

# TRAILS SAFE PASSING PLAN: STOP, SPEAK, and STAND BACK



# The Trails Safe Passing Plan



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### **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.

### **SPEAK:**

Please announce your presence.  
Please say "Hi" when we pass by.  
This helps a horse identify you as a person and will help keep a horse 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 trails!

## Staying Safe



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

The dramatic increase in outdoor recreation adds increased pressure on trails, which can lead to more potential conflicts between trail user groups on public and private lands.

The TRAILS SAFE PASSING PLAN: STOP, SPEAK, and STAND BACK is an educational resource developed to help all trail users understand the importance of yielding to people with horses since horses are prey animals and naturally can be afraid of unfamiliar people and objects.

# Horses Are Our Partners



Photo courtesy of  
J. Klein Photos  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Horses are cultural and historical. They carved their place in history and carried us into the future on their backs.

Today, horses are declared health partners as Equine Assisted Services (EAS) providing emotional, mental, physical, and substance abuse therapy and should be welcomed on public lands.

# Horses Are Prey Animals

Due to the natural pecking order of predator and prey, horses are more afraid of you than you are of them.

Horses expect us to be the leaders of our partnerships, providing opportunities to practice confidence, empathy, empowerment, kindness, leadership skills, patience, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and self-discipline.

Horses appreciate when they are treated with respect.



Photo courtesy of  
J. Klein Photos  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

# Horses Mirror Our Attitudes

The size, speed, and strength of horses hold us immediately accountable for our attitudes and actions. Horses will mirror our attitudes, providing us a reflection of how we are portraying ourselves to others.

Horses improve balance, flexibility, muscle strengthening, stamina, and more for people.



Photo courtesy of Pure Michigan  
Silver Lake State Park, Mears, Michigan

# 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, and run) simulate our gaits, providing us essential industry, therapy, and transportation partners. 7



Photo courtesy of Joe Gall Photography  
Silver Lake State Park, Mears, Michigan

# A Horse's Senses

Horses can hear better than us as they can rotate each ear independently in nearly all directions.

Horses have a stronger sense of smell than people, so they will notice people, other wildlife, and objects before we do.

They are exceptional search and rescue partners.

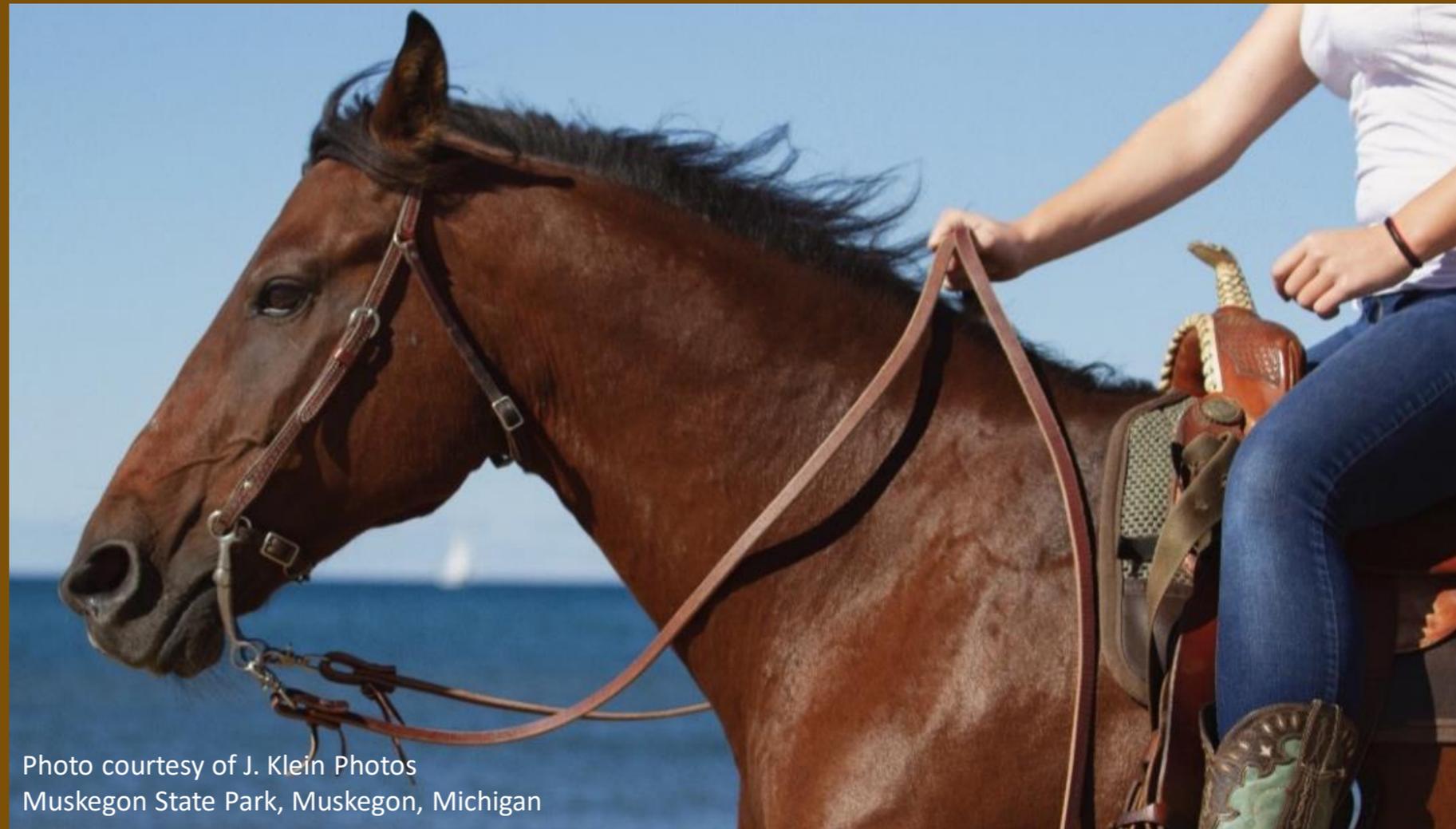


Photo courtesy of J. Klein Photos  
Muskegon State Park, Muskegon, Michigan

# 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.

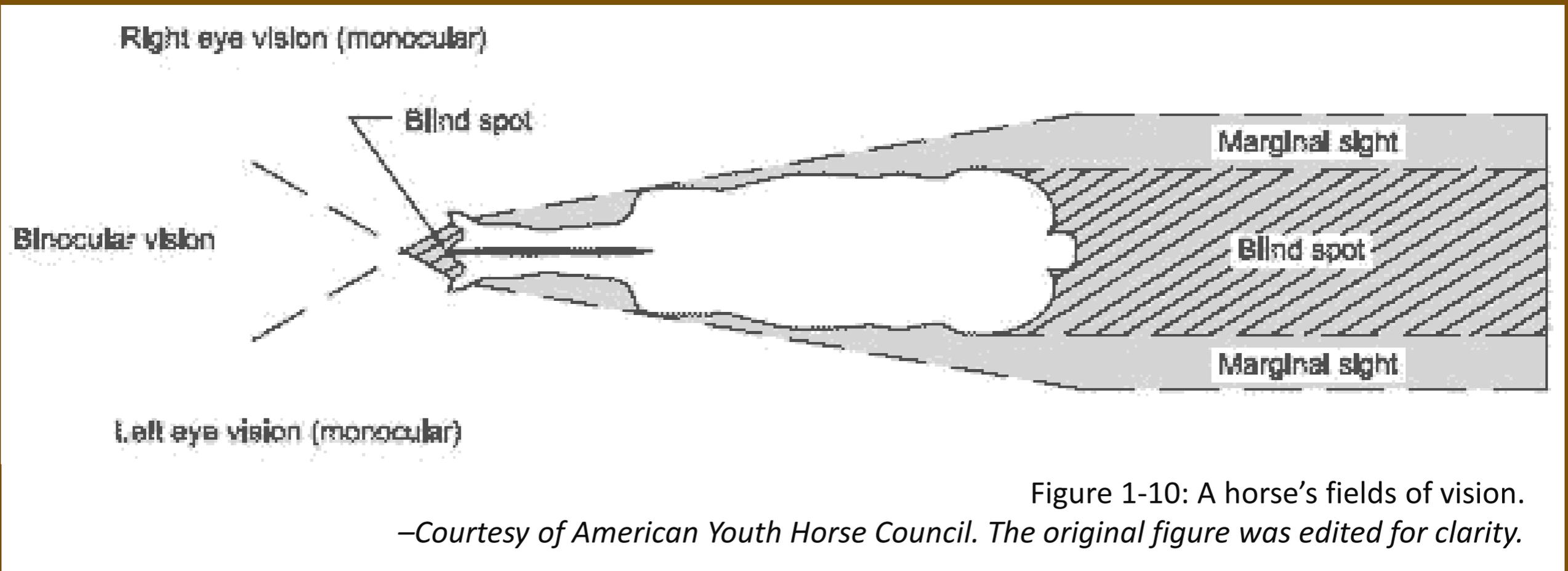
Horses have blind spots up close, between their eyes, and directly behind them.

Always ask horse owners before approaching their horses. Please approach horses at their sides, not directly at their faces or behind them.



Photo courtesy of Pure Michigan  
Fort Custer Recreation Area, Augusta, Michigan

# A Horse's Field of Vision



For more horse behavior, characteristics, and information, please refer to this helpful resource:

*Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads and Campgrounds*

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational\\_trails/publications/  
fs\\_publications/07232816/page03.cfm#visi](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/publications/fs_publications/07232816/page03.cfm#visi)

# A Horse's Sense of Sight

Horses can see movement, such as a bike approaching better than people can.

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



Photo courtesy of Pure Michigan  
Fort Custer Recreation Area, Augusta, Michigan

# Horses Communicate

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



Photo courtesy of J. Klein Photos  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

# Horses Are Vehicles



Photo courtesy of Sally Aungier  
Staunton River State Park, Virginia

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

Horses can react a quarter of a second faster than people can, putting people with horses at risk of injuries when swift, semi-silent bikes are approaching.

# Horses Are Herd Animals

Horses prefer to be in a herd because there is safety in numbers.

People with horses often camp and travel in groups on the trails to keep their horses calm and comfortable.



Photo courtesy of Pure Michigan  
Waterloo Recreation Area, Michigan

# Horses Are Low Impact



Photo courtesy of Best of America by Horseback  
Mackinac Island State Park, Michigan

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 other user groups, including hikers.

Horses are as passive, lightweight, and low-impact trail users in even the most sensitive environments.

# Risk of Injury



Photo courtesy of Pure Michigan  
Waterloo Recreation Area, Michigan

People with a horse have more risks of injuries as they are in sitting positions, on live creatures, over eight feet above the ground. Bikers and hikers are in upright positions, on objects, or on the ground, and are less likely to fall or have injuries.

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### **SMILE:**

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# Thank You



Thank you for following the TRAILS SAFE PASSING PLAN of STOP, SPEAK, and STAND BACK and learning about the natural instincts and gifts of horses.

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

**Equine Land Conservation Resource would like to thank the following:**

**Jenny Cook, Michigan Equine Trails Representative (MTAC)**  
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**Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council of Aspen/Snowmass, Colorado, for the use of the Stop, Speak and Stand Back sign <https://www.rfvhorsecouncil.org/>**  
**[rfvhc.Colorado@gmail.com](mailto:rfvhc.Colorado@gmail.com)**

For more information on equine access to public trails, visit **[www.elcr.org](http://www.elcr.org)**