

Help us Keep Game Land Trails Open

Please read the following and fill out the Survey. We will protect your personal information but we need your contact information in case we have questions or have difficulty finding the trail on the map...You may return the survey in two ways. If you have scanning capabilities you may scan it and email to gwwills52@gmail.com or you may snail mail it to Gwen Wills, 235 Mule Ln. Summerville, PA 15864

Over the last six months, since the August 2014 press release stating the Pennsylvania Game Commission was proposing a Paid Permit to access designated trails, many changes have come about. (You may find more information and history on this subject on the updated Pennsylvania Equine Council website; click on "Trails.") In short, the Game Commission is concerned about the secondary uses on their lands and cannot allow them to adversely impact their primary use and purpose/mandate of ***"Protecting, conserving and managing the diversity of wild birds and wild mammals and their habitats; provide wildlife related education, services and recreational opportunities for both consumptive and non-consumptive use of wildlife, and maintaining and promoting Pennsylvania's hunting and trapping heritage"***.

Various user groups utilize the Game Lands for various recreational activities although it is not the Commission's job to provide land access for recreational activities. We as the Pennsylvania Equine Council's Trail Committee worked very hard to regain access following the complete closure of 1.4 million acres of Game Lands to equestrians in 2002. The Game Commission has been cooperative with us to allow within their scope, opportunities to ride in and through Game Lands to access other land open for recreation. Also there is an application process to request other routes if they fall into the agreed criteria.

Over the past 13 years, the Council has conducted workshops and educational programs teaching non-motorized trail users about the difference between State Forests & Parks and Game Lands. Not all have gotten the message, that when accessing Game Lands, horseback riders and bikers must stay on designated trails and adhere to the time frame restrictions that will not be in conflict with the hunting seasons. Thus, due to **unacceptable impacts** on habitat, wildlife and streams on user generated trails that are not the approved "designated trail system," the Game Commission is attempting to find a solution before they would be forced to **close all** access to trails on their land once again.

There have been three Commission meetings since the news release in August. One in Delmont, PA on September 22 where the public could make comment regarding the "Paid Permit" proposal and another meeting which was in Harrisburg on December 15 that was open for the public to audit their regular Board of Commissioners meeting, but not to participate in the meeting and another on January 25, 2015. We, the PEC, have attended all three meetings, giving testimony in the first and third and listening to discussion about the subject in the second.

For the January meeting there **were changes** to the proposal, reflecting comments received and due to more investigation into the issue by the Commission's executive staff. The latest proposal **was** for the issuance of a FREE permit which must be in the secondary user's possession when visiting Game Lands. A hunting license would also be viewed as a permit

and would also need to be carried when on the land. This free permit would be obtained on line. The issuance of this free permit would be an attempt to educate the users as to the secondary use of the land and the regulations that must be followed. Equine would still have been required to stay on designated trails and adhere to the Hunting Season time restrictions.

THE PERMIT PROPOSAL WAS PULLED FROM THE JANUARY MEETING AGENDA!!

The future of the permit is unknown at this time but word has it, the proposal will be resurrected at a later date.

This riding season, the Game Commission will be enforcing the regulations for the use of the designated trails and the times the trails are open. Once again the PEC gave testimony on January 25 to our commitment to work in cooperation with the Game Commission and to the education of the designated trail users.

We encourage everyone who rides in Game Lands to respect the existing regulations that afford us the opportunity to ride in and pass through to other land open to equestrian use. Also we encourage you to attend a 3-Day or 1-Day Trail Stewardship Workshop to learn what you can do to prevent closure of the trails on Game Lands due to adverse impacts and lack of maintenance.

We need to know what Designated trails are being used to keep them open as we meet with the Commission in March and subsequent meetings.

“We will protect your personal information.”

Trails on Game Lands are a “secondary use” that **must not** interfere with the Primary mandate.

For questions or more information please call or write:

Bud or Gwen Wills 814-379-3759, gwills@pennswoods.net 235 Mule Ln. Summerville, PA 15864

Bud Wills, State Trail Chair