

An open letter to the Equestrian community:

As many of you know, The Connecticut Horse Council, Inc. has been voicing opposition to a proposed regulation change being put forth by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Specifically, we objected to section 24-1-1-I which reads: [Section 23-4-1](l)[.] Trails[/] and roads. [Horse or bicycle riding on foot trails is prohibited.]

(1) Trails are open unless posted closed to hiking, mountain biking or other types of trail-related activities. Horseback riding is prohibited on trails unless posted as permitted. Use of any trail, road or path posted as closed by the Department of Environmental Protection is prohibited.

CHC had meetings and telephone conversations with the DEP prior to the regulations being published to the public, in an attempt to change the wording they were proposing. We were initially advised by DEP that they did not feel the proposed regulation would be a hardship to trail riders, as they had little intention of actually enforcing this regulation once it took effect. However, CHC's position was that regardless of intent to not enforce, the wording would exist in regulations, and therefore it could be enforced at any time in the future.

Ultimately, we were unsuccessful in our efforts to modify the proposed regulations as they went through the development process. We then took what we felt was a necessary next step, which was to advise our membership of the proposed changes, and encourage them to send their own comments, as is permitted under state law.

A public hearing was scheduled on February 5<sup>th</sup> in Hartford. This hearing was very well attended by the equine community, and CHC was thrilled with the turnout. Furthermore, those who spoke did a superb job in raising important points about this regulation. Additionally, horse owners not only in Connecticut, but surrounding states as well, sent emails and letters expressing their objections to this wording. The response was overwhelming, and I do not think that the DEP or CHC expected this large of a reaction from horse owners. It made the public very aware of the strength of the equine community.

After the hearing, the DEP indicated that they indeed heard the voices of equestrians, and they will work with CHC to rework the proposed language. The regulation review process requires that certain procedures be followed, so the changes will not be immediate, but rather need to go through the rest of the process first.

That being said, CHC has agreed to meet with the DEP to review and discuss the issues that were raised at the public hearing. We firmly believe that we can work out any problems and forge a relationship with DEP going forward, so that the concerns of equestrians are addressed.

CHC will be having a special meeting of the board to review specific next steps, and create a plan of action prior to our meeting with DEP. We will continue to need the support of trail riders going forward, because there are projects which will likely be undertaken due to these recent events.

At this time, I would like to express my personal appreciation and gratitude to state Representatives Debra Lee Hovey, Bill Aman, and Diana Urban, as well as Senator Tony Guglielmo, all of whom submitted testimony to DEP in support of CHC's position. Additionally, Representative Hovey and her aide Jake, made numerous calls and did enormous amounts of work on this issue. I would encourage horse owners to let these legislators know that we appreciated their help.

I would also like to send a very special thanks to those who joined us in our opposition. There were a number of organizations and individuals who stepped up and made a special effort to advocate for the rights of equestrians. These included the Oxford and Southbury Horse & Livestock Associations (OHLA & SHLA),

the Newtown Bridle Lands Association (NBLA), The Connecticut Quarter Horse Association (CQHA), Reddington Rock Riding Club (RRRC), Jan Collins, Alesia Defrederico and Nichole Sautter.

Out of state and national organizations joined us as well. It should be noted that support came from The American Horse Council (AHC), The Virginia and West Virginia Horse Councils, Granby Massachusetts Horse Council, The Backcountry Horsemen of California/San Diego Unit and the Bay State Trail Riders Association (BSTRA).

It should also be noted that Diane Ciano, the CHC trails chair, did a huge amount of work. She has also been involved with trails issues throughout the state for over 15 years. She works tirelessly to ensure horses remain on trails, and she should be congratulated for all her efforts.

For those who submitted testimony via letters and emails, attended the hearing, or shared this information with friends, we greatly appreciate all your help and support. Your comments made the difference, and you should be pleased.

And finally, I would like to thank the CHC board of directors. This was a difficult event for us, and it was sometimes overwhelming. There were many players, and we had to make decisions about a very public issue. As an organization made up of all volunteers, we did the best we could with the situation that was presented to us.

Again, we appreciate the involvement of equestrians throughout the country who stepped up and got involved. There were many more individuals and groups who were not named here simply because the list is too long, we also hope you will accept our gratitude and know that we were aware of your efforts.

We are looking forward to meeting with the DEP to create a plan of action. We will continue to keep horse owners updated as we move ahead.

Thank you to equestrians everywhere who made their voices count.

Sincerely,  
Amy Stegall  
President, The Connecticut Horse Council, Inc.