

TRAILS SAFE PASSING PLAN Script revised 3-27-23

2488 WORDS – BETWEEN 11.5 AND 18.4 MINUTES

Bold words are not on the TSPP but are extra details and explanations.

Hello! Thank you for the opportunity to share the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak, and Stand Back, and horse information.

I am one of your Michigan Horse Trails Representatives. We work in partnership with all public land management teams and all trail user groups to find the safest and best practices for our public trails. I have been an owner and operator of nearly every recreational activity, so I understand and respect every user group and know each have their own preferences.

While serving, we have learned there are many people who may not have had opportunities to be around horses and may be unfamiliar with how horses think and react, so we have put together some key facts about horses and a yielding sign to know what to expect and be prepared BEFORE you travel on the trails. We will explain the best ways to interact with people with horses on the trails and develop a common, practical pattern for trail passing. We hope the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back will increase knowledge, inclusion, safety, comfort, and confidence for ALL trail users, including dogs and horses.

Slide 1 - **The Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back** was recently published as a national, educational resource from the Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR). Equine Land Conservation Resource is an organization in Lexington, Kentucky, that provides solutions and resources to increase trail access for people with horses. They work in partnership with American Trails, Back Country Horsemen of America, Trails are Common Ground (TACG), and other trails advocacy groups across the nation.

Slide 2 - **Lets go over the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back details and WHY this yielding plan is so important.**

The first action is to STOP!

Horses are prey animals and naturally can be afraid of unfamiliar people and objects. Horses have natural “flight” survival instincts and prefer to move their feet towards an exit route and away from pressure. Therefore, people with horses should pass at a walk while other trail users remain STOPPED until passed.

STOPPING communicates you are AWARE of the Trails Safe Passing Plan.

STOPPING communicates that you are RESPECTFUL of other trail users, and you are PREPARED to yield to people with horses, who are the trail user group with the most risks of injuries.

STOPPING also allows TIME for people with horses to prepare their horses, assess the other horses, the other riders, the other trail users, their equipment, their children, their dogs, and the nature of the trails for safe trail passing.

Next, it's best to 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.

SPEAKING will allow the horses and riders to know of your approach especially if approaching from behind so horseback riders can turn their horses to face other trail users and prepare for safe trail passing.

SPEAKING to the rider and / or horse is best instead of a bell because SPEAKING helps horses interpret how you, a predator creature, is feeling. Horses can access your intentions from your voice.

SPEAKING is a friendly way to enjoy the trails.

It's also important to STAND BACK.

Please STAND BACK with your whole group on the same side of the trail **to keep all trail users comfortable and allow a safe pathway for people with horses to pass at a walk.**

Please contain children and dogs. **Dogs are natural predators, so it's very important dogs are contained when near prey animals such as horses.**

Please do not hide or stand behind a tree, as these actions may cause horses to fear you are a predator planning an attack.

Horses are more comfortable when trail users stand on the lower side of the trail, so trail users do not appear to be larger and threatening to horses.

SMILE: When the Trails Safe Passing Plan is posted and practiced, we can ALL SMILE and enjoy the safe and happy trails.

Please consider these facts about our trails and why it's so important to Stay Safe.

Slide 3 - Staying Safe –

According to a study by the Outdoor Industry Association, 8.1million more American hiked in 2020 than in 2019.

The dramatic increase in outdoor recreation adds increase pressure on trails and emphasizes the need for a trails safe passing plan for all trail users.

Many people who ride horses have retreated or refuse to ride certain multi-use trails because they feel they are in danger due to other trail users not yielding or not knowing what to do when encountering people with horses on the trails. This is another reason the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back has been developed so more people with horses will be safe and welcomed on our public trails.

Let's take a few minutes and go over some more key, natural characteristics of horses.

Slide 4 - Horses Are Our Partners

Horses are cultural and historical. They have carved their place in history and carried people into the future on their backs. Today, horses are also identified as Equine Assisted Services (EAS) providing emotional, mental, physical and substance abuse therapy.

Knowing horses are therapeutic partners, we hope land management teams will allow more people with horses to be welcomed on public lands.

We'd like to relay one of the most important facts about horses which helps explain how they think and react to stimuli around them.

Slide 5 - Horses Are Prey Animals

Their goals are to eat grass, drink water, survive, and thrive.

Horses understand people are one of their natural, potential predators, but through layers of building trust and training, horses can learn to trust people. Other predators include mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, and even bears.

Due to the natural pecking order of predator and prey, horses expect people to be the leaders of our partnerships providing opportunities to practice confidence, empathy, empowerment, kindness, leadership skills, patience, verbal, and non-verbal communication skills, and self-discipline.

Horses are looking for direction and guidance from their riders. As leaders of our partnerships with horses, we take on the responsibility of looking out for our horses' best interest, and our horses trust we will keep them safe.

Horses appreciate when they are treated with respect.

We'd like to share that

Slide 6 - Horses Mirror Our Attitudes

and match our energy. The size, speed, and strength of horses hold people immediately accountable for our attitudes and actions. **When everyone knows and follows the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back we can all be calm and comfortable including the horses.**

Horses' physical body also helps to improve the riders' balance, flexibility, muscle strengthening, stamina, and more.

Please consider these interesting facts about a horse's body.

Slide 7 - A Horse's Body

The horse's body structure is designed to carry people perfectly.

Horses can carry up to 20% of their weight (approximately 220 pounds) and pull up to twice their weight (approximately 2,200 pounds).

Each of their gaits (walk, trot – which is like our jog, and run) simulates our gaits, providing people essential industry, therapy, and transportation partners.

Horses are unique animals because they have both the body that will carry us and the servant-like attitude to follow our directions. Horses become an extension of us and can carry us across terrains and distances we could never navigate on our own.

Let's learn some more key details about horses, our trail partners.

Slide 8 - A Horse's Senses

Horses can hear better than people as they can rotate each ear independently in nearly all directions **providing them with excellent hearing in multiple directions. Therefore, horses may hear other trail users before their riders.**

Horses have a stronger sense of smell than people.

These extra ordinary senses allow horses to notice people, other wildlife, and objects before their riders.

Horses are exceptional search and rescue partners.

Another important fact about horses that makes their senses unique are

Slide 9 - Horses Have Blind Spots

Horses have eyes on the sides of their heads so they can look for predators and danger in a 350-degree radius.

Horses have blind spots up close, right between their eyes, and directly behind them.

Always ask horse owners before approaching their horses. Please approach horses at their sides, not directly at their faces nor behind them.

Slide 10 - **This is a diagram of the horses' field of vision showing their blind spots. Please notice the large blind area from behind. This emphasizes why it's so important to SPEAK and ANNOUNCE yourself as soon as possible if you are approaching from behind and allow TIME for horseback riders to turn their horses around to face the other trail users.**

Let's talk a little more about

Slide 11 - A Horse's Sense of Sight

Horses are equipped to see movement, such as a bicyclist approaching better than people. **So, horses may conclude a fast moving bicyclist is a predator and naturally go into "flight" self-preservation mode of jumping out of the way before their rider has time to prepare or even know what they are fleeing from. As prey animals, when horses sense danger their "fight or flight" instinct is almost always "flight" which can cause potential injuries for people with horses.**

Horses only have one-dimensional eyesight, so they have difficulty with depth perception, such as how far away a bike is or how deep the water is at water crossings.

Did you know horses are always communicating with their body language?

Slide 12 - Horses Communicate

Horses provide clear communication through their physical body language of ears, head, and tail positions, and eye expressions.

The Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back allows TIME for the horseback riders to READ their horses' body language, ASSESS how comfortable the horses are, and prepare their horses for safe trail passing.

Have you considered that

Slide 13 - Horses Are Transportation

Horses provided our first autonomous modes of transportation. They have excellent situational awareness and self-preservation skills. They will take care of both them and their rider.

Horses can react faster than people, putting people with horses at risk of injuries when swift, semi-silent bikes are approaching, which simulate the speeds and sounds of potential predators.

In this picture, please notice how the horses and riders cannot see what is approaching them from behind. This is a good example of WHY it's so important to STOP allowing TIME for people to turn their horses and ANNOUNCE yourself so horses can understand you are not a predator, and this action will help keep them calm.

You may have noticed people with horses usually travel and camp with other horses and that is because,

Slide 14 - Horses Are Herd Animals

Horses prefer to be in a herd because there is safety in numbers. This keeps horses calm and comfortable.

Slide 15 - Horses Are Low Impact

Horses have a four-beat hoof pattern and prey scent, so even with a rider on their back, horses disturb other wildlife less than all trail user groups, including walkers.

Horses are passive, lightweight, and low-impact trail users in even the most sensitive environments. Proper trail development and maintenance is best for all trail user groups.

Riding horses allows you to be not only surrounded by nature but enjoy a partnership with a natural creature while being surrounded by nature.

The reason why we yield to people with horses is because people with horses have more

Slide 16 - Risks of Injuries

People are in sitting positions, on live, prey animals, over eight feet above the ground. Bicyclists and hikers are in upright positions, on objects, or on the ground, and are less likely to fall or have injuries.

Bicyclists have specific characteristics that naturally can cause horses to fear they could be a potential predator:

- 1. Bicyclists travel swift speeds like potential predators.**
- 2. Bicyclists travel semi-silently like potential predators.**
- 3. Bicyclists have elevated heart rates like potential predators.**

Therefore, please practice the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak, and Stand Back to promote safety, inclusion, confidence, and comfort for all trail users.

Slide 17 - Please Remember the Trails Safe Passing Plan. We hope explaining the natural characteristics of horses will reinforce the importance of the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP)

Stop! Speak and Stand Back. Let's review this action plan one more time.

Please STOP!

Horses are prey animals and naturally can be afraid of unfamiliar people and objects. Horses have natural "flight" survival instincts and prefer to move their feet towards an exit route. Therefore, people with horses should pass at a walk while other trail users remain STOPPED until passed.

Please SPEAK:

Please ANNOUNCE your presence.

Please SAY "Hi" when we pass by.

Speaking helps horses identify you are a person and will keep them calm.

Please STAND BACK with your whole group on the same side of the trail.

Please contain children and dogs. **Dogs are predators by nature and should be contained when they**

are near prey animals such as horses.

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:

Let's ALL smile and enjoy our safe and happy trails by posting and practicing the Trails Safe Passing Plan of Stop! Speak and Stand Back.

Slide 18 - Thank You

Thank **YOU** for following the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak and Stand Back and learning about the natural instincts and gifts of horses.

Understanding these horse facts FOR PEOPLE will drive out fears of horses, develop compassion and respect for horses and people with horses, and provide a plan of action when you encounter horses and people with horses.

We invite you to share, promote, post, and practice the Trails Safe Passing Plan (TSPP) Stop! Speak, and Stand Back with your land management teams, trail user groups, friends, and family and help our trails be safer and more enjoyable for everyone.

We would like to thank American Trails in Redding, California for sharing this information and providing this national educational webinar, the Equine Land Conservation Resource in Lexington, Kentucky for their partnership in developing this action plan, Jena and Lynsey Cook for their dedicated support, and the Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council in Aspen/Snowmass, Colorado for the use of the Stop! Speak and Stand Back TRAIL sign.

I'd like to introduce the President of the Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council, Karin Reid Offield, to share some more details about this action plan and signs.

(Karin speaking about the TSPP)