

American Horse Council Releases Equestrian Trail Access Report

Trail riders can still submit feedback on land access issues in the AHC's ongoing survey.

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The American Horse Council (AHC) has released a report on Equestrian Access on Federal Lands. The report is based on responses to the AHC's ongoing survey on the topic. Riders can report their experiences with equestrian trail access at the AHC's website.

Equestrians have long enjoyed the ability to visit federal parks and wilderness areas on horseback. However, access has become limited in many public areas, and the AHC hopes to shed some light on the root problems that affect trail riders.

The current survey report finds several primary causes of equestrian land loss: Trail maintenance issues Trails have been restricted or closed to equestrians Trails have become unusable due to user conflict

Trail maintenance issues include locations where problems such as downed trees or erosion have made trails impassable. In many cases, there are simply not enough workers or volunteers to maintain the upkeep of certain lands. In other cases, trailheads are inaccessible to horses or horse trailers, preventing equestrians from reaching otherwise usable lands.

Closure to equestrians is an increasingly common occurrence. Trails may be closed to horses due to environmental issues or concerns about liability. Based on responses to the survey, many times there is a vague or undisclosed reason for the restriction against equestrian use.

In the case of user conflict, the trails are not necessarily closed to equestrians in an official sense, but riders feel unsafe on trails heavily used by ATVs or other motorized vehicles. When land access by motorized vehicles is not regulated, those trails may become dangerous for equestrians.

The full report is available on the AHC's website.

"The AHC will use this report to illustrate some of the challenges facing recreational riders," said AHC President Jay Hickey. "Our federal land managers work hard to provide recreational opportunities, and we need to make sure they have adequate resource and equestrians need to work with them at all levels. However, sometimes there are issues and conflicts that need to be documented and brought to their attention. This report is just one part of our efforts to ensure equestrians continue to have recreational opportunities on federal land.

The AHC asks all recreational riders to visit the AHC website and continue to report any land access issues they have had in the Trail Access survey.