



Newsletter  
July 2021  
Issue 2021-3

# Protection of Confederation Trail Edition

## Letter from the President to Members of Island Trails

It was recently brought to our attention that the Government of Prince Edward Island had been approached by the PEI Trail Riders with a proposal for a Pilot Program which would enable horses to ride on the main trail bed of three 15 kilometre sections of the Confederation Trail. The proposed sections are from O'Leary to Murray Road on the Main Line; Emerald to Freetown on the Main Line; and Georgetown Road to Selkirk Road Rte. 23 on the Murray Harbour Line.

The Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure has requested a meeting to discuss this proposal with Island Trails and we have agreed. We will be sending three members of the board to discuss the proposal on the 22nd of July. As a board, we are adamantly opposed to this proposal and I will explain why below.

At this point I want to make very clear that we are not 'anti-equestrian.' We strongly support horse riding on the Island and one of our destination trails is in fact the Forest Hill Hiking & Equestrian Trails. The PEI Trail Riders met with us last year to discuss their proposal for an expansion of this trail and we immediately agreed - it's a great idea and we are very supportive. We are happy to work with them when it makes sense.

### Background

This is an issue that arises with great regularity and its latest iteration began in December 2019 when a meeting was held at Founders Hall in Charlottetown where a group of approximately 50 people expressed a strong desire within the equestrian community for access to the Confederation Trail. Meetings by PEI Trail Riders were held from January through March 2020 and they formed a Trail Committee and identified three 10-20 km sections of the Confederation Trail they would bring forward for consideration by the Government.

In October 2020, the PEI Trail Riders Trail Committee had a meeting with then Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Steven Myers. This meeting reaffirmed the Government's steadfast intention to exclude equestrians from the Confederation Trail. However, Minister Myers strongly encouraged the Trail Committee to pursue other options for equestrian trail development and suggested the Government would be very supportive of such endeavours. Despite the categorical denial of their proposal to have equestrians given access to the Confederation Trail, the Trail Committee decided to press ahead with a formal proposal for a pilot project. Apparently it has been submitted and this is why we will be meeting with the Deputy Minister.

### Why is Island Trails so Opposed to Equestrians on the Confederation Trail?

The Confederation Trail was created in 1989 after CN Rail discontinued rail service on PEI. A group of Islanders formed a group known as Rails to Trails with the goal of creating a bicycle and hiking route from Tignish to Elmira on the abandoned rail bed. This group eventually evolved into Prince Edward Island Trails Inc (Island Trails) and Island Trails continues to advocate on behalf of non-motorized use of the Confederation Trail.

When the Confederation Trail was created, we pushed to have the trail designated for non-motorized use. It was designed to provide a safe corridor for cyclists and walkers. Horses were not allowed for safety reasons - cyclists and horses do not function well on the same corridor. Despite this, some horse riders continue to break the law and take their animals on the trails. When that happens, it leads to significant trail degradation. Even one horse can damage the smooth surface so coveted by cyclists as seen in the photographs below. The argument that this degradation would not happen with even greater equestrian use is simply not credible given actual experience. And once the trail surface is destroyed, cyclists will either stop using the trail or end up riding on the road.



Several members of our board have encountered sections of the Confederation Trail after they were used by horses and they had to endure a corduroy surface that was difficult and unpleasant to bike on. Last year there was a section of the trail near Breadalbane that was so pock-marked with hoof prints that it was unrideable and it was necessary to dismount and walk.

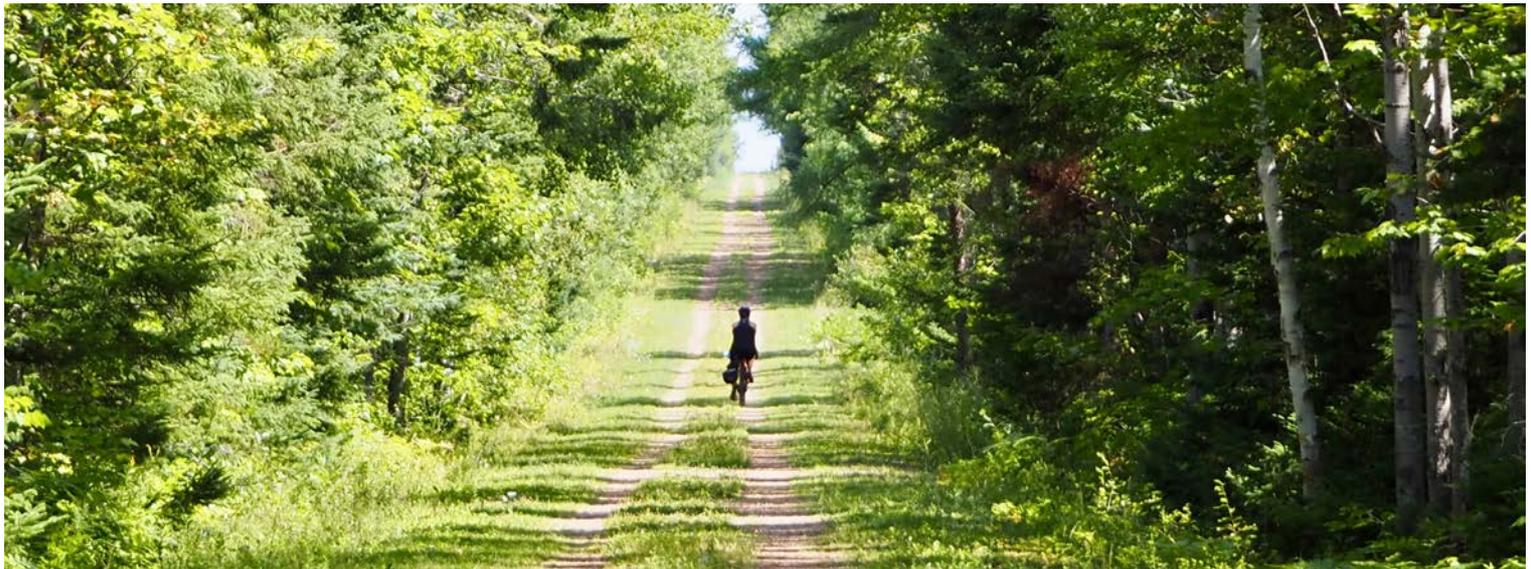
The Confederation Trail has grown to 450 kilometres and includes many of the spurs that made up the PEI railway network. It is a showpiece of the Trans Canada Trail and is the backbone of a new trail experience unmatched elsewhere in Canada - the 700 kilometre Island Walk. The Island Walk use 350 kilometres of the Confederation Trail and part of the attraction of the Island Walk is the fact that it utilizes this safe and accessible cycle and footpath.

The Confederation Trail has been over 30 years in the making. The general public is increasingly appreciative of what it has to offer and it would be a tragedy to see something so wonderful slip away.

These are the reasons your board is opposed to equestrians on the Confederation Trail. If you, as a member of Island Trails, would like to have a say, please send us an e-mail to [info@islandtrails.ca](mailto:info@islandtrails.ca) and let us know what you think.

Thank you,

Mike Salter  
President Island Trails



## **My Personal Opinion**

Many Island Trails members may want to voice an opinion regarding horses on the Confederation Trail. So what is that opinion? I had the same question.

My first thought was "I am not afraid of horses but on the trail there isn't a fence between us. In fact, we could be as close as 6 feet."

My second thought, 'horses weigh, on average, one ton. Wouldn't their hooves damage the trail, making holes and ridges? What if I'm on my bicycle? Do I need to constantly watch for holes and ridges missing out on the scenic landscape?'

My third thought, "I love the sight of horses and riders on heritage roads and on horse-friendly trails. In fact, I expect and anticipate them there, knowing I will step aside or dismount from my bike to let this majestic animal pass. If there is a group of horses, all the better!"

So what is my opinion now that I have spoken to people who have experienced horses walking on groomed walking and biking trails?

Fact: Horses do serious damage to groomed trails.

Fact: There IS a safety issue.

Fact: Island horses and riders are welcomed on horse-friendly trails and Island heritage roads.

So what is my opinion? The Confederation Trail should remain a pristine trail for hikers and cyclists only.

Leona Lane  
Island Trails Board Member

