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

PRESS RELEASE

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RECREATION TRAIL BENEFITS FROM GROUPS' COOPERATIVE EFFORTS

Antigo, WI - At a time when conflicts over land use make headlines, there's some good news out of Langlade County.

This winter, cross-country skiers are watching the forecast, hoping for enough snow to allow outings on trails in the county forest. Come spring, horseback riders will use the same trails.

Encouraging year-round use of the land and cooperation among skiers and riders were just some of the goals of Lisa Haefs and others who worked in 2006 to establish the Moccasin Lake Horse Trail. The larger dream, Haefs said, is creating a destination point for people who have horses and enjoy trail riding.

"We'd like to create an attraction, an area where people can bring their horses here and go to the Evergreen trail in Langlade (County) one day, then to Moccasin Lake, then to Underdown in Lincoln (County), and so on— a week of horseback riding and camping," she said. "It could be a tourism draw— a tour of the Northwoods on horseback."

The new Moccasin Lake Horse Trail adds to what the region has to offer, while making good use of Langlade County forest land, she said.

About 20 years ago, members of the Elcho Cross-country Ski Club carved ski trails out of the forest, using old logging roads or clearings through the dense woods. Haefs was among the many people who skied the trails, enjoying the winter scenery. In the summertime, she traded her skis for a horse and continued to enjoy the trails.

"We were riding the trails anyway, and we thought with the funding available for developing horse trails and the more people interested in riding, we'd try to improve the trails, make them year-round trails, and benefit everybody," Haefs said.

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Some funding agencies require that applicants belong to an established group in order to qualify for funding. The Elcho Cross-country Ski Club was willing to create a “horse unit,” Haefs said, and the small group of horse-minded volunteers was able to start applying for grants.

“We report to the ski club board of directors, but the arrangement is very informal,” Haefs said.

In 2006, the group was able to improve the trail parking lot and signage, install new restrooms, and begin developing a campground.

“The idea is that the improvements will benefit all users – horseback riders, hunters, skiers, bikers, and hikers,” Haefs said. “It’s helping the whole trail system. Multiple use is the only way to go.”

Among the groups providing funding for the 2006 improvements was the Wisconsin State Horse Council.

The Moccasin Lake Trail is a good example of how groups can make the most of the limited land available for recreation in Wisconsin, said Dan Catherman, head of the WSHC Trail Committee.

“I think this might be the only horse group in Wisconsin that has partnered with a cross-country ski club to develop and maintain a trail, but it’s a great example of how groups can work together,” he said. “The state and counties don’t have the funds or staffing to take care of all the recreational areas. We’ve got to help.”

The WSHC helps fund several trail projects every year. Applications for 2007 grants are due March 1. Grants of up to \$3,000 are available for development of new trails 3 miles or longer. Grants of up to \$2,000 are available for improvements and enhancements to existing trails.

Haefs said the volunteers will apply to the WSHC’s annual trail grants program again, because they have plans for more improvements at the site.

“In the long term, we envision construction of a pavilion, a well for warm-weather water availability, and substantial expansion of the trail system into a larger area of the Langlade County forest,” she wrote on the group’s 2006 WSHC grant application. “These possibilities are limited only by our imaginations, volunteerism and the availability of future funding.”

Improving the trail takes time, Haefs said, but she believes the scenery and riding the trail offers are ample reward.

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"It's such a pretty trail," she said. "It follows high ridges, goes through hardwoods and into some lower areas. It overlooks two river basins, the Prairie flowing west and the Hunting flowing east. It's a real nice, real interesting piece of land. When the leaves are just coming out in the spring, the colors are beautiful."

The Moccasin Lake Horse Trail is north of Antigo, just out of the Village of Elcho. Information on the trail will be included in the new edition of the WSHC trail directory, to be released in April.

For more information about the Moccasin Lake Horse Trail, contact Haefs at Futurity Farms, (715) 487-5298, or the Langlade County Forestry and Recreation Department, at (715) 627-6300. For information about the WSHC trail grant program, visit the Web site at wisconsinstatehorsecouncil.org. Trail Grant Program guidelines and forms are available under the "Affiliates & Programs" menu.

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Photo Available by Request

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