



ROARING FORK VALLEY HORSE COUNCIL

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11/14/2018

Hi To All,

The Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council (RFVHC) would like to thank Rosemary Strong for organizing our gathering yesterday, November 13th, 2018, to discuss possible equestrian trails in and around the Town of Snowmass Village (TOSV) with the help of the TOSV Parks and Recreation Dept., the U S Forest Service and the Aspen Skiing Company. Thanks to those present – Susan Cross – Aspen Ski Co., Katy Nelson, Monty Lutterman – USFS, Starr Jamison – TOSV Trails Director, Lauri Smith – TOSV Trails Ranger, Rosemary Strong – concerned equestrian, Holly McLain – RFVHC Communication Chairman.

First up for discussion was the possible extension of **Tom Blake Equestrian Trail** allowing a loop, connecting to the Sequel Connector and Sequel Trail. The original Tom Blake section and the old ditch portion of this loop is historic for horseback riding use.

This is a multi-layered initiative. In order to coordinate this loop access for equestrian use, the USFS, Ski CO. and TOSV will each have to support their portion of the loop and all work together for approval with proper signage, and in some places improving line of sight for all multi-use trail user safety.

There is another option to ride the **Government Trail loop from the Tom Blake Trail**. Again, proper signage, and improving visibility in some sections would increase safety on this multi-use trail.

Parking -

Lack of parking is a major impediment for horseback riders to access all the trails that they have historically used since the early days of ranching in the Snowmass Valley. At this time there is no adequate parking at the Tom Blake trail parking area.

Parking at the Rodeo Lot has some major safety issues for horseback riders crossing to the Lowline Trail to access Tom Blake Equestrian trail. The round-about traffic, and crossing Owl Creek Road to lowline Trail is scary. Lowline Trail is not safe because of trail sloughing, sheer drop offs and mountain bike traffic to pass on narrow sections.

It would benefit equestrian access if the Aspen Skiing Company would allow truck and trailer **parking in the top lot at Two Creeks**. Horseback riders could then ride up the existing two-track trail into the meadow near Gracie's Cabin and cut through to the Tom Blake Equestrian Trail. This loop is of great importance to Rosemary Strong and other equestrians, who have ridden all of these trails for many years prior to the urban explosion and mountain bike take-over of our horseback riding trails.

We are thankful that everyone is willing to work with the equestrian community for inclusion and equity on TOSV, Ski Co. and USFS existing trails. As a note, horseback riders can ride anywhere on USFS lands, with the exception of seasonal winter wildlife closures.

Starr Jamison mentioned that the **North Mesa Trail** could be improved in sections through the steep, sloughing hillside sections for safety reasons. This is a wonderful equestrian only trail with **excellent access at the Rodeo Parking Lot**.

If the trail can be widened and stabilized in areas, the **North Mesa Trail**, offers the beginner and intermediate horseback rider an enjoyable and beautiful experience.

We would ask that Starr Jamison request the TOSV to conduct a professional estimate, perhaps done by "Single Track Trails Company", to improve the dangerous sections on the North Mesa Trail in early spring. Once the estimate is understood, the RFVHC could put forward ideas for potential fund raising for this initiative.

The ancient Fen located within the **North Mesa Trail** area, now protected by the TOSV is a water source for wildlife. Because existing bike trails are above and below this area, it still has a peaceful, slow moving character. Horses are prey animals just like deer and elk. Horseback riders entering into wildlife areas are more readily accepted by wildlife because they are mounted on slow moving grazing creatures. The acceptable, respectful distance of 150 feet is recommended for all humans to give deer, and especially elk their space. Horseback riders respect wildlife and often stop look and listen to all creatures living around us. This enjoyment is possible because we are walking on trails. We are especially thoughtful going downhill on mountain trails at a slow, careful, steady pace.

Lauri Smith, TOSV police woman, trail ranger, and Animal Control Officer, dealing with wildlife is very familiar with all the historic and new trails in the area. She had mentioned another possible parking and equestrian trail possibility for horseback riding enjoyment. **Parking at the top of Wood Road** would give access on the **Elk Camp Work Road, leading to the Elk Camp Restaurant**. It was mentioned that a high line might be possible for equestrians to tie horses, while they enjoy lunch at the Ski Company's Elk Camp Restaurant.

We will rely on Laurie Smith's knowledge and experience to guide us for advice to accomplish equestrian inclusion for recreational trail access.

The RFVHC is grateful for all of your support. We offer our hand in partnership to preserve and protect our Western Heritage by allowing horseback riders to continue their historic rights to ride horses on trails.

We will do our homework and re-group in the spring, after what we all hope is a winter full snow.

Kindest Regards,

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