



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DCNR Announces Local Changes To Horseback Riding in Elk State Forest

Harrisburg, PA – In an effort to further safeguard natural resources and enhance the experience of all trail-users, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has announced local changes affecting horseback riding will be forthcoming along the Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail in Elk State Forest, Elk County.

“Since its inception in 1994, the Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail has become increasingly popular with horseback riders, hikers and bicycle riders, and year-round use of the trail system has grown tremendously,” said Bureau of Forestry Director Daniel Devlin. “Although such growth is gratifying, this intense use has presented negative impacts as well.”

The state forester said the bureau is taking gradual steps along the 26-mile, non-motorized, shared-use trail to better accommodate horses, bicycles and hikers while addressing equestrian impact that includes: users developing trails on state and private lands without permission; soil erosion; safety concerns; group and commercial riding without required agreements; and trespassing reported by private land owners.

“Addressing these issues and directing recreational resources in a more sustainable direction remains a top bureau priority,” Devlin said. “We plan to promote more directed and sustainable use of the resource; create a safer environment for visitors; and encourage respect for private landowner rights, all in an attempt to improve our visitors’ experience.

“To accomplish this, we will work with the Pa. Game Commission to establish year-round game land connectivity to the Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail, create one map featuring both the game commission and DCNR trails, improve trail sustainability for a better riding experience, close user-generated trails not associated with the Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail, and require all riders to remain on approved roads and trails.”

Driven by the area’s elk-herd growth and promotion of the surrounding Pennsylvania Wilds, trail popularity has skyrocketed in recent years, Devlin noted. The bureau’s Elk State Forest District will work to effectively communicate information to the public on these changes as they occur. It also will cooperate with local businesses to gain an accurate measure of trail use; assist in educating their clientele; and promote volunteer efforts.

“We know equestrians often travel long distances to Benezette to enjoy the world-class attraction of Pennsylvania’s elk herd and to enjoy the stunning beauty found throughout Elk State Forest,” Devlin said. “Fall weekends, especially, attract hundreds of animals and riders to the many locations both in and around the forest.

”These changes are directly in line with the bureau’s ongoing efforts to provide all visitors with a quality outdoor experience and conserve our forestlands for sustainable use, both now and in the future.”

A map of the affected area can be found at
<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/recreation/equestrian/index.htm>.

For more information, contact Elk State Forest District at 814-486-3353, or visit
www.dcnr.state.pa.us (Select "Find a Forest"); or
<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/recreation/equestrian/index.htm>.

The district also maintains Facebook page: www.facebook.com/elkstateforest.

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