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Study Identifies Potential Enhancements to Maryland Equestrian Sites, Activities *Modernizing aging facilities can increase the economic impact of horse-related events for the State*

BALTIMORE, MD. (August 31, 2015) - The Maryland Stadium Authority (MSA) today released a study commissioned by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB) that calls for enhancements to horse competition and recreational horseback riding facilities at the Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area (Cecil County) and the Prince George's Equestrian Center.

The study, conducted by Crossroads Consultants, Inc., evaluated existing equine resources in the state and identified improvements that would be needed at those facilities in order to develop a statewide horse park system that would spread economic benefits throughout Maryland.

Although both the Fair Hill and Prince George's Equestrian facilities currently operate as successful event venues, the report concluded that modernizing them could bring more events in to Maryland and increase the economic impact of those events while improving the climate for horse-related activities throughout the state.

The report studied Fair Hill, a 5,656-acre site managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, as a major equestrian field event venue for events requiring a specialized field and/or course. The Fair Hill International 3-Day Event in October and the Fair Hill Races in May are held annually and are among the largest spectator events in Cecil County. Fair Hill also features trail riding stables, where the public can rent horses and take guided trail rides throughout the park. The study recommends enhancing these facilities. Other suggested improvements include an overhaul of the 1930s-era racetrack grandstand, additional camping and RV hook-ups, and upgrades to the steeplechase course, arenas and stables.

The Showplace Arena and Prince George's Equestrian Center, managed by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, is an equestrian expo venue that hosts shows and indoor competitions. The center currently hosts a full schedule of equestrian shows including the Capital Challenge Horse Show, which takes place over 10 days and attracts more than 1,500 top show hunters. The study found, however, that the venue has potential to become a world-class equestrian complex with greater economic impact by modernizing the indoor arena, providing additional covered arenas, improving stables and increasing camping facilities.

The study estimates that, if all enhancements were implemented, they would cost between \$19.6 million and \$24 million at Fair Hill and between \$36 million and \$45.4 million at Prince George's Equestrian Center. However, projects can be completed as funding allows, so the study provides each local jurisdiction with a road map for moving forward since large projects would likely take a combination of state, county, private and perhaps federal funding. The study further states that additional state and county tax revenue generated by additional equine activities would eventually pay for the improvements. Elected local officials in both counties, who have been briefed on the study and its findings, will ultimately decide whether to try to upgrade one or both facilities.

"This study provides the Maryland Horse Industry with valuable information about the current market for our facilities," said MHIB Chairman James Steele. "It furnishes us with concepts for building upon the strong foundation Maryland has established over the many years equestrian sports have been enjoyed here. It offers a blueprint for improving the venues we have and suggests how they can be addressed in workable components through a master plan."

“Maryland is home to 80,000 horses and nearly 800 licensed riding schools and boarding stables. With few exceptions, these are all small businesses that have invested billions of dollars in land, buildings and horses,” said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Joe Bartenfelder. “Having top-notch facilities is important to keeping jobs in the state and keeping the industry not just viable but flourishing. This study shows we have a solid base to further build up our horse industry.”

“We are pleased this thorough and comprehensive study offers so many options to improve the Maryland equestrian industry,” said Tom Kelso, chairman of the Maryland Stadium Authority. “By considering the various concepts and the probable return on investment, the Maryland Horse Industry Board has a far better idea of where to focus their efforts.”

The report is a continuation of a 2006 Horse Park Study that recommended one major horse park be built in the state, similar to the Kentucky Horse Park. That plan never materialized; however, when Maryland’s horse community revisited the idea, the MHIB suggested developing a horse park system that links existing sites into a statewide network while also improving existing major equestrian facilities. Such a system could spread economic benefits throughout Maryland and keep current, long-established venues from being negatively impacted by one new site. MHIB issued a Request For Information (RFI) a year ago to determine which venues were interested in being included in the study. The study only evaluated the sites for equestrian event purposes, although numerous other activities are held at each.

The full study may be seen here: <http://www.mdstad.com/pdf/HorseParkStudy2015.pdf>

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