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AERC LAUDS PASSAGE OF TRAILS STEWARDSHIP ACT

Late last month, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (NFSTSA) was signed by President Obama. The American Endurance Ride Conference, along with partner organizations like the American Hiking Society, American Horse Council, Back Country Horsemen of America and the Wilderness Society, were proud to be proponents of the bill.

The bill requires the U.S. Forest Service to partner with organizations that can help to decrease the backlog of trail maintenance plans, currently at \$314 million. With 158,000 miles of trails, the U.S. Forest Service's trails are integral to many endurance rides, and AERC welcomes the opportunity to work with the USFS to plan and coordinate trail maintenance wherever possible.

“The signing of the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act by President Obama is a great opportunity for volunteer trail advocates of America to keep our trails open on United States Forest Service property. So much of the forest service budget is used yearly to fight wildfires, leaving little funds to maintain trails,” said AERC Trails and Land Management Chair Monica Chapman of Pleasanton, Kansas.

“Now is the time for AERC members and other interested equestrians to get organized and contact your local Forest Service Ranger and ask how you can help keep trails maintained for an endurance ride, to condition your horse, or just enjoying nature,” Chapman said.

Chapman traveled multiple times to Washington, DC, to promote the bill and expressed her gratitude to Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), the bill's sponsor.

Because AERC members compete in distances from 25 to 100 miles per day, well-maintained trails are an integral part of the nonprofit organization. The group has more than 100 members who are AERC-Certified Trail Masters, who have the knowledge to properly design and build new trails and maintain and improve existing trails.

The organization, founded in 1972, also has an active trail grant program and is the nation's leader in encouraging the use, protection and development of equestrian trails, especially those with historical significance.

More information on endurance riding is available by visiting www.aerc.org or by calling the AERC office at 823-2260. By request, the office will send out a free information packet to prospective members.

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Contact: Troy Smith

American Endurance Ride Conference

www.aerc.org

endurancenews@foothill.net

866-271-2372, 530-823-2260