

URGENT TRAILS ALERT! CHC NEEDS YOUR HELP!

In 2002 Public Law 107-338 was signed directing the US Dept of the Interior, through the National Parks Service (NPS), to study the feasibility of the Metacomet, Mattabesett, and Monadnock trails being deemed "scenic" by designating them as an interconnected route. The total length of this trail would be approximately 200 miles, with an additional annex possible to link the trail from the New Hampshire border through Massachusetts and Connecticut and on to Long Island sound.

Many meetings have taken place with various user groups including landowners, the National Parks Service, the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association, the Mountain Bike Association, towns, and legislators. Connecticut Horse Council has been actively involved in the process, and we have attended meetings, provided testimony at the public hearings, assisted in gathering trail use data, and been very vocal in representing the interest of equestrians on this trail.

We were initially met with strong opposition to allowing horse traffic on any sections of this trail, even though there are sections currently open to riders. While we realize that there may be sections of this trail that are not conducive to horses, either due to environmental or geographic concerns, we do not feel that horses should be excluded from the entire length.

Therefore, we have continued to push for the inclusion of horse access "where feasible".

The CHC conducted equestrian trail evaluations of the trail system that were submitted to the NPS. CHC reported that many sections of the trail that were not equestrian accessible, had many possibilities of alternative trails that could be made to go around those areas.

Also, CHC wants this access to be noted because over the years the trail has moved (and will continue to move) as private land owners sell or decide not to have the trail through their land. Often times the new trails use are (and can be) moved onto land in which equestrians have historically used. There is also the possibility of future funding to purchase private lands to protect the trail system. In this case, a priority of multiple use trails should be considered when creating new trails to include more than one user group to enjoy a 200 across the state trail system with everyone's tax dollars.

Due to our efforts, the NPS report which was published in August, included notations about the possibility of equestrian use of this trail. While this is a significant success for us, it does not mean that equestrians are guaranteed access.

NPS is hosting a final public comment periodic through October 16th 2006. After the comments are taken, they will be summarized by the NPS and presented to Congress for final action. It is **CRUCIAL** that horse people make themselves heard in this last open forum. **There is**

a website www.mmmtrail.org where you may post your comments, and download both an abbreviated and full copy of the reports, along with maps of the proposed trail.

Additionally, there will be two public "Open Houses" being held. These will take place on:

Tuesday, September 26th 2006 from 7 to 9pm at the Connecticut Light & Power building on 107 Seldon St, Berlin CT.

September 27th 2006 from 6:30 to 8pm at the Hadley Senior Community Center, 46 Middle St Hadley MA.

At these open houses, you may ask questions, make comments and obtain more information on the trails and the study.

CHC would like to strongly urge all equestrians to visit the website and log their comments, or attend the open house sessions where they can speak. We would like to thank the NPS for mentioning horseback riding as a possible permissible use of this trail, and to reiterate that horse traffic should be included where feasible.

If you have questions, or would like more information, please contact The Connecticut Horse Council Inc. Trails Chair **Diane Ciano** at **203-757-1904** or **Spirit76@snet.net**, or **CHC President Amy Stegall** stegall@snet.net.

For those in Massachusetts, please contact the Baystate Trail Riders Association.

E-Mail: bstra@charter.net Web site: www.bstra.org

Thank you for your support, it is greatly appreciated!

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