

THE RESOURCE



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE EQUINE LAND CONSERVATION RESOURCE

Trail Protection Easements Part I: What are They and Why Should Landowners Want One?

By Dot Moyer for Equine Land Conservation Resource

This article is part one of a three-part series of articles by Dot Moyer on trail easements.

A Trail Protection Easement is a legal grant by a landowner to a trail association, conservation group, neighborhood association, or some other entity permitting the use of designated trail(s) on the landowner’s property. The easement can have many different conditions and restrictions, but its main purpose is to protect the trail and access to permitted people/ organizations from being arbitrarily closed in the future. This article explores the benefits to landowners of protecting their trails with an easement.

Working on trail easements for many years, I’ve found that the first question landowners have is why should they “give up” anything? And won’t it make their property harder to sell? Well, as a landowner with easements on all my trails, it turns out that trail protection easements provide many benefits to landowners, including the following:

- A rare and valuable amenity like an easement-protected trail system dramatically increases property value and marketability. This applies to both equestrian and non-equestrian properties. In my area, realtors call it our “beachfront property,” and estimate an approximate 30% increase in land value for that access.

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Photo Courtesy of the Piedmont Environmental Council and Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

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- Trail protection easements provide land use stability, protecting the integrity of the trail system for the future. This attracts new equestrian usage to “grow” into contiguous areas, increasing equestrian recreational opportunities—and value.
- Easement-protected trails assure landowners’ use of trails outside of their own property boundaries, making all connecting properties more desirable. Comparing trails to a golf course, who wants to play only on the hole they adjoin when everyone can play on the whole course if they cooperate? (That analogy persuaded a non-horseman developer creating an equestrian community who did not understand why owners would want to share when they already had their own 20 acres to ride on.)
- Landowners in my home trail system with easement-protected trails have reciprocal membership rights with another local system, giving them otherwise unavailable riding opportunities. Networks of “sister” systems can provide great benefits to landowners personally and as an amenity to their land.
- Protected trails strengthen a trail organization’s ability to create stability and certainty in planning trail investments and expansion, which benefits all users. Designing the system around protected trails helps the trail organization persuade other landowners to protect their trails to access these benefits.
- Buyers WANT trails under easement. They are looking for stability and protection in making a big investment. Even non-riding landowners protect trails because they want to keep the character, open space, and bucolic rural environment of the area for their quality of life. (In my home trail system, 75% of the landowners do not ride!)

NOTE: Before you start talking about trail protection easements with landowners, understand that that is the culmination, not the beginning, of the discussion. There must first be a community of perceived interest, trust among stakeholders, and a functioning organization to hold the easement. Building a solid foundation is essential to eventual success in obtaining landowner support. While some equestrian developments include easements as they develop, most areas will need to create their system from a patchwork of individual properties and will need to organize to do so. There are many resources to help with the creation of trail organizations on the Equine Land Conservation Resource website at www.elcr.org

Easements are legal documents governed by state law. This article is not intended to provide legal advice or to imply that any examples given would work under all state laws.

Obtain professional legal advice about relevant state laws and appropriate documentation.

In addition to the benefit to landowners, everyone in the community benefits from a vibrant horse culture:

- Horses need land, and properly sized horse farms promote low density and open space and a better quality of life for everyone.
- If the trails disappear, many horse people will move, and their large acreage will be subdivided for higher-density development. This will inevitably bring sprawl, traffic, and higher taxes to pay for community services and the required new infrastructure. Protected trails will help maintain rural character.
- Children (and everyone else) benefit from open space, nature, and access to animals and farms.
- Our Horses Mean Business! According to the American Horse Council’s 2023 Economic Impact Study, the equine industry in the U.S. supports more than 1.3 million direct jobs and adds \$74 billion in direct value to the national economy. Other economic benefits include tourism, events, and the production of agricultural products. Equestrian farms directly support the local agricultural economy, family farms, and rural life

And, of course, the most important reason of all: the future. No Land, No Horse. Protecting land for the future protects the horse community and equestrian recreation, rural land conservation, and a disappearing way of life. It helps preserve our communities.

Landowners can’t control everything, but protecting our own land is something we each CAN do. Preserving our trails with easements is an important step to success and is a win-win for everyone.

Thanks to our corporate friend:



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Spotlight on the Trails Safe Passing Plan

The Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) is an educational initiative created by Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council (RFVHC) President Karin Reid Offield and the Michigan Trails Advisory Council Equestrian Representative (MTAC) Jenny Cook in 2023 to elevate trail safety and the overall shared trail experience.

TSSP serves as a safety action plan urging trail users to stop, speak and stand back when encountering horseback riders on the trail. The initiative was developed to promote trail safety by helping all trail users understand that horses, as prey animals, can naturally be afraid of unfamiliar people and objects and can respond to potential threats with a “flight” survival instinct, preferring to move their feet towards an exit route. Responding to the dramatic increase in outdoor recreational activity since COVID, ELCR has promoted the TSSP and other regional trail safety initiatives to promote proper trail etiquette and safety. The TSSP is a good model because it promotes a better understanding of the special needs of horses and their riders and what all trail users should do when encountering them on the trail.

Both Karin Reid Offield and Jenny Cook say they are thrilled with the response to the TSSP initiative and thank ELCR for helping them get the word out about this important trail education initiative. The following quotes are just a few examples of how well TSSP has been received since the safety action plan was rolled out in the spring of 2023 in an American Trails webinar:

- “We will use the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back on welcome info boards at the trail head parking lots throughout the 6,900-acre White River Area Pines Point Recreation Area.” –*USFS Baldwin Ranger Station Huron and Manistee National Forests, Michigan*
- “There have been increasing conflicts between horse users and other trail users on shared use trails. Your trail sign, QR codes and PowerPoint would educate trail users and raise awareness of how to respond when approaching or being approached by equestrians and horse and wagon users on trails.” –*The Provenance of Alberta, Canada*
- “These RFVHC signs offer practical information on how to behave around horses rather than simply stating yielding rules (triangle signs).” –*TriCities Horsemen’s Association, Martinez, California*
- “We have a new trail system being developed, and education is needed. Many of the trail users are not familiar with what ‘yield’ means. Your trail sign is GENIUS.” –*Back Country Horsemen of Blue Ridge, North Carolina*

For more information on the Trails Safe Passing Plan and to download signage, please go to <http://rfvhorsecouncil.org/trails-safe-passing-plan-tspp.html>



EQUINE LAND CONSERVATION RESOURCE

**Please Remember
The Trails Safe Passing Plan
Stop! Speak and Stand Back**

**Stop! Speak
Stand Back
Yield To**

STOP:
Horses are prey animals and naturally can be afraid of unfamiliar people and objects. People with horses should pass at a walk while other trail users remain STOPPED, until passed. When approaching horses from behind, please STOP! SPEAK to announce your location and pass slowly when the people with horses are prepared. STOPPING allows TIME for everyone to prepare for safe trail passing.

SPEAK:
Please ANNOUNCE your presence.
Please SAY “Hi” when we pass by.
Speaking helps horses identify you as a person and will help keep them calm.

STAND BACK:
Please STAND BACK with your whole group on the same side of the trail.
Please contain children and dogs.
Please do not hide or stand behind a tree, as these actions may cause horses to fear you are a predator planning an attack.

SMILE:
Enjoy the safe, happy trails! Please contact the Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council for the use of the Stop! Speak and Stand Back sign at: RFVHC.Colorado@gmail.com

EQUINE PLACES AND SPACES

REBORN: Northville Downs, Plymouth Township, Michigan

Established in the early 1940s, Northville Downs was the oldest horse racing track, and only remaining nighttime harness racing track, in Michigan. The current site was sold in 2018 to Hunter Pasteur Homes, and the track was allowed to lease the property until its final race in February 2024. Future plans for the property include residences, commercial space, and parks.

Representatives from Northville Downs have submitted a proposal to build a new facility in northwest Plymouth Township on a 128-acre tract of land located within the Michigan International Technology Corridor. The first phase of the proposal would include a half-mile harness track, grandstand, stables, and other buildings to support racing. Future plans include a gaming facility, as well as facilities to host recreation and entertainment opportunities, such as concerts, soccer tournaments, car shows, and carnivals. Any plans would also include environmentally friendly upgrades, such as solar panels, rainwater collection, and more daytime racing to eliminate light pollution.

THREATENED: Grand Oaks Resort, Lake County, Florida

Grand Oaks, established in the 1900s through the acquisition of contiguous properties, now spans 400 acres. This equestrian facility boasts a carriage museum, a competition venue, and a premier boarding facility. However, in the past year, the frequency of equestrian events has seen a decline.

In a recent development, the owner and developers have put forth a proposal to subdivide the majority of Grand Oaks' approximately 400 acres into 795 manufactured home lots, going against the existing housing density requirements. Notably, the property straddles the border of two towns, prompting developers to seek full annexation into the town of Lady Lake. This move has raised concerns among residents who fear uncontrolled growth, the potential loss of equine and open space, and the impact on community services.

SAVED: Essex Equestrian Center, West Orange, New Jersey

In our previous spring newsletter, we shared the sad news of Essex Equestrian Center's closure in December 2022. The historic facility was built in the early 20th century and was known by several names before being owned and operated for the past 20 years by the Hall family. As the area is zoned residential and within 20 minutes of Newark, former clients and neighbors were concerned by the potential for the property to be developed.

To the relief of the equine community, the property was purchased in September 2023 by a real estate developer and his wife, who happens to be a grand prix showjumper. The couple plan to use community input to revitalize and restore the historic equestrian facility to its former glory.

LOST: Arlington International Racecourse, Arlington Heights, Illinois

The Arlington International Racecourse was founded by Harry D. "Curly" Brown and opened in 1927. It was host to a variety of historic events, including the world's first million-dollar race, The Arlington Million, in 1981. The track closed in 1997 but was reopened in 2000 after being purchased by Churchill Downs, Inc., (CDI) 2000. In February 2021, CDI announced plans to sell the entire Arlington Park property for redevelopment. The Illinois Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association criticized CDI's decision, stating that CDI "all but abandoned any meaningful commitment to Illinois racing" after their majority acquisition of Rivers Casino.

In June 2021, the National Football League's Chicago Bears announced they had submitted a bid to purchase the land for a potential new stadium to replace their longtime home, Soldier Field, and in September 2021 the purchase was finalized. Current plans for the property include a state-of-the-art sports and entertainment complex. The last race was held on September 25, 2021. Demolition of the track started in June 2023. This is the second horse racing track to be replaced with an NFL venue in recent years. Hollywood Park in Inglewood, California, was replaced by SoFi Stadium in 2020.

If you are aware of an equine-related place that has been lost, saved, or is in danger, please let ELCR know about it. You can contact us at 859-455-8383 or info@elcr.org, or visit the [Report an Issue](#) page on our website.



From the Saddle

By ELCR President Dot Moyer

As the newly elected President of ELCR, I want to express my gratitude to those who recognize the threat of land loss to our equestrian industry and heritage and are actively addressing it. Without sufficient land for riding, training, racing, competition venues, boarding facilities, recreational trails, and hay/feed cultivation, the future of the equestrian industry is at risk. Our motto, "No Land, No Horse," encapsulates our mission.

As we celebrate ELCR's 25th anniversary in 2024, the need for our organization has never been more pressing. Gone are the days when land and access could be taken for granted. The convergence of factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, technological advancements, urban migration, and housing shortages is putting unprecedented pressure on landowners to sell rural properties to developers. Infrastructure projects like roads, power lines, mega internet facilities, and increased recreational use are direct threats to established equestrian areas.

In response to these challenges, ELCR is actively making a difference by:

- Offering assistance and technical support to local organizations combating imminent threats of equestrian land loss.
- Providing free information and guidance to individuals and organizations seeking to establish protective methods and protocols.
- Supplying educational articles, guides, webinars, and other resources to enhance capacity and fortify local conservation efforts.
- Networking with individuals and groups nationwide to foster collaboration, raise awareness, and prompt action to safeguard equestrian access to land.
- Collaborating with land trusts to incorporate equestrian access into conservation properties.

ELCR, despite being a compact organization with a modest budget, is achieving significant impact. Explore our website at elcr.org and you'll find a wealth of resources. Few national nonprofit organizations offer as much while operating so cost-effectively. However, there is more work to be done, and we can accomplish it together with collective effort. It necessitates a substantial investment of time, energy, and funds. While ELCR plays a crucial role, each of us has a vital part to play. Engage at the local level to influence your area's responses to these challenges, volunteer, and raise awareness.

Thank you for your support, leadership, and unwavering commitment to safeguarding the land for the horse.

ELCR Board Members Recognized at Annual Meeting

Three members of the ELCR Board of Directors were recognized at the annual meeting in October 2023 in Lexington, Kentucky, for their long-standing service and contribution to ELCR.

Both Susan Harding and Ken Haddad joined the ELCR Board in 2011. Susan Harding served as Board President from 2012-2015. Ken Haddad followed Susan as ELCR Board President, serving in that capacity from 2015-2023.

Dale Brown joined the ELCR Board of Directors in 2013 and was elected Treasurer in 2015. He was reelected as treasurer during the 2023 annual meeting.

"We want to recognize Susan Harding, Ken Haddad, and Dale Brown for their outstanding service and contribution to ELCR and their ongoing support of our vital mission," said ELCR Executive Director Holley Groshek. "ELCR has flourished under their leadership and direction. We are thrilled that Susan, Ken, and Dale will remain active on ELCR board committees."



Pictured (L) to (R) Holley Groshek, Ken Haddad, Susan Harding, Dale Brown, and ELCR President Dot Moyer.



ELCR Education Corner

Recent additions and updates to the ELCR Online Resource Library

The ELCR Online Resource Library represents the largest available collection of resources, including articles, guides, tools and templates, and recorded webinars related to conserving horse lands. These online resources are available to the public free of charge. The online library can be accessed at www.elcr.org.

New Article: “Utilities and Recreational Trails: A Summary of the Article ‘Trails and Utilities: A Powerful Partnership’ by the Rails to Trails Conservancy”

Establishing multi-use trails, specifically equestrian trails, in any region of the United States can be daunting. From shaping partnerships between adjoining landowners of private land, to finding funding for trail building, the process is understandably difficult. Many communities have figured out that partnering with utility companies for the use of existing easements as trails has lifted the burden of piecing together private lands from scratch.

The article “Utilities and Recreational Trails: A Summary of the Article ‘Trails and Utilities: A Powerful Partnership’ by the Rails to Trails Conservancy” explores the potential for the establishment of recreational trail systems alongside utility lines, such as power, sewer, gas, etc. Sharing a trail corridor with a utility is not only an efficient use of space, but it also has the potential to defray the costs associated with trail development. With properly negotiated maintenance and land use agreements, utilities can have a minimal effect on—and even offer a host of benefits for—the trail and its community. Read the full article here: <https://elcr.org/utilities-and-recreational-trails-a-summary-of-the-article-trails-and-utilities-a-powerful-partnership-by-the-rails-to-trails-conservancy/>

New Article: “Trail Protection Easements Part I: What Are They and Why Should Landowners Want One?”

In the first installment of the three-part series on trail easements, Dot Moyer delves into the concept of trail protection easements and their significance for landowners. A trail protection easement involves a legal grant from landowners to entities like trail associations, conservation groups, or neighborhood associations, allowing designated trails on their property. The primary goal is to safeguard these trails from arbitrary closures in the future.

The article emphasizes the benefits for landowners, such as a substantial increase in property value, marketability, and overall desirability. As the series unfolds, it will further explore the legalities and advantages of trail easements, offering valuable insights for those interested in preserving trails and fostering a vibrant horse culture within communities. Read the full article here: <https://elcr.org/trail-protection-easements-part-i-what-are-they-and-why-should-landowners-want-one/>

New Article: “Horses Healing Humans: The Multifaceted Role of Equines in Addiction Rehabilitation”

Those who work with and ride horses are intimately familiar with the tangibles equines bring to us: empathy, a sense of responsibility, a solid work ethic, the ability to control our emotions, happiness, stress reduction, physical strength, and a sense of well-being, among a plethora of others. But horses can provide so much more than relaxation; they can be powerful tools on the road to addiction recovery.

The article “Horses Healing Humans: The Multifaceted Role of Equines in Addiction Rehabilitation” by Sarah Coleman gives an overview of addiction in the United States and how programs using horses are helping in addiction recovery. Three programs are highlighted: the John Volken Academy Ranch, Stable Recovery, and Beartooth Men’s Rehab. All of these programs provide training in equine-centric vocational skills, while also restoring a sense of self-worth and hope to those involved. Read the full article here: <https://elcr.org/horses-healing-humans-the-multifaceted-role-of-equines-in-addiction-rehabilitation/>

Greg Goodman Honored with Robert N. Clay Conservation Award

Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) was pleased to recognize Greg Goodman, owner of Mt. Brilliant Farm in Lexington, Ky., as the recipient of the 2023 Robert N. Clay Conservation Award during the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA) National Awards Dinner on September 9, 2023, in Lexington, Ky.

The award, established in 2014 as a partnership between TOBA and ELCR to help increase awareness of the importance of land conservation to the Thoroughbred industry and to serve as an inspiration to others within the industry, is sponsored by ELCR and presented annually at the TOBA National Awards dinner.

Born and raised in Houston, Greg immediately recognized the iconic beauty and quality of life Lexington offered when he moved here and was determined to help create an organization with a daily mission to grow Lexington while maintaining the rural character of the community and promoting the area farms.

In 2006, Greg became a co-founder of the Lexington, Ky.-based land-advocacy organization Fayette Alliance with others from the equine, agricultural, and neighborhood communities. Greg currently serves as co-chair of Fayette Alliance, remaining actively involved in the organization's efforts since its inception.

Fayette Alliance is dedicated to smart, sustainable, and equitable growth in Lexington-Fayette County through land-use advocacy, education, and research. Fayette Alliance's vision is to connect the vibrant city of Lexington with the productive and beautiful Bluegrass farmland of Fayette County. To achieve this goal, the organization advocates at city hall with local decision-makers, educates the community through free programming, and commissions objective and independent research to support its advocacy and educational efforts, to ensure its work is always data-driven.

Goodman said his initial involvement in land protection sprouted from opposition to a development project years ago when a pro-development city leader told him the farms only showed up at city hall when they had a specific issue of interest. "I remember telling him, 'Be careful what you wish for,'" Goodman said, as the Fayette Alliance would then be formed to provide that consistent representation. "I've always loved the land. My first love is the horses, but the land is second. There's a finite number of these farms, of these soils. And once they're gone, they're gone forever."

Goodman said the Alliance has helped educate lawmakers on how important horse farms, and agriculture in general, are to the Lexington area in terms of the economy, tax revenue, jobs, and



ELCR Executive Director Holley Groshek presents the Robert N. Clay Conservation Award to Greg Goodman.

tourism. He said it often makes more sense, strictly from an economic standpoint, to retain farms over development.

"Greg's leadership and steadfast dedication to smart, responsible growth and protecting and promoting the farmland that supports Fayette County's economy and identity have been absolutely critical in Fayette Alliance's success over the last 17 years," the alliance said in a statement. "The Lexington-Fayette County community, and our team at Fayette Alliance, are incredibly fortunate to have Greg and his family. They have committed both time and treasure to seeing our community thrive."

Since the founding of Fayette Alliance, Greg also has been hosting the Bluegrass International Cup at his 1,400-acre Mt. Brilliant Farm in Lexington to raise funds for Fayette Alliance and the UK Markey Cancer Foundation.

"Greg Goodman's leadership and long-term commitment to managed growth and preserving the iconic beauty of Lexington's Bluegrass region through the establishment of the Fayette Alliance serves as an impressive example for not only the Thoroughbred community but our equine community at large," said ELCR President Ken Haddad. "The impact of an organization like Fayette Alliance goes far beyond the local community, as it serves as an example and model for other communities across the country working to balance growth while maintaining a rural feel and protecting equine access to land for the benefit of this and future generations."



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