

by the Maryland Horse Council's Trails & Greenways Committee

Tips for Hikers, Cyclists & Equestrians

As temperatures in Maryland begin to cool off over the next several weeks, more of us will be spending time outside enjoying Maryland's extensive multi-use trail systems. With miles and miles to choose from in every county of the State, trail riding is a great way to see Maryland's diverse topography and ecosystems.

Before heading out on the trails, it is important to keep in mind safety for both you and your horse, as well as the other trail users you may encounter. Below is a brief guide to Trail Etiquette & Safety produced by the Maryland Horse Council's Trails & Greenways Committee.

For a list of public parks in Maryland with equestrian use trails, see page 21 of this issue!

General Guidelines & Safety Tips

Before you go out on the trails, familiarize yourself with your destination by checking out online maps, available facilities, and parking for cars and trailers. Make sure that your destination area is open. Make sure you know if you will be on public or private land. NEVER enter private land without the owner's permission, and ALWAYS stay off planted cropland. If you are going out alone, tell someone your planned route.

- **Respect the Trails:** Clean up litter (pack out what is packed in), protect the trail environment, e.g. do not remove things that belong on the trails or blaze new trails.
- **Look and Listen:** Become the eyes and ears of the trail system. Report problems, e.g. washed-out bridges or downed trees and debris, to the park's maintenance system.
- **Maintain the Trails:** Give back to the trails you use by getting involved with trail maintenance. See page 18 for a list of Maryland Horse Council member organizations that relate to trails and open space.
- **Share the Trails:** Cyclists yield to all other trail users and hikers yield to equestrians.
- **Be Courteous:** On crowded trails, proceed single file.
- **Keep Things Moving:** Slower traffic should keep to the right of the

trail; faster users pass on the left.

- **Keep Things Clear:** Do not pass on narrow bends. Pass only when you can clearly see the trail and traffic approaching from the opposite direction.
- **No Surprises:** When passing other trail users, provide adequate warning, and reduce speed.
- **Watch Out:** Animals on the trails may act unexpectedly. If you are unsure about approaching someone with a horse or dog, ask the handler/rider for guidance. If you are using trails on land where hunting is permitted, check the hunting season calendar maintained by the Department of Natural Resources.
- **Watch Your Step:** Tread gently when the trails are muddy; footprints, bicycle ruts, and hoofprints can damage the trails.
- **Watch Your Volume:** If you choose to wear a stereo/headphone set, make sure that the volume neither prevents you from hearing what is happening around you, nor disturbs the other trail users.
- **Help Others:** If you come upon an injured rider (horse or bicycle), get help immediately. If you come upon a riderless horse, do not approach the horse if you are uncomfortable with horses. Seek professional help. If you choose to approach the horse, speak softly to let it know you are there. Do not chase it. Approach it from the side.
- **Lock Your Vehicles:** Be sure to lock your tow vehicles and trailer to avoid possible thefts from parked vehicles while you are riding.

Additional Etiquette for Hikers/Joggers

- Always yield to equestrians. If you see a horse and rider, say "hello" in a calm, reassuring manner so the horse does not startle.
- If you wish to approach a horse, ask the rider for guidance. If you are with a child when you come upon a horse, hold the child's hand and stay toward the front (but not directly in front) of the horse. Do not approach a horse from behind. Most equestrians will gladly let you and your children pet their horses, but always ask permission first.
- When hiking/jogging with a dog, obey posted leash regulations. Keep a short leash on your dog when passing (or being passed by) horses, cy-

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MHC Trail Etiquette & Safety Guidelines, continued...

clists, or other pedestrians. Remember that other users may be frightened by your dog, and be unsure how to pass safely.

Additional Etiquette for Cyclists

- Approach and pass other trail users with care. You are obligated to yield to all other trail users.
- When approaching from behind, announce yourself (and the number of other cyclists in your group) well in advance so that you do not startle other trail users, especially horses.
- Reduce speed in order to pass safely. Pass horses far to the left to avoid unintentional contact.
- Red ribbons in a horse's tail are an indication that it may kick if approached too closely from behind.
- Should your approach cause a horse to spook or become frightened, be considerate and stop. Wait for the rider to say that it is okay to pass.
- Stay on trails approved for bicycles.
- Obey posted speed limits and use common sense in crowded areas.
- Approach blind curves with caution and assume someone is coming in the opposite direction.
- Use the appropriate hand signals for turning, stopping, etc.

Additional Etiquette for Equestrians

- Be sure your horse has the temperament and training for riding on congested public trails. Busy multi-use trails are not the proper place for

schooling green horses.

- Advise other trail users of your horse's temperament, e.g. a horse with a tendency to kick should always wear a red ribbon in the tail, or a stallion should wear a yellow ribbon. Young horses often wear green ribbons. Assume that not everyone will know what these ribbons mean, so be prepared to explain or take the necessary precautions to avoid trouble.
- Obey posted speed/gait limits, and use common sense in crowded areas (cantering/galloping on crowded trails endangers everyone).
- Remove your horse from the trail if you begin experiencing behavior problems.
- Stay on equestrian approved trails.
- As a courtesy to others in your group, use appropriate hand signals for turning, slowing, etc. and give verbal warnings for dangers on the trail (e.g., holes, low branches, etc.)
- Remember that other trail users may not be familiar with horses or their reactions to new experiences. Your horse may be another trail user's introduction to horses and what you do is a reflection on the local horse community. Cheerfully answer questions about your horse. You are an ambassador for the entire equestrian community.
- If you trailer to a location, do not clean out your trailer in the parking area. Pack your manure out in your trailer.
- On multiple-use trails, step off the trail (if possible) if your horse needs to relieve himself, or kick the droppings off the trail.

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