

WHERE DO YOU RIDE?

Part VI

The purpose of this series of articles is to acquaint our riders with background information on agencies where equestrian trails can be found and how their missions differ from one another.

MISSOURI STATE PARKS

“Part VI” featuring Missouri State Parks is the last of the major public land management agencies with equestrian trails. With each installment we have looked at each of the land managers’ mission statements in an effort to understand how this applies to equestrian trails and to gain some insight into the management of trails. Missouri State Parks is one of six divisions of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR mission statement: *“The mission of the Department of Natural Resources is to protect, preserve and enhance Missouri’s natural, cultural and energy resources.”*

Okay, I see how our organization, SMMBCH, can fit nicely into this mission. As an organization part of our mission is to be of service to *“enhance Missouri’s natural...resources.”* We certainly are devoted to keeping the *“cultural”* use of horses and mules alive. Horses and mules built this state and nation. Through our volunteer efforts we strive to improve and protect the natural resources of public lands and trails.

The mission statement for the Division of State Parks: *“The mission of Missouri State Park Rangers is to provide professional law enforcement service and protection to all park visitors, their property and the cultural and natural resources of Missouri’s state parks and historic sites. We want our visitors to have the opportunity to understand, appreciate and enjoy Missouri’s cultural and natural heritage in a safe, secure environment.”* Again, our organization’s mission compliments the State Parks mission. Our avocation for safe trails and strong trail ethics through our Leave No Trace program creates a more secure and safe environment and we certainly are visitors that enjoy *“Missouri’s cultural and natural heritage.”* When equestrians have access to provide volunteer service for trail and trailhead maintenance our state parks are enhanced. Access is the key word.

Currently sixteen state parks have equestrian access. With close to 50 state parks in the state, sixteen doesn’t seem like a lot; however, some are totally inappropriate for horses and many do not have supportable acreage for long distance trails, BUT some do. As an organization with the mission to promote access for equestrian trails through service and education, we should take notice and start a conversation. But, before a conversation can start we must have chapters in the area to provide the volunteer efforts to support and maintain trails. Currently SMMBCH’s eight chapters are doing a good job in their local areas but are stretched thin to take on more. New chapters are needed in areas where service could be provided to state parks that have adequate acreage to support equestrian trails. One that comes to mind is Roaring River State Park that has had equestrian trails in the past. What would

it take to reopen these trails to riders? Answer: Horsemen and women in the area to ask the right questions and be ready to provide solutions to the obstacles that are keeping them closed. This is a plan that works. It is evident with the equestrian improvements being implemented at Nob Knoster State Park where SMMBCH members have been working with acting Superintendent Daniel Brigman. Lines of communication between park management and horseback riders have greatly improved and positive progress is evident. A work day schedule for improvements to the equine trail system is being developed for 2014.

Missouri did not get the national recognition as the "Best Trails State" for 2013 by accident and much is due to the State Park personnel being open to change and see what all trail users need, not just the majority user groups. If we equestrians want more or better trails in State Parks, we must make ourselves a part of solutions and begin that conversation.