

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
American Endurance Ride Conference
Date: June 2021

National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance grants will improve trails for endurance riders

A commitment to trails is vital to the sport of endurance riding, and the American Endurance Ride Conference is pleased to announce that a 2021 National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) grant has been approved in the amount of \$20,000 for trails work in Ohio, under the auspices of AERC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The funding will continue to 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 (held the last full weekend of June) and The Iron Horse 100 (held the third weekend in September) endurance rides.

"This trail system has been in steady development for the last 12 years," said Mollie Krumlaw-Smith, who manages both the Black Sheep Boogie and Iron Horse rides. "At last year's Black Sheep Boogie we had six inches of rain fall on the day of the ride. The tread on the trail held, which is just an amazing testament to the amount of work that has been done correctly on this system."

Additionally, Krumlaw-Smith noted, "These funds have also enabled us to complete the repair work needed to run the entire Iron Horse 100 on Wayne National Forest Property. This significantly improved the course and we're now able to run 95 miles of the course on improved bridle trail."

Monies from this grant will provide the materials and equipment rental needed to provide the finishing touches along the entire trail system as well as repair some areas heavily damaged by a major ice storm during the winter of 2020-2021. These improvements will ensure the sustainability of these trail systems for years to come.

Krumlaw-Smith, who also serves as AERC's treasurer, helped Jill and Rick McCleese, owners of Elkins Creek Horse Camp, 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 that will benefit current and future equestrians.

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 90 proposals were received for 2021, and 48 were funded, totaling \$547,689.

According to the NWSA, the Trail Funding program elicited over \$1 million in matching cash, and over \$2.5 million of in-kind matches. More than 6,500 volunteers are expected to participate across the 48 selected projects. Over 2,700 miles of trail will be maintained and improved thanks to the NWSA grants and additional donated funds from community members and other organizations.

"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 NWSA. This is a perfect example of how a non-profit grass-roots organization should work."

Besides the Ohio grant, AERC is pleased to announce that a \$15,000 NWSA grant was awarded to the Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands which will be used to improve trails in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in southwest Virginia. Nancy Sluys, project coordinator, announced that the local group raised another \$15,000 from additional grants, corporate matching gifts, horse camps, members of the local community and funds raised at the Iron Mountain Jubilee endurance ride.

“We broke ground on the project on May 23 with clearing a staging area and brushing to prep the trail for mechanized work which will begin in July,” said Sluys. “We hope to involve members of the community, other trail groups, mountain bikers, several youth groups and other BCH chapters.”

Endurance riders will benefit as the Iron Mountain Jubilee ride, held over two days each August, takes place on the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area trails. “We will be working to rehab a section of the trail that has become badly degraded by the strong storms of the past few years, and several connecting trails, for a total of 14 miles of trail,” said Sluys, who is both an AERC-certified Trail Master and the manager of the Iron Mountain Jubilee ride.

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.

More information about AERC is available through the association’s website, AERC.org, or by calling the AERC national office, 866-271-2372.

#

About 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 rides throughout North America.

In addition to promoting the sport of endurance riding, 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

#

Contact: Troy Smith, AERC Publications, 866-271-2372, endurancenews@aerc.org.