

Frequently Asked Questions
Restricting Horse Use to Designated Trails
Upper Bay Creek, Lusk Creek, Big Grand Pierre Creek and Eagle Creek
Watersheds

1. **Question:** Why do we need designated trails?

Answer: Requiring equestrians to stay on designated trails allows us to reduce overall resource impacts by concentrating use on the trail system. Concentrating use on the trail system allows us to focus our maintenance efforts and funding, as well as improving public information and safety.

2. **Question:** Can we stop along the trails for brief periods?

Answer: Stopping momentarily to adjust tack or check a shoe should be done right on the trail tread when possible. When it becomes necessary to stop for longer periods of time or to let others pass, it is best to get off of the trail. Several stock confinement areas and trailheads have been established on the trail system and should be utilized when possible. The Forest will continue to update a free interim trail map showing the locations of the stock confinement areas (available at all Shawnee National Forest offices).

If a stock confinement area or trailhead is not accessible, users may leave the trail tread for short periods of time. If stopping is necessary, care should be taken to disturb the ground as little as possible. When getting off of the trail tread, go only as far off the trail as necessary. Stock should be restrained by having another rider hold them in the trail or by cross tying. Horses should not be allowed to chew or otherwise damage trees. Trips should be planned to use roads and trails designated for stock use.

3. **Question:** What if there are obstructions in the trail?

Answer: If a tree or rock falls into the trail please call the Trails Hotline at (618) 658-1312. If the trail is not passable, it is permissible to ride around the obstruction, but please re-enter the trail as soon as possible. Whenever it is necessary to leave the trail tread, groups should ride single file and avoid bunching up.

4. **Question:** What about muddy trail conditions?

Answer: Information on trail conditions can be found on the Trails Hotline at (618) 658-1312. Equestrians should try not to ride when trail conditions are muddy. Wet-weather trail use by horses causes a greater need for trail maintenance. If a section of the trail is muddy, please remain on the trail, as the ground nearby is likely to be wet and riding there will only lead to the formation of a second muddy

trail. Trail conditions can also be reported to the District office at the Hotline number.

5. **Question:** Will enforcement be reasonable and fair?

Answer: Enforcement will be fair, firm and consistent.

6. **Question:** Why are you closing this area to cross-country riding?

Answer: Requiring equestrians to stay on designated trails allows us to reduce overall resource impacts by concentrating use on the trail system. Concentrating use on the trail system allows us to focus our maintenance efforts and funding, as well as improving public information and safety. The 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan requires equestrian use on designated trails only. However, it delays implementation of this standard until the forest has been analyzed, watershed by watershed, for additional trail designation needs. The Upper Bay Creek, Lusk Creek, Big Grand Pierre Creek and Eagle Creek watersheds have already undergone this analysis. It should be expected that equestrians using other areas of the Forest will one day be required to remain on designated trails or roads as analyses of other watersheds are completed. Please refer to Question 1 for additional information concerning the importance of a designated trail system.

7. **Question:** What about riding from my house?

Answer: When trailheads, road intersections, trail intersections and entry from horse camps are considered, there are approximately 240 points of entry into the designated trail system in these four watersheds. Should you want to access the designated trail system directly from your property, you will need to apply for a special use permit through the Hidden Springs District Office and the District Ranger will make the final decision concerning issuance of the permit.

8. **Question:** It is not safe because I now have to ride on a road to get to the trail system.

Answer: We appreciate the concern over safety. Once again, if you feel you need access directly from your property, please apply for a special use permit at the Hidden Springs District Office. Trailheads are available for access to the trail system. While our current emphasis is to complete trail work as soon as possible, we will also improve trailheads to provide additional parking.

9. **Question:** You are limiting us to the designated trail system so you can charge us to ride.

Answer: We are limiting use to designated trails because of the unacceptable resource damage that was sometimes caused by the proliferation of user-created horse trails that occurred in the past in these watersheds. We want to limit use to routes we can maintain. Maintaining trails to a standard that will accommodate

equestrian use is expensive, especially in wilderness areas as the work is completed by hand labor and not mechanically. We are using a combination of contractors and forest employees to mechanically improve trails outside of wilderness. We have proposed a fee for equestrian use of designated trails to offset some of these costs.

10. **Question:** Why is it only in these watersheds?

Answer: The 2006 Forest Plan requires equestrian use on designated trails only. The Plan also makes a commitment to analyze each watershed on the Forest for trail designation prior to closing it to off-trail use. At this time, these are the only watersheds that have been analyzed. (Please see response to question 6)

11. **Question:** When will you analyze the rest of the forest?

Answer: As time and funding permit. The decision on these four watersheds was signed in 2006. We are hoping to begin the next analysis in 2008 or 2009.