

Development of Warren County as an Equestrian Recreation Destination

A significant economic advantage would result for Warren County tourism from establishment and improvement of equestrian facilities within County borders. In early 2008, the Equestrian Advisory Board (EAB) to the Warren County Regional Planning Commission (WCRPC) was formed, conducted a "barn-to-barn" census, and determined that there are more than 6000 resident equines distributed throughout the County and more than 1700 horse owners. The Ohio equine industry produces a total annual economic impact of \$2.2 billion; based on the number of horses residing in Warren County, this translates to a direct annual impact of >\$24 million. This could be increased by excellent facilities to draw visitors.

THE POTENTIAL

The RPC Parks Survey in April 2008 received the greatest number of comments from citizens about the need to develop "horse-related facilities and trails". Although the City of Lebanon holds the oldest (20 years in 2008) and largest Christmas Horse-Drawn Carriage Parades in the US (over 130 vehicles and 70-80,000 spectators), there are few venues in Warren County for citizens to pursue their equine interests throughout the year. The only currently available riding/driving trails are the Little Miami Scenic Trail State Park (which must be shared by other sports interests) and Caesar Creek State Park. Although we have sixteen 4H groups (with 225 children involved), there are no dedicated facilities for their horse activities.

Because of this limitation, equestrians must go elsewhere – and when they travel, they spend (lots of) money, not only on stabling, but also on hotels, restaurants, gas, etc. Therefore, Warren County would benefit economically from keeping local equestrians here, but also building facilities that would attract those from surrounding areas.

THE PLAN

EAB has developed a recommendation for inclusion in the RPC's Comprehensive Plan for Parks. This has two primary components:

Development of a network of dedicated dirt/gravel/paved trails as appropriate for horseback riders and horse carriages, taking advantage of existing trails and other land options such as old railroad rights of way, borders of private agricultural parcels, etc.

A multipurpose equestrian center for holding all types of equestrian events, 4H activities (educational/historical/agricultural purposes)

Both components will have a priority phase-in, the details and stages of which are described in the attached printed version of the presentation made to the Warren County Planning Staff in Fall 2008 and attached to this document as a computer disc.

The most urgent and critical need is to identify and acquire land for these purposes before it becomes unavailable or is permanently committed to other uses.

RESOURCES

For Warren County to develop usable equine facilities, it is absolutely essential that their personnel consult with equestrian experts. A total of 31 members of the Warren County Ohio Horsemen's Council, the Ohio Valley Carriage Club and advisors of the Warren County 4H clubs participated on the EAB, contributing well over 2000 volunteer hours during the past 9 months. EAB participants are listed in the attached documents.

Ohio Horsemen's Council: Warren Co. OHC was founded in 1972 to promote the development and construction of bridle trails at Caesar Creek State Park. The chapter currently has over 125 members who represent all horsemen regardless of breed affiliation or style of riding. OHC's mission is to promote the development of facilities and activities that support the equine lifestyle throughout the state. In 2007 the chapter invested \$4,060 and organized 82 volunteers who documented over 1,000 hours and provided 280 hours of private equipment working on the equine facilities and trail system at Caesar Creek. OHC also sponsors classes at the Warren Co Fair, donates to and supports the Bridge Riding for the Disabled program at Waynesville, and volunteers at the Lebanon Christmas Carriage Parades.

Ohio Valley Carriage Club: OVCC was founded in 1968 and now has over 90 member families including nationally-recognized carriage historians and restoration experts. Most members are pleasure drivers from Warren/Butler/Clermont/Hamilton counties, but some come from as far away as Kentucky, Indiana, and northern Ohio. Some members compete in combined driving events and others in local shows. More than 20 OVCC carriages typically participate in the annual Lebanon Christmas Carriage parades. OVCC meets monthly, generally for drives in good weather or for clinics/seminars in non-driving months. Locations for carriage drives have become quite limited in the last few years because of encroaching suburbia and the disappearance of rural venues, making it necessary to trailer further away.

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CONCLUSION

The EAB recommends that :

Development of a network of trails should start immediately beginning with connecting Caesar Creek State Park, Little Miami Scenic Trail State Park, Fort Ancient Memorial State Park, and San Mar Gale community. These trails must be appropriate for both horseback riders and carriages, including parking areas for large trailers. They should be limited to equestrian use.

A parcel of about 100-200 acres should be identified for acquisition as soon as possible for eventual development into an equestrian center including a basic well-constructed outdoor arena that could be used initially for 1-day activities and eventually improved for several-days-long events over the next few years.

The OHC and OVCC would be available to support these projects and could suggest other knowledgeable experts for consultation. The attached disc includes many other sources of information that should be used extensively as these projects are planned and executed.

*Equestrian Advisory Board
(Members of Warren Co Ohio
Horsemen's Council, the Ohio Valley
Carriage Club, and 4H Advisors)*