

## A Prospectus

### Creating a Cornerstone for Resolution of Recreational Horse Use Issues on Public Lands

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#### The Management Dilemma

The image of the mounted horseman on a wild landscape is welded into the American psyche. One of our most protective conservation statutes, The Wilderness Act of 1964, provides for recreational horse use. Many of our federal natural resource policy mandates require the preservation of cultural values as well as ecosystem component and process values.<sup>1</sup> Management provision for recreational horse use in rural and wildland settings is the preservation of a cultural heritage in a natural heritage setting.

On the other hand, it seems increasingly probable that a vote taken among the nation's public land managers on continuation of recreational trail horse use would yield a majority opinion for removal. As there are 3.9 million horses used primarily for recreation in the nation, this is no small issue. On a per user basis, horse use has greater impacts on trails than does any other form of non-motorized use. Furthermore, managing to provide trail systems for horse use is more complex and expensive than for systems that exclude horses.

#### A Cornerstone for Resolution

Traditional approaches to this issue have equestrians arguing for more trail miles and facilities and better conditions for horse use while positioned across the table are more or less empathetic agency officials seeking to pacify a user group with which they are often uncomfortable. This approach has no hope of sustainable success. What is needed is a new way of thinking about the issue. The new way begins with a *cornerstone constructed as a conglomerate of basic touchstone principles*. The cornerstone becomes the reference for issue resolution regardless of scale or combination of situation specific details.

#### Creating and Using the Cornerstone

The cornerstone needs to be created by a *think tank* composed of top level thinkers from the equestrian constituency, selected environmental groups, and federal and state land management agencies.<sup>2</sup> The touchstone principles composing the cornerstone should be so fundamental that all planning processes for issue resolution should refer to them for guidance. Furthermore, monitoring the implementation of any resolution should use the principles as a check list for judging success. To accomplish this, the process has two stages: a) creation of the cornerstone (i.e., creation of the body of touchstone principles), and b) use of the cornerstone by a management entity in an actual management planning and implementation process (i.e., demonstration of the practicability of the cornerstone).

#### Proposal

It is proposed here that a think tank be convened and funded by the three main federal agencies managing recreational horse trails and non-government organizations that wish to support the think tank process. The think tank would produce a white paper (the cornerstone) that will be universally available in hard and electronic copy. It would also formulate a recommendation for laying the cornerstone in an agency's framework for planning, managing, and evaluating success of an actual equestrian trails issue resolution. All expenses for the first phase of the process would likely total to \$30,000 to \$40,000.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include the National Park Service Act of 1916, Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, National Forest Management Act of 1976, and Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976.

<sup>2</sup> The think tank will be only roughly similar to The Quincy Library Group model. It will seek principles for guiding resolutions to resource use conflicts as opposed to arguing over conflicting agendas for land and resource use.

## **The Process**

### **Recognizing the Crux of the Problem**

At the crux of the problem is the lack of common ground; i.e., a lack of a common understanding of recreational horse use values on the one hand, and land management agency responsibilities and constraints on the other.

### **Creating Common Ground**

The cornerstone will provide a foundation of common ground from which all parties can work towards issue resolution. The think tank might, but would not be constrained to, begin by considering the following propositions:

1. Equestrian trail users should begin thinking in terms of the trail embedded in an ecological matrix the integrity of which the agencies are mandated by law to protect, sustain, and in some cases restore (e.g., ecosystem restoration programs, as well as endangered species conservation).
2. The agencies should consider as valid the proposition that recreational horse use on wildlands is a cultural value to be preserved by reenactment of an historical American experience.
3. Both sides should focus on the development and articulation of a land ethic that will guide behaviors as well as trail design, construction, maintenance, and regulation processes.
4. The integration of ecological principles and land ethics to guide recreational trail system management is recognized as the foundation upon which the future must be built.

### **The Think Tank and Its Work**

The cornerstone must be created by a team of highly reputable people from across the national landscape that can engage in a *think tank* process. A nationally recognized leader in natural resource management issue resolution should be recruited to lead the process. A skilled facilitator with extensive experience in natural resource management should be selected.

The think tank should consist of 16 members: six people from the recreational trail horsemen, four environmental group representatives, and six from the primary management agencies, i.e., USDA-Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and a state agency. Scholarships to cover travel costs would have to be secured for all team members. The leader and facilitator would likely need additional stipends.

The working sessions should require three days. The schedule might be as follows:

**Sunday:** Arrive at meeting site; get acquainted with the rest of the team, and receive briefing on how to initiate the process.

**Monday:** Initiate the process and articulate the fundamental issues.

**Tuesday:** Develop and articulate principles and recommendations for approaches to issue resolutions.

**Wednesday:** Draft the cornerstone document.

**Thursday:** Travel home.

### **The Work Site**

It is suggested that Clemson University be funded to facilitate the entire process. Clemson has a well defined history of success with this type of work, national and international experience in the subject area, and excellent support staff and facilities that can be dedicated to the effort.

For questions regarding this prospectus, please contact:

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