



State of Connecticut
HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONN. 06106

State Representative DebraLee Hovey
Public Hearing Testimony
Monday, February 9, 2009

Dear Senator Meyer, Senator McKinney, Senator Maynard, Representative Roy,
Representative Chapin, Representative Hurlburt, and Environment Committee Membership:

I want to thank the Environment Committee for hosting this public hearing and Hearing my bill, HB #5108. Many of us here today are deeply troubled by the continued loss of open space traditionally used by equestrians, the formation of land management groups that do not include equestrians and signage changes prohibiting horses where they had been traveling for years.

Two years ago the legislature saw the importance of the Equestrian community and established the Equine Advisory Council as a support to the DEP for assuring equestrian needs were being considered. This group has not been utilized by the DEP and I am not sure, but I do not think all the appointments have been made so that it is not a fully functioning group.

Equestrians are fast losing their ability to enjoy an alternate means of non-motorized transportation and recreation. Trails and Greenways that were once created and exclusively used for equestrians are now being paved and restricted to foot and bicycle use. I do not know what has caused this policy shift as Connecticut leads the nation in the number of horses per capita. The impact of this distinction is about a billion dollars annually; no other trail user group even comes close to having this kind of impact on our economy.

Perhaps there is a misconception that equestrians ruin trails or pose a danger to others? Not true. No one who rides their equine off personal property does so without thought to the safety of others and themselves. Horses are land roving animals and their hooves are made to fall flat and to have minimal impact on the land. Their manure is totally organic and decomposes within several months. Horses consume only natural grains and grasses, their diets are completely vegetarian.

Historically, Connecticut has been very friendly to equestrians and it is my hope that this tradition will continue. Horses have played a significant role in the creation and growth of our State and even today this legacy is still apparent by two official horse guards for the Governor

I have tried to work with the DEP in hopes that it would change its position and become more responsive and allow equestrians continued access to trails. But to this point I feel I have been pacified but politely ignored

When preserving trails and open space all groups who have a vested interest should be at the table, including the equestrians who in this state are represented by the CT Horse Council.

It is my hope that by continuing to offer this trail preservation bill that DEP will honestly come to the table and be proactive in supporting equestrian use and preservation. DEP should work with the DOT to include equestrians as nonmotorized pedestrians and assure that Connecticut's legacy of equestrian excellence is preserved.

Thank you for your time and support.