

# MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA (MPNHA)

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## Equestrian Center poised to become trail-riding hub

MT. PLEASANT—The Cleone Peterson Eccles Equestrian Center, which includes the ConToy Arena, will be at the center of a project designed to facilitate convenient and comfortable access to the area’s back-country horse trails, as well as improving portions of the trail system from Maple Canyon to the Skyline Drive, project participants announced.

Eventually, the Mt. Pleasant Trail System and Amenities Project could boost local tourism by drawing trail riders from throughout Utah and surrounding states.

The main focus of the project will be for the equestrian center to upgrade its facilities by adding 40 horse stalls, 25 RV hook-ups, and men’s and women’s restrooms and showers, to accommodate riders embarking on or returning from the local network of trails.

The upgrade is being made possible by grants, direct funding and in-kind word donations from Utah State Parks, the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area (MPNHA), Mt. Pleasant City, a Utah Outdoor Recreation Grant and the Central Utah Back Country Horsemen.



ROBERT STEVENS / MESSENGER PHOTO

**The Cleone Peterson Eccles Equestrian Center, as shown here in an aerial photograph, is upgrading its facilities to hold more horses and add restrooms and showers.**

Another major phase of the project is repairing 20 miles of the approximately 200-mile pre-existing trail system in the area, and rebuilding a bridge in Canal Canyon, as well as clearing overgrowth in Maple Canyon, and repairing trails in the White Hills, Black Hills and along Skyline Drive.

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Another amenity that the equestrian center plans to offer is a shuttle service, which will transport riders and their horses to or from a trail head so riders don't have to haul their own trailers and equipment up the canyons.

Funding for the project is coming from multiple sources. The MPNHA is providing \$50,000. Mt. Pleasant City is providing \$12,500; Utah State Parks is offering \$67,000; and a Utah Outdoor Recreational Grant will provide \$150,000.

In addition to the monetary contributions, the Central Utah Back Country Horsemen will donate \$8,000 in in-kind labor while Mt. Pleasant City will donate \$12,500 in-kind. In-kind contributions will go primarily towards trail repair.

Various groups and institutions have expressed support for the project.

"For most of our students, living in Mt. Pleasant will be the only time in their lives they will live in a rural environment," wrote Paul Applegarth, assistant head of school for finance and facilities at Wasatch Academy. "Equestrian activities have been important to our students, some of whom are just beginning to be exposed to horses, some of whom are expert riders."

President Lynn Barton from the Central Utah Back Country Horsemen said his group is a major supporter of the project—enough that it is willing to put some sweat equity into trail repair.

"In addition to being a diverse group of individuals who love riding on our beautiful public lands," Barton wrote, "we are also a service organization, which volunteers labor to assist managing agencies in maintaining and improving the trails we ride."

Kevin Christensen, director of economic development and travel for Sanpete County, sees the equestrian center upgrades as an opportunity to boost tourism.

"The tourism industry is growing in Sanpete County," he said. "Restaurant and transient room taxes have increased 84 percent over the past 10 years. It is anticipated that the above improvements will attract visitors from around Utah and neighboring states. Lodging and restaurant businesses in the North Sanpete area will benefit as the equestrian center will be the hub of horse-related activities."

"Horses are big business," added Monte Bona, director of the MPNHA. "This is definitely an economic development tool. It opens up a whole avenue for people who have horses with not many places to ride them."

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About the MPNHA: The series is sponsored by the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area, a federally designated area running along U.S. 89 from Spanish Fork to Kanab. The heritage area also takes in State Route 12, an All-American Road Utah, and State Route 24, the Capitol Reef Scenic Byway.