



## **Statement of Advocacy for Trail Riding in Kentucky**

### **Improving Access to Properties owned by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, including Wildlife Management Areas**

#### **Opportunities for Change**

Expanding interest and participation in equine-based trail use offers opportunities for Kentucky to improve the relationship between horses, land management and public participation. Equine-based trail use is a significant part of Kentucky's heritage and, when done in pursuit of viewing nature, is a wildlife-related activity.

By defining equine-based trail use on nature properties under a structured permit system as an acceptable type of use, by partnering with equine associations to provide volunteer trail maintenance using Best Management Practices, by involving the equine community in land use decisions, and by enabling equine wildlife activities as an integral part of adventure tourism, the Commonwealth of Kentucky and its citizens will realize the following benefits: Expanded public/private partnerships, increased citizen volunteerism, dedicated and long-term funding sources for land management, increased tourism and economic development in rural communities, diversified user base for wildlife properties, and the preservation of Kentucky's proud equine heritage.

#### **Background Facts**

- Kentucky has one of the lowest percentages of public land in the U.S., and opportunities for outdoor recreation on private lands are decreasing due to landowners' concern for liability.
- The horse is a core industry in Kentucky and the basis for our national reputation, our state motto, and is our largest agricultural product
- An estimated 100,000\* horses in Kentucky are used for recreational riding, which is 31% of all horses in Kentucky
- An estimated 18,500\* individuals in Kentucky participate in pleasure riding in Kentucky
- Most trail riders enjoy being in nature and viewing wildlife, and their preferred mode for partaking in this activity is on horseback.
- Luring visitors to Kentucky for horse trail usage has great potential for economic development in rural counties
- KY Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources (F&W) has nearly 100 WMA sites throughout the state, of which 11 are open to equestrian use.

\* Kentucky Equine Study, The American Horse Council, 2005

#### **Changes which would increase access to public lands:**

1. Establish a permit system modeled off of New Mexico's GAIN (Gaining Access Into Nature: see <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/recreation/gain/index.htm>) which would legally allow users to ride a horse, view wildlife, photograph, hike, bike, ski or snowshoe on public properties. The permit system would
  - benefit all outdoor recreationists,
  - be managed by and enforced such as the current Fish and Wildlife hunting and fishing permit system is,
  - bring additional revenue for Kentucky's public lands

- establish a structure for outdoor recreation in addition to hunting and fishing on public lands.

These permits would come as both an annual and a temporary permit, allowing both in-state, routine use and out-of-state, visitor use.

2. Agencies responsible for the management of the public property should enter into an MOU with the Kentucky Horse Council (and other stakeholder user groups) to provide trail maintenance and clean up.
3. A taskforce composed of representatives from Kentucky land agencies, equine trail users recommended by the Kentucky Horse Council and land use experts should develop a process for evaluating all public land in Kentucky, including WMA properties, regarding the appropriateness of the property for outdoor enthusiasts. The process should include public input, and must include local notification to counties in which the public land or WMA is located.
4. Administrative Regulations for affected land agencies should require that any changes to the status of public land or WMA with respect to user access have a significant public notification process, including public hearings in the county in which the change is proposed. Any acquisition of property by a state agency which has potential outdoor recreational use will be subject to the process of evaluation as described in section three above.