



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Becky Banker
(618) 253-7114

DESIGNATED TRAIL USE ONLY IN FOUR WATERSHEDS

Harrisburg, IL, January 22, 2007 –Today Forest Supervisor Allen Nicholas announced equestrian use will be limited to designated trails in the Eagle Creek, Big Grande Pierre, Lusk Creek and Upper Bay Creek watersheds in Gallatin, Hardin, Johnson, Pope and Saline counties of the Hidden Springs Ranger District. “Requiring equestrians to stay on designated trails allows us to reduce overall resource damage by concentrating use and associated impact 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,” stated Forest Supervisor Nicholas.

The 2006 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) for the Shawnee National Forest indicates equestrian use forest wide will be restricted to designated trails. The Plan also indicates that cross-country riding will be allowed to continue across the Forest until an environmental analysis of a given watershed has been completed, unless restrictions were already in place before the 2006 Plan. Restrictions limiting horse use to designated trails in natural areas, disallowing horse use on hiker only trails and disallowing horses in developed recreation areas, except Camp Cadiz and Johnson Creek Campgrounds, were already in place and will remain in effect.

A decision was made in March 2006 concerning the designation of trails in these four watersheds and the environmental analysis leading up to that decision was documented in the Designated Trails Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Forest personnel has spent the last year and a half constructing and reconstructing 18 miles of designated trail in the four watershed area. Additionally, 40 miles of trail were maintained, three creek crossings were constructed, four equestrian confinement areas were constructed/reconstructed and 381 directional signs were installed. “In general, we have had very good comments from the public concerning the newly designated trail system, particularly in the Lusk Creek Wilderness,” Nicholas said. “We will be monitoring closely how well these trails stand up to use,” added Nicholas.

Rules for stock use in the Shawnee National Forest include:

In most areas of the Forest (outside of the Lusk Creek, Upper Bay Creek, Big Grande Pierre Creek and Eagle Creek Watersheds) stock use is generally allowed with the following exceptions:

- ❖ Stock is not permitted in natural areas off of designated trails.
- ❖ Stock is not allowed on hiker-only trails.

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- ❖ Stock is not permitted in developed recreation areas unless specifically authorized by instructions posted at the site. On the Shawnee, stock is allowed at Camp Cadiz and at the Johnson Creek Recreation Area.

Inside the Lusk Creek, Upper Bay Creek, Big Grande Pierre Creek and Eagle Creek Watersheds, the rules governing stock use are different than in the remainder of the Forest. Rules pertaining to stock use in these four watersheds include the following:

- ❖ Stock is not allowed off of designated equestrian trails, interim equestrian trails, public roads, designated stock confinement areas, equestrian trail heads or parking areas. The routes and areas authorized for stock are identified on the Shawnee National Forest Interim Trails Map, which is updated annually.
- ❖ Stock is not permitted in developed recreation areas unless specifically authorized by instructions posted at the site. In these four watersheds, stock use is authorized at certain trails and trailheads at the Garden of the Gods (Backpackers Parking Lot, River to River Trail, Trail#108K and the Garden of the Gods hitching rail just north of the Observation Trail parking lot.)
- ❖ Stock is not permitted at Millstone Bluff.
- ❖ In the Lusk Creek Wilderness, stock users are not allowed to stop and tie their stock on or along the “Ride-Through Only Trail” across from Saltpeter Cave and then east along Lusk Creek past Natural Bridge as identified on the Interim Trails Map.
- ❖ Lusk Creek, Bay Creek and Garden of the Gods Wilderness Areas are closed from December 1st to March 31st. Additionally, during the months of April, May, September, October and November the Lusk Creek Wilderness will be closed to stock use whenever more than one inch of rain falls within a 24 hour period. This closure will last a minimum of one day. Current information on wilderness rainfall closures can be obtained by calling the trail hotline at (618) 658-1312.
- ❖ Group size for all users in the Lusk Creek, Bay Creek and Garden of the Gods Wilderness Areas is limited to no more than ten persons. Where stock confinement areas are located in wilderness, group size at these locations varies, but is limited to the number of tying points on the high lines that are there. Groups are asked to stay out of sight and sound of one another. If encounters with other groups cause you to exceed these limitations, please separate out of sight and sound of one another as quickly as possible.
- ❖ Camping with livestock is prohibited in the Lusk Creek, Bay Creek and Garden of the Gods Wilderness Areas. Camping with stock outside of these wilderness areas can be accommodated at various road-side hunter camps. Details can be obtained by calling the Hidden Springs Ranger District at (618) 658-2111.

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- ❖ Stock is not to be tied within reach of a live tree. Stock will be cross-tied, hobbled or restrained so they can not damage live trees. In many locations, high lines have been provided for this purpose.

The EIS, quarterly trail accomplishments and the annual trails monitoring report are available at the Supervisor's Office in Harrisburg, the Hidden Springs District Office in Vienna and online at www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/shawnee. The Forest Supervisor's order and accompanying maps can also be obtained at these locations. For additional information contact Bob Monroe at (618) 658-2111.

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