

# Grant Funding at Work

An AERC trails grant allowed the Gold Country Trails Council to relocate a portion of Northern California's Pioneer Trail

BY MELISSA RIBLEY, DVM

**AS EVERY ENDURANCE RIDER** knows, access to trails forms the very basis of our sport. Open trails allows us to train, condition and enjoy all that nature has to offer with our horses. Open trails also provide us with the opportunity to experience areas all over the country on horseback while participating

in endurance rides. The AERC Trails Grants Program assists with the creation and maintenance of existing trails and trail heads.

In the spring of 2012, the Gold Country Trails Council, a nonprofit association that develops, maintains, and protects non-motorized recreational trails in the Sierra

foothills of Northern California, applied for an AERC trails grant. The grant was to be used to relocate a portion of the Pioneer Trail, a trail extending from Nevada City, California, for approximately 50 miles east through the Tahoe National Forest.

The trail is used by equestrians, pedestrians and mountain bikers and is the trail used by the Wild West Endurance Ride, held every year since 1998. Many local endurance riders use the trail for conditioning their horses.

A section of the trail extended through a prehistoric lava flow and had deteriorated to a degree which made continued equestrian use only marginally safe at best. The proposed trail relocation moved this section of the trail to a nearby canal berm providing a level trail pad free of boulders and other obstructions.

Since the trail project was located on public land, the Tahoe National Forest, a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) report was required. The AERC trails grant in the amount of \$1500 was put towards the NEPA report. The Gold Country Trails Council donated the remaining funds for the trail relocation project and donated 50 hours of volunteer labor for supervision of the trail crew.

The relocated section of the Pioneer Trail continues to be used and enjoyed by endurance riders and recreational trail riders. This is a good example of how effectively AERC trails grant funding is used for the purpose of providing maintenance and continued access to trails. ■



Trail crew at work on the Pioneer Trail in Northern California, site of the Wild West Ride. Inset: the old, deteriorated trail.

## Are You a Force to Be Reckoned With?

BY SUE KEITH

**TRAIL VOLUNTEERS** are people passionate about trail preservation who understand without open access to trails and open spaces we have no sport. Equestrians need to become more aware of the issues surrounding their state and local trails, and what they can do to maintain access to their trails.

As trails become a more popular means for recreation, trail riders, hikers and bikers all are competing for use of the same trails. Because of ever-changing land use and budget constraints, many state parks, forests and recreational areas are using volunteers to maintain, and clear trails.

In the State of Indiana most volunteers

are members of horse organizations like Indiana Trail Riders Association (ITRA), Hoosier Backcountry Horseman, and local saddle clubs and distance riding clubs.

### Keep our trails and open spaces open, preserving them for the future.

Do you know who your state trail organizations are? Do you belong and volunteer; can you give one weekend a year to help work on the trails you use? All trail users are responsible for the future of our trails. Riders need to let the "powers that be" know you enjoy riding the trails and care about keeping them

open for future generations.

How do you predict the future? You make the future! The foundation to any successful process is the relationship that exists among the various participants. Communications is basic to a good relationship: careful thought before speaking; not being afraid to speak up; respect for all; clarity, patience, understanding of each other's position; being informed; having your facts correct and being able to put some sweat equity in volunteering on working on your trails.

In April my granddaughter Raven and I attended a fund-raising ride sponsored by ITRA, who partnered with a local saddle club, continued on next page

at Old Capital and O'Bannon Woods State Park. This event takes place every spring and fall. The ride proceeds support the horse campground, trail construction, repair and maintenance projects in the park. All camping fees and donations originating from this event will go directly to this parks' trails. The event had a beautiful spring weekend for fellowship and working on clearing trails. We had a lot of fun with a campfire social, pitch-in dinner and a silent auction. Birdhouses were sold to help support the event. We are looking forward to the fall event.

Indiana Trail Riders Association was established in the early '70s to save the single-track horse trails in Brown County State Park. They have 1,500 members and partner with other horse clubs in the state to 3,500 strong. As with most organizations, only about 10% put the sweat equity into volunteering on working on the trails.

**ITRA's Mission Statement:** The purpose of the Indiana Trail Riders Association is to promote trail riding and equine activities in Indiana and the surrounding area. The ITRA is involved on the local, state and national levels striving to promote and improve trails and campgrounds.

They work actively to educate the public of the value of our parks and trails as well as sponsoring and organizing workdays on several recreational properties in the hope that the natural beauty we enjoy on horseback will be available for future generations. Over the years ITRA:

- lobbied Indiana DNR to save the single-

file trail system at Brown County State Park and they help maintain them

- built and helps maintain a connector trail at Yellowwood State Forest
- lobbied the Indiana DNR to keep Potato Creek Campground open
- helped plan a new Class A horse campground at Deam Lake and O'Bannon Woods state parks
- laid out and marked trails at Greene-Sullivan State Forest
- represents the interests of Indiana trail riders with state officials
- hosts the Governors' Ride (the last one was with new Governor Mike Pence)
- is working with Indiana DNR and others to put a Class A Campground in Versailles State Park
- partnered with equine groups such as Hoosier Back Country Horsemen and Old Capital Saddle Club to support Indiana's horse trail legacy

ITRA volunteers work year-round with Indiana State Parks and State Forests to maintain and improve existing horse trails. ITRA members represent Indiana trail riders at national trail symposiums. All this would not be possible without building and having a good working relationship with the land managers and being willing to put the hard work in maintaining open access to trails.

The Daniel Boone Distance Riders have had an endurance ride in the Hoosier National Forest for the last five years. The trails are well maintained with the work of the Forest Service and the Hoosier Back Country Horsemen. The Hoosier group is a chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of America, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the historical use of recreational stock in

the back country commensurate with our heritage.

In 1996, a concerned group of equestrians recognized the need to assist the U.S. Forest Service in keeping open multiple-use trails, and the Hoosier Back Country Horsemen came into being. Since that time, our volunteers have maintained a working relationship with the U.S. Forest Service rangers and property managers, donating our time and expertise to help maintain the trails in Hoosier National Forest.

Hoosier Back Country Horsemen are men and women from all walks of life, from all over the state of Indiana, who have a common goal: to preserve and maintain the multiple-use trail systems in Indiana's forests for recreational trail riders today and in the future.

They work with the Hoosier National Forest to keep our trails open and safe. The "You Are Here" information signs with the map of the trails on carsonite posts are a result of a matching grant they wrote for the HNF.

The Springs Valley Trail is a result of the HBCH working with the HNF on a recreational trails program grant. The HBCH adopted the Deam Wilderness in the Hickory Ridge Trail system and work to maintain the trails there.

These two organizations know none of this work would be possible without building and having a good working relationship with the land managers and being willing to put the hard work in maintaining open access to trails.

Get involved! Keep our trails and open spaces open, preserving them for the future. Ride with a smile, a light hand and lightly upon the land. Leave a positive impression on all you meet, as you represent all riders. ■