



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

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One Common Bond: The Horse
One Common Voice: The Horse Council

In the House Environment & Transportation Committee, February 29, 2024

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 530

Maryland Trails Advisory Committee and the Maryland Office of Trails - Establishment (Great Maryland Trails Act)

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the state-wide horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. We represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

This is an ambitious bill that will change the entire landscape of trail development, maintenance and use in Maryland. Maryland's trails are very important to equestrians.

A recently released Economic Impact Study¹, commissioned by the American Horse Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by the Innovation Group, found that almost 500,000 Maryland households contain at least one person who owns a horse and/or participates in equestrian activities; and that ten percent of Maryland's households contain at least one person who trail rides on horseback. In our own recent survey, respondents reported riding on over 50 public

¹ That study also found that Maryland's horse industry has grown by almost 40% since the last study was released in 2018. The overall economic impact of the horse industry today is \$2.9 billion, with the recreational sector such as trail riding contributing \$421 million.

trail systems spread throughout the State.² Many trails are multi-use, meaning that the same trail can be used by horses, bicycles and people on foot.

² Here are the public trails that our survey respondents reported riding their horses on:

Bohemia River State Park (Cecil County)
Cedarville State Forest (Prince George's County)
Chesapeake State (Lower Eastern Shore)
Doncaster Demonstration Forest (Charles County)
Elk Neck State Park (Cecil County)
Fair Hill NRMA (Cecil County)
Green Ridge State Forest (Allegany County)
Greenbriar State Park (Washington County)
Greenwell State Park (St. Mary's County)
Grove Farm WMA (Cecil County)
Gunpowder Falls State Park (Bunker Hill) (Baltimore County)
Gunpowder Falls State Park (Monkton) (Harford County)
Gunpowder Falls State Park (Sweet Air) (Balto & Harford)
Gunpowder Falls State Park (Torrey Brown) (Baltimore County)
Hashawa Loop Trail (Carroll County)
Idylwild Wildlife Management Area (Caroline County)
Indian Springs WMA (Washington County)
Liberty Reservoir Cooperative WMA (Balto & Carroll County)
Little Bennet Regional Park (Montgomery County)
Maxwell Hall Park (Charles County)
McKee-Beshears WMA (Montgomery County)
Merkle NRMA (PG County)
Monocacy NRMA (Montgomery County)
Morgan Run NEA (Carroll County)
Mrytle Grove WMA (Charles County)
Newtowne Neck State Park (St. Mary's County)
Patapsco Valley State Park (Avalon) (Baltimore City)
Patapsco Valley State Park (Cascade Falls) (Baltimore County)
Patapsco Valley State Park (McKeldin) (Howard County)
Patapsco Valley State Park (Orange Grove) (Howard County)
Patapsco Valley State Park (Rockburn Branch) (Howard County)
Patapsco Valley State Park (Sykesville) (Howard County)
Patapsco Valley State Park (River Road) (Howard County)
Patuxent River State Park – Jug Bay Natural Area (Prince George's County)
Patuxent River State Park (Annapolis Rock) (Howard County)
Pocomoke River State Park (Milburn Landing) (Worcester County)
Pocomoke State Forest (Furnace Town)
Prettyboy Reservoir Cooperative Wildlife Management Area (Baltimore County)
Rosaryville State Park (PG County)
Sassafras NRMA (Kent County)
Rocks State Park (Harford County)
Gambrell State Park (Frederick County)
Seneca Creek State Park (Montgomery County)
South Mountain State Park (Washington County)
Spring Valley County Park (Pennsylvania)
St. Mary's River State Park (St. Mary's County)

We note that although horse riding is acknowledged as one of multiple uses of trails (subsection 2-902(B)(4)(IV)), there is no other mention or inclusion of equestrian users in the bill.

Accordingly, we request that the bill be amended to recognize and include equestrian uses and users.

1. Specifically, in section 2-902(B)(2), add the Maryland Horse Industry Board, which licenses horse stables and which is charged with promoting equestrian activities and the use of horses for recreation, to the list of entities with which the Office of Trails will "COORDINATE . . . TO IDENTIFY OR ESTABLISH FUNDING SOURCES TO DEVELOP, CONSTRUCT, MAINTAIN, MANAGE, AND PROMOTE THE MARYLAND TRAILS NETWORK."

2. Similarly, we ask that in section 2-904(B)(1), which specifies the members of the Trails Advisory Commission, a seat be specifically designated for the Maryland Horse Council, and another seat be specifically designated for the Maryland Horse Industry Board. We note that both Bike Maryland and MORE have designated seats.

3. We also request that section 2-904(B)(1)(XXIII) be amended as follows:
UP TO SIX CITIZEN MEMBERS WHO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF BICYCLISTS, PEDESTRIANS, EQUESTRIANS AND THE DISABLED COMMUNITY . . .

As previously mentioned, on many trails different types of users share the trail simultaneously. The Horse Council in recent years has received a number of reports from our members regarding confusion about "trail etiquette." leading in some cases to potentially unsafe interactions with the various types of trail users. For example, trail bike users can be moving very fast and relatively silently with little to no advance warning to others. Horses are flight animals and can react dangerously to sudden noises and rapid movement. Walkers/hikers are unsure what to do when confronted by rapidly moving bikes or large horses. From our perspective, improved communication, signage, etc., could go a long way toward averting problems.

In addition, there have been instances where trail planning and installation has taken place without the equestrian community being "at the table," resulting, for example, in bridges over streams being designed and built in a way that is unsafe for mounted riders (insufficient side rails, slippery surfaces, etc.). Although in many cases Park staff have been accommodating when problems with completed projects are pointed out, obviously, it's not very efficient or beneficial to the taxpayer to have to reconfigure/repair projects, rather than to "smart design" them from the outset.

Although there have been conversations with Park managers about this, we believe that a codified, statewide approach would be helpful. This bill presents the perfect opportunity to address these issues.

Therefore, we suggest two additional amendments:

4. Add to section 2-904(l)(3), which authorizes the Commission to provide guidance to state agencies on several topics, a sub-subsection:

(3) PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS OF TRAIL-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND TRAIL SAFETY, INCLUDING

(l) Providing education and outreach to increase awareness of responsible use of trails, including appropriate and safe interaction between and among various users and user groups such hikers, bicyclists, horseback riders and others.

5. Add to section 2-902(B)(1):

THE OFFICE SHALL:

(1) DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN THE MARYLAND TRAILS PLAN TO FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT, CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, MANAGEMENT, USE, AND PROMOTION OF THE MARYLAND TRAILS NETWORK;

(l) When considering the development, construction, maintenance, management, use, and promotion of the Maryland Trails Network, the Office shall take into consideration equestrian use, and shall permit such use except as prohibited by law or regulation.

For the convenience of the Committee, in addition to this written testimony, we have also submitted a scan of certain pages of the bill, which are marked up to show the amendments we are requesting.

We urge the Committee to adopt these requested amendments and give HB 530 a Favorable with Amendments report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

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