

DRAFT
Kingdom Heritage Lands
Equestrian Corridor Management Proposal

Submitted by:

Vermont Horse Council
VHC

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I. Introduction and History

In 1999, the State of Vermont, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Timber Company (now owned by Weyerhaeuser), the Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Land Trust combined efforts to conserve and manage approximately 130,000 acres of Essex County timberland once owned by Champion International Paper, Co. The complex arrangement protected the timber, wildlife and recreational values of the land while ensuring that the public would be able to continue, in perpetuity, such uses as hunting, fishing and dispersed recreation. The planning process for the newly conserved lands also required all 'corridor-based' recreation uses such as bicycling, snowmobiling, horseback riding and hiking be managed by designated Corridor Managers.

Since 2003, the Vermont Horse Council (VHC) has successfully managed equestrian use on over 100 miles of trails across Vermont, including as designated Corridor Manager of the Kingdom Heritage Lands. VHC joins other organizations engaged in corridor-based recreation management in the Kingdom Heritage Lands:

- Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) for snowmobile use
- CRAG-VT for rock climbing
- NorthWoods Stewardship Center for hiking use

Following approval as corridor manager for equestrian use in 2003, and again in 2015, VHC manages a modest system of equestrian trails, primarily on the West Mountain WMA, Weyerhaeuser timberlands, and adjacent properties south of Vermont Route 105. The system, comprised of marked routes on gravel surface roads and two designated parking and overnight camping areas, is an extension of the VHC trail system in Victory basin.

Presently, VHC is proposing to consolidate and improve its existing equestrian riding network while adding a small number of modest riding loops. Additional improvements to the existing parking/camping areas, and the development of a previously proposed parking area in East Haven at the southern extent of the KHL corridor.

II. Background and Qualifications

The VHC is a volunteer 501c3 non-profit organization established in 1975 whose mission is to unite, support and promote all aspects of equine sport throughout Vermont and provide information on the VT equine industry. The equestrian sport supports equine owners and businesses; single horse owners, multiple horse owners, competitive and non-competitive riders and drivers, farmers, boarding facilities, stables, feed stores, tack shops, independent businesses, clinicians and various veterinary care.

VHC has a long and distinguished history as an organization and celebrated 50 years of active membership in 2025. The organization invites diversity and values collaboration with other groups such as Green Mountain Horse Association, VAST, Vermont Trails & Greenways and the American Horse Council.

Horses have always been an important aspect of Vermont's heritage, where open land and trail access has played a key role in the VT landscape and recreation. VHC and FPR have partnered under a Cooperative Agreement throughout Vermont whose key aim is to use and develop equine friendly multi-use trails in state-owned parks and forests. This Agreement includes trail access, parking & camping opportunities in Groton State Park, Willoughby State Forest, Victory State Forest and Coolidge State Forest. VHC has recently partnered with the US Forest Service to fund a multi-use connecting trail in Addison County.

The VHC mission is accomplished by the successful efforts of the volunteer organization to offer educational seminars, support youth programs & county equestrian activities, maintain a legislative voice, work with private landowners, develop a statewide trail system, and provide ongoing information pertaining to VT equestrian trails. VHC maintains a Vermont Equine Directory, offers a statewide equestrian road & trail safety campaign, and maintains a newsletter and an active website with articles of interest to Vermont horse enthusiasts.

In addition to being financially member supported, VHC has received grants for trail networks and equestrian education (e.g. from the Department of Agriculture, US Forest Service, local town(s)) works with other clubs hosting and sponsoring events, holds fund raisers, and aids in equestrian disaster relief & rescue situations-

III. Vision and Goals

VHC is committed to providing equestrians with an opportunity to explore Vermont's wild lands while respecting their natural resources. Mostly utilizing existing roads and skid trails within the Kingdom Heritage Lands, VHC believes equestrians can co-exist with other recreational groups and have little impact on the land & wildlife.

With a philosophy of working together, **committee VHC** members believe that the greater the diversity of interests (hiking, riding, biking, hunting, skiing and snowmobiling), the more effective VHC can be in organizing and maintaining trails. As more and more land is developed, posted and made off limits to

outdoor enthusiasts the need and obligation to join & collaborate with other groups to maintain areas for recreational use becomes an unmeasurable value of land stewardship.

The main objective of the VHC is to establish a series of trails and associated facilities that are limited in scale, to the greatest extent utilizing existing corridors and connecting the Kingdom Heritage Lands with other nearby public lands. VHC has established working relationships with surrounding landowners, ANR and other recreational user groups and is committed to managing equestrian routes in the Kingdom Heritage Lands so that equestrian access can be successfully developed and maintained.

The goals of the VHC **Equestrian Equestrian** Corridor Management Plan include:

1. Provide corridor-based access for equestrians on the Kingdom Heritage Lands and adjacent public and private conserved lands.
2. Provide and manage trail facilities such as trail heads, parking, campsites, and signs that will facilitate safe and sustainable equestrian access and foster public education, stewardship, and the protection of cultural and natural resources.
3. Engage Kingdom Heritage Lands partners and other interested groups and stakeholders in planning and projects to support shared goals of multi-use trails.

IV. Management Considerations

The Vermont Horse Council recognizes there are a variety of management considerations that will require thoughtful planning and close cooperation with partners to ensure success. The following considerations will influence the provision and management of equestrian access:

- Need for management and on-going maintenance
- Focus on safety and stewardship
- Educate users about riding opportunities
- Acknowledge the need to respect and conserve wildlife and their habitats
- Respect and collaborate with other users
- Preserve wild and remote characteristics/setting
- Quiet and passive nature of use
- Variety of length, destinations, loops, and linkages
- Forest management easement is primary (over public access) and routes may be closed or relocated, when necessary
- Engage community and volunteers
- Foster connections between/across conservation lands
- Support local communities and recreation economy where possible.

V. Present Conditions

At the present time, VHC manages approximately 24 miles of roads and trails used by equestrians on West Mountain WMA and approximately 12 miles on Weyerhaeuser timberlands. These routes are situated primarily on gravel surface roads and shared with other users. Additionally, VHC manages two parking areas in West Mountain WMA that also serve as designated campsites; one located at the

north end of South America Pond Road and the other near the junction of the Paul Stream and Maidstone Lake Roads which is shared with VAST (both are shared with hunters in the off-season).

The present configuration includes the following designated routes:

- South America Pond Road (Ferdinand)
- Paul Stream Road (Ferdinand/Maidstone)
- A short section of Madison Brook Road (Ferdinand)
- Maidstone Lake Road (Maidstone)
- West Lake Road (Maidstone)
- Notch Pond Road (Brunswick)
- Portions of Jimmy's Road and VELCO Road (Ferdinand)
- Granby Stream Road (Granby/Ferdinand)
- Stoney Brook Road (Granby)
- Line Brook Road (East Haven/Granby)
- Radar/Moccasin Mill/John Irwin Road (Victory/Granby/East Haven)

VHC will prioritize maintenance of and access to the existing Kingdom Heritage Land (KHL) equestrian trail system by monitoring and improving signage, coordinating with partners and landowners to monitor and maintain roads, culverts, and bridges, and providing access and stewardship information to the equine community.

VI. Implementation

The Vermont Horse Council has evaluated the roads and trails on the Kingdom Heritage Lands with ANR for the purpose of managing an equestrian trail system on the properties. VHC has attempted to identify corridors that currently create loop trails or corridors that could easily be connected by developing short segments of new trail. The two properties that currently have designated equestrian trails, and are being proposed for continued use, are the West Mountain Wildlife Management Area and the Weyerhaeuser Timberlands. The USFWS has stated they would consider connector equestrian trails that provided access to other ownerships but would likely not designate large or stand-alone trails. No trails have been or are proposed for the USFWS property or any lands north of Vermont Route 105.

In addition to the 36 miles of existing horse trails (24 at West Mountain, 12 at Weyerhaeuser), VHC will utilize Town of Granby Legal Trails to connect the Private Timberlands to West Mountain WMA, and to connect with equestrian trails in the Victory Management Unit.

VHC proposes adding the following routes (totaling approximately 35 miles):

- Conehead Loop: Conehead Road to VAST 142 to South America Pond Road Loop- West Mtn WMA/WH, Ferdinand (approx. 5 miles)
- South America Loop: South America Pond Road to VELCO to VAST 142 Loop- West Mtn WMA, Ferdinand (approx. 5.5 miles)
- Ferdinand Loop: South America Pond Road to VELCO- West Mtn WMA, Ferdinand (approx. 8

miles)

- Maidstone Loop: Westside Road to VAST F98 to Paul Stream Road- West Mtn, Ferdinand/Maidstone (approx. 8 miles)

Other Potential Routes include:

- Maidstone Lake Loop: Maidstone Lake Road/ Maidstone SP/Westside Road (VAST F98A)- WH/Maidstone SP/West Mtn WMA (approx. 8 miles)

VII. Management Actions

As with any recreational trail network the level of use is a key concern. Currently, the level of use appears to be low enough that user and resource impacts are minimal, but sufficient to warrant continued maintenance of the trail system. The amount of time needed to maintain the facilities for equestrian users is another concern. General maintenance includes signage, camping/parking area monitoring, monitoring for illegal trail use and evaluating potential user conflicts and taking corrective actions. These management activities will be performed by VHC volunteers & assigned stewards to the greatest extent possible.

Detailed descriptions of management actions are provided below.

a. Parking/Camping Areas

As indicated on the attached Map, there are 2 parking/overnight areas existing currently, one at the northern end of South America Pond Road and one near the junction of the Paul Stream and Maidstone Lake Roads. An additional day parking area- previously approved but not established- is proposed for the area of John Irwin and Stony Brook Roads, to provide access to the southern section of the trail network .

Parking areas will utilize existing clearings and log landings and be large enough for horse trailers and trucks to maneuver and park on level ground. The area would provide space for 3-4 truck/trailer units and accommodate both overnight and day use parking for equestrians. Areas will be constructed from existing log landings, with the following improvements:

Hitching posts will be constructed of 2 pressure treated or cedar posts 6" to 8" in diameter spaced 8 Feet apart with a 6" cross bar on the top. Hitching lines made of rope or cable strung between posts or trees may also be used for this purpose.

Manure beds made with logs aid in the organic composting process and are a technique that many equestrian facilities use. They will be constructed of two 12" logs that are 10 feet long, laying parallel approximately 8 feet apart with another 12" log closing them at one end. The bed will be located in an area that is absent of water flow and isolated from the rest of the facilities. They will be emptied or composted annually or more frequently, if needed.

Moldering privies will be constructed to manage human waste and will include a two-bin above ground system with a privy. The active bin is utilized by the privy while the inactive bin is left to compost. Composted waste is disposed of and the privy is moved to the alternate bin to renew the process.

Picnic tables and **fire pits** will be placed at sites to contain visitor impacts.

b. **Signs**

Signs will be installed at major trail heads and in locations where horses are not allowed. Signs will have numbers that correspond to numbers on the equestrian trail map and recorded with E911. Signs prohibiting horses will be posted with the same construction technique and contain a plastic trail sign that would indicate “no horses”. Signs will be mounted on pressure-treated posts with a small plastic 4 X 4 horse trail sign on the top (similar to VAST trail signs). There are trail directional arrows on plastic signs. Signs will be collocated with VAST or other trail/road signs, where possible, to minimize aesthetic impacts. Small signs may be placed on trees, as needed.

c. **Trail Closure**

VHC will provide online information related to the seasonal closure of trails, consistent with opening of roads in the spring, after mud season, and in the fall when conflicts **with** hunting activities would increase. Information will **be** posted on the VHC website, ANR website, and at www.TrailFinder.info. Accordingly, VHC expects the KHL equestrian trails to be open annually between Memorial Day (approx. June 1) through October 15 (approx. start of moose season). Dates are subject to change.

Additionally, VHC will coordinate with VT ANR, Weyerhaeuser, the other landowners to ensure the safety of equestrians during active timber harvests and road maintenance activities. This may require the closure and/or relocation of some routes to reduce use conflicts.

d. **Management/Membership**

Vermont Horse Council has taken on the responsibility of managing the equestrian trails in the Kingdom Heritage Lands. VHC will maintain a line item in their annual budget designated to the expenses incurred as a corridor manager.

Income is generated from VHC individual & business membership fees, trail donations and sponsors. The financial standings, trail income and membership numbers are available to the Agency of Natural Resources, if needed. VHC may at various times apply for funding from area foundations as well as state and federal Recreation Trails Funds.

Active members can acquire information on trail etiquette & guidelines for users, information

on stewardship and trail access information through the VHC website (vthorsecouncil.org).

e. Outreach and Education

Information about the equestrian KHL trails will be provided by VHC. Current members of VHC will receive notification when trails are approved and will be given contact information.

f. Collaboration and Communication

Vermont Horse Council is committed to collaborating with all other corridor managers as well as users of the trail system. It is the philosophy of VHC that horses, bicycles, hikers, etc. can co-exist and that healthy communication is the key to the success of multi-use trails. After multiple years of managing the equestrian trails of the KHL, VHC has found that very few problems have materialized. Part of our membership plan includes educating equestrians on multi-use trail etiquette and road safety as well as low impact camping.

Members of VHC have met with individuals from VAST and believe that there is a spirit of collaboration between corridor managers that will strengthen the area for all trail users. VHC is willing to share expenses and labor of any joint trails or parking areas. The latest collaboration was in 2025 with Lunenburg Polar Bears with a member matching fund drive to help finance a shared trail upgrade.

VHC is a statewide organization that includes members clubs from the Northeast Kingdom and surrounding counties. VHC has experienced trail managers that are ready to assume local leadership roles, including monitoring and site inspections and communicating with VT Forest, Parks & Rec, Agency of Natural Resources and other corridor managers on a regular basis.

VHC will develop a communication plan to inform users about trail conditions, active timber operations, and other potential disruptions to route access. Particular emphasis will be placed on safety considerations when encountering vehicles, logging/forest operation equipment, and bicycles.

g. Safety

VHC has the goal to promote safe, sustainable riding on the Kingdom Heritage Lands by providing equestrians with the information they need and land managers with a point of contact to help communicate with the user group. Many areas of the Kingdom Heritage Lands, including those managed by the Vermont Horse Council, lack cellular phone service and VHC will communicate the need for awareness, preparation, and self-reliance in areas where other traffic and/or visitors are unavailable to assist in the case of an emergency. **Riders will be instructed to call or text 911 for emergencies, providing last known location to the dispatcher.**

VHC will provide safety information to riders through a variety of means:

- Online maps and user information on the Vermont Horse Council website Home –

<https://vthorsecouncil.org>

- On-site maps and signage
- On-site kiosks at parking and camping areas
- Coordination with KHL partners, as appropriate (particularly in the event of timber management and road maintenance activities).

Equestrians, bicyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles currently share the majority of secondary roads in the State of Vermont. Horses are familiar with these users and have been co-existing with them for decades. All VHC members are encouraged to familiarize their horse to these users annually.

VHC has produced a Public Service Announcement (PSA) in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and the University of Vermont Extension Service in an effort to provide non-equestrians education about for rider safety. VHC has been a leader in the horse industry in Vermont holding statewide meetings that address safety issues, producing articles, as well as booklets that address safety concerns. Vermont driver's education classes incorporate horses and carriages as a 'vulnerable user'.

h. Reporting

VHC will provide annual reports to ANR, which will distribute them to each of the Kingdom Heritage Lands landowners and partners to describe trail conditions and maintenance efforts. Landowners are asked to notify FPR and the Vermont Horse Council immediately of trail changes as needed (especially planned forestry operations), trail damage observed, and other concerns. Reports should be sent to the St Johnsbury District Outdoor Recreation Specialist (presently, Luke O'Brien).

VHC representatives will meet in person with KHL Partners once a year, to plan, discuss and evaluate equestrian trail corridors on the KHL, and will notify ANR of each planned maintenance operation on the lands.