Why do we need this guide?

Faster trail users. Bikers and equestrians, as well as runners, approaching from behind will often say “On your left.” This means you should stay to your right.

Bikers yield to foot traffic. The responsibility of cyclists to pass at a safe speed. Offer friendly communication to let the rider know when it’s safe to pass; give verbal acknowledgement, step to the side of the trail, or wave the rider by on a wider trail.

What can you expect?

Inexperienced trail users. While all trail users yield to horses, many are intimidated by large horses, or they just don’t know what to do.

What is your responsibility?

Manage your animals. Don’t school green horses in high-traffic areas. Familiarize horses with expected trail encounters (cyclists, dogs, backpack-wearing hikers, etc.).

Negotiate safe passage.
1. Greet users early. Hikers and bikers should yield to horses, but they may need your guidance.
2. Be vocal and announce yourself on blind corners.
4. Continue communication until the pass is complete.
5. Expect the unexpected. Small children and animals can be unpredictable or easily frightened by horses.

What can you expect?

Surprised trail users: Fast moving users can startle others, especially when approaching from behind. Always ride under control, anticipate others and announce yourself around blind corners. In general, be friendly, communicative and aware of your surroundings. If you wear headphones, keep the volume down or only wear one earpiece.

What is your responsibility?

Mountain bikers yield to hikers, horses and uphill traffic.

Passing hikers:
1. Greet hikers early.
2. Slow down to about the same speed as the hiker.
3. Pass slowly and be prepared to stop if necessary.
4. Expect the unexpected. Humans and animals can be unpredictable and easily spooked by cyclists.

Passing cyclists:
1. Announce your intention to pass with a friendly “Let me know when it’s safe to pass.”
2. Use the “single-track yield” on a narrow trail – stop to the side, put one foot down and lean away from the trail.

Passing horses:
1. Stop at least 30 feet from the horse.
2. Greet the human and the horse to demonstrate that you are not a predator.
3. Ask for instructions on how to pass safely. Offer to get off your bike.
4. Pass slowly and steadily, but only after the equestrian gives you the go-ahead. Sudden movements can spook a horse.

What can you expect?

Varying speeds: Fast moving users can startle others, especially when approaching from behind. Always ride under control, anticipate other users, and be communicative and friendly. Pass on the left and say “On your left.”

What is your responsibility?

Bikers yield to walkers and uphill traffic.

Passing pedestrians:
1. Greet pedestrians and slower riders early.
2. Slow down to about the same speed as the person you’re passing.
3. Pass Slowly and be prepared to stop if necessary.
4. Expect the unexpected. Humans and animals can be unpredictable and easily spooked by cyclists.

Passing cyclists:
Announce your intention to pass with a friendly “On your left.”

Yield to horses.
1. Stay downhill. Spooked horses go uphill.
2. Greet the rider. Horses can perceive hikers wearing tall backpacks as predators. Your voice confirms your humanity.
3. Ask how to proceed. If hiking with a child, hold their hand when passing.

Walkers, runners and hikers regularly use the more than 300 miles of paved and unpaved trails in the Forest Preserves for exercise and exploration, to walk their dogs, and as a way to get from Point A to Point B.

Horses may use any of our stone and natural surface trails. Most equestrian activity takes place in the northwest and southwest areas of the County.

Off-trail riding is prohibited, and horses and riders must have Forest Preserve licenses.

Approximately 50 miles of stone and natural surface trails wind through the 15,000 acres of wilderness in the Palos Preserves in southwest Cook County. This is the area’s premiere destination for mountain bikers of all skill levels. Off-trail riding is prohibited.

The Forest Preserves offers 147 miles of paved trails that are frequented by a variety of users travelling at different speeds, from walkers and joggers, to families with young children and bicycle commuters.

Equestrians

What can you expect?

What is your responsibility?

Don’t school green horses in Mountain Bikers

Bicyclists on Paved Trails

What can you expect?

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We need your help!
The Forest Preserves is seeking new volunteers to join our Trail Watch program. Become additional eyes and ears for our Law Enforcement Department, and help us keep the preserves safe, healthy and attractive for all our users. Just by going out and enjoying the preserves, you can be a visible presence to help make our preserves even more welcoming.

Support
Your positive, visible presence increases a sense of safety and discourages prohibited conduct.

Monitor
Familiarity with your route allows you to easily recognize troubling trends and issues.

Report
Prompt reporting leads to prompt resolution and reduces the chance that the unwanted behavior will reoccur.

Don’t use wet trails.
If you are leaving prints (hoof, tire or shoe) the trail is too wet to use. When approaching muddy spots, go through the center of the mud to keep the trail narrow.

Stay on the trail.
Do not go off the trail (even to pass), create new trails or cut switchbacks. Narrow trails mean less environmental impact and happier critters.

Respect.
If you offer respect, you are more likely to receive it. All groups have rights and responsibilities to Cook County’s trails and to each other. Be friendly and expect to see folks around every corner.

Don’t block trails.
When taking a break, move to the side of the trail.

Preserve our natural areas.
Please put trash in its place.

A note for dog owners.
Please be sure to pick up after your pet. And remember that all dogs must be leashed.

What does yield mean?
Yielding means slow down, establish communication, be prepared to stop if necessary, and pass in a safe and friendly manner.

Find out more and register!
1. Visit fpdcc.com/volunteer
2. Click the red “Volunteer” button
3. In Search by keyword, type “Trail Watch”