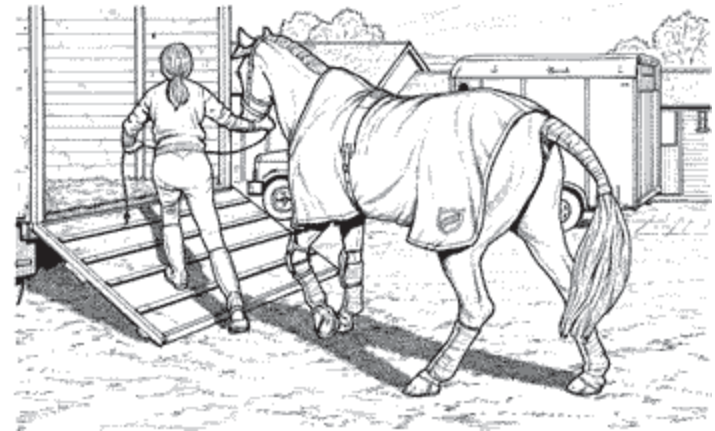


Stewards of the Trail



Snohomish
Conservation
District

Your Guide to a
Safe and Healthy
Trail Riding
Experience

Stewards of the Trail



Research & writing
Alayne Blickle
Executive Director,
Horses for Clean Water
www.horsesforcleanwater.com

Design & layout
Lois Ruskell
Public Outreach Director,
Snohomish Conservation District
www.snohomishcd.org.

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Notes

Stewards of the Trail

Trail riding is a healthy, fun activity for both horse and rider. It can give you a better appreciation for the land and its flora and fauna, and it will give your horse new learning experiences as well. How we as horsemen treat the privilege of trail riding determines how well we are able to maintain existing trails, as well as improving options for opening new equestrian trails. Here are a few guidelines to help ensure a safe trail riding experience for you, your horse and the natural environment. We will cover how to be a good steward of the trail, both at the trailhead and while riding. At the end will be a list of resources useful to you on the trail as well as at home on your horse property.

At the Trailhead

YOUR HORSE

A good trail ride starts with a good horse. Know your horse and be able to anticipate and handle his behaviors. A young horse with a skilled rider can be safely under control while an older horse with little experience and inadequate horsemanship can be an accident waiting to happen. Accidents can happen when a rider tries to force their horse through a situation that the horse is unfamiliar with and unprepared for.

Be sure your horse will stand tied to the trailer, both alone and with other horses. This is necessary so you can properly tack and untack your horse. If your horse paws while tied, he will do damage to the parking area and possibly to your trailer. If he does dig a hole, be sure to fill it before leaving.

Be able to mount and dismount your horse from both sides. If you have to dismount while out on the trail you may not have an option for which side you'll mount on. Be sure your horse is properly shod for the conditions of the trail. Broken-down hoof walls and sole bruises can result from improper shoeing.



Be sure your horse has properly fitting tack for the conditions of the trail. A cinch or girth that cuts into a horse's belly or an ill-fitting saddle can make a horse sore and give him (an understandably!) poor attitude. Be sure your horse is in good physical shape for the conditions of the trail such as steep slopes, obstacles and water crossings, or a lengthy trail.

Teach your horse to walk when going up and down hills. An inexperienced horse will want to run, potentially causing erosion, not to mention possible injuries to horse and rider. This also isn't a safe habit for your horse to get into and walking will help him develop muscle tone and balance. Know whether your horse will cross obstacles such as a log on the trail or a bridge. Be sure your horse is controllable in case you encounter wild animals, dogs or other trail users.

YOU

Be prepared for the weather and wear appropriate clothing. Rapid changes in weather can occur and if you aren't within a quick return distance to your vehicle, you could risk getting very cold and/or very wet. Hypothermia can happen quickly, even in our mild Pacific Northwest climate. Consider appropriate rain gear such as waterproof gloves and hat and, especially in the winter, insulated boots. Always carry a coat or rain slicker in case of unexpected bad weather, even in summer.



If you are riding in a hunting area during hunting season or at dusk, be sure to wear blaze-orange reflective gear. Know the route you are taking as well as when to turn away from an unsafe condition such as deep water or a broken bridge.

MANURE MANAGEMENT

Parking lots. Carry a manure fork in your trailer. Take home everything: manure, old hay, spilled bedding. If possible, throw a bucket of water on

Joseph, Bunny. *Trail Etiquette*. Connecticut Horse Council, Inc. 2007.
www.cthorsecouncil.org/trailletiquette.html

Trail Riding Etiquette. Outfitters Supply. October 2005.
www.outfitterssupply.com/russon/trail-riding-etiquette.asp



Photos: Pages 2, 3, 5, 9,10 Alayne Blickle, HCW. Page 8, 9, pintos: Julie Allen, SCD; Page 7, Amanda Ruzicka, SCD.

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WEED CONTROL

Invasive weed species in open spaces and wild areas are a huge problem everywhere. Non-native weed seeds are often transported in, take root, and quickly out-compete native plants. This is a particular problem when wildlife lose critical habitat or food sources, or when toxic weeds move in.

It is thought by some that horses convey weed seeds onto trails and rural lands through their manure. Recent studies show that this may not be the case after all, since horses rarely eat weeds. Fibrous weeds in the seed head stage are particularly unpalatable to horses. Instead, weed seed conveyance may be via weed seeds caught in horse hooves or on the soles of riding boots. Take care to inspect your horse's hooves before leaving home to eliminate weed seed transmission. Brush your horse's coat well while still at home to remove potentially harmful seeds, particularly if your horse lives in a weedy area. Be sure to remove mud and foreign debris from riding boots as well.

Consider seeking help from Snohomish Conservation District or Horses for Clean Water to learn more on how to manage your pastures to eliminate, or at least substantially reduce, invasive weeds on your property as well as their spread onto other properties. See resource section for contact information.

PERMISSION

Only ride in areas where you have permission of the landowner. If you open a gate to pass through, be sure to close it after you. Respect the property of others.

TYING

Avoid tying your horse to a tree or other vegetation if at all possible. Doing so can seriously harm the tree, perhaps even destroy it. If you have to do so, such as during lunch breaks or rest stops, so be sure to look for the sturdiest tree possible or a low hanging branch. Teach your horse to stand quietly. Pawing may damage sensitive tree roots.

WILDLIFE

Observe wildlife from a distance. Be careful not to stalk or approach wild animals, and never feed them. Feeding wildlife damages their health, changes natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.

Resource Section

There are many wonderful resources out there to provide guidance on trail riding issues as well as on horsemanship, trail maintenance, equestrian trail locations, horse property management and other natural resource issues.

Snohomish Conservation District

Conservation districts are non-regulatory, locally-led natural resource agencies in almost every county. Snohomish Conservation District (SCD) provides education and technical assistance to landowners on a variety of natural resource issues. Contact SCD for farm plans, technical assistance, designs for best management practices, permit assistance, riparian restoration, educational workshops, native plants, stream restoration, a free quarterly newsletter – and more! Phone 425-335-5634, web: www.snohomishcd.org.

WSU Extension - Snohomish County

WSU Extension is available for technical assistance and they offer classes on a number of topics such as the Livestock Advisors training. Extension also has an excellent youth 4-H program including an Horse 4-H program in Snohomish County. Phone 425-338-2400, web: www.snohomish.wsu.edu.

Horses for Clean Water

Horses for Clean Water (HCW) is a program run and supported by horse owners promoting environmentally sensitive horse keeping. HCW offers consultations on ways to manage manure, reduce mud, improve pastures and incorporate wildlife enhancement techniques. HCW also offers classes, farm tours, workshops and products for sale. For more on HCW educational opportunities, or to be on listserv to be contacted about future events, contact Alayne at 425-432-6116, by email Alayne@horsesforcleanwater.com or www.horsesforcleanwater.com.

Backcountry Horseman of Washington

Backcountry Horseman (BCH) is an excellent organization that works with various government agencies volunteering time and labor to keep trails open for equestrian use. BCH has great expertise in building and maintaining equestrian trails. Web: www.bchw.org.

Resources Used In This Publication

ORGANIZATIONS

Backcountry Horseman of Washington. www.bchw.org.

Washington Trails Association. www.wta.org/

PUBLICATIONS

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Gimenez, Rebecca. “*You Can Build a Horse Trail*.” John Lyons Perfect Horse. August 2006: 43-46.

N2Dirt Organization, in association with California Off-Road Vehicle Association. “*Trail Riding Basics, Riding on Public Lands*.” January 2005. www.n2dirt.org/library/Trail_Riding_Basics.pdf

“*Trail Riding Etiquette*.” www.westkingdom.org/equestrian/TrailRidingEtiquette.pdf

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William, Carey, PhD & Elsishans, Janice. *Trail Riding Etiquette for Horse Enthusiasts*. Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experimental Station Cooperative Extension. August 9, 2005. <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS370>

Wood, Gene W. *Recreational Horse Trails in Rural and Wildland Areas: Design, Construction, and Maintenance*. South Carolina: Department of Forestry and Natural Resources Clemson University, 2007.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR TRAIL RIDERS:

Corkery, Jennifer. *Lead-Horse Trail Etiquette*. Equisearch.com. December 22, 2007. www.equisearch.com/horses_riding_training/trail/eqtrail77/

Davis, Bonnie. *Trail Riding Etiquette*. Bay Area Equestrian Network. www.bayequest.info/horsetalk/trailetiquette.htm

urine puddles to help dilute them further. Smelly piles of manure and urine invite flies and are not attractive to other riders or users.

On the trail. Teach and then encourage your horse to keep walking when they defecate on the trail. This helps to avoid manure piles. If a group of riders stops for any length of time and there is a build up of manure, dismount and kick manure around to disperse it.

On the Trail

STAY ON THE TRAIL

When mud and puddles develop along a trail, teach and encourage your horse to ride through them. Riding around these areas widens the trail, destroying more vegetation.



Stay on marked trails and do not cut new trails, switchbacks or corners. Whenever possible, riding single file will prevent widening and degrading trails. Never go off a trail into a sensitive area such as a wetland, bog or marshy meadow. Creating new trails without permission of the landowner can cause those areas to be closed to future use. New trails can't be maintained and may decrease the amount of maintenance the whole system receives. It also potentially destroys wildlife habitat and may cause erosion and loss of valuable topsoil. When sediments end up in streams, ponds and other water bodies, serious water quality problems can result.

In the parking area, avoid driving your truck and trailer over vegetation and into sensitive areas. Stay in designated areas and minimize your impact.

WATERBODIES

Only cross creeks, waterways or other sensitive areas in designated locations. Existing crossing points have been chosen and designed to limit the impact on waterways. Crossing in other areas potentially increases erosion and the loading of sediments as well as nutrients and bacteria (from manure and urine) in water bodies, resulting in increased water pollution and possible trail closures. Cross single file so as to not widen the crossing further.

Other basic emergency items include a hoof pick (for hoof problems) and duct tape (for emergency tack repair or in the case of a lost shoe). A sharp pocketknife and matches are other basic necessities to consider carrying. Drinking water for people is always important. Use the buddy system and ride with at least one other person. At the very least, let someone else know where you are planning to ride, when you plan to return and with whom you will be traveling.

The Rules of the Road

While riding, follow Backcountry Horsemen's motto of "Leave No Trace." This means leave what you find, carry out what you brought and take all litter with you.



It is paramount that as we ride, we make every effort to preserve the past. Look at and enjoy, but do not touch, cultural or historic structures and artifacts. Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them. Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species of plants and animals. Do not build anything — such as fire pits, chairs or trenches.

Share the trails with other trail users when you come upon them. While other trail users are supposed to defer to horses, it is smart to be polite and courteous when approaching others. Speaking to them will often help settle an uneasy horse startled by the sudden appearance of a new object. Friendly conversation helps keep horses and equestrians in a positive light. Remember that while you are riding you serve as an ambassador to non-riders. What you do reflects on other horse owners. Bicyclists, runners and hikers should all yield to equestrians. But if there's any question and when possible, give the other user the right of way. Common sense and courtesy are more important than who has the right of way.



Keep your horse under control and at a safe speed at all times. A fast gait on wet soils degrades trails, potentially causing erosion. Plus, it can be unsettling to other trail users if you ride up behind them at a fast speed. If possible, keep trail rides to a small group so you can manage safety concerns as well as trail riding etiquette. Smaller groups also have less impact on the trails. Unless the trail is wide enough, go single file, keeping a horse's length between riders. And finally, do not smoke or drink alcohol while riding.

What Can Be Done to Help Maintain Trails?

There are some simple techniques you can do to help keep trails open and safe, both for yourself and others. Carry a small, foldable handsaw and clippers. Clip or remove small branches that lean into the trail (10 to 12 feet above the trail). When a newly fallen tree blocks a trail, and if someone else can safely hold your horse, consider moving the tree to make it safer for the next rider.

If you see unapproved trails being started, like a corner cut on a switch back, consider blocking the trail at both ends to prevent or discourage access. Blockage can be done with branches, rocks, old trees, or stumps.

Carry a spare plastic bag with you in order to pick up and carry out any litter you come across along the trail.

If you belong to any kind of a riding group, formal or informal, perhaps you can volunteer as a group to do trail maintenance. Backcountry Horseman of Washington, www.bchw.org, is an excellent organization that works with different government agencies volunteering time and work to keep trails open for equestrian use. BCH has a lot of great expertise in building and maintaining equestrian trails. Any riding group you belong to can make a difference in helping to keep trails open!

Remember...

Following basic trail stewardship can help ensure the safety of you, your horse and other trail users, as well as keeping the environment healthy. It also helps keep the trails open to horses. Many trails are closed to horses because of riders who abuse trail-riding privileges. You and your horse are always an ambassador wherever you ride; what one horse and rider do reflects on all. Abusing privileges makes it difficult to receive support for maintenance of existing trails, as well as for building new trails. Please, help your fellow horse owners preserve this privilege for generations to come.



Only YOU can make a difference!

Happy trails!

Plants Toxic to Horses

Bracken Fern
Poison Hemlock
Tansy ragwort
Red Maple trees
Water Hemlock
Japanese Yew
Arrowgrass
Buttercup
Cocklebur
False Hellebore
Coast Fiddleneck
St. Johnswort
Common groundsel
Horsetail
Jimsonweed
Larkspur
Lupine
Nightshade
Indian Paintbrush
Sword Fern



Bracken Fern

Morning Glory
Rhododendron
Asters
Hydrangea
Sweet Pea
Boxwood
Foxglove
Oak
Wild Cherry
Azalea
All bulbs



Observe wildlife from a distance. Be careful not to stalk or approach wild animals, and never feed them.

Avoid wildlife during sensitive times such as mating, nesting, and periods of raising young. For those species that hibernate in winter, avoid disturbing their winter dens.

DOGS

A dog should be under control at all times. The American Dog Owners Association (www.adoa.org) recommends always leashing your dog. Leashed dogs are protected from being lost or injured by wildlife, and from harming or chasing wildlife or other dogs on the trail. Unleashed dogs can frighten other trail users, including their dogs, depriving others of peace of mind and the use of a public area. Horses and riders can be startled or hurt by a loose or aggressive dog. An out-of-control dog increases the chances of dogs being banned from your favorite public lands and trails.

Riding a horse with a leashed dog may be dangerous, especially with pedestrians or horse traffic around, so consider leaving your dog at home.

EMERGENCY CONSIDERATIONS

While riding on a trail, especially in a remote area, carry a whistle and a cell phone. In case your cell phone dies or is out of range, it takes less effort to blow a whistle than to yell for help.

Always carry ID, and consider an ID tag for your horse. The ID should contain your name, the horse's barn name and your cell phone. Should you and your horse part ways, the cell phone number will be faster for reuniting you and your horse.

Carry a map of the area in which you are riding or a GPS (Global Positioning System) unit that you are familiar with.





*Washington State has many scenic trails.
Use them responsibly!*

In this age of increasing urbanization, we as horse owners need to consider the impact we are making on our neighbors and the environment. If we want to see trails remain open for equestrian use, we need to ask ourselves:

- ❖ Are we contributing to reduced water quality in our watershed by leaving manure in parking lots and riding through wetlands or unmarked creek crossings?
- ❖ Or, does our trail stewardship make us good ambassadors and help to ensure a place for horses and trail riding experiences in the future?

Protect your watershed, the environment, and the equestrian way of life: Take steps to become an asset to your equestrian community, trail club and watershed today!

Stewards of the Trail Guide

Water Quality Section



Mussels in a stream are a sign of a healthy ecosystem. However, even if mussels are present, do not drink the water. Untreated water from any water body may contain the parasite, Giardia, which causes illness in humans and other mammals.

Water Quality

What are the Issues?

Let's start by taking a look at the "big picture," environmentally speaking. A **watershed** is a valley or system of depressions that water drains through and eventually follows into the ocean. In Snohomish County, watersheds originate in the mountains and drain through a system of creeks and rivers, eventually emptying into Puget Sound.

The quality of water in local streams, lakes and other water bodies affects and is affected by all people. No matter where we live or what we do, the runoff we each produce impacts water quality. This is what scientists refer to as **non-point pollution**. Non-point pollution is essentially polluted water from homes, streets, parking lots, forests, and farms, all of which do not come from a single pipe or source. It can be the result of logging, development, traffic, construction and agriculture, as well as everyday activities like washing your car, spraying your lawn and not managing livestock and pet waste. All runoff, be it oils, chemicals, sediments, septic tank wastes or animal waste, has potential for reaching surface waters through storm drains, streams and waterways. Non-point pollution affects the quality of life we all enjoy.



Responsible Stewardship

As horse owners, we need to be especially aware of how we impact the environment and take the necessary steps to minimize this impact. The end result will help preserve the equestrian way of life that we as horse owners enjoy in the Pacific Northwest.

Runoff from horse manure, and sediments from eroded stream banks and steep slopes, cause a heavy impact on the environment. Sediment clouds the water and excess nutrients (from manure and urine) can cause imbalanced vegetation growth. This reduces water quality and creates a poor environment for fish and other aquatic life. Bacteria from manure can make waters unsafe for recreation and can even make its way into Puget Sound, contaminating the shellfish living there.

Wetlands areas and other sensitive areas contain plants that simply cannot survive trampling. Horses are particularly hard on wet areas as their hooves compact the soil, act like plungers, and suffocate plant roots. This results in fine particles of topsoil becoming loose and washing away during rain events. Wetlands and grassy areas serve as natural filters for water moving into streams and ground-water supplies. They cannot function properly when they are muddied and clogged with debris.



Trillium

Trees and forest undergrowth are nature's system for filtering contaminants. Along a stream bank, they help prevent soil erosion and provide food and shelter for fish and other aquatic wildlife. An overhead canopy along a stream keeps water cool. When these natural elements are destroyed, a toxic environment is created for fish and other stream life, since cool water is able to carry more oxygen (which fish need) than warm water.

More and more wildlife habitat is being lost as land is cleared of native plants, then subdivided and developed. Even pastures, which are a monoculture, don't provide good habitat for most wildlife which are adapted to the native trees and shrubs that they use for food, nesting, and shelter. Destruction of native plants while trail riding reduces critical food and nesting sites needed by birds and other wildlife, as well as shade for fish.

Pack your clean-up supplies with you. Carry a manure fork in your trailer and take home manure, old hay, and spilled bedding. Remember to carry out your own garbage as well!

