform sign guidance covering design, content and location information for use on EQ trails, trailheads, and campgrounds. Partner with Friends Groups to place and maintain signs where needed. [Primary lead: DNR]
16. Develop an implementation plan for trails and facilities recommendations that includes quarterly reporting on implementation progress (Primary lead: ETS/DNR).

Goal #3 - Promote EQ Trails and Facilities to Users and Businesses

17. ***Collaborate with Pure Michigan, riding associations and others on the development of innovative promotional platforms that will draw new users, e.g. the development of awards/patches for riding certain areas of the state, or volunteering for maintaining certain amounts of trail corridors. [Primary lead: ETS]***
18. ***As part of the internet portal development, provide detailed EQ information that includes location and trail maps garnered from the inventory, rules and***

- procedures regulating use, trail etiquette and Leave No Trace policies that can be conveyed to users on a variety of platforms. [Primary lead: DNR]*
- 19. Work with the Land Information Access Association, using Michigan's "Up North Initiative" as a model to provide guidance on trail towns catering to EQs. [Primary lead: ETS/MSTAC]**

Goal #4 - Collaborate with Partners and Governmental Agencies to Improve Communications, Expand Riding Opportunities, and to Maintain Trails and Facilities

- 20. Inform equine riders of DNR's trail proposal process. This information would allow EQ users the ability to assist in the identification and development of connecting EQ trails on private and public land. [Primary lead: DNR]**
- 21. Partner with the U.S. Forest Service, other states, local governments and other public entities to provide trails and campgrounds that are identified as needed in the gap analysis. [Primary lead: DNR]**
- 22. Investigate opportunities to partner with others in the design, construction, and operation of a Signature Equestrian Park. Develop through collaborative partnership(s) a feasibility assessment, development plan, business plan, and marketing plan. [Primary lead: DNR]**
23. Inform the public on how they can effectively participate in the DNR's land management planning processes. [Primary lead: DNR]
24. Collaborate with riding associations to facilitate opportunities so that equine community can learn how to initiate friends associations, perform trail maintenance activities, and achieve certification for chain saw operations. [Primary lead: EQs]

Goal #5 - Identify and Pursue Stable Funding to Develop and Maintain Equine Facilities

- 25. Encourage the Michigan Trust Fund Board to reinstate the \$500,000 limit for development grants and to meet the Governor's objective to make Michigan the "Trail State", to place emphasis on trail related projects. [Primary lead: MSTAC]**
- 26. Pursue reclassification of equine use as an approved alternative mode of transportation as defined by DOT/FHWA to qualify for bicycle-pedestrian federal funding. [Primary lead: ETS]**
- 27. Investigate and make recommendation on other funding sources that have been implemented in other states, including, but not limited to; bridal tags and special license plates. [Primary lead: ETS]**
28. Work with riding associations to promote purchase of the Recreation Passport to their members and others to provide stable funding for the development and maintenance of recreation facilities. [Primary lead: EQs]
29. Initiation of diversity in the campground fee structure would provide the means for development of expanded amenities, user pays for services received. [Primary lead: DNR]

Goal #6 - Develop a Conflict Resolution Process

- 30. Promote the establishment of an overall Friend's Group for each State Park, Recreation Area, Forest, or Game Area which would consist of a**

- representative from each user group and which can serve as the first step in resolving conflicts at a local level. [Primary lead: ETS]*
- 31. Develop a group of qualified Michigan mediators/facilitators who will receive education in the laws and regulations which affect DNR's administration of lands under its stewardship. [Primary lead: MSTAC]*
 - 32. Develop a process for referrals to mediate/facilitate and resolve recurring conflicts between user groups utilizing those qualified Michigan mediators/facilitators who have received training in the laws and regulations related to DNR land administration. Costs of mediation/facilitation to be borne by the user groups involved in the conflict. [Primary lead: MSTAC]*
 33. Promote utilization of MSTAC as a forum for directing and facilitating conflict resolution at the regional or state organizational level. [Primary lead: MSTAC]

XI. Plan Review and Update

The Equestrian Chapter of the Statewide Trail Network Plan has been developed to be a dynamic instrument, designed to provide information and guidance for EQ trail users and public land managers over time. To assure the relevance of this plan, it will follow a 5-year review and update cycle.