

Together we saw our way
through an unprecedented
year.

Working together,
Stronger than ever.

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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TO OUR MEMBERS

Strategic Highlights

- Weathering a National Pandemic
- The reopening of horse shows in North Carolina under COVID-19 Rules
- New Social Media and Marketing Specialists
- New grant category established, and Grant awards increased across all categories
- Trail Issues and access to public land

Financial Highlights

- Safety Net Grants streamlined to address COVID-19
- New Distressed Horsemen's Fund established for financial assistance to both the horse and the horse owner
- Revenue down during the pandemic but the NCHC remains stable

Legislative Highlights

The NCHC Lobbyist carried a heavy load throughout 2020 to keep our Equine Industry open. They continue to refine our legislative agenda and will be working towards improving equine access to public land .

Looking Ahead

We remain committed to improving equine business and working towards becoming the most legislatively friendly state in the nation. "Come Join the Herd".

Sue M. Gray
Executive Director
2020



“We appreciate all horsemen and women across the state who help us grow a strong equine community.”

- Tom Thomas, President

“Nothing would get done if we didn't work together. The Horse Council represents all aspects of the industry.”

- Sammy Jenkins, Past President



WEATHERING A PANDEMIC

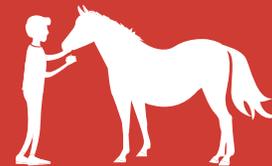
NCHC helps save the Horse Show Business by lobbying to reopen our shows early in the Pandemic.

The NC Horse Industry remained a stable and vital force in our State's economy during the COVID-19 Pandemic. During the early months of the crisis when most businesses were shutdown, the equine industry was one of the few enterprises that was allowed to open. After weeks, days and hours of negotiations with the Governor's Office, we were finally successful in exempting our horse shows by putting in place Guidelines and limiting the public from attending. While we did experience some initial slow-downs, once we began showing all categories of shows, both open and breed specific were up in attendance. Other Aspects of our Equine Industry also remained stable.



\$423 Million

Competition Sector adds \$423 million in value to the state economy



\$734 Million
7,976 Jobs

Supports 7,976 jobs and has a total economic impact of \$734 million to North Carolina

NEW SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE DESIGN

New Social Media Consultant was brought on board to increase engagement and improve information to our equine public.

Information provided by: Emily Thomas Luciano



Emily Thomas Luciano joined the NCHC Team as our new Social Media Consultant.

Since the beginning of October when our Social Media posts and Blogs first began to appear, we've had 50 new Facebook "likes." The same period in 2019 saw 23 "likes." A

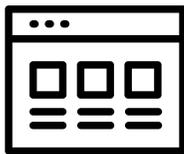
Good sign that our numbers will rise.



Trending Up

Increased likes and comments on the social media platforms. Along with driving traffic to the website.

During this past year, we initiated a monthly blog post on our Website. In addition, we have now established on Facebook and other social media sites: Member Monday, Woman Crush Wednesday, and Throwback Thursday We have been seeing increased post engagement each week. Typically, about 25% each week. The most popular posts tend to be historical and informative in nature.



Increased Visits

Facebook posts drives traffic to the website.

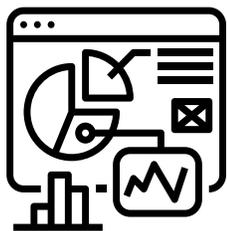
While many of our posts are not tied directly to membership, the post shares drive eyes to the Facebook page. Users also tend to engage well with the blogs posted, which does drive traffic directly to the website and early statistics tend to indicate many visit the membership page.

Our users tend to be most active in the early evening hours, so we have adjusted post times accordingly.

CONTINUED SUPPORT

Claudia Cokis continues to provide website and graphic design to the NCHC including technical support.

Information provided by: Claudia Cokis

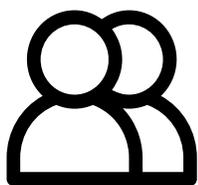


12,500 +

Number of sessions overall in 2020

25,000K +

Number of pages viewed in 2020. Repeated views of a single page are counted.



10,000K +

New and Returning visitors to the website in 2020

4,500 +

Number of sessions via Social Referral



NCHC was rebranded from the logo, marketing materials and online presence with a new website. Along with information management with analytics to make better decisions for the business and members.

A new website was introduced in 2020. Traffic overall to the website has increased dramatically, and the social media efforts are driving traffic to the website as well.

The following are some 2020 analytical highlights:

- Both new and returning visitors have increased, along with the frequency/recency that the single user comes back to the website after the initial visit.
- The current bounce rate (When users enter the site and leave without viewing other pages) this year has held steady between 51% - 53% which is average. For 2021 the goal is to get the bounce rate below 45%.
- The returning users are spending 4.5 minutes on the site and new users are spending 1.5 minutes.
- Visitors to the website consist of 33.4% male and 66.6% female. The age groups range from highest to lowest are 55-64, 45-54, 25-34, 65+, 35-44, and 18-24 of age.
- With the website being mobile compatible the visits have doubled in views for tablets, and doubled in mobile views.
- The top pages visited throughout the year are the following: Covid-19 Information, Home page, Grants, Memberships, News, Resources, Business Directory, and Store.
- Top channels that visitors found the NCHC website are as follows: 22.2% Direct, 33.5% Organic Search, 29.7% Social, 4.6% Referrals, and 10% Other.

Honorable Mentions for November/December data:

- The Covid-19 Information page received 6,570 views and users spent 2 1/2 minutes on this page. The spike was in April 2020 and very few have visited this page since.
- Between the weeks of (12/11 - 12/28 and 11/23 - 12/10) the membership drive has proven to be successful. 141% increase in visits to the membership page, and 90% increase in visits to the membership/insurance page.
- There has also been an 72% increase in visits to the leadership page from November to December.
- There is also a 100% increase in visits to the NC Horse Trails page from November to December.



TRAIL REPORT

**In part, submitted by
Barbara Oslund,
Trails Consultant**

This annual report is a sampling of the activities that have occurred but is not comprehensive and there are many others who have had important accomplishments related to trail access and stewardship. We are proud of all the important work NC trail riders do, and please feel free to share your accomplishments and access the NC Horse Council's resources in 2021.

This year is certainly like no other, but there continues to be progress and advocacy for horse trails.

The year started with January public meetings in Oak Ridge with many equestrians present to advocate for a short distance equestrian trail on land recently purchased by the Town of Oak Ridge for recreation. The area has seen tremendous growth in recent years with many horse farms sold for development and the Easter Horse Show not held recently. There was enthusiasm from equestrians and offers of financial and in-kind support, and interest expressed from Town officials present and recognition of the Towns equestrian heritage and the Easter Horse Show. Another opportunity local equestrian's need to monitor is the planned 16 mile Piedmont Greenway, which could have equestrian access but needs sustained equestrian involvement in the planning. Below is a link describing a key land purchase outside of Oak Ridge for the greenway: <https://www.piedmont-land.org/bandera/>

“Thanks to local horse owners for helping build new trails at Mason Pointe.

Barb Oslund, Trails Consultant,
NCHC

“We must preserve and protect our historic right to ride. Working together with other trail groups improves our success!

Sue Gray, Executive Director,
NCHC



Equestrians were also encouraged to attend public input sessions in January for the Wilderness Gateway Trail. This trail will connect Chimney Rock State Park to locations in Catawba County as well as the Overmountain Victory State Trail, the Town of Valdese, and South Mountain game lands and state park. When complete, the trail will traverse Rutherford, McDowell, Burke and Catawba

TRAIL REPORT, CONTINUED

counties. Negotiations with private landowners and public land managers is on-going, however, this trail corridor will have great potential for equestrian use. Equestrians will need to be diligent to advocate for access to this trail, as the planning effort and allowed uses may be different in each municipality, and there could be access from the equestrian trails in South Mountain State Park.

NCHC continues to work with the non-profit Jordan Lake Trails Conservation Association (JLTCA) on the Mason Point horse trail on a portion of gameland near Jordan Lake at the Chatham/Durham County line. JLTCA started the year strong with final planning for signage, maps and orientation targeted for early June opening. However, the Covid-19 stay at home and social distance restrictions presented challenges for the volunteer workdays needed to complete. A large portion of the trail also had several months of active timber harvest which required opening to be delayed. However, a hardened stream crossing was completed, signage is being mounted, and volunteers have been recruited for bush-hog duty. The JLTCA is now aiming for opening at the end of the year.

Wake County is in the construction process for equestrian trails at Proctor Farm in the eastern part of Wake County near Lizard Lick. Permit issues have delayed parts of the planned system, so the decision was made to phase the project which will result in about 5 to 6 miles of trails being opened first. The contractor has been working on trails as well as the parking area. The trails might be open before the end of this year, weather dependent.

Last year NCHC provided feedback during the 30- day public comment period on the rationale for the permanent closure of the Hang Glider trail in Uwharrie National Forest. This once-popular trail has been “temporarily” closed since 2010. In July, Terry Savery (District Recreation Staff Officer) and Chris Stewart (interim District Ranger) contacted NCHC about the “Decision Notice” and “Finding of No Significant Impact” for the Hang Glider Trail (719) Vista Segment Closure. The Hang Glider trail will be closed permanently because it is a significant archaeological site. NCHC and BCHU commented about limiting the trail corridor and covering the surface to protect artifacts and still allowing riders. The comments were considered, but the District Ranger determined it would be nearly impossible to prevent riders from going off the trail, and there were no re-routes that would provide the same vista. The trail will be “obliterated” so there will be no obvious path. People can still hike up there but it will be discouraged because there will be no trail. They are looking for other locations that are not arch sites that would provide a nice vista but haven’t found any. The NCHC emphasized that riders really liked Hang Glider and how disappointed they will be to not be able ride up there anymore.

NCHC looked into equestrian concerns about the rocky trail surface on Umstead State Park multi-use trails. We received a reply from Superintendent Scott Letchworth. He stated that *“The biggest difficulty is the sheer size of the trails (13 miles long, 10-18 feet wide) and the fact that the screenings wash off in the rain. We also have minimal equipment to maintain the trail, just a tractor and a compacting roller. I have one full time maintenance staff member (out of a total of four for the entire park) who is out working on the trail every day, but each section can take 1-2 weeks to repair.*

TRAIL REPORT, CONTINUED

The repairs also can't happen when the weather is too hot because the screening can't be spread as dust, or too cold because the screenings and existing surface get too cold and stiff to work." The NCHC will continue to monitor and offer assistance if we can.

The strong working relationship between NCHC and the Back Country Horsemen of NC (BCH-NC) resulted in comments being submitted on important plans and proposed policy changes that affect equestrians. NCHC and BCH-NC each had active representation in the multi-year Pisgah-Nantahala Forest Plan Revision process. The plan revision options were open for public this Spring. Both organizations submitted formal comments. The exact comments are in the public record, and the comments emphasized the following:

- Restricting horses to designated trails should happen only after a collaborative trail planning process
- Allowing additional horse trail mileage in Wilderness or Proposed Wilderness.
- Support of no cap on trail mileage, and support of the alternative that provides a balance of all desired conditions for the Forest, with the benefit of allowing trail system expansion without resource damage, and with input from stakeholders.
- Giving horse camping priority over non equestrian campers in designated equestrian camps.
- Encouraging the value of commitments from established volunteer organizations
- Notifying trail user groups if streamside mitigation efforts being planned would impact their trails.
- Adding a minimum of 20 new trail loop proposals during the life of the Forest Plan.
- Granting Special Use Permit requests only after securing a Performance Bond to fix potential damage to the trail system. Permit holders should be required to notify the public at least two weeks in advance of the event of the area (trails & trailheads) that will be involved. A monitoring plan should be enacted by the Forest Service to measure the impact of these events.

TRAIL REPORT, CONTINUED

Both NCHC and BCH-NC also submitted comments on proposed legislation that would allow electric bikes (E-bikes) on non-motorized trails on National Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service land. The specific comment are in the public records, and the comments emphasized the following:

- Electric bikes are actually motorized vehicles and are not compatible with non-motorized trail use in areas traditionally considered back country open for hunting, fishing, hiking and trail riding.
- The safety concerns associated e-bikes, mainly the speeds at which they can travel that would endanger equestrians, hikers, and even traditional mountain bike riders.
- Adding another use to trail systems that are already being heavily used will hasten erosion problems, create more user conflict and not be sustainable.
- Having the public comment period for an important policy during a nationwide pandemic was poor timing. Sunday hunting on Public Land was also an issue during 2020 as the Wildlife Resource Commission held focus groups to help shape public policy. The focus groups identified the following guiding principles, which were considered for each property:
 - Changes and recommendations should be simple, easy, and understandable
 - Do not allow Sunday hunting where resources could be negatively affected
 - Focus on providing opportunities for all citizens
 - Move carefully and deliberately and adapt in the future as needed
 - Perception of safety differs among users

The main criteria that emerged from the focus groups for evaluating individual game lands were:

- Focus on rural game lands that are not heavily used by non-hunters
- Proximity to other game lands and public lands where hunting is prohibited
- Value to unique properties that are important to user groups
- Avoid game lands where past conflict has been a pattern

As with other years, trail issues are considerable across the state and the NCHC remains vigilant in monitoring our equine trails and access to public land.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS



The North Carolina Horse Council wishes to thank our lobbyist for another successful year.



John Cooper



Jackson Stancil



Nathan Honaker

The North Carolina Horse Council was once again represented by John Copper of Connect C and Jackson Stancil of Jones Street Consultants as our lobbyists. Nathan Honaker joined Connect C this year to bring us additional lobbying and legal support.

The North Carolina Farm Bureau has always been a strong partner with the Equine Industry. The NCHC joined forces this year with the NC Farm Bureau in a Shared Values Initiative. The project was formed to work with the public in shaping their view of agriculture and farming. Multiple focus groups will be conducted to assist in developing the message. Due to COVID-19 the project was delayed this year.

The NC Farm Act that clarified equine activities as agritourism was finally signed into law during the early part of the year. This clarification will allow for the inclusion of equine activities as part of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture Agritourism Programs. Legislative discussions and preparing for the upcoming Long Session occupied the middle part of the year. Our Lobbyists continue to position the Equine Industry issues to the forefront as we have worked with multiple legislators on potential legislation including protecting and including equine access to public land.

Work began this year on the development of a NCHC Political Action Committee. With the large number of horse owners in the state, support of equine friendly legislators would enhance the equine environment with regards to policies, laws, rules and regulations.

GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The North Carolina Horse Council was able to award grants in all categories in 2020. An expedited review process was initiated for the Safety Net Grants so that we could quickly fund those in need due to COVID-19. A new Grant Category: NCHC Distressed Horseman's Grant was added. This grant was created to help North Carolina Horse Owners during times of difficulty that arise from unexpected, catastrophic or calamitous events. This grant fund is intended to address funding issues not addressed in our current grant categories. The funds may be applied for and utilized for both human needs and horse needs.

The following synopsis of the awards in 2020:

EQUINE ACTIVITY AND THERAPY GRANT

Four awards were given for a total of \$10,241.05

INDUSTRY PROGRAM SPONSORSHIPS

Eight sponsorships were awarded to the following programs: NCSU Equine Health Symposium, VETPAC Annual Symposium, NC Agricultural Extension Professional Improvement Conference, NC Farm Bureau Federation, NC Agricultural Foundation/ FFA State Conference, NCSU Livestock Agent training and the Equine Diseases Communication Center. Total award in this category was: \$19,350

GELDING VOUCHERS: \$600

EUTHANASIA VOUCHERS: \$220

SAFETY NET GRANTS:

Forty-two awards were made for a total of: \$6126.74

DEVELOPMENT GRANT: \$3,500

HEALTH AND RESEARCH GRANT: \$4,500

TRAIL GRANTS:

Three projects were awarded funding for a total of: \$38,500

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY GRANTS:

Four programs were funded for a total of \$29,140

DISTRESSED HORSEMEN'S FUND:

One award for a total of \$2,500.

TOTAL GRANTS AWARDED: \$ 114,577.79



Grants are a major function of the NCHC and this year we awarded dollars in all grant categories.



Trail work is a priority for the NCHC.



Health and Research Grants Awarded to NCSU/CVM

2020 ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS

Casey Armstrong
Tina Batchelor
Michael Benner
Tom Bennett
Pat Benton
David Brooks
Dottie Burch
Scottie Campbell
Mary Constantino
Todd Erickson
Tom Fischer
Alison Grotz
Alan Harper
Erin Hensley
Sammy Jenkins
Jerry King
Mary Myers
Gayle Nifong
Patty Nunnery
Rick Peniston
Jimmy Petty
Bob Sanford
Tracey Scheltinga
Dave Spencer
Carey Stewart
Jim Thomas
Tom Thomas
Tracy Tinsley
Rene Trehy
Laurie Wood
Anthony Blickslager
Callie Fogle
Shannon Pratt

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Cheryl Bennett

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Emily Thomas Luciano

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Barb Oslund

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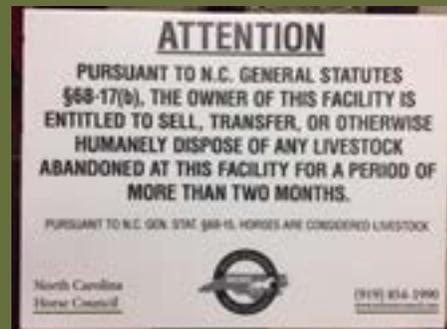
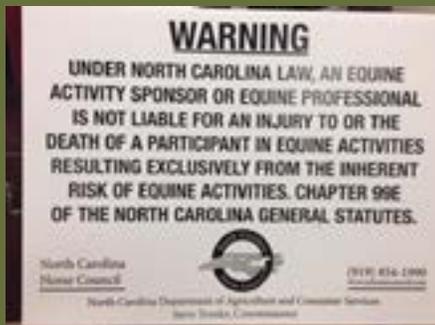
suegray@nchorsecouncil.com

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL HORSE OWNERS

If you own horses and they are located on your property, you should post the following sign in multiple locations:

If you board horses on your property you may wish to post the following sign on your property and include this information in your boarding agreements.

These signs are available to NCHC members at a discount and can be purchased on-line at www.nchorsecouncil.com/store





North Carolina Horse Council

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