

# Update - Trails on Game Lands

---

Since the announcement of the proposed “**trail use permit fee**” in August, 2014, there have been meetings and many phone calls from across the state. We will summarize the timeline and developments.

On August 14, the PA Game Commission (PGC) posted a press release, **Release #071-14**, announcing a proposed fee for those using the Game Lands Designated Routes. The release also stated, “The Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners will consider the recommendation at its regular meeting to be held Sept. 22 and 23 in Delmont, Pa.” Of the 34 testimony presentations that day, relating to the proposed fee, only one person was in favor of the fee and he stated that it was his own opinion, not the opinion of the organization to which he belonged. The release may still be viewed on the PGC website. Our (PEC’s) statement was that we believe the existing regulation and standard operation procedure that we worked on along with the Game Commission for 5 years and was approved by the Commission and the Attorney General’s Office if enforced along with the education through the PEC Trail Stewardship Workshops are sufficient to protect the Game Lands. Also, it was clear from information offered in the afternoon session that the problem of renegade trails causing unacceptable impacts to the environment and sensitive wildlife habitat was the real concern, not the designated trails themselves.

It is also our belief that creating a fee will not have any effect to educate those who do not understand why the designated trails were put in place to start with or curb the blatant disregard for those regulations. Also the enforcement of the permit may cause an undue time burden on the officers and unfavorable public relations image in this time when both the Game Commission and many of us active in promoting recreation are trying to find ways to get people out of doors and learn about and appreciate nature.

The following day the Commissioners decided to table action on the fee proposal and directed the Executive Director to work with staff to re-evaluate the proposal and bring back new recommendations to the board at the working group meeting on Dec. 15. Also following the Delmont meeting, we had a meeting with the executive staff of the PGC to offer our assistance in any way we can.

The Game Commission has started to issue warnings for those riding off designated trails and during hunting season when the trails are closed to recreation. Come Spring we believe you may be seeing citations written instead of warnings. The commission is also re-thinking trail markings to be tamper proof.

At the December 15th meeting of the Game Commissioners and executive staff, there was a lot of discussion concerning different options regarding a “Permit with a fee” and a “free Permit”. Either option would create an opportunity for those who want access to the designated trails to be educated by information that would accompany the Permit. Following all the discussion, the executive staff was once again asked to come back to the PGC January meetings with a proposal regarding the Permit.

On January 15 the agenda for the January 25-27 Game Commission's scheduled meeting was published on their website. The agenda contained a proposal to address the secondary uses on Game Lands that contained provisions for a free permit that would need to be in the possession of visitors to the Game Lands over 16 years of age that did not possess hunting or trapping license. The proposal also included the hiking community for the first time since the designated trail provision for equestrians and bike riders went into effect in February 2003. With this proposal the hikers would not need to restrict their activity to designated trails but they would need to adhere to the time restrictions that apply to equestrians and bikers.

## THE PERMIT PROPOSAL HAS NOW BEEN PULLED FROM THE JANUARY MEETING AGENDA!!

On Thursday January 22 the secondary use proposal was withdrawn. To read the PGC Press Release, [click here](#).

The future of the permit is unknown at this time.

This coming 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 is hoping to give testimony on January 25 to our commitment to work in cooperation with the Game Commission and to the education of the designated trail users.

Once again 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.

This would be a perfect time for the trail users to be **proactive** by attending an existing 1-Day Workshop, setting up a 1-Day Workshop for your area or signing up for the scheduled 3-Day Trail Stewardship Workshops in July, to learn what you can do to prevent closure of the trails on Game Lands due to adverse impacts and lack of maintenance.

Please contact us if you have any questions regarding the issue or for available dates to have a workshop. Phone: 814-379-3759 or e-mail: [gwwills@pennswoods.net](mailto:gwwills@pennswoods.net)

Bud Wills, State Trail Chair  
Gwen Wills, Trail Stewardship Program Director