

Hello, I'm Jim Thomas, and I am Trails Development Chair for the Kansas Horse Council. I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Kansas Trails Council. Through these positions, I work to support the creation and maintenance of equestrian trails in Kansas. Trail riding is one of the fastest growing segments of the recreational industry in our state, and the KEEP Act could allow more funding for expansion and improvements to our current trail system. Many of these trails are multi-use trails, that are used by hikers and bikers as well as horseback riders. Currently, at least 24 public use areas in Kansas State Parks or on Corps of Engineer lands offer equestrian camping and/or trails. With state and federal budgets decreasing annually, it's becoming more difficult to find financial support for maintaining these trails, let alone expanding and creating new trail systems. There is a large volunteer element among trail users that work diligently to keep trails maintained and open as well as dedicated park managers who are doing the best they can with fewer dollars. The KEEP act could allow equestrians to help support and maintain these recreational activities.

The horse industry in Kansas is a big and vital part of the agricultural community. We support tack and feed dealers, buy horse trailers with living quarters and pickups to pull them, spend money on vet bills and horse care items...and we drop money across the state as we travel with our horses to campgrounds and public use areas. We eat in local restaurants and buy fuel as we travel down the highways (lots of fuel!!). A lot of these campgrounds are becoming popular with out-of-state equestrians who are using Kansas parks for trail ride destinations and also using them as stopover points as they travel across the country bringing tourism dollars into the state. With the financial support that can be made available through the KEEP Act, we can continue to provide improved and expanded public use areas for trail riders, and trail riders will continue to spend the money necessary to support our horse habits!