

AHC Seeks to Document Equestrian Access Issues on Public Land

Submit your information on equestrian lands that have been lost or blocked.

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The American Horse Council has launched a new effort to collect information on access issues equestrians are experiencing on federal lands. The center piece of this effort is an online form equestrians can use to report their personal experiences regarding trails and federal lands that have been closed to them or other access issues.

Americans who use horses and pack stock enjoy a unique experience when they ride on trails and public lands. It is an experience that ties them to the "pioneer" era and provides not only a way to connect with America's vast and unique natural resources but a link with America's history and traditions. It is an experience that cannot be enjoyed without a trail system, trailhead access and areas for camping. It is an experience that Americans enjoyed even before there was a national park system and an experience they want to continue.

Unfortunately, equestrians are seeing an increasing loss of access through trail restrictions, trail closures, and use restrictions. Riders and stock users are being excluded from areas that they have historically traveled through and indeed first opened up. It is a loss of opportunities for riders, families, persons with disabilities, school groups and others. There seems to be a management environment less open to these traditional forms of use. Sometimes restrictions on equestrian use are done intentionally through management plans that reduce, restrict or eliminate horses, horse facilities, camping or grazing restrictions, cross-country travel restrictions or closures. Sometimes the restrictions are indirect though a lack of trail maintenance, or over regulation, or lack of services to the public like facilities that provide saddle and pack animals or parking for horse trailers.

In order to better combat this disturbing trend the AHC is asking equestrians to document examples of trails or entire areas that have been closed to equestrians on federal land (National Forest Service, National Parks Service, and Bureau of Land Management, etc). The AHC is seeking all relevant information concerning these closures such as the reason for the loss of access, details concerning any public process that was involved and the history of equestrian use on the closed trail or area.

The AHC is also interested in examples of attempts to bar equestrian access that have been defeated.

"The reduction of trails, trail heads and the closure of public lands to horses and pack animals is a continuing problem for equestrians. However, there is no centralized, comprehensive database that documents any loss of access and even fewer specific examples," said AHC President Jay Hickey. "We hope by giving equestrians a place to report their experiences we can get a better picture of the problem and use that information to fix it."

The AHC is asking all recreational riders to visit the AHC website and report any access issues they have had using this electronic form <https://www.horsecouncil.org/survey.php>. This will be a permanent feature of the AHC website.

"The AHC is committed to preserving equine access to public lands. It is very important for these efforts that we have evidence that demonstrates the extent of the problem and the need for action on the part of Congress or the federal land agencies," said Hickey.