

Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett National Scenic Trail Study

NOTE: Below this informational article are letters addressed to the National Park Service from the CT Horse Council.

Study Background

In December 2002, President Bush signed Public Law 107-338 directing the National Park Service to study the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett trail system in Connecticut and Massachusetts for possible inclusion in the National Trails System through designation as a National Scenic Trail.

The principal rationale for the Study, as expressed in testimony before Congress, is that without a concerted effort to protect this trail system, currently stretching nearly 200 miles across CT and MA, it will cease to exist as a recreational resource for future generations.

A 200 plus mile route of these three trails pass through 37 communities in Connecticut & Massachusetts. The trails pass through 20 towns in Connecticut: Middletown, Haddam, Durham, Madison, Guilford, North Branford, Wallingford, Middlefield, Meriden, Berlin, Southington, New Britain, Plainville, Farmington, West Hartford, Avon, Bloomfield, Simsbury, East Granby, Suffield and into 17 towns in Massachusetts.

3 public forums were held in CT in November. There was a notable amount of equestrian representation turnout at these public hearings to voice their vote in support of the study and ask for equestrian use to be included on these trail systems that may become a National Trail. This has led to the National Park Service setting a special equestrian meeting with them to discuss equestrian use on the trail system. Some parts of these trails may not be accessible to horse use, due to the terrain, but many parts of the trail system can be used for horse excess and to connect to other suitable trails. It is important to know that if this does become a National Trail, there will be federal funds to maintain and purchase properties abutting the system that can eventually be used to develop new trails that can be for multiple users including equestrians.

For more information on the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett National Scenic Trail visit the website at www.mmmtrail.org. The site includes background information on the study process, updates on the CT Steering Committee activities, contacts and resources, and upcoming activities to stay in tune with the study progress. Primarily focused on the Connecticut portion of the study, the site also provides contacts for the leaders of the Massachusetts study section.

Below are the CHC letter addressed to the National Park Service:



February 8, 2005

Kevin Case
Dan Hubbard
National Park Service

The Connecticut Horse Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 57
Durham, CT 06422

Dear Kevin and Dan

The members of the Connecticut Horse Council have reviewed the updated Blueprint for Management Plan (2-1-05) for the Metacomet-Mattabesett (MM) Trail Study and are disappointed in the Blueprint over several points with the predominant area being the continued bias of the study regarding the term "footpath".

Throughout our year long communication with the study, we have repeatedly addressed the fact that the trail should be referred to as **"multi-use"** rather than single (footpath) use, because of the evidence that there are property owners of the trail that do allow equestrian, mountain biking, snow mobiling, hunting, and some ATV use. **We feel that this is the most important issue that the plan has ignored and we have addressed it in all of our communications.**

We are confused as to why our communications and input are ignored or deleted from the plan and why there seems to be ambiguous statements in the plan. In Section II, #1 and Section VII, 3f, the plan supports the trail as a "footpath" and yet in Section VII 3e and 3g it is stated the NPS will not impose any use or land restrictions and in Section II 1a landowners have the final say regarding trail uses. These last statements would be more believable if in Section 1 #7 equestrian, biking, and other legitimate uses were listed along with hunting, fishing and timber management as landowner uses and rights; and in Section II #1 equestrian, biking and other legitimate uses listed along with recreational and commercial uses at each owner's discretion. We question what commercial uses would be more important and have less of an impact than equestrian use to warrant commercial being mentioned here but not other more traditional trail uses such as horseback riding.

We strongly suggest and encourage the elimination of the word "footpath" from the entire plan and advise replacing it with the word trail or multi-use trail. Then Section VII 3f would read NPS will give funding priority to the protection and development of the MMM Trail which CHC feels would better represent the public interest in this multi-use trail.

We are also disappointed on another point; that a very important statement that we had commented on in an earlier draft was completely taken out under **Trail Use Goal**, which stated "Opportunities for multi-use, such as biking or equestrian, **may** be explored in areas where appropriate." We had asked that the word "may" be replaced with **"shall"**, to ensure that future goals of the plan would include opportunities for multi use and that the word "may" implies that it is only a possibility, rather than a goal. To see this goal left out completely from this plan is very disappointing and not acceptable. From our correspondence of October 25, 2004 we cited "the reason being that the Management Plan should acknowledge that there is already legitimate multi-use by permission of some of the landowners as the study indicates. Also if this is to be a plan for future goals, there is enough evidence and support from the other trail users that they should be included in the future, when there may be opportunities to purchase lands or when ownership is changed. This can provide opportunities for multi-use or creation of new multi-use trails as "go around" if the trail needs to be re-routed for any reason.

Also missing from the October draft under **Administrative Framework** "Pertinent User Groups -Representatives **may** be appointed representing hiking and other compatible trail users, including bike, equestrian, hunting, or other interests." Again we addressed that the word "may" read **"shall"** citing that representatives from other interests are legitimate on some parts of the trail system and should be included under this section.

Under the new plan, **Section VI. Administrative Framework 1e** this has changed dramatically to "**Working committees/subcommittees will be encouraged, and may be formed around trail segments and/or issues. Participation will be open to individuals and organizations beyond the Stewardship Council.**"

This is unacceptable, as the plan is **downplaying** multi-use representation on the Stewardship Council by stating "**Participation will be open to individuals and organizations beyond the Stewardship Council.**" Where does this statement leave the CT Horse Council, who has participated and commented in this Trail Study, without being mentioned once in the Blueprint Plan?

Section 2f includes: "**User Groups – four seats will be available on each state Council to represent user interests.**" It is **insulting** that equestrian, mountain biking, hunting and other legitimate trail user groups are not listed here, nor are mentioned anywhere in the plan.

Again in our correspondence of October 25, we would like to remind you that we stated: " If the Management Plan does not include other representatives than hiking, we will be back at square one, with no communication with the various user groups. A Management Plan works when there is communication and includes a representative from each interest group. One representative from each legitimate group does not seem unreasonably large. **Creating "smaller sub groups" when there is a possibility that communication may be lost from separate meetings seems inappropriate and an erosion of the multi-use concept.**

As mentioned in our April 22, 2004 communication: You will see, within all these documents, a consistent view of the equestrian community and how we are willing to work together to provide equal opportunities for all trail users while providing protection for our natural resources. It is our intention to see statewide plans include equestrians wherever possible on existing trails as well as include them in future designs of new trails and Greenways and that these documents are included in the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail Study. As stated in the CT Statewide Forest Resource Draft: "**Cooperation between different sectors including the government, Municipal/State/Private relationships will result in participation by all of society in developing and implementing public policy. Long term comprehensive planning for state owned land occurs in collaboration with Connecticut's citizens and local government.**" CHC believes that the DEP Recreational Trails Plan, Forest Resource Plan and SCORP can be drafted to address consistency in state and local policies and that the National Park Service should follow this to provide consistency in the development of the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

In summary The Connecticut Horse Council supports the MMM Trail as a National Scenic Trail. But while we are in support of this Trail Project, we can not support the labeling of "footpath only" to these trails as in the proposed Blueprint for Management Plan. Various landowners along the Trail System allow other user groups on their property. To label this as "footpath only" is incorrect and misleading to the public. **In addition we feel our priorities and comments have never been mentioned or addressed in this blueprint and it seems unbelievable that our input for over a year, including an extensive equestrian evaluation of the trail system has been totally ignored.**

Lastly, as mentioned in previous communications, which seem to also have been ignored, the CT Horse Council has offered their Horse Patrol Program as a way CHC may maintain and monitor the MMM trails. The CHC-VHP was modeled after the National Parks Service

"Volunteers in Parks" (VIP) program, which CHC has implemented in the CHC-VHP program with the Department of Environmental Protection.

We believe through education, sharing of the trails, understanding and respect of all people and trail users that these issues can be resolved. To develop a trail system that is inclusive of only one trail user group on a 100 mile trail across the state that will link to the 100-mile Monadnock Trail in MA, a total of 200 miles, is not a fair and equitable use of state and private land. Equestrians and bikers, like hikers ride long distances cross-country. While these trails are scenic and peaceful, they also serve as a very important safe means of transportation, eliminating riding along a parallel state or federal highway that would be mandated if the trail were closed to multi-use.

We look forward to your input from this letter and previous communications addressed in the Final version of the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett Trail Study [Blueprint for Management](#).

Diane Ciano
Trails Chair

Stewart Beckett III, DVM
President, CHC

Dr. Jenifer Nadeau
CT Equine Specialist

cc:

Governor Jodi Rell
Nancy Johnson
Christopher Dodd
Joe Liberman
Jim Ammann
Rosa DeLauro
John Larson
Christopher Shays
Rob Simmons
Sen. Donald Williams



The Connecticut Horse Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 57
Durham, CT 06422

October 25, 2004

Kevin Case
Dan Hubbard
National Park Service

Dear Kevin & Dan,

Thank you for all your work that has been done on the Trail Study.

I would like to remind you that the CT Horse Council (CHC) members are still evaluating the trail system using the Massachusetts Trail Evaluation Study and an Equestrian Trail Survey from the CHC that I have previously e-mailed to you.

At the last meeting of 10/20/04, it was said that the study will end by the end of the year and your report will go on to Washington. CHC is working very hard to get these surveys completed and would like to have them included in the Study. I would appreciate it if you would confirm that our evaluations will be part of the study. Over half of the trail evaluations are completed and we expect the rest by the end of November.

I am holding all the maps and evaluations, until I have them all, but if you prefer to receive what has already been completed, I would be more than happy to send them to you.

As far as the Trail Study meeting went the only comments to the draft was where the Trail Management plan under **Trail Use Goal** stated "Opportunities for multi-use, such as biking or equestrian, **may** be explored in areas where appropriate."

This should read "**SHALL**". The reason being that the Management Plan should acknowledge that there is already legitimate multi-use by permission of some of the landowners as the Study is indicating. The word "may" implies that it is only a possibility. Also, after receiving the evaluations from CHC, the Study can use this information for its future management goals.

Also if this is to be a plan for future goals, there is enough evidence and support from the other trail users that they should be included in the future, when there will be opportunities to purchase lands or when ownership is changed. This can provide opportunities for multi-use or creation of new multi-use trails to "go around" or the trail is re-routed for other reasons.

Again, under **Administrative Framework** under "Pertinent User Groups -Representatives **may** be appointed representing hiking and other compatible trail users, including bike, equestrian, hunting, or other interests."

This should read "**SHALL**". Again, representatives from other interests are legitimate on some parts of the trail system and should be included under this section.

At that point, I had to leave, but was informed by other equestrians there was some discussion about the numbers of people that would be involved for the Stewardship Council if all the bulleted groups were represented. It was felt it would be too large a group. Mention was made of perhaps having an executive board of a smaller number of reps. The group wants to find out how other trail systems handle this.

If the Management Plan does not include other representatives other than hiking, we will be back at square one, with no communication with the various user groups. A Management Plan works when there is communication and includes a representative from each interest group. One representative from each legitimate group does not seem unreasonably large, so as to imply that they go under "smaller" sub groups where there is a possibility that communication can be lost from separate meetings.

Lastly, in regards to the National Parks Service "Volunteers in Parks" (VIP) program that was mentioned at the meeting. I did want to confirm with you that this program does include a Horse Patrol program, which CHC has implemented in the CHC-VHP program with DEP. We have also mentioned this in the past as a way CHC will help to maintain and monitor the MMM trails.

In closing, CHC would like to thank the National Park Service for its help in creating a Study that involves many aspects of the importance of the Metacomet - Mattabesett- Monadnock Trail. It is our hope that communication with the various user groups can create a harmonious group and the trail will be for all citizens.

Thank you for your consideration and future communication involving the important issues discussed above.

Diane Ciano
Trails Chair
CT Horse Council, Inc.
203-757-1904

Stewart Beckett III
President, CHC

cc:
Nancy Johnson
Christopher Dodd
Joe Liberman
Rob Simmons
Christopher Shays
John Larson
Rosa DeLauro

Diane,

Thanks for the letter. You raise some helpful points. I'd be happy to discuss further with you if you'd like. We'll be coming out with a new iteration of the management blueprint in the next few weeks based on your input and the input of the steering committee. Thanks for your continued involvement. Best, Kevin
Kevin M. Case, National Park Service P.O. Box 395 100 East River Road Pleasant Valley, CT 06063
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The Connecticut Horse Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 57
Durham, CT 06422

Kevin Case
National Park Service
P.O. Box 395
Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

April 22, 2004

Hello Kevin,

We are writing on behalf of the equestrian community in Connecticut. We would like to see equestrian use included in the National Park Service Study of the Mattabesett-Metacomet Trail System in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and address equestrians about the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail Study in CT. As the Trail Study gets underway, we look forward to our participation in addressing equestrian use and collecting information to be included in the Study.

Along with our equestrian comments in this letter, we have also enclosed the CHC comments to the CT Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and the CT Statewide Forest Resource Plan. Also enclosed is the DEP Recreational Trails Draft from Leslie Lewis. In the DEP Draft, the issues that are most important to the CT Horse Council have been highlighted in red, as well as other colors that pertain to equestrian interests. You will see, within all these documents, a consistent view of the equestrian community and how we are willing to work together to provide equal opportunities for all trail users while providing protection for our natural resources. It is our intention to see statewide plans include equestrians wherever possible on existing trails as well as including them in future designs of new trails and Greenways and that these documents are included in the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail Study.

The CT Horse Council, Inc. (CHC) supports the MMM Trail as a National Scenic Trail. While we are in support of this Trail Project, we can not support the labeling of "footpath only" to these trails as in the proposed Vision statement. Various landowners along the Trail System allow other user groups on their property. To label this as "footpath only" is incorrect and misleading to the public. The CFPA can not control what the wishes of the landowners through their own agenda, as they do not own this land. Your study to date has shown that approximately 20 - 25% of the MM Trail in CT is privately owned, while 75 - 80% is public owned State or municipal lands. If this trail system becomes a National Scenic Trail, equestrian use should be permitted where feasible. Equestrians helped build many of the trails in Connecticut. Many old roads and paths in Connecticut were former horse trails. Equestrians in local areas of the trail are currently using the Mattabesett -Metacomet Trail System to access other trails, where they are multi-use in nature.

We are aware that the other National Scenic Trails do not have this restriction. The entire exclusion of other users is not present on other National Scenic Trails and therefore CT should not make that distinction and set a precedent on this issue. We believe through education, sharing of the trails, understanding and respect all people and trail users that these issues can be resolved. To develop a trail system that is inclusive of only one trail user group on a 100 mile trail across the state, that will link to the 100 mile Monadnock Trail

in MA; a total of 200 miles is not a fair and equitable use of state and private land. Equestrians, like hikers ride long distances cross-country. While these trails are scenic and peaceful, they also serve as a very important safety means of transportation, instead of riding along a parallel state or federal highway that would be mandated if the trail were closed to equestrians.

We are also watching the federal legislation introduced by Representative George P. Radanovich (R-CA) intended to preserve the use and access of pack and saddle stock horses on public lands. The legislation, H.R. 2966, known as the "Right to Ride Bill" applies to all federal lands managed by the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service. The American Horse Council submitted testimony to the Subcommittee in support of H.R. 2966. The testimony stated, "too often over the last twenty years we have heard reports that public lands and trails are closed and access denied to pack and saddle stock and recreational riders. We fear that some of these closures are effected with a bias against horses and riders, without sound science and without justifiable rationale."

Public land must reflect and respond to the needs of the general population, which includes equestrians. There is a universal need for the outdoors, especially as development expands and people search for access to open space for recreational activities. From a historical perspective, horses have a prominent role in America's past. Horses built this country. This tie to the past and interest in preservation is the key issue to the equestrian community and therefore the preservation of space for horses is a cultural preservation.

In this time of international confrontation, national economic turmoil and local uncertainty, the protection of open space and recreational trails falls even more heavily onto the lap of public advocacy. The educational benefit of such a vision for the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail of CT come from the stewardship of the land, from which the CT Horse Council can assimilate to its constituents.

Also, enclosed is the CHC response and some copies of testimony from the public hearings held in 2001 when DEP purchased water company lands known as the Kelda Properties. At three public hearings that have been recorded by DEP, equestrians supported the purchase of the lands while vocalizing their desire to ride on Class I & II lands. The CHC and other organizations presented DEP with documents regarding horses ridden on water company lands. All documents showed that equestrian use does not provide any environment hazards to water pollution and horses pose no hazard to public health. The activity and defecation of wildlife, waterfowl and humans would show more pollution than the horse ridden on the trails. In CT, the Bethany Horse Council paid for water testing on the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority lands (SCCRWA). After 18 years of water testing, equestrian use was determined not to pollute the water, and the testing has been stopped. CHC can provide you documentation of the testing done in CT, testimony we have given to the Dept. of Health, and national studies done on this issue. Claims against health issues are false and without any verification to affirm such accusations. Equestrians can show studies that falsify any negative claims.

As stated in the CT Statewide Forest Resource Draft: **"Cooperation between different sectors including the government, Municipal/State/Private relationships will result in participation by all of society in developing and implementing public policy. Long term comprehensive planning for state owned land occurs in collaboration with Connecticut's citizens and local government."** CHC believes that the DEP Recreational Trails Plan, Forest Resource Plan and SCORP can be drafted to address consistency in state and local policies and that the National Park Service should follow in providing this consistency in the development of the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail as a National Scenic Trail.

A recent example of a model of success is with the Department of Environmental Protection. The CT Horse Council along with the DEP established a Volunteer Horse Patrol (VHP) as a pilot program in several State Forests. The goal of the program is to foster public user stewardship, educate and promote public involvement with the equestrian community as well as provide helpful visitor contacts while on patrol. The Patrol helps maintain the multi-use trails in these forests including collecting data of the condition of the trails, possible erosion, and monitoring the use of the trails. In 7 months the VHP reported over 680 hours of patrol and trail maintenance. CHC can provide future management to the MMM team with the Volunteer Horse Patrol Program.

To update you on our progress from our meeting with you, we have also located 9 equestrian volunteers for the Northern Section and are checking into a Universal Trail Assessment Program. We are also keeping in communication with the MA Equestrians and the Monadnock Connection to the Trail system. They have informed us that there are no restrictions in MA for "footpath only" on any public land. Sections of the trail that are unsafe for horse use are marked or known by equestrians not to use. We are in the process of developing an evaluation for the trail system by equestrians and will have our results by the end of the year.

The University of Connecticut will have the results of the CT State Equine Study in June of this year, which will be forwarded to you as soon as it becomes available. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to call or e-mail.

The CT Horse Council looks forward to addressing the CT MM Trail Study and offering NPS whatever information you may need. Below are answers to some of your questions.

When the time comes for you to assess the trails and their suitability for horse use, we will be happy to provide you with any assistance you may need. Thank you for being open to the idea of equestrian use on this trail system. We firmly believe that we should all work together to share the resources this great state has provided us. Feel free to contact Diane at spirit76@snet.net or (203) 757-1904 or Jenifer at jnadeau@canr.uconn.edu or (860) 486-4471 if you have further questions. Best of luck with the study, and happy trails!

Sincerely,

Stewart Beckett III, DVM
President
CT Horse Council

Dr. Jenifer Nadeau
The University of Connecticut, Equine Specialist

Diane Ciano
CT Horse Council, Trails Chair

**Questions from Kevin Case, National Park Service:
(CHC response in blue ink)**

1) Currently, where can and do you legally ride on the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail System? Remember that our study is only addressing the Metacomet-Mattabesett portions of the blue blazed trail system. If you have issues/questions/concerns on other portions of the blue blaze trail system, while important, they are not something we can address in the study.

Unknown at this time. Unofficially there are probably many local horse owners that use parts of the trail in their area where it is possible to connect onto other trail systems. Many of the horse owners have permission to ride on private lands and are unaware of user restrictions of the trail.

2) What types of trail conditions are required/desired for equestrian use?

According to the 1993 CHC Trail Study Survey dirt, grass, sand and gravel were the top preferences. An 18" berth (footpath) of the animal's feet is the minimum width required. The average trail width response to the CHC survey was 7 feet, with a range of 2 to 40 feet. Dry, solid footing is the safest condition for trail riding, but note that many horse and pack animals are used on mountain trails as seen out west in NPS Brochures. Trail lunch or rest stops on top of mountains are desired. The CT Horse Council Trails Committee will work on Trail Conditions Criteria for evaluation of trails for equestrian use to evaluate the Metacomet-Mattabesett Trail System.

3) Provide details of where you would like to be able to ride on the Metacomet-Mattabesett trail system.

Unknown at this time. CHC would like to become part of the 3-year study in helping to assess and evaluate the trail system for equestrian use.

While this is of interest to us, it by no means suggests that equestrian use will be allowed on sections not currently open for such use on the Metacomet-Mattabesett trail system.

Who is designated to use a trail is often a "political" decision instead of a rational one. Federal, state, regional and municipal planners make land use decisions, often by working with special interest groups. Most are not horse people and some are against horse use of trails. The horse user group should therefore be included as part of the planning process, since it has an interest in preserving land for recreation and knowledge about the needs of a large user group, equestrians. On publicly owned land multiple use trails and trail corridors (Greenways) should have highest priority whenever possible (may be separate trail treads within a corridor). CHC offers their expertise as horse people to assess and evaluate the trail system for equestrian use.

Ultimately all choices of the types of use allowed on a particular section of trail is up to the landowner.

We recognize that many trails exist on private lands through the generosity of individual landowners. Education by promotion of safe, courteous riding practices that respect the rights of landowners and encourage trail users to seek community goodwill can address multi-use issues. CT also has an Equine Liability Law in effect that can ease landowners concerns.

The study will recommend a blueprint for managing the trail system, including addressing multi-use issues, and the possible use scenarios and management needs associated with such uses.

The CT Horse Council Trails Committee can supply NPS with information. See trail maintenance/management partnerships below.

4) Trail maintenance issues that are associated with equestrian use.

There are not many maintenance issues for equestrians. Large downfall trees present problems and encourage switchbacks (CHC educates trail users not to create these along with providing other etiquette). Height of the canopy is important for safe passage, and safe natural water crossings are preferred over bridges. If bridges are used they are often made for human crossing and need to be made safer for equestrian use.

5) Parking issues. How much is available? How are parking needs calculated?

Assuming that non-local riders need parking areas, it is best to encourage development of linear off road parking and turn out or around for exit is best. According to the CHC Trail Survey, a truck and horse trailer needs a minimum of 24'. Larger trailers can use up to 40'.

6) Any knowledge you all have regarding how equestrian use is managed on other trails. What is an ideal trail management scenario from your perspective?

The CT Horse Council can provide studies on Equestrian Trails, and has resources from national organizations such as the Equestrian Land Conservation Resource (ELCR), American Trails, and Enviro Horse.

Trail Maintenance/Management Partnerships

- **Trail Use, Resource Protection and User Conflicts:** Create a forum to resolve user conflicts.
- **The Connecticut Horse Council's Volunteer Horse Patrol (CHC-VHP) can be utilized on these trails.** CHC-VHP offers CPR, First Aid, information, educational materials, maps for lost visitors and reports to DEP on visitor contacts and trail conditions, dumping, etc.
- **Public and private partnerships to manage and maintain trails**
- **Qualified leaders, skill instructions, tools, recognition and other incentives to develop 'esprit de corps' among all volunteers**
- **Develop partnership and access with Utility owned lands on Trail system**
- **Adopt a Trail - Professional and Volunteer trail crews and local community groups**
- **Dedicated trail funding, user fees, trail access licenses**
- **Use Design and Management guidelines based on scientific study of measurably significant environmental impacts of trail uses and mitigation of those impacts**
- **Education: Trails Information, user Education and Public Awareness: Trail maps, guides, brochures, web sites should all mention trail etiquette, safety, resource protection, and user responsibility**

7) Other pertinent issues you would like to address.

Establish equestrian easements or other rights of way that will permit preservation or re-routing, rather than closure of trails through and around developments or private lands. Promote safe, courteous riding practices that respect the rights of landowners and encourage trail users to seek community goodwill. Preserve existing trail systems for equestrians and establish new ones.