

EQUINE LAND ADVOCACY – A BEST PRACTICE FOR EQUINE ACCESS

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What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is, in basic sense, the act of publically speaking, writing or recommending on behalf of or in support of an idea, action, cause, policy or proposal. It can also be, specifically, helping persons to achieve their needs in terms of rights. There is even an Advocacy charter, but we won’t get into that here. We’re going to talk about advocating for what your equine community needs, and how to do it.

For horsemen and women, access to horse lands, facilities and trails is a cause to be passionate about. But for the average equestrian (that would be us) participating in finding solutions to local issues is not only disagreeable but rather dreadful. We have better things to do.

Some issues, however, will pop up that will require a greater effort on your part especially if you are about to lose equine access in some form. You need information. You need the support of fellow equestrians, and that will most likely come from an organization that already has their antennae up (ears pricked?) about this issue. But don’t expect others to do everything. Go ahead and join, attend their functions and fundraisers, or participate in planned public input meetings or demonstrations.

What to do if there is no existing organization? Form your own. When things in your community are not working for the benefit of the horses, people or activities that you care about, it’s time to take the Bull by the Horns, or the Tiger by the Tail. Sorry, couldn’t resist. Remember that advocacy is not a quick fix, band aid solution. It is a long term commitment. Once you achieve equine access, your access needs to be protected in order to keep it.

Here are some things you need to know for effective advocacy:

1. Step One, Learning:

- a. Find out what the benefits horses bring to your community and region.
- b. Get to Know what the issues are that affect your cause. You’ll want to check local media publications and with planning offices and documents such as zoning regulations (ordinances) and comprehensive plans.
- c. Realize that issues may stand alone, such as manure on trails. Others may be offshoots of other local issues, such a lack of trails for everyone to use.
- d. Explore the policies and regulations that local public land managers are required to follow.
- e. Find the basic information available in your community about land stewardship and best management practices for soil and water protection.
- f. Seek out the language of other laws and regulations regarding land use and recreation.

Basic Best Practices for Effective Equine Advocacy Organizations:

- Learning
- Listening
- Talking
- Acting
- Partnering

- g. Find out who the decision makers in your community are, and how local ordinances and regulations are created.
- h. Find out what current re-zoning, development and other projects are going through the zoning or development review process, and how you can provide input. This is where your informed organization can play a big role and provide support, or lead.
- i. Every organization should be prepared for dealing with local issues and should have a committee or other component that can work in advocacy.

2. Step two, Listening:

- a. Find out who the stakeholders in your cause are, both for and against. These might include other equine groups, elected or appointed officials, land and nature conservation groups, other recreationists (who may be users of the trails you ride), private landowners, public land managers, parks and recreation departments and other government agencies, people in the community that are enthusiastic (or not!) about horse activities, and those who design, develop and sell land.
- b. Get an idea of the economic impact and other benefits that horses provide in your community.
- c. Learn which of the user and advocacy groups in your community or region would be good to collaborate with, and which have issues with your cause.

3. Step three, Talk: Create Relationships

- a. Use the information you have gleaned about the impacts and benefits of horses and any specific statistics that may have been reported as talking points to use with both decision makers and others interested in your cause.
- b. Learn how to communicate with different user groups and agencies, using facts and statistics gleaned about recreational riding and the horse industry from authentic research.
- c. Work with other groups to form coalitions.
- d. Create communication opportunities between everyone working toward the same outcome and for others to state their case. Be cognizant that all user needs should be addressed, not just your own.
- e. Repeat.



Photo New Jersey Horse Council

What Organizations Do

Most of us have been a member of an organization of some sort during our lifetimes, and our experiences tell us that we have a good idea of what they are about. Let's just say that organizations are groups of people who come together for a particular purpose with these intentions:

1. Understanding their overall purpose for forming the organization – it's mission;
2. Working within the group to identify their goals, and the objectives (actions) that the organization's members might utilize to achieve the goals;
3. Communicating with outside entities (individuals, agencies, etc.) to give and receive information and input;
4. Creating a strategic plan, which is a plan of action to carry out their goals and fundraising actions;
5. Implement the fundraising plan;
6. Implementing their project plan of action.

The Horse community needs to participate in planning, zoning and monitoring change.

Advocacy organizations are usually agents of change, or at least attempts to change the way things are in an area of interest or a community. It takes a lot of work and commitment for the long haul.

Equine advocacy organizations are highly varied, depending on what they are trying to accomplish. For some groups, such as local trail organizations or clubs, the goals might be centered around the social aspect of horses, including scheduled trail rides and announcing basic trail behaviors that must be followed to a) be a member of the 'club', and b) ride on the trail system overseen by the club.

Other advocacy organizations might be more concerned with adding or maintaining horse trails facilities in their local area. In this case, the horse community needs to participate at an active level in local planning and zoning, and monitoring or advocating for horse-friendly legislation. In more imminent circumstances, an equine-based advocacy group might be formed to spur major changes regarding land use, zoning for horses and/or the inclusion of horse facilities in comprehensive plans and on public land.

At a more in-depth level of advocacy, an individual or group might be doing legislative research and hire or perform lobbying to ensure that local, state and federal regulations are protective of and favorable to the equine and overall local communities, and perhaps the horse industry itself.



Photo Courtesy NRCS

Types of Equine Advocacy Organizations and What They Have Accomplished

Let's talk about three levels of equine-based organizations that have had or are having success in advocating for horses in their local communities – and beyond.

Advocacy by Recreational Riding Groups



Photo Courtesy ETA

Equestrian Trail Advocacy (ETA) is a group in Louisville, Kentucky that came about as a result of the equestrian trail situation in the Louisville/Jefferson County area. When a new trail system, the 100 mile Louisville Loop, was proposed by a private entity/city consortium, equestrian trails were discussed at public meetings and seemed to be a 'sure thing'. The equestrians went home with the verbal assurance that their trails would be included in further planning and implementation. They were wrong.

Because the equestrians did not formalize an action group that would monitor trail planning, funding and development, their needs went unmet. Other user groups were more active in establishing their trails, impeding the development of

equestrian trails. Not only were equestrian trails not included in the overall master plan, but some existing trails and facilities in area parks were lost to other users.

ELCR received a request for assistance, and aided area horsemen in establishing a new 501 (c) 3 (non-profit) organization, Equestrian Trail Advocacy, with a group of committed horse enthusiasts at the lead. Their mission is to advocate for equestrian trails and equine land, both in the county and in surrounding counties; to inform the equestrian community of their actions and include them where possible; to work with private and public agencies to follow through on equestrian trail needs, and to master plan specific projects and fundraise to form a base for implementation dollars.

In its early stages, the group is working to establish itself as the go-to trails organization for the area, draw in new members and volunteers, and identify potential equestrian trails projects. With the use of a webpage, social media and co-sponsored events, ETA is attracting attention and volunteers. With ELCR's assistance the group will perform strategic planning to more firmly set their course for the next few years and receive input from stakeholders. See www.equinetrailadvocates.org for more information.



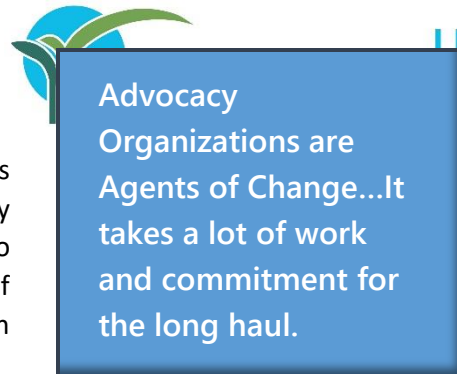


Twin Oaks Valley Equestrian Association, San Marcos, California was established in 2004 in response to development that was causing conflicts with horse lands and activities. TOVEA's mission is to "To dedicate ourselves to preserving the rural and equestrian lifestyle of the Twin Oaks Valley and surrounding communities." Their objectives include "Equine Education and Advocacy, Horse Park and Trail System, Equine Emergency Response and Community-Business Partnership". TOVEA has effectively prevented loss of equine trail miles, lobbied to save open land from development, has developed the "Twin Oaks Valley Community Trails and Pathways Plan" in conjunction with the County, and just recently, is monitoring several new

development plans that have been submitted for approval. See [www. http://www.keepitequestrian.org/](http://www.keepitequestrian.org/) for more information.

Advocacy by Horse and Nature Organization Coalitions

The Greenwell Foundation operates in Green State Park, Hollywood, Maryland. Their organization provides a great example of a working partnership between government and private entities – the Foundation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The Foundation's mission is to provide outdoor recreational opportunities to all community members. The nonprofit organization partners with MDNR to manage the park and programs but doesn't receive funding of any kind through that agency, rather fundraising through private means.



Interestingly, equestrian activities, including trail rides, lessons in riding and driving, and therapeutic riding programs are a big part of the activities that are offered with the support of the Foundation as part of their daily and Adventure Camp activities. They are one of 35 Horse Discovery Centers as a part of the Maryland Horse Industry Board. In addition, the Foundation offers Nature Explorers programming. See <http://greenwellfoundation.org/> for more information.



The Caledonia Conservancy in Racine, Wisconsin is a truly workable example of how a land trust can be established and its benefits. After gathering a group of equestrians in 1994 and working to protect open space and trails, the group came to understand that the "analysis and goal-setting" involved in the planning process, and achieving formal non-profit and accredited land trust status was

"worth the effort and expense in the long-run. Organizers of new trusts should be prepared for a steep learning curve that includes methods to protect land, tax deduction strategies, fundraising expertise, computer skills, database management, plan making, writing and speaking skills." (From ELCR's article *The Caledonia Conservancy*, see <https://elcr.org/the-caledonia-conservancy/>)

"Sometimes, in an effort to act with haste, what gets lost is planning. Eventually, this can become debilitating." – Wendy McCalvy, first president of the Caledonia Conservancy.

Committees were formed to include trail management and maintenance, acquisition of park land, finance, insurance, grants and fundraising. A government liaison was present at government meetings “to keep the Conservancy apprised of planning and development, and often providing a ‘first alert’ of impending land loss.”

What they gained, in the long-run, is many faceted. The Conservancy has purchased or obtained easements on five natural areas that offer nature education, thirty miles of equestrian trails, cross-country skiing, walking trails, geocaching and other activities that benefit schools and the community as a whole.

Advocacy and Funding Through Statewide Conservation and Planning Agencies

Local equine advocacy organizations might wish or need to partner with larger organizations to perform advocacy. Here are some examples of conservation organizations and agencies that work on statewide bases and can form these partnerships when needed, adding their experience to local knowledge.

Florida Conservation Group works to conserve natural and agricultural lands (including horse lands). They promote and implement land protection projects, and provide private landowner conservation incentives. The Florida Conservation Group advocates for land protection through several state and federal funding programs, including:

Florida Forever is the state land acquisition program, managed through the Division of State Lands (DSL). The program purchases properties with high conservation value, purchasing both land outright and conservation easements on land. DSL often forms partnership arrangements with water management districts and county governments on conservation land acquisition.



*1 Equestrians enjoying access to Florida trails and open land.
Photo Courtesy Florida Forever.*

The Forest Legacy Program, managed by the Florida Forest Service and overseen by the U.S. Forest Service, is involved in the protection of forests that are threatened by development in order to maintain their economic value. Partnerships with county and state government are common to help with funding. The program works mostly through the acquisition of conservation easements, though some outright purchases of land have been made.

The associated programs that are funded through federal sources and utilized to protect open land, natural environments and water quality are here:

<http://floridaconserve.org/land-conservation/>

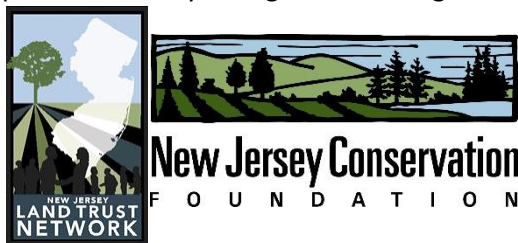
New York State Conservation Partnership Program is a partnership between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), a non-profit land conservation organization. According to the program website, \$2.25 million will be awarded to New York land trusts in 2019 to strengthen “urban, rural and suburban land conservation and public outreach programs, build community partnerships and implement best business practices.” The partnership serves as a “model for leveraging public and private funding for communities in their efforts to advance open space, farmland preservation, and resource conservation goals,” in fulfillment of the goals of the 2016 New York State Open Space Plan.



The NYS Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) funds the grants each year. Land Trust alliance manages the NYSCPP “in coordination with DEC.” To date, and since 2002, the Program has given grants to over 80 of the state’s land trusts. That’s \$17.2 million with an additional \$19 million from local governments and private donors. This means that local communities have been able to place conservation easements on nearly 30,000 acres of open space, including “farmland, wildlife habitat, recreation areas and open space, also bringing dollars and jobs to local economies.”

2019 grants were awarded in these categories: Professional Development, Conservation Catalyst, Conservation Transaction, Stewardship and Resource Management, and Conservation Capacity & Excellence. For additional information, click here: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/48901.html>

New Jersey Conservation Foundation is a land trust whose mission is to preserve New Jersey’s land and natural resources for the benefit of all. The group was founded in 1960 in response to Port Authority of NY and NJ plans to build a large airport in the middle of the Great Swamp near Morristown. The fight for protection of this critical watershed lead to the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The Foundation partners directly with government agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection Green



Acres Program and NJ Water Supply Authority to protect open space. The Foundation uses their lobbying and advocacy expertise to protect and conserve land statewide, partnering with many land trust organizations, conservancies, coalitions and other foundations. (where does quote end?)

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation protects both natural and farm land, by acquiring and stewarding the properties, working with other agencies to help protect water quality and additional resources. 120,000 acres of threatened natural and farm land has been preserved since the Foundation’s beginnings.

The Hill & Dale and Franklin Parker Preserves maintain equestrian access, and several horse farms have been protected through conservation easements. The Foundation recognizes the importance of the horse, which is the state animal of New Jersey, as an economic engine, contributor to the wellbeing of New Jersey residents, and on the forefront of open space preservation. For additional information visit <http://njconservation.org/>.

Conclusion

Just as there are many issues that arise to threaten the equestrian way of life and access to equine land, facilities and trails, there are just as many opportunities to partner with local and state level government agencies, conservancies, land trusts and other organizations to work toward resolving land and trail issues in your local community and have a positive outcome. It's up to local equine community members to take the steps required to have your voices heard and to protect the places and spaces that serve the need for equine activities and horse-keeping.

About the Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR): *The Equine Land Conservation Resource is the only national not-for-profit organization advancing the conservation of land for horse-related activity. ELCR serves as an information resource and clearinghouse for land and horse owners on issues related to equine land conservation, land use planning, land stewardship/best management practices, trails, liability and equine economic development. For more information about the ELCR visit our website at www.elcr.org or call (859)455-8383.*

