

Equestrian Corridor Management Proposal
for the Kingdom Heritage Lands

Submitted by: Vermont Horse Council
Northeast Kingdom Equestrian Trails Committee

Vermont Horse Council hereby submits this proposal for management of equestrian trails on the Kingdom Heritage Lands as set forth in the public access easements and Long Range Management Plan.

I. History/Qualifications

Vermont Horse Council (VHC) has a long and distinguished history as an organization. Started in 1975, it has grown to include a state wide membership. The organization invites diversity and values collaboration with other equestrian groups as well as trail groups such as VAST, Green Mountain Horse Association and various riding clubs.

The mission of Vermont Horse Council is to unite, promote and support all horse enthusiasts and equine breeds in the State of Vermont.

This mission has been accomplished by the successful efforts of the organization to offer educational seminars, participation in youth support programs, maintaining a legislative voice, work with private land owners, development of a statewide trail systems and VHC member sponsored trail rides. They have also published a Vermont Equine Directory, to promote equine education, developed a statewide equestrian safety campaign and maintain a newsletter and website with articles of interest to Vermont horse enthusiasts and the American Horse Council.

In addition to being member supported, VHC has received grants from the Department of Agriculture, worked with other clubs hosting and sponsoring events as well as holding fund raisers, aid in equestrian disaster relief and assistance for significant horse rescue situations.

Since 2003 VHC has successfully managed equestrian uses on over 100 miles of trails across Vermont including the Kingdom Heritage Lands, as designated Corridor Manager.

II. Ability

Vermont Horse Council has formed a Northeast Kingdom Equestrian Trails Committee (NEKET), which manages trails, and the Kingdom Heritage Lands trail system is primarily managed by the St Johnsburry District Stewardship Forester (ANR) and Michael Benoit (VHC). The committee's sole purpose is to promote the development of horse trails on the Kingdom Heritage Lands and current landowners.

With a philosophy of working together, committee members believe that the greater the diversity of

interests: hiking, riding, biking, hunting, and snowmobiling, the more effective we can be in organizing and maintaining trails. As more and more land is developed, posted and made off limits to all of these interests, we feel the need and obligation to join with others to maintain areas for recreational use.

Recognizing that there are a lot of stake holders in this project, VHC has successfully recruited a committee that is made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds, clubs and organizations such as: Green Mountain Horse Association; Northeast Kingdom Pleasure Horse Association to name a few. This committee has brought together a strong group of some of the most knowledgeable trail people, fund raisers, individuals experienced in non-profit management and organizers as well as the stake holders in the horse industry in Vermont.

III. Vision

VHC is committed to providing equestrians with an opportunity to explore Vermont's wild lands while respecting their natural resources. Mostly utilizing existing roads and skid trails within the Kingdom Heritage Lands, VHC believes we can co-exist with other recreational groups and have little impact on the land.

The main objective of the VHC and NEKET Committee is to establish a series of trails and associated facilities that is limited in scale, to the greatest extent utilizing existing corridors and connecting the Kingdom Heritage Lands with other nearby public lands. The VHC has established working relationships with surrounding landowners, ANR and other recreational user groups.

IV. Goal

To continue as the corridor manager for equestrian trails in the Kingdom Heritage Lands and the Plum Creek Timberlands so that equestrian access can be successfully developed and maintained.

V. Trails

The Vermont Horse Council has evaluated the roads and trails on the Kingdom Heritage Lands with ANR for the purpose of establishing an equestrian trail system on the properties. We have attempted to identify corridors that currently create loop trails or corridors that could easily be connected by developing short segments of new trail. The two properties that currently have designated equestrian trails, and are being proposed for continued use are the West Mountain Wildlife Management Area and the Plum Creek Timberlands. No new corridors are proposed for these properties. The USFWS has stated they would consider connector equestrian trails that provided access to other ownerships, but would likely not designate large or stand-alone trails. No trails have been or are proposed for the USWFS property.

Overall, the designated corridors have been, and are proposed to remain as 23.8 miles of existing roads on West Mountain Wildlife Management Area and 11.6 miles of existing roads on Plum Creek Timber Company property.

In addition to these trails, town of Granby Legal Trail designations on the Stony Brook and Granby Stream Roads connect the Private Timberlands to West Mountain WMA, and VHC has been given permission from VETCO and Hancock Timber to access their neighboring lands. Further, equestrian trails in the Victory Management Unit are an important nearby resource for VHC riders and are also managed by ANR, but are not subject to this proposal because they lie outside the Kingdom Heritage Lands.

VHC will consider proposing expansions of the designated corridor network, especially north of Vermont Route 105 on the Plum Creek, and potentially Conte National Wildlife Refuge, lands in the future, if the levels of interest from users seem to warrant such proposals. At this time, however, VHC will concentrate its effort in maintaining and improving its current trails and facilities.

VI. Facilities

As with any recreational trail network the level of use is a key concern. Currently, the level of use appears to be low enough that user and resource impacts are minimal, but sufficient to warrant continued maintenance of the trail system. The amount of time needed to maintain the facilities for equestrian users is another concern. General maintenance includes signage, camping/parking area monitoring, monitoring for illegal trail use and evaluating potential user conflicts and taking corrective actions. These management activities are to be performed by volunteers to the greatest extent possible.

Daily Parking Areas

As indicated on attached Map, there are 2 daily parking/overnight areas existing currently. An additional parking area is proposed for consideration in the area of John Irwin and Stony Brook Roads, to provide access to this section of the trail network. In addition, the parking area on South America Pond Road may need to be relocated if plans continue for a designated shooting range in a gravel pit nearby. Such proposals will need to be vetted by the landowners and easement holders for each parcel, and subsequently approved, modified, or rejected.

Like existing parking areas, new areas would be made large enough that horse trailers can maneuver and would be constructed from existing log landings, with the following improvements:

Hitching posts will be constructed of 2 pressure treated or cedar posts 6" to 8" in diameter spaced 8 Feet apart with a 6" cross bar on the top.

Manure beds will be constructed of two 12" logs that are 10 feet long laying parallel approximately 8 feet apart with another 12" log closing them at one end. This shallow bed construction will aid in the quick organic composting technique that many equestrian facilities use. The bed will be located in an area that is absent of water flow and isolated from the rest of the facilities. They will be emptied annually. (Although it is not anticipated that these beds will be filled annually, VHC will empty more often if they do reach capacity sooner).

Signs will be constructed at major trail heads and in locations where horses are not allowed. Signs will have numbers that correspond to numbers on the equestrian trail map. Signs prohibiting horses

will be posted with the same construction technique and contain a plastic trail sign that would indicate “no horses”. Signs will be constructed of pressure treated 4 X 4's with a small plastic 4 X 4 horse trail sign on the top (similar to VAST trail signs). There are trail directional arrows on plastic signs. When available signs can be placed on trees.

VII. Management/Membership

Vermont Horse Council has taken on the responsibility of managing the equestrian trails in the Kingdom Heritage Lands. VHC will have a line item in their annual budget designated to the expenses incurred as a corridor manager. Northeast Kingdom Equestrian Trails (NEKET) Committee, a committee of VHC will have an annual budget for the proposed equestrian trail system.

Income is be generated from trail fees including annual VHC individual memberships and sponsors. The income and membership numbers will be available to the Agency of Natural Resources should they have an interest in logging the number of equestrian users. Currently, VHC membership prices are: Junior at \$10, individual at \$20, family \$25, farm/club \$35, business \$50, and life \$200. VHC currently has 250 memberships. In addition, there are corporate sponsors who have pledged support. Once the new corridor proposals are approved VHC may apply for funding from area foundations as well as state and federal Recreation Trails Funds.

Members receive membership packets that include: trail map with trail etiquette, guidelines for users, dates of availability, directions to parking areas and emergency numbers.

VIII. Outreach

Information about the equestrian trails will be provided by VHC and existing riding clubs in the State of Vermont. Current members of VHC will receive notification when trails are approved and will be given contact information.

IX. Collaboration/Communication

Vermont Horse Council is committed to collaborating with all other corridor managers as well as users of the trail system. It is our philosophy that horses, bicycles, hikers, etc. can co-exist and that healthy communication is the key to the success of the project. After multiple years of managing the equestrian trails of the KHL, VHC has found that very few problems have materialized. Part of our membership plan has included educating equestrian users on trail etiquette as well as low impact camping and riding through posters, Public Service Announcements, and content in Driver's Education courses.

Members of VHC have met with individuals from VAST. We believe that there is a spirit of collaboration between corridor managers that will strengthen the area for all trail users. We will share expenses and labor of any joint trails or parking areas.

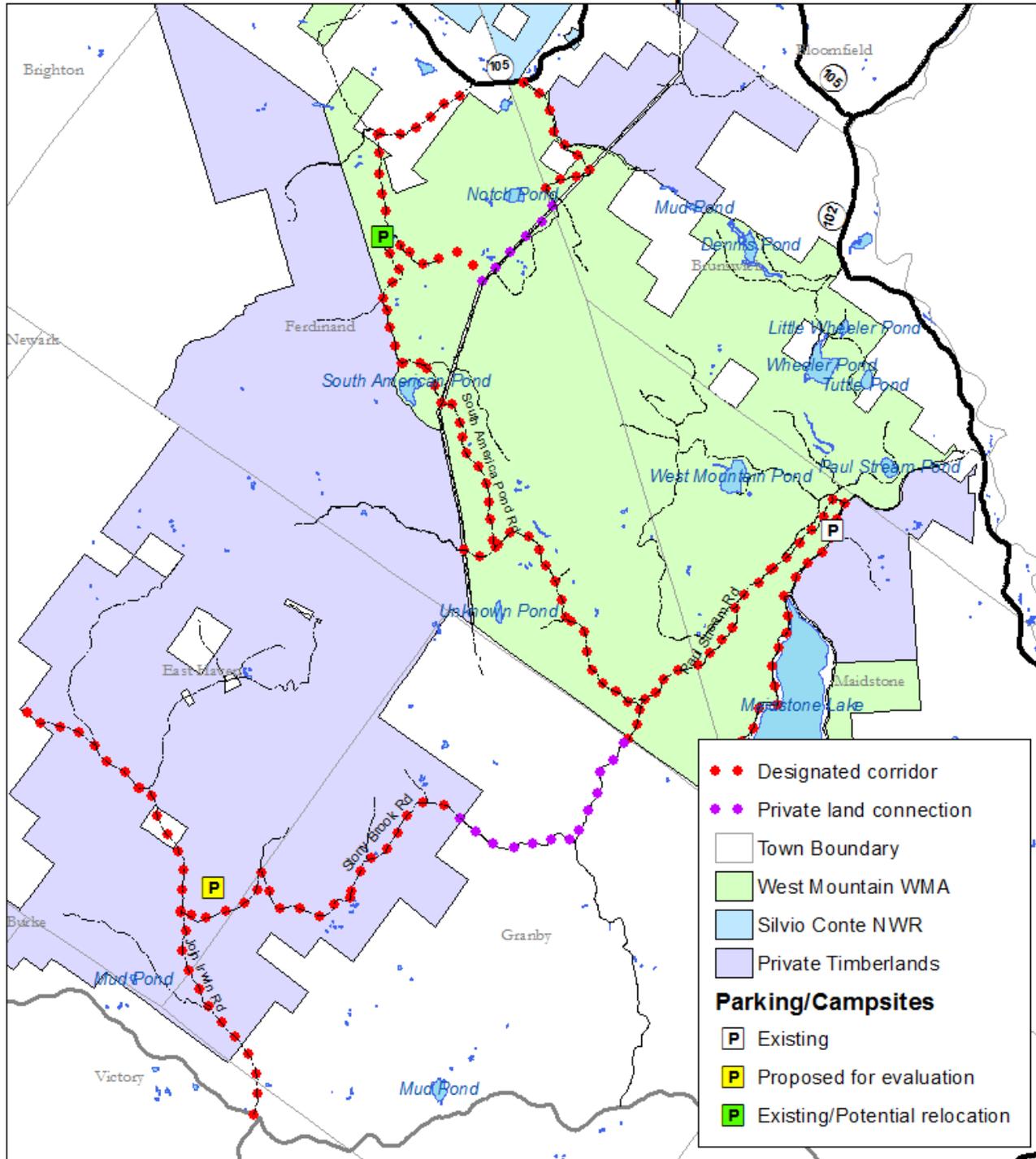
VHC is a state wide organization that includes member clubs from the Northeast Kingdom. We have trail managers that are ready to assume local leadership roles that would include communicating with the Agency of Natural Resources and other corridor managers on a regular basis.

Furthermore, they would conduct regularly scheduled site inspections to monitor use and problems.

X. Safety

VHC has produced a Public Service Announcement (PSA) in collaboration with the Vermont Farm Bureau and the University of Vermont Extension Service in an effort to provide education for rider safety. VHC has been a leader in the horse industry in Vermont holding state wide meetings that address safety issues, producing articles, as well as booklets that address safety concerns. VHC is in the beginning stages of incorporating horse and auto safety in driver's ed classes state wide. VHC has met with State Police Department's and County Sheriff's Departments educating the "horse laws" in the State and safety on the roads. All members will sign an agreement with VHC stating that they have read and will abide by our trail guidelines when using the Northeast Kingdom Equestrian Trails and VHC sponsored events. Equestrians, bicyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles currently share the majority of secondary roads in the State of Vermont. Horses are familiar with these uses and have been co-existing with them for decades.

VHC Corridor Proposal



Created by Doug Morin
 Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
 2015

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

For planning purposes only. Not survey accurate.

