



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AERC Awarded \$20,000 Trail Grant from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance

A commitment to trails is vital to the sport of endurance riding, and the American Endurance Ride Conference is pleased to announce that a National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) grant has been approved in the amount of \$20,000 for trails work under the auspices of AERC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The funding will develop and improve existing trail systems in the Wayne National Forest, Vesuvius Region, near Pedro, Ohio. This system is home to Elkins Creek Horse Camp and AERC's Black Sheep Boogie and Gobble 'Til You Wobble endurance rides. Although the ride names are whimsical, the rides of 25, 50 or 75 miles in length are a testament to the horsemanship and training of the participating riders and equines. In addition the Boogie, held the last weekend of June, there are long-term plans in place to hold a 100-mile endurance event in 2019 and then host the AERC National Championship Ride in October of 2020.

Monies from this grant will be used to provide the materials and equipment rental needed to improve areas along the entire eastern side of the main loop, a 25-plus mile section of trail. These improvements will ensure the sustainability of these trail systems for years to come.

AERC Ride Manager Committee Chair Mollie Krumlaw-Smith, who also manages the two rides held on this system, and Alex Uspenski, co-chair of AERC's Trails and Land Management Committee, helped Jill and Rick McCleese, owners of Elkins Creek Horse Camp, to write the grant. All are graduates of AERC's Trail Master program, which trains AERC members and land managers to build sustainable trails and make trail repairs in that will last for many years.

The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, signed into law in December of 2016, calls for the U.S. Forest Service to create a way to catch up on back trail maintenance, and pairs with organizations like the Back Country Horsemen, American Hiking Society, American Trails and the International Mountain Biking Association to meet the country's trail maintenance goals.

The Trails Stewardship Funding Program awards funds to trails and stewardship organizations who then increase trail maintenance accomplishments and reduce deferred maintenance (trail backlog) on National Forest System trails. More than 100 proposals were received, requesting \$1.4 million in funding, and a total of 42 projects were funded, totaling \$402,000.

According to the NSWA, the Trail Funding program elicited over \$1 million in matching cash, and over \$2 million of in-kind matches. More than 5,300 volunteers, trail crew members, and nonprofit staff are expected to participate across the 42 selected projects.

Over 1,700 miles of trail will be maintained, additional signing, structure repair, and many bridges will be replaced using these grant funds.

“I am very excited and proud of AERC’s Trails Program, said Monica Chapman, AERC Trails and Land Management Committee co-chair. “The grant is a perfect example of a group effort from the locals on the ground doing the sweat equity, the committee level members writing the grant and with the local forest, to attending meetings in Washington, DC, to meet with legislators and many of the groups belonging to NSWA. This is a perfect example of how a non-profit grass-roots organization should work.”

The volunteers at Elkins Creek Horse Camp plan on having most if not all of these improvements completed by December of 2018 and will be working steadily throughout the year.

“Endurance riders will appreciate the improved trail conditions, even under rainy conditions, in the Wayne National Forest, and the improvements will also be welcomed by the thousands of trail riders who visit the area each year,” said Krumlaw-Smith. This trail system has a wonderful group of volunteers who literally put thousands of hours each year into its development and maintenance.

“This grant will finally enable them to complete the 10-plus year project,” said Krumlaw-Smith. “Additionally it’s a wonderful help to the whole community in bringing more tourism to the region. By doing so we bring more revenue into local retail stores, restaurants, and other small businesses. The effect of the trail improvements will be felt community-wide.”

Randy Welsh, NWSA’s executive director who manages the program, said, “Trails connect people to the National Forests, and this funding will help these local groups and volunteers participate in caring for and managing their Forests. The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Partnership Funding Program will encourage a huge increase in the number of volunteers and public involved with National Forest trails.”

Further information on the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partnership Funding program can be found on the NWSA website at www.wildernessalliance.org/trail_funding.

For more information about the American Endurance Ride Conference, visit www.AERC.org.

About the AERC

The American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) was founded in 1972 as a national governing body for long distance riding. Over the years it has developed a set of rules and guidelines designed to provide a standardized format and strict veterinary controls. The AERC sanctions more than 700 rides each year throughout North America and in 1993 Endurance became the fifth discipline under the United States Equestrian Team.

In addition to promoting the sport of endurance riding, the AERC encourages the use, protection, and development of equestrian trails, especially those with historic significance. Many special events of four to six consecutive days take place over historic trails, such as the Pony Express Trail, the Outlaw Trail, the Chief Joseph Trail, and the Lewis and Clark Trail. The founding ride of endurance riding, the Western States Trail Ride or “Tevis,” covers 100 miles of the famous Western States and Immigrant Trails over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. These rides promote awareness of the importance of

trail preservation for future generations and foster an appreciation of our American heritage. For more information please visit us at www.aerc.org.

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Photos available on request