



WISCONSIN STATE HORSE COUNCIL, INC.

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A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF HORSES AND HORSEMEN IN WISCONSIN

PRESS RELEASE

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VOLUNTEERS HELP COUNTY CREATE, MAINTAIN EQUESTRIAN TRAILS

Jim Falls, WI – The trail riding season never really ends for Jeanne Fox and other members of the Chippewa Valley Trailriders.

Even though they're not spending many hours in the saddle this time of year, they're focused on improvements they'd like to complete at the Hay Meadow Flowage and other Chippewa County trails.

"I'm in the process of applying for another grant from the Wisconsin State Horse Council," Fox said. "We want to put in some gravel and parking pads at Hay Meadow."

In the next few months, club members will set the timeline for the work and finalize plans. They'll talk with county officials and do some fundraising – and dream of the day when this year's projects are completed and they can perhaps just enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Fox and her husband, Mike, live near Jim Falls and have Missouri Foxtrotters. They've been members of the Chippewa Valley Trailriders since Day 1.

"We started in 1989 because several members lived by the Old Abe Trail and had ridden on that railroad corridor for years," Fox said. "It was going to be a bike trail, and they were going to get squeezed out."

A few concerned people contacted the WSHC for help and learned the advantages of becoming an organized club with a stronger voice. The Chippewa Valley Trailriders was born.

The Old Abe Trail in Chippewa County is still open to horses. The group has also helped establish or maintain trails in Wissota Park, Tom Lawin Wildlife Area, and the Chippewa County Forest.

The club has received several WSHC trail grants to help fund improvement projects. The WSHC offers grants of up to \$4,000 for development of new trails. Grants of up to \$3,000 are available for improvements and enhancements to existing trails. The deadline for applications is March 1.

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"The Chippewa Valley Trailriders has been just the kind of partner the WSHC wants and land managers need," said Dan Catherman, chair of the WSHC Trails Committee. "County, state and federal budgets just don't stretch enough to cover all the expenses of creating and maintaining horse trails."

The Chippewa County Forest and Parks Department works with a number of user groups that have an interest in recreational activities in the Chippewa County Forest, said Doyle Richards, the department's administrator. The Trailriders have formed a good working relationship with the department, he said.

"Typically they call and ask for a meeting if they have major trail improvements or additions they'd like to have considered," he said. "Usually the Trailriders have several representatives from their organization present, to explain what they are interested in doing or would like to see improved. Often with proposed projects, we have an on-site field inspection of the areas where the trail improvements are to be made. Typically they express their interests in what they'd like to do or see done, and our department listens and responds with any concerns or thoughts regarding their proposal."

The meetings generate more than just permission to begin an improvement project, Richards said.

"Getting together at a meeting gives us, as well as the Trailriders, an opportunity to better understand each other," he said. "We get the opportunity to learn what's important to them to make for good trail riding and they get a better understanding of any management concerns that we may have as the land manager."

The County tries to accommodate as many user groups as possible in the forest, since the area is public land. Some user groups have more potential funding sources available than others. The Department of Natural Resources has some funding available for development of snowmobile and ATV trails, since those groups pay registration fees that are funneled in part into trail development programs.

"For other user groups such as the horseback riders and cross country skiers, there's not much DNR grant money out there," Richards said. "For groups like the horseback riders the County can only really afford a limited amount of expenditures for trail improvements. Funding from the horse council, local club funding, and volunteer work really become important in enhancing horse trail opportunities and facilities. The Trailriders should be commended for the work they do on behalf of their membership and other riders around the state, to help improve trail riding opportunities."

The Hay Meadow Flowage trail system has been a long-term partnership between Chippewa County and the saddle club, starting with improvements in the early 1990s.

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In one of the bigger cooperative projects, the Chippewa County Forest and Parks Department worked with the Trailriders to select a site for a trailhead and parking area, and upgraded the access road to the site.

“The County spent over \$3,000 on gravel, labor and equipment upgrading the road into the flowage which benefited the Hay Meadow project as well as improved the access into the flowage area,” Richards said. “That was work we couldn’t have done if it hadn’t been for the Hay Meadow trail project and our interest in working with the Trailriders.”

And each year, the Trailriders find more ways to improve the trail system for horseback riders.

“We put in a bridge over a wet area that the County didn’t want us walking through with our horses,” Fox said. “That became an interesting project. We used work horses to set the bridge in place.”

In 2005 club members created a “Horsemen’s Park,” a place for riders to get off the trail and enjoy a picnic. The area overlooks a lake, with hitching posts for the horses and picnic tables for the people.

The club’s biggest project has been development of the equestrian campground at Hay Meadow Flowage. Riders benefited from the first phase of that project in the 2006 season. Plans are to install parking pads, hitching posts and picnic tables, Fox said. At some point in the future, the club would like to have a well on site.

Another project last year was a collaborative effort with the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. The club worked with geography students at the university to create maps of the trail system.

“In the pouring rain in September, students came out and walked the trails and created the maps,” Fox said. “In the past we’ve had some people say they got lost on the trails. Now we’ve got better signs and good maps. It should make it easier for everyone.”

The Chippewa Valley Trailriders has about 40 members, and most have full-time responsibilities with family and careers. But when the club announces a work day, people show up to help, Fox said.

“I think we’ve stayed a strong club because we’ve always been strictly a trail riding club,” Fox said. “We aren’t spreading ourselves around, trying to do too many things. We’re very proud of our Chippewa County Forest. We spend a lot of time up there. We want people to come to enjoy it.”

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The Hay Meadow Flowage trail system is between Bloomer and Cornell in Chippewa County. Information on the trail will be included in the new edition of the WSHC trail directory, to be released in April. The trail is in WSHC District 1, which includes Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Chippewa, Douglas, Dunn, Eau Claire, Iron, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, St. Croix, Taylor, and Washburn counties.

For more information about Chippewa County trails or the Chippewa Valley Trailriders, contact Fox at (715) 288-6751 or Tom Jolicoeur at (715) 382-4794. Information on the WSHC trail grant program and application forms are available online at www.WisconsinStateHorseCouncil.org/trail_grants.html.

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High Resolution Photo Available by Request, Photo Credit: Chippewa Valley Trailriders

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Chippewa Valley Trailriders setting a bridge on the Joli Trail near the new Hay Meadow 3 Trailhead