



MHC UPDATE

mdhorsecouncil.org

The Political Horseman

by Royce Herman

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POLITICS! YUCK – who wants to talk about that? This is the reaction that I get from many horse people when the subject comes up. I hear things like, “I don’t vote because I don’t like any of the candidates,” or “If I ignore the whole thing, maybe it’ll just go away.”

Well, folks, it won’t just “go away.” The political process invades every aspect of our lives, including where we ride and sometimes even whether we can own a horse. Sticking our collective heads in the sand only means that someone else (who may or may not share our interests) will be making decisions on our behalf.

That said, we now need to talk about one of the basics of politics: “grass roots.” Fact of the matter is, the horse industry doesn’t have any grass roots. Webster defines the term as “the common people, originally those especially of rural or non-urban areas, thought of as best representing the basic, direct political interests of the electorate.” Sounds like horse owners, doesn’t it? The fly in the ointment here is that, to a politician, only voters are the common people. Everyone else doesn’t count. Why, you ask? Only two things matter to a political candidate: money to run a campaign and votes to put that person in office. To gain office, a candidate needs the support of the grass roots – but only if they are going to vote.

So now we are getting to the meat of the issue. The horse industry doesn’t have any grass roots because most of us don’t vote. In fact, most of us are not even registered to vote. Frequently, when a volume of mail concerning an issue is received in Annapolis, names are compared to voter registration rolls to determine the importance of the issue. Our sources in Annapolis have told us that concerning horse-related issues, only 22% to 25% of the letter writers are registered voters. Folks, this can’t continue.

If we want political support on issues such as slots, trail issues, the Horse Park, etc., we need to climb out of our saddles and flex our muscles at the polls.

Your Maryland Horse Council is kicking off a concerted effort to get out the vote in 2006. At our booth at the Jan. 19-22 Horse World Expo in Timonium, we will be asking you to register to vote if you aren’t already registered. If you come by the booth and register or show us your registration card, you will get a bumper sticker that proclaims, “I’m a horse person – and I vote.”

In 2006, it’s vital that we make a statement. That statement is that we love horses and we care what happens to them. Even if you don’t like any of the candidates, ask yourself, “Which of these people will make me and my horses better off?” And then VOTE. It’s your sport. Look what the gun people have done, only because they ALL vote. There’s no reason that the horse people can’t do the same.

Over the next few months, I will come back to you on other topics of importance politically. I’ll also be reporting the results of an inquiry that will be sent to key candidates in Maryland. Remember, folks – if YOU do nothing, nothing will get done!

Trails & Greenways Committee

More Bad News, re: Trails and Funding

Peggy Bree’s notes from her meeting with Nita Settina, chief of recreation and resource conservation programs, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, August 16, 2005

First, the bad news:

1) The State Park Service’s staff has been reduced by approximately 100 members; they now work for the Natural Resources Police division, providing law enforcement services in the parks. The State Park Service is hiring 23 new replacement employees this fall, but manpower for trail maintenance is limited, and the department must rely on volunteers for most trail work. The Greenways Commission was dissolved and, therefore,

most proactive tasks – like greenways trail planning – have been reduced.

- 2) Responsibility for Maryland state forests has been moved from the State Park Service into a separate forestry division. Equestrians will now also need to work with the forestry division to secure existing and future trail access in state forests.
- 3) The State Park Service simply does not have the manpower to staff an equestrian trails advocate. With the current DNR hiring freeze and lack of funding, there is no realistic possibility that anyone can be assigned to the tasks listed in the job description prepared by the MHC. Funding for a state equestrian trails advocate would have to come from other sources, such as the MHIB.

Now, the good news:

- 1) Nita is very willing to work with the equestrian community; she is also knowledgeable and helpful. As a trail user, Nita is already familiar with the problems of building and maintaining sustainable trails. She recently attended the week-long Bureau of Land Management Trail course. We have a common language and goals.
- 2) We discussed the idea of opening some state parks for primitive equestrian camping. Nita recognized the value and need for this type of recreation experience; however, she cautioned that existing services in state parks are currently being reduced at this time. Equestrians will need to take the initiative to propose areas that would be suitable for equestrian camping, developing strategies for educating their peers on “Leave No Trace,” low-impact camping practices.
- 3) We also discussed our idea of building additional equestrian facilities to support horse camping, like the facilities at Brookfield (New York), Manchester State Forest (South Carolina), Withlacoochee State Forest (Florida), and River

(continued)

Rise State Park (Florida). Nita stressed that since current services within the Maryland Park Service are being reduced, support for expanded recreation opportunities will need to have additional resources and/or volunteer commitment. An economic impact study showing the potential return in recreation-based tourism, the capital infrastructure required, and the operational budget necessary to maintain such a facility would be required to garner attention and additional resources. Similar studies in the past have cost \$25,000-50,000. The Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB) or the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development could fund this study.

- 4) The Department of Budget and Management awarded a \$75,000 pass-through grant to the Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts (MORE) mountain bike club to support training and trail maintenance in state parks. Equestrians have an opportunity to participate in this initiative, and would need to lobby for similar allocation.
- 5) The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) funds a coordinator for bicycle paths. Equestrians can explore this option with MDOT.

Sounds like the ball is in our court. Are you ready to be pro-active, in order to create more trail riding and horse camping opportunities in Maryland? Join the dialogue by sending e-mail to MHC-TG-subscribe@yahoo.com.

Thanks,
Peggy Bree



Announcing a New Discussion Group Just for Maryland Trail Riders!

- Want information about trails and places to ride?
- Looking for a trail-riding buddy?
- Need a ride or to share a trailer?
- Want to find out about organized club rides?

Then this discussion group is for you.

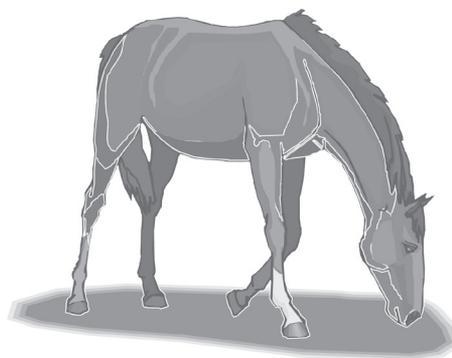
Send this message to your friends and trail riding clubs. The more people who join, the more valuable information we'll be able to share. The goal is more fun for everyone!

If you've never used a Yahoo discussion group before, you will need to create a Yahoo e-mail account for yourself. You can read messages on the web, but if you'd like to send and receive messages through your e-mail program, be sure to set your Yahoo profile to send messages to your personal e-mail address (like mary@aol.com). You also have a choice of receiving each message individually, or having Yahoo send you a "digest" of consolidated messages.

This group is just for discussions about trail riding; I'd be happy to refer you to other discussion groups if you want to discuss other horse and farm topics.

Happy trails!
Peggy

MarylandTrailRiders-subscribe@yahoo.com



Maryland Horse Council Quarterly Meeting Thursday, January 19, 2006

Meet & Greet Reception – 6 p.m.
Meeting – 7 p.m.

The Vista Room
Maryland State Fairgrounds
Timonium, Maryland

— Convenient walk from Horse World Expo —

For directions, please visit mapquest or horseworldexpo.com.



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Industry
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Maryland Horse Council

2005

- Association—\$100/year
- Farm—\$60/year
- Business—\$60/year
- Individual—\$35/year
- Youth Club—\$10/year

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP—\$1,000 one-time fee

Open to any private entity, corporation, or for a state, county or other municipal agency, department, service or office that wishes to support the Maryland equestrian industry. Membership shall be a one time fee of \$1,000. Payment shall entitle the institution to designate one or more individuals to serve in an advisory (non-voting) capacity to the Council.

Name _____

(Assoc./Business/Farm/Youth Club/Individual) _____

Phone _____

If Assoc., Representative to Serve as MHC Board Member _____

Phone _____

Alternate Phone _____ Fax _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email _____

Website _____

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