

# **ADDENDUM**

## **Equestrian Summary**

Focus Groups with  
Recent Users and Lapsed/Non-Users  
of Texas State Parks  
Contract #177796

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*Attracting Texas Residents to Texas State Parks*

*Conducted for:*

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Austin, Texas

*Conducted by:*



## Equestrian (Lapsed/Non-user) Target

### **Respondent Profile**

A focus group of Equestrians was conducted July 23, 2007 in San Antonio.

- Ages 25+
- Personally own or lease a horse to ride personally
- Trailered horse to ride for pleasure at least once in the past year
- Have not ridden their horse in a Texas state park in the past year
- Half very/half somewhat interested in riding their horse at a park or public recreational area
- 4 Moderate, 6 High level of interest in nature-related outdoor activities at parks or recreational areas
- 10 Caucasian
- 3 Males, 7 Females
- 4 with children at home (not a screening requirement)

### **Outdoor Activities: General Perceptions, Usage and Decision Factors**

Note: The term “horseback riding” is used to refer to times when they trailer their horse away from home to ride for pleasure.

#### Perceptions

- Top-of-mind images when thinking of taking their horse to ride somewhere for pleasure brought to mind concerns and problems with how their horse will behave, maneuvering the trailer, having enough water, and having some place to put the horse overnight.

*“Yeah, easy access getting in with the trailer. I always wonder can I get turned around, am I going to get stuck, are there trees in the way, that kind of thing.”*

*“Yeah, it’s hard sometimes if you have living quarters in your trailers, and we do, and they’re heavy. We’ve gotten stuck at, I don’t remember which place it was that...We’ve gotten stuck several times in the mud and trees inside the air conditioner. We have generators on the top and hayracks and so it’s hard to get in and out sometimes. And they’re big, big trailers and I can usually turn it around and back it up anywhere, but it’s just mud in the trees.”*

*“Water. If I go somewhere and I ride my horse I want access to water, whether it’s natural being a creek or a river or a waterfall, so that’s real important for my horses, especially after a long ride.”*

- Images of riding their horse away from home represented a variety of terrains, away from highways and noise, getting away from the real world and communicated feelings of fun, relaxation, and contentment.

### Usage and Habits

- When horseback riding (riding their horses for pleasure away from home), Equestrians:
  - Prefer to go on weekends (due to work schedule)
  - Like both overnight and day trips (most)
  - Go to places they have been before (the known equals fewer problems)
  - Enjoy organized trail rides/benefits
  - Seek scenic and varied terrains
  - Tend to go with friends (“barn buddies”) or family
- Places they have taken their horses are: Bandera, McKinney Roughs, Lake Benbrook, Honeywell Ranch, Hobby Ranch, Hill Country Trail Ride, Eddie Nimitz Trail, Big Bend, and friend’s ranches (in state and out of state).

Several mentioned Sister Creek Ranch north of San Antonio, a new private park they wanted to visit with their horses.

- Bandera was the most frequently mentioned place to take their horses because it offers appealing features such as: advanced and easy trails, scenic, pins for horses, water available, accessible and place for trailers, camping available.

*“I think I like to go Bandera. The trailer parking is easy to get in and get out. I had to watch that one tree with my trailer. They have a place to tie the horses. There was water available. There was some pens there that were available. They had a wide variety of trails from novice to experienced and to whatever basically my mare would do, because she doesn’t like doing the rocky stuff so. So it was kind of if somebody chose to go up on the rocks I could always go down along the bottom, closer to the bottom and we’d meet over on the other side anyway, so..., but that’s where I liked it the most.”*

*Then my second choice is Bandera. I just think...It’s a challenging ride. It’s different and it’s picturesque and you’ll see some game and then get the weather just right and it’s really, really nice, really nice early in the morning.”*

McKinney Roughs offers a diversity of terrain (hills, meadows, river) and facilities.

*“McKinney Roughs has got mounting blocks throughout the park. They’ve got water faucets throughout the park. They’ve got stalls and a round pen at the trailer parking area. They’ve got a wash rack because the public came and gave their opinion and said this is what we would like to have; they got it.”*

- Some improvements and suggestions to improve the places they have been are:
  - More accessible
  - Available water for horses
  - Stabling or pins for horses
  - RV hook-ups, campsites

### Decision Process

- The primary factors in the decision process as to where to take their horse for horseback riding included:
  - Scenery (shady, open, variety and is related to trails)
  - Trails (marked, varied terrain, exclusive for horses)
  - Facilities (stable, water)
  - Distance/amount of time I have

Other factors that were also important, but not as critical were:

- Trailer parking/accessible, easy in and out (not on the side of the road)
- Accommodations (cabin, tent, hook-ups)
- Cost (if weeklong stay)

*“I like to be somewhere that I’ve been before just because of all the reasons that were just listed, just I don’t like to go somewhere not knowing any of those things.”*

*“I look for scenic areas. I don’t want to go just ride across a field. I’d like to have something that’s got some varied terrain. McKinney Roughs it’s between Austin and Bastrop, which is more my area, which is why I go over there. It’s like that. They’ve got meadows, they’ve got hills, they’ve got a river; you know you’ve got different terrain to ride through and a lot of trees so you ride through shady areas and you can cool off and then you can ride out through the open and that kind of thing. So just the variety is what makes it worth trailering to something really.”*

- Equestrians need to know about trails (rocky, sandy, etc.) and horse facilities prior to arrival.
- For a weeklong trip cost may become more important and distance may become less important.
- The most important source of information about places to trailer their horses was word-of-mouth recommendations from other Equestrians. Most appear to be very connected to other horse riders.

*“Somebody goes, they like it, they tell other people and then they go try it and a lot of times because we’re concerned about getting in and out and trails and that kind of thing, a lot of us won’t go unless somebody tells us ‘I’ve been there, and this what I found’ kind of thing.”*

- Other sources were varied and numerous, including:
  - Websites/internet (“trail rides” or “hiking trails”)
  - Ads for trail rides/benefit rides in horse magazines (for each breed of horse such as Quarter Horse, Appaloosa, Paints)
  - *Hike Texas* (Book that cites horse friendly trails)
  - *Horse Gazette*
  - Feed stores advertising for trail rides/benefits

## Texas State Parks

### Awareness and Usage

- Texas state parks bring to mind images of hiking, fishing, camping, facilities such as shelters, cabins, bathrooms; but they do not think of horseback riding.

*“I think of facilities. Usually when you go to a state park they have shelters or cabins or something available. They’ve always got bathrooms around everywhere and you know.”*

*“But I don’t think you think horseback riding in your state parks.”*

- Familiarity with state parks was limited, and confusion emerged as to what park/area was a state park and what wasn’t.

*“A lot of us in here are going, ‘I don’t even know what a state park is in Texas.’”*

Questions about state parks were raised, such as:

- Is Government Canyon a state park, is it open, do they have horse trails.
- “Bandera” is popular and close to San Antonio, but they now wonder if it is a state park -- some remember it being called a wilderness area or Bandera State Natural Area. (They are actually referring to “Hill Country SNA,” but none seem to know it by that name).
- One had on a Lake Somerville t-shirt, but did not realize that was a state park (and said it had been years since she was there).

Several were aware of Bandera because of sponsored benefit trail rides.

*“I think that’s why Bandera gained a lot of popularity is they’ve had a lot of benefit trail rides there for the Meadow Haven Horse Rescue...”*

- Discussion arose about Guadalupe River State Park as having horse trails, and a few had heard of it.

Some weren’t sure if it had opened. One had been there but would not return because the horse trails were too short (only 3 miles) and there was no access to the river (which they would expect based on the name of the park).

- State parks where they had taken their horses included:
  - Palo Duro Canyon 10 years ago
  - Guadalupe River 3 years ago
  - “Bandera” (Hill Country SNA) without knowing it was a state park
  - Lake Somerville (several years ago without knowing it was a state park)

- A few Equestrians seemed to have more frequent experience with state parks (not necessarily for horseback riding) and named several: Guadalupe, Palmetto, Palo Duro Canyon, Lockhart, Garner, Bandera, Enchanted Rock, and Lost Maples.
- Equestrians were surprised to learn that there were 9 state parks within 60 miles of San Antonio, and were even more surprised to learn that some had facilities for horses. (They had not heard of Hill Country SNA and were surprised to learn that it was what they call “Bandera.”) Many planned to be “googling” the state parks when they got home.

*“I’d be shocked!. I’d say they need to do some more advertising.”*

- Deterrents to taking their horses to state parks include:
  - Lack of knowledge about facilities available for their horses
  - Lack of familiarity with state parks
  - Lack of awareness of which ones have trails (*“you can’t just automatically go to a state park and assume they’ve got horse trails”*)
  - Haven’t been recommended by other horseback riders
  - Fear of getting lost (from a less experienced equestrian)

*“Because they don’t all have horse trails so you can’t just automatically go to the state park and assume they’ve got horse trails.”*

*“And obviously there’s a lot of us in here going I don’t even know what a state park is in Texas.”*

*“They’re not very well publicized.”*

### Image of State Parks

- State parks tend to be considered for camping and hiking, not for horseback riding.

*“They just aren’t advertised for horse people...they are for hiking.”*

- A few were satisfied or would expect to be satisfied with their equestrian experiences at state parks citing well maintained and well marked trails. Most rated their satisfaction in the middle – neither positive nor negative primarily because they do not have experience and do not know what to expect.

*“I gave it a five, which is just a...I just pulled that out of my head. Just because with the state park the first thing I think of is hiking and geared more for people, not for horses.”*

*“I gave it a five just because of the uncertainty factor because I haven’t been to one and even though I’m fairly certain that it would be okay I don’t know what kind of facilities they would provide for the horses.”*

- Some of the positive expectations of riding at state parks include:
  - Trails and scenery
  - Good, nice locations
  - Variety of areas / all over the state
  - Safe and secure (rules and regulations)
- Negative expectations of riding at state parks were minimal and not based on any negative experiences with state parks, but lack of experience:
  - Uncertainty – don't know what they will find
  - Possibly strict rules and regulations (although most think that's a positive)
  - Crowds/congestion (want it to be quiet and secluded)

#### Increasing Usage of State Parks for Horseback Riding

- To encourage and increase usage of state parks for horseback riding, suggestions for facilities to make them "horse friendly" predominated and included:
  - Water troughs
  - Wash rack to get the sweat off
  - Holding pens/round pens
  - Hitching posts at the bathrooms
  - Mounting blocks
  - Trails of 10 miles or more (for half day/full day rides)
  - Availability of veterinarian/medical care and feed stores
  - Facilities and access for their horse trailers

Availability of overnight accommodations such as cabins, camping, RV sites is essential (most would not go to the trouble required for trailering their horse for a day trip). In addition to horse facilities, Equestrians are interested in nearby restaurants and stores.

- The primary suggestion to encourage usage of state parks for horseback riding is to increase awareness of the parks and the facilities available for horses.

*"We need to know they are there."*

Suggestions to increase awareness included:

- Holding benefits/benefit trail rides
- Advertising

*"I think advertising in general would pick up a lot of state parks, a lot of people going."*

*"Host a benefit. Have a benefit, people come, they go hey Melinda I went to this one it was cool, you should go, and it just spreads like wildfire."*

- Recommended sources for information about horseback riding at state parks included advertising: on television with a web site (like state tourism ads), equine magazines, *Horse Gazette*, feed stores, radio/public radio.
- Information that would be important to communicate in order to assist in their decisions include:
  - Horse trails available, including condition, terrain and length
  - Park Hours
  - Fees and rules
  - Facilities available for the horses
  - General facilities (restrooms with hitching post, cabins)
  - Virtual tour so can see it before we go
  - Someone to check horses' health certificate

#### Increasing Usage of State Parks in General

- Because familiarity and usage of state parks in general is low among this group, they were asked what would increase their usage of state parks in general, unrelated to horseback riding.

Equestrians were slow to say why they did not go to state parks more often or how to increase usage. However, they seemed receptive to increasing usage of state parks, and do not have poor experiences. In fact, it brings up positive family memories.

- Some suggestions to increase overnight stays were:
  - Good camping facilities
  - Available camping sites (hear they are always booked, can't be spontaneous)
  - River, water features
  - Reasonable fees
  - Museums and history (like Monahans, Davis Mountains observatory)
  - Dance halls, good restaurants
- For a day trip to a state park, some would be interested in picnicking, swimming, hiking trails, or historical interests. Others would need something really "special" (like Enchanted Rock or Lost Maples) to draw them in because they tend to procrastinate.

A few were receptive to stopping into a state park if they were driving through the area and saw a sign for a state park (if it looked like it would have pretty scenery.)

## Reactions to Concepts

*Note: Respondents were made aware that there are a number of state parks within 60 miles, which may have contributed to higher interest.*

### Yurts (electric, water, kitchen)

- Interest in Yurts was low to moderate among the Equestrian target. Those interested thought it might be like a hotel, fun for a girl's trip. Others thought it sounded like "roughing it" which they were not interested in. Interest increased somewhat when they were assured it would have air conditioning. They would expect to pay \$30 to \$50 per night.

Several questions emerged when they heard the description (does it have windows?).

### Group Facilities

- Interest in renting a group facility was fairly strong, with half indicating definite interest for parties, family reunions, and a biker group. Expected rental fees typically ranged from \$50 to \$100 per day.

### Outdoors Workshops

- Participating in outdoors workshops received very little interest. Most feel they already know how to do these things. The few that had some interest in the workshops were thinking of their grandchildren or children. Fees were expected to be \$15-\$25 per person.

*"There's just not enough children today who know how to do that stuff. They are too concerned with cell phones and video games."*

### Summer Camps (Day, No Transportation)

- Half of the Equestrians thought summer day camps at state parks were a good idea (in general) and one would be interested for their grandchild. Expected value was typically \$150-\$200. However, half were not at all interested primarily due to the lack of transportation. Interest would increase if this were an overnight camp.