

Trails

PEC Trail Stewardship Program

History:

In early 2002, the Pennsylvania Equine Council (PEC) initiated its Trail Stewardship Program (TSP). Our actions were in response to what the trail riding community has heard over the last several years about the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) shutting down access of the game lands to users other than hunters as well as declining conditions of recreational trails on other lands that lead to closures. The customary use of trails on game lands as well as our State Forests and State Parks has become a part of many of our lives. We have been able to enjoy the forests and watch wildlife while enjoying our time with our personal equines of choice. With close to 500 separate pieces of game lands, totaling 1.7 million acres scattered throughout Pennsylvania, it is difficult for many to ride for any length of time without having to cross through a piece of game land to access other public or private land.

We must realize that the PGC was legislatively created and is the only agency charged solely and specifically with the following: 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.

There has been a lot of misinformation on this issue, and over the past several years we have begun to make headway toward the resolution of this complex situation among user groups and the different agencies. We believe that education is the key to a good relationship between those in control of public land and the recreational public. Most trails that we enjoy on public land are user generated, which means they were never laid out with any thought of sustainability, only cut in and used.

In light of regulations passed by the PGC and the increased interest in development of good sustainable non-motorized equestrian and bike trails by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) (State Forests and State Parks), 2.4 million acres, and the Allegheny National Forest, 513,175 acres, for their long range plans, the PEC Trail Committee has initiated the three-phase Trail Stewardship Program. Pennsylvania is now showing more interest in recreation and tourism, thus we need to be more concerned about the infrastructure of our trail systems.

Phase One - Volunteer Coordinator/Agency Personnel 3-Day Workshops

3-Day Trail Stewardship Workshops are offered in Central Pennsylvania combining concepts and practical application of effective trail design and maintenance. We find classroom instruction and site work where participants actually lay out and construct a section of viable non-motorized, shared use trail is a well-accepted approach.

Participants in the workshops include land management personnel from the PGC, DCNR, National Forest and private lands open for recreation, and volunteers from PEC

chapters, saddle and riding clubs, the mountain bike community, and hiking groups. In the workshops, these groups meet, learn and work together establishing the kind of working relationship needed for shared trail stewardship. These workshops have been met with overwhelming acceptance. Because of the limited number of participants that can effectively be accommodated, several workshops will be offered to attain the goal number and maintain a good complement of agency personnel and PEC Trail Stewardship Coordinators.

Phase Two - Regional 1-Day Trail Stewardship Workshops

In the second phase, the PEC Trail Stewardship Coordinators, who have now been prepared to work with agency personnel, return to their respective regions to coordinate local/regional stewardship groups and assist the trail committee in the workshops for these groups. In this way, the continuity of the program is preserved. Local workshops are one or two days long and scheduled as needed to fit demands and work schedules.

Two-Day Packing Clinics

Two-Day Packing Clinics are held to learn how to safely use pack stock to transport tools and materials, such as gravel and pipe, needed for trail maintenance.

In order to offer a holistic approach to the stewardship education process, Gwen and Bud Wills have completed a "Leave No Trace" Masters Course for people who actively teach others Outdoor Skills & Ethics for backcountry and front country horse use. These holistic concepts can now be offered to local PEC stewardship groups, riding clubs, and outdoor enthusiasts.

Phase Three – Outreach

Phase three consists of outreach programs. To support the work being done by the Stewardship Groups, outreach programs have been developed in the form of one hour to one-day workshops in Leave No Trace skills and outdoor ethics, trail update programs, and trail riding as well as packing and pack stock programs. These are available to PEC county chapters, saddle clubs and for various horse expos throughout the state. By incorporating sound trail layout and management practices, as well as outdoor ethics principles and good equestrian skills, into presentations throughout the year, our presentations promote understanding of natural resource conservation and cooperation between agencies and trail user groups.

What Can You Do?

The situations that arise from various land use conflicts have not developed over night, and it is not going to be resolved in a short time. The Trail Stewardship Program is available but the most important ingredient is YOU!!! The Pennsylvania Equine Council is a volunteer organization, and we need good folks like you -- who care about your animals and the great outdoors you enjoy -- to get involved. We need your input and your help to be able to affect trails in your area. Everyone is not in a position to do some of the things outlined in the descriptions of the Trail Stewardship Program, but support in many areas is needed. If you can make coffee or phone calls, help on a trail, spread

information or just tell a friend about a "Leave No Trace" or other program that a local saddle club may be hosting, you will have helped. When we all do just a little, it will lighten the load.

These types of programs are working here in PA to build a trusting relationship with our land agencies and must continue if we plan to ride in Pennsylvania. There is no reason to send the tourist dollars to neighboring states or have to go out of state ourselves.

Where do you or your friends ride? We are in the process of identifying individuals or groups who ride in these regions whether it is Game Lands, State Forest, State Parks, or National Forest. If you have been involved in this type of trail maintenance in the past, don't assume we know about your work. We have many new volunteers who are helping to identify people and matching them with stewardship projects in the areas where they ride. Please be patient. PEC is a volunteer organization so most who are involved have family, jobs and stalls to clean.

Tax-deductible contributions from individuals, clubs and user groups can be made to the Pennsylvania Equine Foundation (a 501C3 non-profit organization) to help the PEC produce the free programs described above. Clearly label the contribution for the PEC Trail Stewardship Program.

Mail to:

**Pennsylvania Equine Foundation
c/o Elaine Bish
7025 Pine Road
Harrisburg, PA 17112**

Your contributions are tax deductible and can also be used to secure matching grant monies to continue this vital educational program.

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