

**Michigan Equestrians Support:
Recreation Passport - Opt Out HB 4486, 4775 and 4776**

September 11, 2019
State Representative Jack O'Malley
Chairman, House of Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Chairman O'Malley and Members of the House Transportation Committee:

Access to public parks, waterways and trails are the answer to many communities healthy living needs. Central Park, situated among the growing New York City, was created by visionaries in the 1800s who saw it as a necessity for public health. Public parks have become increasingly relevant today as a solution to the rise in sedentary lifestyles. In this PBS Newshour clip from 2019, doctors are prescribing outdoor time for patients as medical evidence has shown how important escaping the stresses of modern life via nature is, <https://www.pbs.org/video/outdoor-rx-1567032037/>. Actual paper prescriptions are being written to enjoy nature, motivating patients of all ages to spend more time outside. Studies have shown that exposure to nature can help anxiety, depression, preterm labor and even near sightedness. Within 15 minutes of spending time in nature, improvements were seen in cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rates. Natural stimuli have psychological, digestive and immune system benefits and those of us who live in green areas live longer. Nature gives our bodies the break they need to function normally, a time to enjoy being in the moment.

As our push button, tech driven world continues to evolve, it is vital that public lands and parks be accessible for nature therapy. In previous generations, daily time spent outside was 6 to 8 hours or more each day for normal activity, today that time has been cut in half. There is no doubt more emphasis should be placed on outdoor activities rather than indoor time, such as video games. We can help our communities and ourselves by having access to, development and maintenance of quality parks and trails that are available for everyone to use. We are incredibly lucky to have 103 amazing State Parks for our outdoor therapy in Michigan!

Horse owners are thankful for the horse friendly campgrounds and trails throughout the state of Michigan. These destinations are an oasis of rest and refreshment offering both recreational and educational experiences on our beautiful public lands. Access to horse friendly areas provides enjoyment, freedom, training platforms, physical exercise and therapy for horses and horse owners. Our Michigan Equestrian State Campgrounds and trails are home base for Great Lakes Distance Riders, Competitive Mounted Orienteering, community benefit rides, fox hunts and many various trail associations events like Chili Cook Offs, Poker Runs, Halloween Events, cook outs and much more.

The equestrian trail riders of Michigan show our appreciation of horse friendly public riding areas, by the evidence of our usage, dedication and volunteerism. We donate time, energy, equipment and materials to design, improve and maintain campgrounds, staging areas, corrals, confidence courses, trails and more with a value of over \$500,000.00 annually. We are dedicated stewards of the campgrounds and trails because our horses are more than our hobby or occasional interest, they are our partners for healthy living. We have major investments of time, training, money and effort in our horses, tack, trucks, trailers, grooming tools, camping provisions, professional services, and equipment.

Out of the 103 State Parks, there are 38 State Park campgrounds in Michigan and horse riders have access to seven of these: Brighton, Highland, Ionia, Ortonville, Pontiac Lake, Waterloo and Yankee Springs. These campgrounds have been supported, developed and maintained by

horse owning volunteers for the last 20 plus years. Without the horseman's contributions, our privileges would have ended, as they have in many areas in Michigan. The equestrian campgrounds have only pit toilets and a water source, there are no Michigan equestrian campgrounds with electricity, restrooms or shower houses. When camping with our horses, we may not leave our horses unattended, so we do not have access to the showers often available at nearby non-equestrian campgrounds. The state of Michigan would attract more usage and tourism if our equestrian campgrounds offered electricity, running water, rest rooms and shower houses for visitors at these campgrounds.

It is the best safety practice to have Equestrian Campgrounds separate from other campground users. There is a comfort in knowing we are in a like-minded community, where seasoned, knowledgeable people with valuable horse experience are available if needed. Horses are herd animals, so it is natural and necessary for horses to be with other horses for protection and rest. It is essential for their survival and allows horses to be calm and confident. By the time we camp with our horses, we understand the calm, quiet disposition needed to conquer new frontiers.

Funding for the proposed equestrian campground improvements would need to be procured. In recent years, Michigan's Department of Natural Resources budgets have not grown to match inflation or the economy. Therefore, we are in favor of the Opt Out proposal to increase Michigan State Parks and Trails funding which could be used to support improvements, such as these and more, throughout the parks in Michigan.

Many citizens of Michigan may not realize the most efficient way to support their parks and take advantage of the lower price for the Recreation Passport is to "check the box" when they register their vehicle yearly. Because of this, our Parks are missing out on the support of people who would want their contribution to go to the parks. Just as it happened in Montana when their Opt Out Bill was passed, the increase in funding will provide our citizens with improved parks and trails, providing pathways of healthy options for exercise and nature therapy.

By passing the Opt Out HB 4486, 4775 and 4776, you will be helping our society become healthy, as we get back to basics and get back nature.

Michigan equestrians wholeheartedly support the Opt Out HB 4486, 4775 and 4776.

Michigan Equine Trails Subcommittee
c/o Jenny Cook
Michigan Equine Trails Representative (MTAC)
SW Michigan Equine Trails Subcommittee Representative (ETS)
P O Box 337
Mattawan, MI 49071
mi.trail.rep@gmail.com
(269)998-5916