

# The Steep Rock VISTA

## SPECIAL EDITION

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

March 1997

### Reservations Closed to Mountain Bikes and Horses During Spring Thaw

Signs announcing the closing of Steep Rock and Hidden Valley to mountain bikes and horses went up on Saturday, March 1.

"Many of our trails are in terrible shape. They are particularly susceptible to damage during the spring thaw. We had to take some action," said John Millington, President of Steep Rock, explaining the decision to close the reservations to mountain bikes and horses. Prohibiting the uses that create the most wear and tear on the trails - mountain bikes and horses - during this brief but critical time period will prevent further erosion.

Trails are particularly susceptible to erosion and damage during the freezing and thawing periods that regularly occur in early spring. Many of Steep Rock's trails are in a fragile condition already. They are eroding and showing signs of overuse and abuse.

The reservation(s) may be closed for as long as four to eight weeks. The decision when to reopen will depend on what kind of spring it is - wet or dry, warm or cold. When the frost has left the ground and the trails are dried out the signs will come down.

Closing the reservations during the spring thaw has been considered several times in the past. Plans were in place and signs were ready last year, but heavy snows actually insulated the ground, and the frost was not deep, the thaw was quick, and the ground dried rapidly.

Sheila Anson, Chair of the Stewardship Committee that made the decision, said she hopes users will understand the reasons for the closure and obey the signs. "Mountain bikers and horseback riders are well aware of the poor condition of many of the trails. I think they understand completely why this decision was made, and are willing to stay off the trails for however long the thaw takes," she said.

The Steep Rock Stewardship Committee consists of several members of Steep Rock's Board of Trustees and other concerned volunteers from the town of Washington. The Committee has been meeting regularly over the last several months, grappling with the issues of overuse of certain trails, trail erosion and degradation, and management of a multiuse trail system.



*Signs at Steep Rock announcing closing.*

### Stewardship Program Begun

Steep Rock recently qualified to participate in the Connecticut Forest Stewardship Program, sponsored by the UConn Cooperative Extension System, the CT DEP Division of Forestry, and the US Department of Agriculture.

As a participant, Steep Rock, with the help of a professional forester, will conduct an inventory of the reservations and create a stewardship plan. The plan will consider many aspects of land resource management, including trail restoration and management, reclaiming overgrown fields to create better and more diverse wildlife habitats, reforestation in areas where many trees have died (for example areas where Steep Rock's hemlock trees are dying) and outdoor recreation considerations.

Once the plan is in place, Steep Rock will qualify for cost share programs that pay sometimes up to 75% of the cost of implementing the projects.

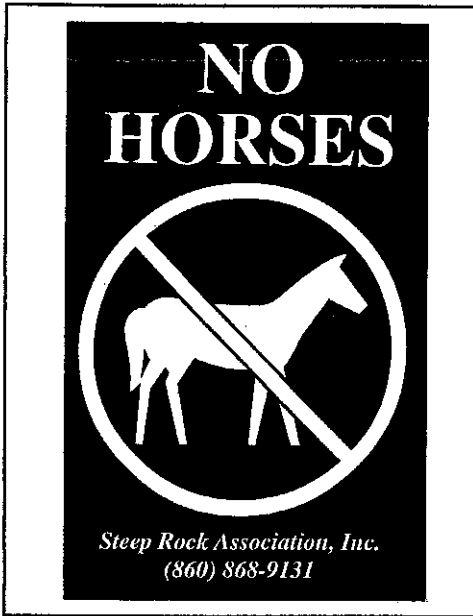
Steep Rock's Stewardship Committee has put trail restoration, and management of a multiuse trail system in first place on the list projects that will be included in the Stewardship Plan.

## Restrictions on Mountain Bikes and Horses When Reservations Reopen

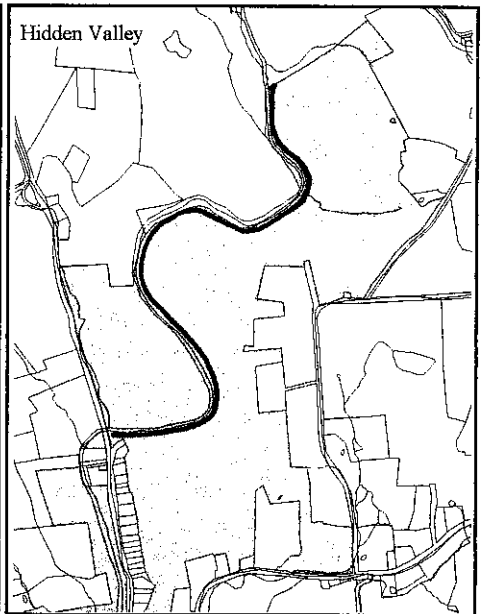
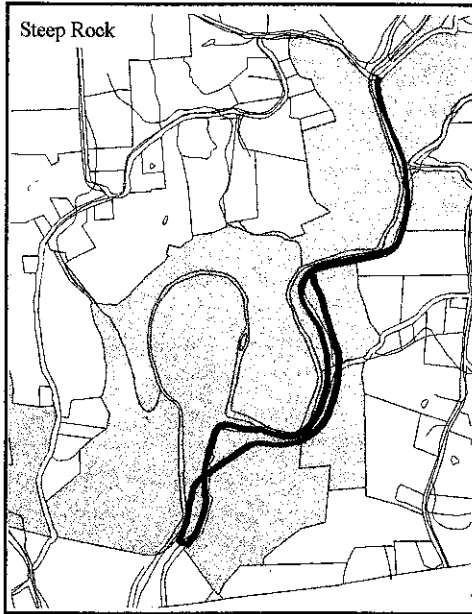
When Steep Rock and Hidden Valley reopen, mountain bikes will be restricted to certain trails and horses will be prohibited from several designated trails:

- In Steep Rock, mountain bikes will ONLY be allowed on Tunnel Road and the Railroad Bed on the East side of the Shepaug River.
- In Hidden Valley, bikers may ride ONLY on the vanSinderen trail (yellow blazed) from its beginning at the barway on the east side of the Shepaug River until the trail reaches the Railroad Bed; then along the Railroad Bed to the property line barway.
- In both Steep Rock and Hidden Valley the trails that prohibit horses will be posted.

These restrictions and prohibitions will remain in place while a trail rehabilitation and management plan is created. The plan and its implementation will be part of the Forest Stewardship Program, and will be the first project in the program that Steep Rock will undertake.



*Equestrians should be on the lookout for these signs.*



*Mountain Bikers will be allowed only on trails shown in bold..*

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