

**Peninsula Chapter Backcountry Horsemen Input on Equestrian Facilities
(Questions Came from State Parks)**

1: What makes Miller Peninsula a great place to ride? I asked this so that we can keep that in mind as we work on the planning efforts so that we don't inadvertently make it less appealing.

TM: all trails are safe to ride. They have a firm bottom even though some get covered with water. They present hazards that stock need to learn how to handle. E.g. encountering hikers, dog walkers, bicycle riders, wild game, brush.

JD: Miller Peninsula offers horseback riders hours of riding on trails that loop and that permit a rider to not ride the same trail twice. The magic of riding here is the fact that the varied terrain affords views of ecosystems. In a mere three-hour trail ride are revealed, Madrona Forests, Cedar and Fir forests, fern forests and a coastal marine forest with all the micro fauna native to each biological capsules. Then of course there are the seasons adding another layer changing what a person sees from week to week throughout the year on each trail. The aromas and sounds that each ecosystem brings in each season another way to explore this park. It is a treasure chest of experiences. The varied terrain also offers opportunities of riding challenges. Straight lovely bridle paths like trails with sight distance allows for a leisurely canter. The narrow steeper bluff trails offer a backcountry experience with views of the Straights. Downed logs permit one to build confidence in both horse and rider. The footing is excellent throughout the trail system. Not too soft or too hard and there is only one rocky place where rip rap rock was applied to harden one of the trails. It is of small consequence because the rock was applied on only about two hundred yards of trail.

The trail system is far away from traffic noise and so one can hear bird song throughout the year. Again this chorus varies depending on the season. Sometimes there is no bird song and utter silence is what surrounds the horse and rider not even the hum of electricity. To stop and listen then, one experiences a fullness.

DH: The beauty of the trails at Miller is that they are varied and many loops exist. There are wide, relatively flat routes suitable for inexperienced horses and riders. Other "single track" trails are far more technical, with switchbacks, steep sections, and footing that requires an experienced horse. There are areas that have significant shade and others that are very open, so the rider can choose based on the weather of the day. A rider can choose a trail that takes one hour or up to 5 or hours without overlapping routes, so many choices!

MR: I have ridden at Miller Park for several years and have loved the quiet and serenity available there. The park property is large enough it never seems crowded, and we have a big choice of equestrian trails to choose from. We share them with bikes and hikers with no issues.....I would hope that if any restrictions are placed on multi-use, it would be very small, perhaps the ADA trails only.

SK: Miller offers the feeling of being in the back country miles away from everyday life while still being within close proximity of civilization. For many horse people, this may be a first step toward more

adventurous trails in the USFS, DNR, or ONP. Or for some, it may be the complete experience. The ADA ramp at Miller offers accessibility to the primitive experience of Miller for those who may have limitations that preclude them from many equestrian trail opportunities.

2: What would make a good horse camp?

JD: The Forest Service has an excellent resource called [Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds](#). The best example of a horse camp layout I can offer is LeBar Horse Camp on the Skokomish River. It has cable High Lines in each camp well behind the picnic table and fire ring, pull through and flat parking area and probably 30 feet between camp sites.

A Horse camp needs a horse water source, loop trails, manure bunker and a vault toilet. Primitive is better. No hook ups.

I have thirty years experience as a horse camper. I have spent time camping in Oregon which has a great horse camp system through their state parks and the Forest Service. I have also paid outfitters in various state to take me camping using their stock.

Horse camp needs to be a separate loop altogether from the people campground. Not sure how to compute a distance but plenty of space. Last thing I would want while horse camping is having kids riding their plastic trikes with streamers and bells riding through my horse's high line area. At the horse campground itself ideal distance between horse camp sites is about 30 feet. Again this is the way LeBar is laid out. And it is generous. The people campground there is about an 1/8th of a mile away.

DH: A good horse camp needs "pull through" parking, at least 2 corrals each, a picnic table, and fire ring, vault toilets, potable water, and nearby "vaults" to deposit horse bedding and manure.

Where would it be?

TM: first choice is near the current trailhead parking staging area. Second choice is near developed camp sites.

JD: On the east side of Diamond Point Road

DH: It should be located in an area separate from other RV and tent spaces.

MR: Horse camp should be near the road, not right next to it but easy access so quiet from traffic. Diamond Point Road quite busy.

SK: Easily accessible to trail system.

What facilities/amenities would it include?

TM: Stock rig pull through parking, stock water, each site having 2 or 3 pens available or high line where stock can be safely tied. Manure bunkers. Kiosk explaining trails, 3S Stop-Stand-Speak and LNT education. Fire pit, picnic table, and restroom. Common shelter area for group activities.

JD: Horse water source, manure bunkers equidistant from each site, vault toilette, cable high lines in each camp site and an area with a hitch rail in your camp site where a rider can tack her horse and a mounting block or equivalent in camp.

DH: Vault toilets and potable water should be available within an easy walking distance. A sewage dump station should be available somewhere at the park for Living Quarters trailers to use. (Water, sewer, and electricity to each site would be very nice, but the cost may be prohibitive because the sites need to be more spaced than RVs. Horse campers will come even if the sites are somewhat primitive.)

MR: Vault Toilets, water, corrals, hitching rails, drive thru camping spots.

SK: Consider having half the campsites with corrals and half more primitive with either a highline or room for portable corrals. Parking and/or tent sites need to be adjacent to stock areas with separate stock areas for each site. Equestrians need to be able to keep sight on their animals from their sleeping/eating area.

How many campsites would be best?

TM: start with 6 and have plans to increase should use increase.

JD: 7 – 10

DH: I think there should be 10 horse camp sites. There must be a reservation system so that campers are assured of a space. (You cannot haul horses for 4 hours or more and not be sure you will have a place for them.) A system needs to be developed so that no one group can monopolize the available spaces.

MR: I would guess that 8 or 10 with a possibility for expansion in the future if warranted.

How separate should it be from other campsites?

TM: Camp areas could be near each other but stock camping should be separated from other camping. They can be within sight of each other. It could allow interaction with other campers as folks today don't get to see stock much less interact with them. Stock campers are usually friendly folks and may not mind talking to youth about their stock.

JD: Thirty feet

DH: Probably a separate “loop” road with campsites along the sides, away from tent and RV spaces.

MR: Equine camping should have a decent sized buffer from non-equine camping.

3: What are folks’ hopes and concerns for the park.

JD: Hope that it changes as little as possible. Concern that as density builds horses will be excluded.

DH: That it can be developed without significantly changing the character and use of the existing trail network. I think most equestrians would like to see a “horse camping” opportunity available as they are very difficult to find and these trails are excellent for a multi-day adventure.

MR: My biggest concern, and that of my friends who ride, are that horseback riding possibilities will shrink with park development, plus countless new rules that hinder enjoyment we now.

What would make it the best park ever?

TM: offering full up camping and hiking/riding opportunities. Providing two different beaches to explore – cobble and sand. Each presents new things to see and learn about. Multi use trail system where visitors can learn to respect and interact with each other. ADA accessible trails.

JD: For horseback riders on the Peninsula it already is the best park ever.

DH: Keep development of campsites and new recreational opportunities on the east side of Diamond Point Road and away from the existing multiuse trail system currently in use. Put a couple more vault toilets out along the existing trails. (Suggest: Near the Beach Trail, near the picnic table area at Manzanita & Fireweed Road on the west gate edge of the park, at the bicycle parking on E. Sequim Bay Road.)

MR: To leave it as undeveloped as possible.

SK: Horse trailer parking is frequently full in the summers and on weekends. Need to ensure ample parking for day use equestrians as well as for horse campsites; especially if RVs increase their usage of the day use parking.

What worries you about park development?

JD: Crowds, noise, garbage, and density that would preclude horses.

MR: Too much development, too many rules, too many restrictions for horseback riders. We have lost many, many opportunities on the Peninsula in parks which have been so encumbered with rules and too much development that we have been squeezed out and no longer have access.

DH: The multiuse designation of the current trail system will be changed and that equestrian use will be limited or discontinued.

SK: Traffic and congestion. Safety accessing Highway 101 and in the advent of fire.

4: There was a suggestion to have the ridge trail go east and west from the beach trail. Which direction does it go now? Just west?

20201007 Tom replied:

New bluff trail:

The new trail suggestion is for a companion bluff trail to go from the current beach trail starting about where today's bluff trail drops off the bluff and meets with the beach trail. The new trail would climb up the hillside using an old roadbed towards the north and east. Then along the bluff heading east (towards the Diamond Point community) and circling south to join other existing trails.

5: My question in our meeting was mostly about getting to understand the equestrian opportunities in the Olympic Peninsula better, particularly the north to upper west side. And about getting to better understand where Miller Pen lies in the range of horseback experiences on the Olympic Peninsula.

JD: There are very few. Miller is the best thing equestrians have on the whole peninsula.

6: You did a great job of helping us understand Miller Pen's place in the equestrian world. Our parks are often gateways to more in-depth experiences in wilder places on forest service lands or national parks. I'm wondering:

What a typical trip for someone who would bring their horse to a camp at Miller Pen would look like.

DH: I think a typical trip would be a couple with a horse trailer, 2 – 4 horses, maybe a camper, tent, or LQ horse trailer. They would stay at Miller for 3 or 4 days and ride the trails that exist on the property. It is likely that friends might want to occupy 2 or more campsites and ride out together. A few people might haul out one day to do a back country day trip to the Tubal Cain/Buckhorn Pass ride in ONF or haul to Dan Kelly Road and ride the Olympic Adventure Route Trail for the day.

MR: If I were camping at Miller, I'd definitely spend a couple of days riding right there, the trail system is easy to navigate, fairly level and vast. Might travel out west to the Olympic Discovery Adventure trails too which are interesting to ride and not too long a drive from Miller.

7: Would people stay there and use the great trails or would they also venture out into ONP or elsewhere on the peninsula?

TM: I would expect them to enjoy Miller trails first and then venture out to other systems on the peninsula. Maybe offer maps of front country and back country riding. Front country riders enjoy loop trails and about a 2 hour jaunt.

ONF offers great day rides and great overnight trips to the back country.

DNR has great day ride trails. DNR does not have much, if any, overnight ride/camp capability. DNR is very open to facilitating stock/hiker/biker riding areas. They have some specific areas designated biker and power trails to help mitigate user conflicts.

ONP has great day and extensive overnight riding opportunities.

JD: What trails and where? ONP and FS are virtually inaccessible because roads are so bad and there is no trailer turn around or parking near trailheads. No formal trails from DNR in Jefferson county

DH: As stated above, a few might venture out, but the trails at Miller would keep most people busy for several days. Many of the riders who would come would not be comfortable venturing out on the far more challenging trails that exist in ONF backcountry! They would be happy camping and staying at Miller.

MR: They might, depending how adventurous they are.

SK: Miller is the best front country equestrian experience on the peninsula. Other options that could be considered without a guide or prior experience would be: connecting to the ODT from Miller and riding along it; trailering to the Dungeness River Trails near Sequim; and the previously mentioned OAT.

8: If they are going out, would they be hiring guides to help connect them to the trails?

TM: Not much of a guided trail ride opportunities are here now. It could be a good opportunity for some folks to start such an enterprise. There are local riding facilities where folks can round pen or arena ride and do some dressage.

DH: I am not aware of any "guides" that would be available to take people on additional trails in the area. It might be an opportunity for a new business venture!

MR: I'd say most trails outside Miller do not need a guide, although a comprehensive pamphlet describing some outside trails in detail, i.e. how to get there, how far, trailer parking, and trail descriptions would be helpful and available at a kiosk at Miller.

SK: Due to issues previously mentioned, it is very difficult to access USFS or ONP trails unless you have been there before or have a guide. This may well be an opportunity for a business venture.