

Eastern Trail reconsiders horses

By JEFF LAGASSE

Staff Writer

With the beginning of the spring season on the horizon, those who walk or ride on the Eastern Trail – the epic walking and biking trail that runs through several communities in Southern Maine – will soon be witness to the sights that trail allows: Bicyclists cruising, families walking, and dogs

wagging their tails.

What they may not see is the presence of horses on the trail. That, it seems, has become a point of controversy.

An equestrian group that was formed earlier this year, the Eastern Trail Equestrian Stewardship, is arguing that equestrian activity is, and always has been, expressly allowed by the Eastern Trail's

established bylaws. Several of the municipalities that share a part of the trail, including Kennebunk, Arundel, Biddeford and Saco, are discussing whether or not the presence of horses is indeed in the best interest of those who utilize the popular walking route.

And the Eastern Trail Management District, the enti-

ty that oversees the regulation and maintenance of the trail, has been caught in the middle as it tries to broker a solution.

"It's not a matter of being 'allowed' on the trail, it's about our right to be on the trail," said Cindy Parran Brochu, a member of the Eastern Trail Equestrian Stewardship. "We

See Trail Horses

PAGE A3

Trail Horses

FROM PAGE A1

have the right to be there; we always have."

Kennebunk already has an ordinance on the books prohibiting horses on the trail; the Town of Arundel, at its board of selectmen meeting on Feb. 13, discussed equestrian use on the Eastern Trail, but did not vote or come to an official stance on the issue.

Kristen Gould, another member of the Eastern Trail Equestrian Stewardship, cites the trail operator's manual posted on the ETMD's website as evidence for the allowed use of horses, saying that "with all the founding documents ... that define the trail, when communities enter into that they have an obligation to know what they're entering into."

In a Frequently Asked Questions section at the back of the ETMD manual, the answer to a question regarding horses reads, "Uses on the trail include at a minimum and without limitation; walking, jogging/running, hiking, cycling, equestrian, show-shoeing, cross country skiing and motorized wheelchairs. Some towns along the trail might have a local ordinance forbidding equestrian use, so the best bet is to contact the local municipality along the trail."

Tad Redway, president of the ETMD and Arundel's town planner, said that there have been issues before with horses on the trail. State funding for a transportation enhancement project allowed the stewards of the Eastern Trail to import all-new surfacing that is capable of handling all-terrain use and facilitates accessibility for the

disabled. According to Redway, there have been more than three incidents of horse hooves causing significant damage to that surface, which prompted trail officials to suspend equestrian use until a solution is formed.

"We called a moratorium on horse usage on the Eastern Trail," said Redway. "There was too much damage."

There have also been complaints and concerns, said Redway, much of them revolving around cleanup. Any living creature, after all, leaves droppings, and some have expressed worries to the ETMD about proposed solutions for the disposal of any waste left behind.

Others, including Arundel Town Manager Todd Shea, have voiced concern about the danger of horses potentially trampling some of the smaller children who walk with their families along the trail.

The Eastern Trail Equestrian Stewardship, for its part, has been attending regular meetings of the Eastern Trail Alliance with proposed solutions to those concerns. Brochu and Gould say that they have drafted a set of rules that, among other things, would require horses to be ridden on the trail at no more than a trot, addressing concerns about possible trappings. The group has also included a rule requiring riders to clean up after their horses, or to equip their animal with a special diaper, which is currently a requirement for equestrians riding their horses along the sands of Old Orchard Beach.

Because of the group's cooperation, Brochu claims that no entity has the right to place an outright, trail-wide ban

Guided hikes planned on Eastern Trail

The Eastern Trail is hosting several area trail hikes. Participants are welcome to cross country ski, snowshoe or hike, depending upon conditions, at an easy pace.

• Tonight, Friday, March 2: A starlight ski, snowshoe or walk will leave at 6 p.m. from the rear of the Southern Maine Medical Center parking lot in Biddeford, at the entrance to the trail. Participants will proceed on the trail toward Arundel and return to the Southern Maine Medical Center lot at approximately 7:30 p.m. For more information, contact Joe Yuhas at folk44@aol.com or 283-4487.

• Saturday, March 3: A hike in Scarborough will leave at 1 p.m. from the trail parking lot on Pine Point

Road and return to parking lot around 2:30 p.m. For more information, contact Bob LaNigra, runnar1@gmail.com, or 883-8662.

• Sunday, March 4: A hike in Saco will leave at 1 p.m. from the Eastern Trail parking lot at the end of Mill Brook Business Park, off Route 1 in Saco (across from Vacationland Bowling) and return to parking lot around 2:30 p.m. For more information, contact Carole Brush at eta@eastertrail.org or 303-877-8337.

• Wednesday, March 7: A hike in Saco will leave at 6 p.m., also from the parking lot at the end of Mill Brook Business Park, and return to the parking lot around 7:30 p.m. For more information, contact Carole Brush.

on horses.

"We basically believe they're in violation, essentially," said Brochu. "We think that this might be a case where users don't want to share, basically. This is no different than putting rules in place for dogs. We've done what they've asked. It's not a question of 'allowing' or 'not allowing.'"

"They're doing a good job coming up with some horse etiquette," said Redway, adding that the ETMD is currently seeking input from involved municipalities on the issue.

While the ETMD is the entity in charge of drafting policies regarding trail use, Redway said the organization must keep in mind the wishes of towns and cities along the trail, which

could make any potential policy revisions a tricky proposition. The satisfaction of many different entities is at stake, he said.

"The ETMD is an entity separate from the municipalities," said Redway, "and yet the municipalities are members. This will be an interesting thing for the ETMD: How do we deal with a trail-wide policy?"

"A real quandary is that we've always had a real relationship with our communities," he said. "In a situation where there might be conflict ... I would imagine we could come up with a reasonable solution."

— Staff Writer Jeff Lagasse can be contacted at 282-1535, Ext. 319 or jlagasse@journaltribune.com.