



MHC UPDATE

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Ride Smart

by Gwen Wills, Trails Stewardship Program director • Pennsylvania Equine Council

Many riders have never thought much about the impact riding has on soil and water. As trail riders, we enjoy our horses, our friends and the scenery. Mostly, when on the trail, we concentrate on staying on top of the steed.

We meet many people on our travels who have gotten into the pleasure horse industry from walks of life other than farming or ranching. Many of them come from an urban setting, with little to no large animal or land management background experience, and thus little knowledge of environmental protection regulations.

Environmental protection regulations developed over the past few decades help guard land and water resources, plants and animals from the impact of industry and human contamination. Many of us understand the need for clean sources of drinking water and non-polluted land to grow food on, but forget that the regulations protecting land for those purposes also apply to the land and water used for recreation. Public land set aside and not meant for development is the source of our water, called watersheds.

My husband always says he doesn't think any trail rider woke up and said, "I think I will go destroy a trail today" or "I think I will go make an agency person, private land owner or another outdoor recreationist angry." However, many trail riders have done just that. Unaware of who owns the land, how it is managed, and what regulations and management policies apply, many trail riders continue to cause harm.

Equestrians, by nature, are caring people.

We care for our animals, study to become better horse people, supply our horses with the most nutritious feed and supplements, good medical care, and best fitting tack.

Sometimes we obsess over information that is easily accessible and never think about the other parts of the equation: where and how we ride.

Think 'Ride Smart'

So what does "ride smart" mean? It means educating ourselves so we can ride our favorite beasts, make a minimum impact on the land, and be courteous of others using and maintaining public or private land. Not only is this easy, it is imperative – or we will lose our riding privileges.

The following are a few "Ride Smart" tips:

- **Plan Ahead**

Know who owns or manages the land you are planning to ride on. There are several different types of lands, rules, regulations, and management policies, such as DCNR, State Forest, State Park, Conservancy or County Land, Timber Company Land, public and private land.

Some questions to ask may be: Do you need permission or permits to ride? Do you need proof of current Coggins? Can you camp? Is it day parking and riding only? Are there different trails you should ride if it has been raining?

- **Trail Etiquette**

Often, trails lead over some sort of waterway. When crossing a stream, stay on the trail

and take your turn. When riding in a group and spreading out when crossing the stream, or stopping to water, riders cause an unnecessary impact to stream banks. If your horse does not want to drink and begins to paw the water, move on. This allows the next person in line to offer their horse a drink. When continuing on a trail ride with a group, don't ride away from those still offering their horses a drink. Due to herd instincts, the separation may cause anxiety for the horses. When taking a break from the trail, don't tie your horse directly to a tree. Cross tie or high line your horse. A horse can chew a tree and strip the bark, causing the tree to die or exposing the tree for disease or pests.

People have said, "There are signs that say 'No Horses,' but we go anyway. We aren't hurting anything." Riders ignoring these signs often don't understand there may be an endangered species protected under federal law, a high quality stream protected because it is a drinking water source, protected historical structures or a place that the agency feels is too sensitive. We as equestrians must respect posted signs. When hoof prints appear on these trails, the agency person or hikers think one of two things: The average horse owner is illiterate or not trustworthy. Trail riders who ignore signs or lack proper trail etiquette taint everyone's image of the caring horse person. ■

Editor's note: The above was reprinted by permission from the Pennsylvania Equine Council newsletter.

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How To Grass Roots Lobby—

A Tour of Maryland's House & Senate Chambers

Tuesday, Nov. 14, 2006 • 3:30 p.m.

Meet in Lowe House Office Building, Bladen Avenue Entrance
Enjoy Happy Hour at Historic Annapolis Watering Hole!
Reconvene Lowe House Office Building, Room 180

6:30 p.m. Meet & Greet Reception

7:30 p.m. MHC General Membership Meeting

With Joint Presentation By Maryland Horse Industry Board
"2006 Election—Who's Left Standing, Who's New, and How Does That Affect the Horse Industry"

This column is sponsored by the Maryland Horse Council. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of The Equiery's publisher or staff.