

## Handshake Partnership Program Final Project Close-Out Report

1. Fiscal Year Selected as Winning Project: FY 2020
2. Name of Corps Project/Lake: Big Hill Lake
3. District / Division of Corps Project/Lake: Tulsa District/ Southwestern Division
4. Handshake Project Name: Mapping & Maintenance of Big Hill Trail
5. Amount of Handshake Funds remaining: \$7.56
6. What has been accomplished?

During this grant period the following was accomplished on the Big Hill Horse Trail: noxious weeds including Sericea Lespedeza were sprayed along the trail; trail was mowed and prepared, markings were painted, then GPS mapped & the locations verified, bird and wildlife was researched; brush and continual growth of smaller trees encroaching the trail was removed which included use of heavy equipment with mulching attachment, chain saws, pole saws, and a rock chisel in order to widen the clearance for possible rescue operations, trail maintenance and monitoring using UTVs and mowers; in addition to the Handshake partners meeting/exceeding their contributions, an unexpected contributor, Southern Star Pipeline Company donated time and equipment in the efforts expanded on the results; purchase and installation of three 3'x 4' kiosks at major trailheads for displaying trail maps; obtaining the map maker for the creation of the trail map including access points, road numbers, native flora & fauna, etc; maintaining trail markers every quarter mile; production of the map and information created to display/distribute; communication to engage the public through local newspapers, social media has been contributed by volunteers.

	Total
<b>Handshake Program Funding Amount</b>	\$15,000
<b>Local Corps Office Funds</b> (total expended on labor, materials, contracts, etc.)?	<b>\$20,883</b>
<b>Partner's Contributions</b> (total value of funds, goods, services, volunteer hours, etc.)	
Partners Name	Total Value of Contributions
1 North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC)	\$10,364
2 American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC)	\$3,208
3 The Bridge Campground, Chuck Waggoner	\$552
4 Western Way Cowboy Church	\$2,645
5 Back Country Horsemen	\$11,724
6 Boy Scout Troop 4	\$5,129
7 Big Hill Lake Horse Trail Riders Association	\$9,740
8 Audubon Society of Southeast Kansas	\$1,173
9 Labette County Tourism	\$400
10 Southern Star Pipeline Company (new/additional)	\$10,000

## **6. Handshake Program Recipient Feedback**

Please take this opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of the Handshake Program and the Challenge Partnership Agreement authority. Your productive comments are important to the ongoing improvement of the program. Make sure to let us know how the Handshake funds have benefited your efforts to initiate and/or strengthen your partnerships.

2020-2022 Comments from our volunteer/partner: First, I acknowledge all the wonderful things the Handshake Grant program has accomplished at Big Hill Lake, Cherryvale, Kansas. I believe the benefits are not only from the projects the monies paid for, but also the visual results and it inspired many other groups to join in the effort because they saw what could be accomplished. However, this past years' experience has done much to negate the previous year's efforts. This Handshake grant seemed fraught with confusion and changing rules, almost from the start. For the first time we had nine partners and the administration's requests to return to those partners—twice—after the initial signing of the agreement was very labor intensive and actually somewhat embarrassing. Going back with changed paperwork a total of three different occasions seemed to delay the process and cause skepticism among the partners. A couple were reluctant to even sign the third time due to clauses added implying they were personally responsible. Then, based on past experience and a written timeline to accomplish the tasks, participants were continually "put off" due to no money release. Some projects were weather sensitive, and opportunities were missed. Spraying could not be done when temperatures were over 80 degrees resulting in the delay due to seasonal restrictions. Scheduled clearing equipment was cancelled and hard to reschedule due to availability. Orders could not be placed. Enthusiasm lagged. It seemed to be a much more difficult process compared to the past experiences. To those in charge, I know things cannot be fixed if you do not receive feedback as to the problems. Thank you for your years of support in accomplishing many inspirational projects at Big Hill lake.

## **7. Handshake Summary:**

Please also include a separate newspaper type article describing the project and the benefit to the Corps of Engineers and to the public as a result of this partnership project. Examples can be found on the gateway under [Handshake Success Stories](#).

A great success in trail improvement which increased visitation exponentially; improved safety in many ways including providing clear information about trail length and routes, improved access for emergency services, remediated problem areas & overgrowth encroachments; garnered the collaboration of several different groups that worked portions of the trail in clearing and maintenance; and reduced invasive species and pests through herbicide treatment & removal of brush. Big Hill Lake Horse Trail is becoming a destination for national competitions.

See attached published articles:



Marsha Hayes/Courtesy photo

**Bobbie Barton, Southern Star employee and avid equestrian, trims a tree at Timber Hill camp at Big Hill Lake earlier this month. Barton helped set up the volunteer project. "I love doing this kind of work," she said of her day outdoors.**

# Southern Star helps clear horse trail at Big Hill Lake

**By Marsha Hayes**  
Special to The Sun

CHERRYVALE — On April 6, 30 Southern Star Pipeline employees under the direction of Bob Young, Independence, district field operation leader for Southern Star, met with local volunteers to clear the equestrian trail and address safety concerns at Big Hill Lake at Cherryvale.

The groups met at The Bridge campground, owned by Chuck Waggoner, near Rea bridge to split into crews. Southern Star trucks, some pulling trailers with equipment, including a trackhoe, skid steer with grapple and side by sides, filled the area.

The first project centered upon a steep rock ledge, exposed after decades of equine use and erosion. Often becoming wet, the treacherous ledge caused steel shod horses to slip. Several falls were reported at the location. The Southern Star equipment broke down the rock, creating better footing and making the trail less steep. Their work also made the trail safely passable by maintenance equipment and special emergency equipment.

The second priority centered on the 2.75 mile Timber Hill section where encroaching trees prevented access of equipment for draining and contouring the trail to prevent erosion. Six years ago the Corps of Engineers embarked on a volunteer-driven project to maintain the trails with an excavator, but the Timber Hill section had remained inaccessible. Two Southern Star crews attacked the trail from each access point carrying chain saws and tree limb saws. A skid steer with a grapple followed, moving downed trees.

Dr. Fred Gardner, DVM, of Garnett, drove down to see

**See TRAIL, Page 8.**





Marsha Hayes/Courtesy photo

Southern Star operator Devin Wallace works to break up rock ledges to improve equestrian trail safety as his crew mates watch.

## TRAIL

Continued from Page 1.

the innovative combination of corporate volunteers working alongside traditional trail advocates and the somewhat new use of specialized equipment to accomplish what hand tools could not.

"They had excellent

equipment and they are excellent operators," he said. "Plus, you can tell they like each other. They were safe, cheerful and I just can't believe how much they accomplished in a day."

Josh Woollard, manning one of the chain saws for Southern Star, typified the attitude of the workers. "If my work keeps a stick from going in a horse rider's eye,

I'm happy," Heath Smith echoed Woollard's attitude and noted, "One piece of good equipment makes a huge difference. I'm just glad we could help."

Young, asked a few days after the workday, how his crew felt, responded, "They thought it was wonderful. I thought it was wonderful." Young did admit some crew members were "a little sore."

Young found his crew's skills, "a perfect match for the needs of trail maintenance."

Chris Hammerschmidt, director of Big Hill operations, concurred. He summed up the feeling of the horse community enjoying the trails. "I'm just ecstatic at how much they accomplished."



# Big Hill Lake chosen for nat'l trail ride

**Recent improvements to Big Hill Lake Equine Trail have made it a national venue for competitive trail rides**

BY MARSHA HAYES  
Special to the Chronicle

With heavy rains assaulting the midwestern United States in 2019, one outdoor sports community had to succumb to Mother Nature.

That's why equestrian trail riders had to cancel many of their nationally-sanctioned, competitive trail rides across the region.

That will change this weekend when the North American Trail Conference (NATRC) brings its final national contest to Big Hill Lake in northwest Labette County.

The NATRC's region six, which includes Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, North and South Dakota and parts of Canada, will have riders at the Big Hill Lake Equine Trail on Oct. 25-27 to compete for year-end points and potential national honors. Because of the drier conditions in recent weeks, the trail course is perfect for late-season competition. Additionally, improvements to the equine trail at Big Hill Lake in recent years have made the venue into a national-caliber course.

"The trail maintenance and continual facilities improvement made this an obvious choice," explained ride manager Ruth Mesmer from her home in Liberty, Mo.

At the competition, horse and rider teams will cover between 20 to 60 miles over the weekend, depending on their

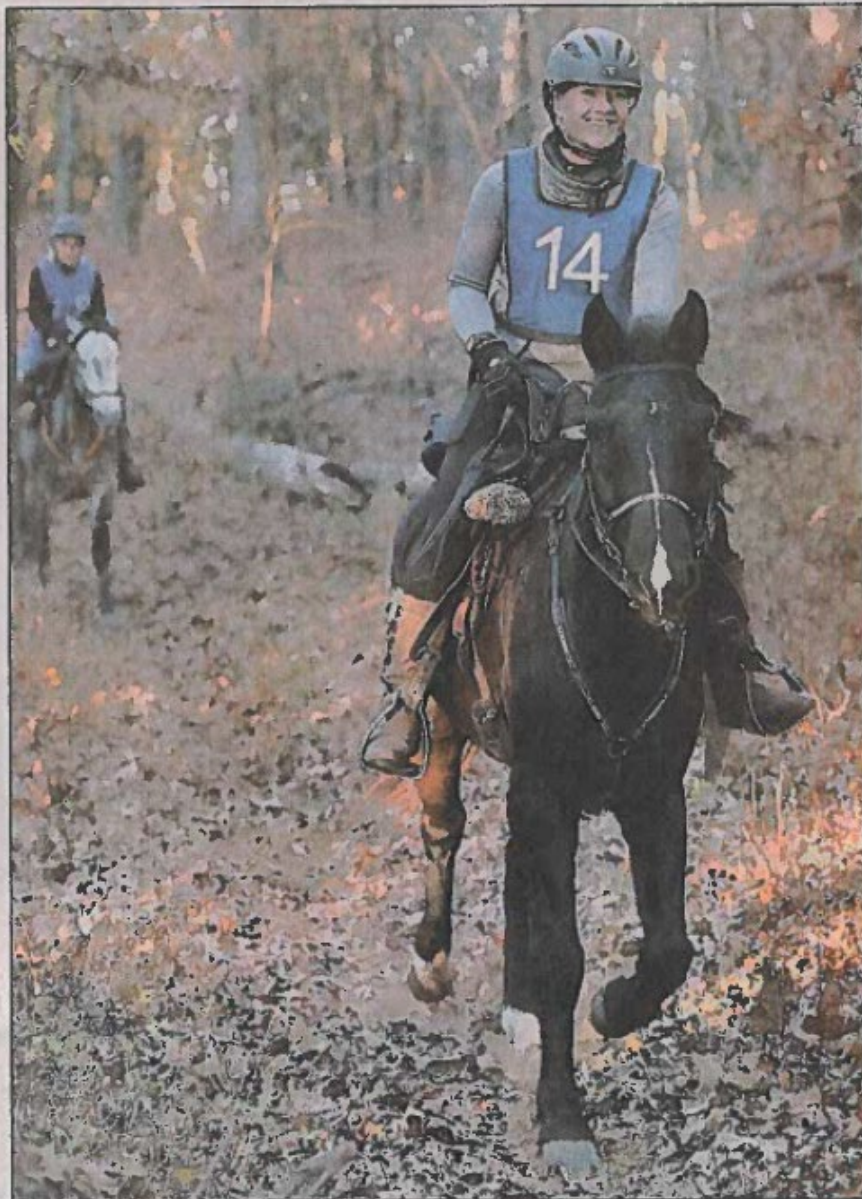
respective divisions of competition.

"Having permanent group pavilions at each major horse campground offer ride management a huge asset when planning a last minute competition," noted Pricilla Lindsay, a former Cherryvale resident and the October event's horsemanship judge.

In addition to the improved facilities, volunteers have meticulously measured and planted permanent trail markings on the nearly 20 miles of equestrian trails, cutting competition preparation time. Local volunteers and Big Hill staff have also worked together to divert water from the trails by utilizing a variety of equipment in innovative ways to drain the trails during wet weather.

Not only will the Big Hill Lake horse trail get a good workout during the nationally-sanctioned contest but so, too, will the local economy. Organizers say the infusion of out-of-town participants will translate into additional business activity in the Parsons, Cherryvale, Independence, Coffeyville and Chanute area. Convenience stores, hotels, restaurants and other businesses are expected to see a bump in sales as dozens of riders and their families migrate to Big Hill Lake for the national competition.

Everyone is invited to visit ride camp at the Big Hill South Equestrian Camp during the competition. For information on entering the ride and learning about the sport of Competitive Trail, visit NATRC.org or contact local representative Marsha Hayes via text or call at 620-330-0582.



Riders from multiple states will cover over 50 miles this weekend at Big Hill Lake in a nationally sanctioned NATRC competition. This photo was taken at the Big Hill Lake trail in 2016. PHOTO BY

RON OSBORN



Tuesday, April 27, 2021

www.parsonssun

on, Pfizer or Moderna, I strongly encourage every Kansas to get vaccinated as soon as they can."

The state expects to receive 1,700 doses of the J&J vaccine the week of May 3.

On Monday, Kansas reported 493 new COVID-19 cases since Friday, bringing its total to 307,865 since the pandemic began.

## DEATHS

Obituaries or notices for following people can be found on Page 2 in today's Sun.

Rodney Middleton  
Steven Gatton  
Janice Larkin  
Scott Hazelwood

## FUNERALS

JANICE LARKIN, 77, Webb City, Missouri, service at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday at Carson-Wall Funeral Home, Parsons.

STEVEN GATTON, 59, Parsons, service at 2 p.m. Friday at Forbes-Hoff Funeral Home.

JUSTIN WATKINS, 41, Parsons, service at 2 p.m. Saturday at Edgman Cemetery near Columbus.

RODNEY MIDDLETON, 66, rural Altamont, service at 4 p.m. Tuesday at Forbes-Hoff Funeral Home, Parsons.

LLIE JO COLLIN, 70, of La Grange, service at 11:30 a.m. May 22 at First Church (Disciples of Christ) in Parsons.



Courtesy photo

Nikki Wommer on Rusty leads the way Saturday during the competitive trail event at Big Hill Lake. Rusty was named the novice sweepstakes winner.

## Big Hill Lake hosts nationally sanctioned horse trail ride

By Marsha Hayes  
Special to the Sun

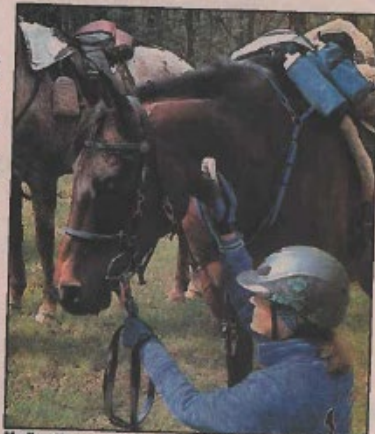
Riders from eight states convened over the weekend for a North American Trail Ride Conference-sanctioned competition at Big Hill Lake equestrian camp.

Open horses covered over 50 miles during the two-day ride, and the novice competitive pleasure division rode slightly over 35 miles.

Nebraska rider Helen Smith was the sweepstakes winner in the open division. Kelly Queen from Oklahoma won the competitive pleasure division, and Nikki Wommer of Dewey, Oklahoma, won the novice division. Sweepstakes points were based on the horses' scores.

Bill and Diane Wingle traveled from Colorado to participate, but while pre-riding the trails, Bill Wingle felt his gelding, Mariah 3, was not quite up to the two days of challenging competition.

"We are still glad we came," he said. "It is so green here and we love the camp."



Marilyn Marsten strokes her half Arabian Remington at a pulse check during the Big Hill Lake competitive trail event last weekend. Marsten won first place in open heavyweight horsemanship after completing over 50 miles during the two-day event.

Rianna Deselich from Missouri and her mule, Dolly 3, had an adventure-filled first-time novice rider camp.

Diane Wingle won first place in the competitive pleasure horsemanship class.

See RIDE, Page 8.

Independence

# Reporter

YESTERDAY. TODAY. TOMORROW

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 5, 2022 | VOL. 142, NO. 198 | \$0.75 11 PAGES 1 SECTION

## Big Hill Lake hosts nationally sanctioned competitive trail ride



BY MARSHA HAYES  
Contributing Writer

Big Hill Lake, Cherryvale, hosted the Autumn Adventure Competitive Trail Ride this past weekend, October 1 and 2. Priscilla Lindsey, Independence, acted as Horsemanship Judge and Stephanie Ostrowski, DVM, flew in from Tuskegee, Alabama to fill the Horse Judge position.

Competitors and volunteers gathered from Oklahoma and Missouri, as well as Kansas, to vie for national and regional points as the 2022 ride season nears completion. Riders found the trails in excellent shape, although dusty and rocky. Due to the ongoing drought in Southeast Kansas, little grazing forage existed along the trails and fewer water opportunities existed for the horses.

Leon Shoenhair, of Wagoner, Okla., and his equine partner, Willie, enjoyed their nearly 40 miles of trail riding during the competition. "I love the trails here. It's one of my favorite rides," he said. Shoenhair has owned the 14-year-old Paint gelding for eight years and had nothing but praise for Willie's performance. "He takes care of me out there. I wouldn't take a million dollars for this horse."