

2021 State Trail Advocate Report

ARKANSAS

Julie Moore AERC Arkansas State Trail Advocate
No Report Submitted

CALIFORNIA

Robert Sydnor AERC California State Trail Advocate
January 24, 2022 RHSydnor@gmail.com 916-335-1441
Subject: Opposition to Mountain Bikes on Brown's Ravine Equestrian Trail in Folsom Lake State Recreation Area

Dear California State Parks Officials:

The American Endurance Ride Conference consists of about 4,200 equestrians (nationally) who ride long-distances (50 and 100 miles) on mountain trails in organized rides under government permits.

Many of our AERC members live in El Dorado County, and ride on equestrian trails in Folsom Lake State Recreation. Our AERC members frequently use the Brown's Ravine Trail to condition their horses for long-distance (50-mile) rides. For decades, the Brown's Ravine Trail has always been restricted in use for only equestrians and hikers.

Mountain bike organizations have applied to open Brown's Ravine Trail for use by mountain bikes and motorized eBikes. AERC is opposed to this, for safety reasons enumerated below.

1. A focused Environmental Impact will be required under the California Environmental Quality Act. No decision can legally be made by management of the California Department of Parks and Recreation until the CEQA process is completed.

2. Brown's Ravine Trail is narrow with many blind turns with forested vegetation. It is not safe for fast mountain bikes and motorized eBikes. This is steep side-slope terrain with drop-offs in metamorphic bedrock that cannot easily be widened to four feet wide without mechanized bulldozers, and local blasting of the hard bedrock. There are several very steep segments along the axis of the trail-bed; this is conducive to high-speed descents by mountain bikers.

3. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, who legally owns the land, has not agreed to this proposal to add mountain bikes to Brown's Ravine Trail. Furthermore, this

Robert Hadley Sydnor proposed action is not in compliance with the General Plan for Folsom Lake State Recreation Area.

Public safety is of paramount importance. Public safety is not secondary.

There are hundreds of miles of trails within the region that are already open and heavily used by mountain bikes. Brown's Ravine Trail is one of the few remaining trails that are only for equestrians and hikers.

6. Mountain bikers are already illegally using the Brown's Ravine Trail. State Parks officials have never (yet) arrested and cited mountain bikes. Illegal use needs to be properly enforced.

7. The cell-phone reception is limited and often dark along Brown's Ravine Trail. That means that it is not possible, in the event of an emergency, to call 911 for emergency help resulting from a serious crash between a horse and a bike.

8. Elsewhere within Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, mountain bikers have illegally built bike-jumps that are hazardous and unsafe. Horses are terrified of airborne mountain bikes, and typically will spook, bolt, and throw the rider. Broken bones and broken necks typically result. Who will be legally responsible for the medical costs of these tragic accidents? Personal injury litigation for huge sums of money may result.

9. There are hundreds of residential homes on the southside of Brown's Ravine Trail. Families with small children typically take safe hikes along this trail. It is unsafe for high-speed mountain bikes to crash into little kids. We are concerned that the State Park Superintendent stated in a recorded public hearing that he will not enforce 15 mile-per-hour speed limits for mountain bikes on this trail. Hypothetically, what if the Chief of the California Highway Patrol stated that he would not enforce speed limits on the freeways? This is both a legal concern and a safety concern that needs to be answered in writing during the CEQA process.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert Hadley Sydnor
A.E.R.C. California State Trails Advocate A.E.R.C. Trail Master (licensed trail maintenance)
Fellow, Geological Society of America
Board Member, Mother Lode Unit
of Backcountry Horsemen of California

COLORADO

Karen Fagan AERC Colorado State Trail Advocate
I started off strong by writing letter to all Colorado AERC members introducing myself and my position. I received responses from:
Jim Kristakos – who indicated interest in the Bijou Creek open space in Arapahoe county
Gwen Hall
Tanja Hess
Phoebe Bechtolt
Kelly Brestin
I also posted on the MRER Facebook page.
I subscribed to Back Country Horsemen of Colorado as well as groups from Jefferson County.

FLORIDA

Doug Shearer AERC Florida State Trail Advocate
No major changes to trail in Florida during 2021. The Goethe State Forest where most rides occur is status quo. The Ocala National forest is a battle with the current head Ranger, Carl Bower. He has closed many old trails that we used in the past but is working Back Country Horsemen of Southeast Ocala nation Forest. On the west side of the forest we haven't found a group to maintain trails so most riding is on roads. St Johns Water Management has several properties used by members for training, Ocklawaha Prairie and Sunnyhill are the most popular. They are well maintained.
The Cross Florida Greenway is used for 3 endurance ride and the Florida 3-day 100 CTR and is maintained by the Cross Florida Greenway Equestrians. It has about 100 miles of trails. The western trails are under threat right now by a proposed extension of the Florida Turnpike. We along with other groups are opposing this project.
I really need to get more people involved in other areas of the state by am having trouble finding will souls. Julianne Philip is help near Jacksonville in the Jennings State Forest. We have had rides there in the past, but it has been over 10 years. The State is proposing a paved trail through the forest and Ms. Philip is attending meetings and talking to the rangers about the horse trails.
We are lucky in Florida to have so many state and federal lands to ride on and are working to keep it that way.

IDAHO

Danielle Delamater AERC Idaho State Trail AdvocateMade contact with local BCH and helped clear one local trail with them (Feather Creek Bovil, Idaho)
Also made contact with someone at Idaho department of lands and still trying to figure out who the right contact is.
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ILLINOIS

Tony Troyer AERC Illinois State Trail Advocate

Illinois has seen an increase as like others to get out and recreate! Most of our COVID issues are starting not to be as much as of an issue.

State Legislation- SB3908 This year has take a big swing to restructure the ILDNR Advisory Board at present. The IDNR started out with just abolishing the board. Then with an amendment they started to make the restructure of naming certain seats. We are seeing that they want to appoint more environmentalist and do with less hunting and or others. I have been in talks with the Senator's to make sure we the Horsemen also have a voice. The other issue is that they do not want to have this Advisory Board to be able to make suggestions and to hold open public meetings. This has a number of us on edge as they will have no one to question their actions to be accountable to the people.

There now will be another admin

Trails- The volunteer program has really started to take shape! The legislation took a long time to hammer out with the concerns of the IDNR State Union, but anyone and any group can have the opportunity to clean trails using there own equipment (tractor or chainsaw) as long as we understand that we need the insurance and it is on us if said equipment gets damage.

KANSAS

Monica Chapman AERC Kansas State Trail Advocate

I took over the position from Erin Glassman in October. An email group was created so each Kansas AERC member was forwarded information about free webinars, trail grants, and trail works days across the state. Kansas AERC members recorded 32 hours on the AERC trails log. Many Kansas AERC members are also members of Back Country Horseman(BCHA) of Kansas or in a local chapter. Being members of both organizations creates good communication and comaraderie between different equestrian trail user groups. Two AERC rides happened in 2021 on Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks trail systems and campgrounds. The Hillsdale Fall Blast and Kanapolis Canyons rides. Both ride management groups have a great rapport with the land management. The Hillsdale Fall Blast management group teams up with the BCHA chapter for the trails system to keep the trails in shape. Over the last two years the ride has donated \$4000 to the BCHA chapter to help with trails maintenance. It has created a great relationship between the groups.

KENTUCKY

Greg Jones AERC Kentucky State Trail Advocate

While Covid Restrictions continued to hamper some outreach efforts, 2021 saw considerable progress in strengthening the organizational structure of our efforts to preserve equine access to trails and open spaces. Much of the credit goes to Ron Oyster who assumed a greater leadership role with BCH Kentucky.

On the other hand, Covid caused considerable financial stress to equine related businesses with some of our camps unsure if they will continue to operate in 2022.

Some progress was made in efforts to re-establish connections between trails previously fragmented by USFS actions, but the USFS once again proved an untrustworthy partner as it closed another trailhead which will again cause concentrated use on some trails instead of dispersing use more widely.

The good news is that we are finally bringing Endurance back to Kentucky in 2022 with the Shake it Up ride at Shaker Village in May. Two areas in Eastern Kentucky have indicated an interest in hosting an Endurance Ride but both need to be checked to see if they are suitable. Another location near the West Virginia line has just received a large grant for trail improvements, but the area we had identified as a potential camp area was just developed as a highway garage.

LOUISIANA

Maranda Bibb AERC Louisiana State Trail Advocate

Much trail clearing has occurred due to various storms, but that is often done by local riders and/or hunters who utilize the trails.

I have requested a meeting with representatives at the local WMA, Sandy Hollow, about options for permanent trail markers. This area is frequently ridden, but the trails are difficult to follow without consistent visual markers. Often riders end up on areas/trails that have been requested to not be traveled and new riders to this park have struggled.

For the last few years there has been efforts to get horse camping approved on at one of the local parks, Bogue Chitto. Ongoing efforts have been less than fruitful despite many promises.

During a recent park meeting, letters were read from various people by representatives with equine interests. It was presented that there would need to be a master plan approved before anything further could move forward. I have offered to visit with one of the local riders that would like to put one together and move forward with the plans.

I will present efforts as they move forward.

MICHIGAN

Becke Grams AERC Michigan State Trail Advocate

White River Rides are working well with Forest Service. The DNR, Dept. Of Natural Resources, "the state" are harding to deal with due to lack of man power and funding.

They are supposed to start working on Tin Cup Campground this year.

Amy Sharman is heading trails in Mich. She has a site listing all campgrounds and trails in MI.

She keeps everyone infor.ed about what is going on with DNR in MI. Far better job than I do.

Karen Bahrman is working in UP on trail issues.

I have my fingers in the pie but not much AERC can do right now.

MINNESOTA

Candi Barbo AERC Minnesota State Trail Advocate

Since covid has hit our city of Duluth and the majority of the workforce has been cut way back there has been nothing done on our trails. In the southern half of our state the Back Country Horseman have been out doing maintenance on already established trails but no new ones.

Our trail group has worked with the city planners but it's been very discouraging between them and the DNR. Not many workers and not any money. We are still planning our next phase but not getting much help or the permission to do so. We were under mandates to still wear masks of last week. Our government workers are still working from home.

MISSOURI

Pamela Garrison AERC Missouri State Trail Advocate

No Report Submitted

NEVADA

Tami Rougeau AERC Nevada State Trail Advocate

The State of Nevada has seen a huge growth in the use of our outdoor resources over the past few years in the form of OHV/ATV/UTV. This has caused issues with our trails and caused more involvement from the equestrian, hiking and cycling communities. Many of our high use trails have experienced erosion and are in need of repair and signage. The year 2021 saw a great deal of interest and I was fortunate to be selected for the Recreational Trails Program Committee.

This committee reviewed 28 applications requesting nearly \$2.3 million in project funding through the recreational trails grant program. We had approximately \$1.3 million actually available to award. Most of the projects awarded were multi-use and included equestrian use in their planning. The following projects are of particular interest to the equestrian community:

Cultural Resource survey to complete S.106 survey for 10 miles of new trail from Centennial Park to Washoe State Park (these trails actually already exist as Social Trails but will be converted to formal maintained trails)

Planning of route corridor/trail alignment and clearances for existing Tamarack Lake Trail near Mr. Rose Ski Area to Galena Creek Park trail

Construct 2 miles of new trail to connect 5th Street Loop with North Loop on the Prison Hill recreation area

Maintenance on non-motorized trails in Red Rock Canyo Scenic loop and Calico Basin

Complete maintenance on trails in Ruby Mts, Carson, Ely, Austin-Tonopah, Santa Rosa District and SMNRA

Basic maintenance of 31.4 miles of TCT Trail, 2.4 miles of Cow Canyon and Reese River Trail to access TCT

The local Washoe County and Reno City Parks Planning process has also been underway with many projects to update or revamp local parks. Many of these parks have had equestrian activities in the past and we are working to ensure that they maintain equestrian access. These projects include:

Carcione and Canepa Trailheads Master Plan – These historic ranches were bought by Washoe County and are being redeveloped for outdoor activities to include fishing, hiking, cycling and water craft. There are numerous equestrian trails that connect to TRT and PCT from this area. The area is currently used frequently as a staging area for local trail riders. Our local Nevada All-State Trail Riders group is taking an active role in this project to build and maintain formal equestrian trail head with parking, water etc.

Hidden Valley Regional Park – This is a well established park on the east side of Reno. It currently has 2 horse arenas and ample trailer parking to access trails in the area. This park was actually once used as a vet check for the Virginia City 100 in its early days. We are actively engaged with park planners to ensure equestrian use is strongly considered in the planning. Much of the initial development to this park was by equestrian groups. However the equestrian use in the area has fallen off over the years. We are working to get more folks out there to be a presence.

The Lakeview Trail Head project was completed in 2019 with a horse water system established in 2020 using grant money from AERC and RTP along with matching funds from NASTR.

Carson City has not actually ever turned on the water to this area so we will continue efforts to get this water turned on.

The trails committee for NASTR has started the initial work to re-establish the Old 102 Trail from Hobart Road to Franktown Meadows. This will be a foot traffic only (no wheeled or motorized vehicles) as requested by the Ranger. This is in alignment with other trails in the area that are all non-motorized. This trail was destroyed by fire in the 90's and was never re-established. This project will be a collaborative between Nevada State Parks, Forest Service and Nevada All-State Trail riders. We will be seeking grant funding once we have a formal plan agreed by all parties.

A trails work party of 8 members of the Nevada All-State Trail Riders, Inc., performed a day of trail maintenance on the River Trail at Fort Churchill State Park in June. These 8 persons spent 6-8 hours each opening up, clearing and cleaning 3.5 miles of trail along the Carson River.

Over the course of the past year I have made contact with members of several other outdoor recreation groups to include the OHV Commission, local motorcycle and cycling groups. There are a great deal of opportunities for these communities to work together to maintain our outdoor space collaboratively. We all acknowledge that we have different priorities and not all of them align but our willingness to work together to keep our public lands and to educate users is a key to success for all of us.

NEW MEXICO

Deirdre Monroe AERC New Mexico State Trail Advocate

In 2021, we had progress a couple of important areas.

Federal legislation is being discussed with NM Congressional representatives to provide permanent protection of the Caja del Rio plateau, which is a portion of Santa Fe National Forest located just west of Santa Fe, NM.

We received an AERC grant for fifteen new gates in the Caja del Rio to replace existing barbed wire gates; about 2/3 have been installed by Grazing Association members. The new gates will benefit both recreational users and existing cattle operations.

I wrote a 60-page "Caja Vision Plan" that is being shared with our congressional representatives as well as local USFS, BLM and Santa Fe County contacts.

The Vision Plan presents the Caja del Rio as a valuable potential element of our New Mexico recreational system.

Specific projects that include trails, water infrastructure and wildlife protection are detailed.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/hcttht6q6r7ofoj/MonroeDocument10.12.20_ForPrint.pdf?dl=0

I am creating an electronic Caja map that will show the water infrastructure and grazing allotments for the Caja del Rio La Majada Grazing Association. This will support USFS and BLM water infrastructure reporting but will also help in planning water infrastructure improvements.

When published, a new Caja map will be available to recreational users .

A Caja Endurance Ride is planned for April 30th, 2020. I will mentor a new RM, Aura Jenssen-Curtis.

I continue as a POC for multiple riding organizations in Northern NM. I attend meetings on trails issues.

My Trails Advocate work has largely been centered on the Caja del Rio. I think we need additional trail advocate partners in other parts of the state. The Caja is taking virtually all my free time.

NORTH CAROLINA

Stith Gower AERC North Carolina State Trail Advocate

No Report Submitted

NORTH DAKOTA

Angie Mikkelsen AERC North Dakota State Trail Advocate

There was no major activity in ND for trails this year.

In late November I spoke with the president of the nonprofit "Save the MDH" about applying for "The Trail Fund" grant offered by American Trails. They were interested in applying so I contacted the email address provided in the grant info and received a response on 12/6/21 that I would be sent an application when the grant was available. I haven't heard anything since.

Save the MDH does a lot of work on ND's biggest trail system, the Maah Daah Hey which is a 144-mile single track trail through the ND Badlands, including sections in Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The other parts of the trail are on National Grasslands. I put an endurance ride on using this trail and some connecting trails. The MDH Endurance Ride donated \$500 to the Save the MDH organization this year from its ride profits. The organization is more geared toward mountain biking, but the MDH is a multi-use trail and I have a established good relationship with them both as a rider and a biker. They do a ton of trail maintenance and mow 100 miles of the MDH in July before their big annual running and biking events. This keeps the trail in great condition and keeps it from becoming overgrown. It is very noticeable when you leave the areas of the trail where the Save the MDH org maintains. Biking has become more popular over the last couple of years so I would like to maintain a good relationship with the organization so we can continue to educate both bikers and riders to use the trail together.

There is a pretty limited amount of trail in ND but I do believe some of the grants that come along are worth looking into further. There are several trails up north by the Canadian border and 2 State Parks, Little Missouri & Fort Ransom that do not allow bikes. Both parks need

significant trail work, especially Little Missouri where the trails are often washed out, overgrown or otherwise in poor condition. I would like to become more involved with the Back Country Horsemen of ND since their organization seems to have grown in the last few years and maybe we could apply for some of the grants offered.

OHIO

Alex Uspenski AERC Ohio State Trail Advocate
No Report Submitted

OKLAHOMA

Leslie Brown AERC Oklahoma State Trail Advocate
Lake Carl Blackwell

Park staff repaired a damaged wooden bridge and volunteers worked to clear and mark over 20 miles of trails that had been extensively damaged from the historic ice storms of Oct 2020 and Feb 2021 which allowed Indian Territory to return Lake Carl Blackwell. Starting January 2022, camp reservations can now be made online at <https://www.campspot.com/book/lake-carl-blackwell>

Prague Lake

Prague Lake staff and volunteers have been hard at work repairing the damaged water crossing, reclaiming lost trails, installing permanent marking, and creating a detailed trail map. AERC grant money was used to reimburse the City of Prague funds to complete the horse pen project that was started last year. Now all camp sites have 2 horse pens each.

Bell Cow

City of Chandler staff and volunteers spent many hours this past year mowing, clearing, and marking trails. Bell Cow is a favorite destination and hosts up to 4 endurance rides most years. Future projects include new high tie posts and permanent markers.

Oklahoma members did 230 of recorded trail work.

OREGON

Jeff Tryens AERC Oregon State Trail Advocate

To say 2021 was a slow year for trail advocacy in Oregon would be an understatement. To my knowledge very little group trail construction or maintenance was done in Oregon over the past year. One of the big trail planning events, organized by Oregon Equestrian Trails (OET) stalwart, Rhonda Marquis, involving federal and state land managers along with numerous trail advocacy groups, occurs on February 12 – remotely. This yearly event is an excellent opportunity for folks in the Central Oregon region to know what the big players are up to in the coming year. I will be attending as the AERC rep.

When needed I have sent out email updates to AERC members statewide. I try to only send information that may be of direct interest to my members, generally. For very specific issues, like the meeting notices for BLM advisory groups, for instance, I try to make folks aware of how they can get on the email list for the group that interests them. What had been monthly reports were more like quarterly updates in 2021. Perhaps the most important thing I did this year with to crosstab AERC members with membership in OET, our flagship equestrian trail maintenance/construction group in Oregon. As I suspected only a small percentage of AERC members also belong to OET – less than 10%. At my urging a few additional folks joined. My argument was that even if you don't want to work, simply belonging to the group benefits trails in Oregon.

Oregon is blessed with lots of equestrian trails on public land and quite a few groups that care about those trails so, as the AERC trail advocate, I play a fairly small role in the greater scheme of things which seems to be just fine with my members. Soon I will "clean" my Oregon AERC member list with the help of AERC data base guru Mike Maul which I try to do yearly.

PENNSYLVANIA

Kathy Shank AERC Pennsylvania State Trail Advocate

The most significant impact to equestrian trails in Pennsylvania was recent passage of a bill which established Sunday hunting. Prior to this, horses were permitted on designated State Game Land trails only on Sundays during hunting season from the last Saturday in September to the third Saturday in January, and after 1 PM from the second Saturday in April to the last Saturday in May. In 2021, three Sundays were open to hunters. All three were in the month of November. In addition to State Game Lands, equestrian trails are available in thirty State Parks and seventeen State Forests. However, 90% of Pennsylvania State Parks and Forests also permit hunting. While horses are permitted in the Parks and Forests during hunting season there is obvious risk in riding there during this time.

Now that Sunday hunting has been established on three dates during the hunting season, concern is that Sunday hunting will expand to include additional, if not all, Sundays during hunting season. No additional dates were added for 2022, but the species that can be hunted on the existing three dates has been expanded from deer and bear to also include coyotes, foxes and raccoons.

The primary state-wide advocacy group representing equestrian interests is the Pennsylvania Equine Council. Trail support on an organized basis is primarily via "Friends" groups associated with Pennsylvania State Parks and Forests and conservation groups such as the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy. The Horse-Shoe Trail is a 140+ mile pedestrian and equine trail originating in Valley Forge National Park and terminating at the Appalachian Trail north of Harrisburg, PA.

Note: I currently serve on the BOD for the H-ST Conservancy. I am a Section Maintainer and will be taking on additional responsibility as Treasurer in May of this year.

PA AERC members reported trail volunteer hours associated with the Horse-Shoe Trail, Swatara State Park, Noxamixon State Park, Clarence Schock Memorial Park, Green Lane Park, and trails on local private lands.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Vance Stine AERC South Carolina State Trail Advocate

The new CCC Loop trail at Kings Mountain State Park in Blacksburg, SC has attracted new and more riders to the park. This 17 mile trail was built and paid for by volunteers and members of the Friends of Kings Mountain State Park. It was made possible by preserving historic entrance markers to the two CCC Camps that built Kings Mountain State Park and Kings Mountain National Military Park in the late 1930s. This trail was built by volunteers at no cost to the state of South Carolina.

The state is now in the process of putting in a new well at the Kings Mountain State Park Equestrian Campground. When the well is approved by DHEC, the volunteer group (Friends of Kings Mountain State Park) will help install underground power. There is also help and cooperation from York Electric Cooperative to the well and campsites, which are currently primitive. Because of the addition of this new trail, we are able to put on an endurance ride at this location. There has also been equestrian trail work done at Woods Ferry Recreation Area in Union, SC. Woods Ferry is part of the Sumter National Forest, located along the Broad River, and is a great place to ride. Currently there are 8 endurance rides per year held in South Carolina. Established contact with National Park Service in Feb. 2017 to be included in the park planning process for equestrian trails.

TEXAS

Sylvia Sazama AERC Texas State Trail Advocate

The trail that I am most involved with is RICHARDS RAVEN EQUESTRIAN TRAIL, near Huntsville TX. It opened the spring of 2021 and is well used. We now have grant to finish the other 10 miles of it. Ross and Dawn Carrie have also gotten permission to hold an endurance ride there in September. And have confirmed a ride camp on some private land.

Trace Trails private land has held several rides and those trails are now permanently marked, and are kept clear by volunteers several times a year. They held 2 rides there this last year.

Storm Ranch in Dripping Springs has agreed to let us hold an endurance ride there this year. Have not had one there in several years, because of disagreements, but it has been worked out.

John Nowell our photographer, is managing the WHOLE HOG ride again this year at the grasslands.

Texas Tango at 7IL Ranch was held on New Years this year, again there has not been a ride there for a few years so it was good to have it again.

As always the Fants and Parrish families keep the trails open in the Davey Crockett Forest for Unicorn Hunt and Armadillo.

The Heritage Center where the River Run ride is held has added additional parking for more convenience and additional riders, which is great.

Last Hoorah, Racing Stripes and Shanghai Trails all on private ranches is greatly appreciated, and attended by endurance riders.

Quitaque held at Pole Canyon Ranch is a beautiful hilly challenging place to ride, once again well done.

All our ride managers have done an amazing job working with the land owners to accomplish the use of these lands for rides.

VIRGINIA

Nancy Sluys 2022 AERC Virginia State Trail Advocate

See end of the report.

WISCONSIN

Jon Wagner AERC Wisconsin State Trail Advocate

Trail and camping projects are continuing across the state of Wisconsin. The Gov. Dodge State Park in Iowa county (southwest WI) is nearing the completion of their renovation and enlargement of their camping and parking facilities. These improvements make it possible for more and larger trailers to use the park and access the trails. Underdown Trails in north central Wisconsin has begun efforts to update facilities there and continues to improve trail access and availability. The Northern Kettle Moraine Horse Trails Association in conjunction with the DNR has undertaken the goal of installing electricity to all of the remaining camping and service areas of Horse Riders Campground located in New Prospect (southeast WI.) All of these trails host endurance rides during the year and are used extensively by distance riders for training and conditioning.

WYOMING

Bridgett Helms AERC Wyoming State Trail Advocate

I became the state trail advocate in May 2021. I have made contact with the ride managers in our state. I have contacted the Black Hills Backcountry Horseman, which is South Dakota based but the BCH that takes care of my local forest to attend their next work day here. (I am located in the NE corner of the state). I have also contacted my local USFS office regarding trail work here. There were only 3 rides held in our state last year, to date two sanctioned for 2022. I have an email list to spread the word throughout my state members.

Virginia 2021 AERC Trails Report

I just came into this position near the end of 2021, replacing Mary Howell. To give you all a little background, I am the Ride Manager for the Iron Mountain Jubilee Endurance Ride and Ride & Tie in Cripple Creek Virginia in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, a part of the George Washington/Jefferson National Forest. I also manage the Virginia Highlands NATRC Competitive Trail Ride at the same location. Being a strong trail advocate I am also the president of the Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands (BCHVH) who help maintain the trails. Approximately 8 BCHVH members are also AERC members and all are very active on our trail projects. Both rides are benefits for the BCHVH Trail Fund and help generate revenue for trail projects. Although I reside in North Carolina all my trail work is in Virginia and we own the property in Virginia where the Iron Mt. ride is held.

In 2021 we applied for and were awarded a \$15,000.00 matching grant for a 14 mile trail rehab project on the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail. A grant from the Southeast Endurance Riders Association (SERA) also provided a \$1,000.00 of the matching portion of the grant. The remainder of the match was achieved through donations from the 2 rides and the surrounding community. The project was entirely conceived and carried out by BCHVH with the blessings of the US Forest Service and took place throughout 2021. The project was hugely successful, even being awarded a prestigious Regional Foresters Honors Award in Region 8 of the National Forest Service. A number of AERC members had a hand in the project including Joe Stump, our excavator operator, and Alex Uspenski, owner of AK Trails LLC, who was our hired contractor. The project repaired a severely damaged section of the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail and several connectors, all of which are used on the Iron Mountain Jubilee Endurance Ride. BCHVH logged 2209 volunteer hours on this project alone and a total of 3309 hours for 2021. The skills I gained through the Trail Master Certification Program made the planning and execution of this project possible and also strengthens our credibility with the Forest Service. The George Washington/Jefferson National Forest is just beginning to discuss its future trails strategy and with my good connection with the Forest Service at a local and regional level I will be on the ground floor of the conversation.

The Old Dominion organization is the other endurance entity operating in Virginia and they are also very active on the trails and have a great relationship with the Forest Service (also George Washington/Jefferson National Forest). Their big project for the year was re-opening the iconic Indian Graves Trail after a rock slide closed it a few years back. A crew headed up by Pete Godwin hauled heavy equipment up on the mountain and camped out for several days to get the job done. With sledge hammers, hammer drills and sheer grit they smashed the rocks that were blocking the trail and made the passage safer than it had ever been before.

I am happy to take on this position and hope that I can have a positive influence on trail maintenance, issues and planning in the state of Virginia in the name of AERC.

Happy trails!

Nancy Sluys - M17009

Indian Graves Trail after repair

