

Wind Wolves Preserve – Permanent Trail Markers Bakersfield, California



At 95,000 acres, the Wind Wolves Preserve is the largest non-profit nature preserve in the state. It currently supports robust agricultural activities that complement its environmental priorities, including a USDA-certified organic, grass-fed beef operation, and the seasonal production of grass-fed lamb from more than 5,000 head of ewes raising their lambs on the property each spring. The grazing regime is managed to complement endangered species habitat restoration, as well as supporting the re-introduction of the Tule Elk back into the southern extent of its home range.

The Preserve has been open to hikers, campers and mountain bikers (on designated trails), since 2002, and offers a variety of outdoor programming for children, families and adults, all at no cost to participants. It is open 7 days per week, excluding major holidays. Equestrian access was initially allowed when the Preserve first opened. Unfortunately, after some early, negative experiences with irresponsible riders, combined with the lack of a managed plan for equestrian use, the Board of Directors decided to prohibit equestrian access.

However, the current management recognizes that because of its immense size, unique topography, and proximity to major metropolitan centers (2 hours or less from L.A., Bakersfield or San Luis Obispo), the Wind Wolves Preserve is uniquely well-suited for managed equestrian access. With over 200 miles of existing ranch roads, an extensive network of stock watering troughs, and existing, developed public amenities (administrative center, on-site management, paved access roads, road signage along Highway 166, picnic areas, bathroom facilities), equestrian use is not only appropriate, it is the only practical, low-impact way for visitors to access the back country. (Motorized recreational vehicles are prohibited

throughout the entire TWC system.)

To demonstrate the potential for enhancing TWC's public access mandate through the inclusion of equestrian access, TWC held an AERC-sanctioned 30/50-mile endurance ride on Wind Wolves in November of 2010. This successful event introduced the Preserve to the endurance community, and generated public enthusiasm for future events. Marking trails for the ride, and replacing those that were damaged by cattle, was the most labor-intensive aspect of the event. Because much of the Preserve is grassland, with no trees or structures on which to tie ribbons, most of the trail markers were painted wooden stakes that had to be pounded into the ground, and removed afterwards. From a time-management perspective, this is not a sustainable model. That is why one primary focus of this grant proposal is the installation of permanent trail signs and mile markers.

Wind Wolves management has made it a priority to expand public access through equestrian access by implementing a managed equestrian program, which includes sponsored events (AERC, NATRC), organized group rides/camping, and eventually, open use. In order to safely and successfully facilitate this expanded use, and minimize the staff time required for continually marking and un-marking trails for specific users and events, TWC will implement equestrian access through a phased approach.