



# Middlebury Bridle Land Association

March 2, 2015

CT Siting Council  
Ten Franklin Square  
New Britain, CT

Re: Docket #192 B

Pre-Filed Testimony from Middlebury Bridle Land Association

We respectfully submit the following information as it pertains to equestrian safety on the Larkin State Bridle Trail and the economic and environmental impact of the proposed power plant on the Middlebury Bridle Land Association, local equestrians, and others who enjoy the scenic beauty of the region through outdoor recreation:

## Equestrian Safety on the Larkin State Bridle Trail

It is a well-known fact that horses and loud machinery, including trucks, do not mix. Horses are prey animals with well-developed senses. Strange sights, sounds, smells and feelings can make them apprehensive. When apprehensive, horses are less likely to listen to their humans and more likely to act in a manner more in keeping with self-preservation. For horses, this means fleeing away from the strange sight, sound, scent or feeling that frightened them. For an equestrian, this can mean serious injury or perhaps even death as a mount rears, spins, bucks or races away at speeds up to 35 miles per hour without any regard as to whether or not the rider is able to stay on.

It is sometimes difficult for non-horsemen to understand how differently a horse experiences the world and even more difficult to understand how this difference translates into very different reactions. In particular, horses have a very different way of seeing the world from their human. As a prey animal, horses have eyes on either side of their heads. While this allows horses to see almost all of the way around its entire body, it has two blind spots - one immediately in front of it and the other immediately behind it. Even more importantly, the fact that horses have 146 degree monocular vision on either side and 65 degrees of binocular vision to the front, the shift from binocular vision to monocular vision caused by a moving object can cause of perception of a visual "jump" that could cause the horse to "spook" or become frightened. Adding to this effect is the size of a horse's pupil, which is designed to improve the animal's ability to sense movement.





## Middlebury Bridle Land Association

Horses also have a different sense of hearing from humans. Horses can detect sound in the range of 14 Hz to 25kHz (humans hear in the range of 20 Hz to 20 kHz). The ear, with ten muscles devoted to movement, can swivel independently from each other, locking in on different sounds. In particular, horses are sensitive to high-pitched noises. Horses also notice the slightest changes in pitch, and sudden or loud noises can frighten the animal, as it associates certain noises with predators. It is said that horses are capable of hearing the whinnys of other horses from as much as a mile away.

The horse also has a tremendous sense of smell. Although horses do not differentiate scents as efficiently as dogs do, their sense of smell is far more developed than that of humans. In fact, the horse's olfactory system may occupy as much as 25% by weight of his head. It is said that thirsty horses can detect the smell of water from as much as two miles away. Horses are also very sensitive to the scent of blood and may become frightened if they smell blood, and any horseman will quickly assure you that horses can smell or sense fear in a human.

Non-horsemen sometimes think a horse is very sturdy and relatively insensitive to touch but the reality is far different. A horse can detect a fly landing on its body and reacts quickly to the invader. Horses use their sense of touch to communicate with each other and with their riders. A slight shift in body weight can tell a trained horse to react with a specific movement. Well-trained horses will react to the tightening of a rider's muscle. As a prey animal, horses react to changes in terrain or to unusual ground movement. Some horses will not walk through a puddle or a bit of mud because they fear the depth of the water or the pull of the mud. Many horses will not walk across even a sturdy wooden bridge because they sense the minute unsteadiness of the crossing. Some horsemen claim horses also have a sensitivity to electricity. When housed within a so-called electric fence, horses quickly learn to stay away but will interestingly be able to detect fairly quickly when the fence is disabled. Horses are also among the animals that may be able to detect certain human ailments. Like dogs, horses have been reported to react to grand mal seizures before any human is aware that a seizure is imminent.

All of these senses are designed to allow a horse to notice and flee from a predator. When a human rides a horse and asks the horse to walk quietly down a trail, ignoring strange sights, sounds, smells, and feelings, he is asking the horse to ignore its own self-preservation instincts. A well-trained horse with a competent self-assured rider is safer than a young or lesser trained mount with an inexperienced rider, but even the well-trained mount with a strong leader/rider can be overwhelmed and give in to base instinct when faced with strange situations that feel overwhelming. When overwhelmed by fear, horses can become uncontrollable. At that point, the horse becomes a one thousand pound missile thundering down a trail or road.





# Middlebury Bridle Land Association

That is one reason why horses and construction areas do not mix well. Flashing lights, beeping signals, shrieking horns, rumbling ground, fast-moving trucks and humans shouting out commands to each other will result in a wreck for both horse and rider, and potentially a number of others around them. For example, a truck driver may be thinking he has a schedule to keep and that he cannot slow down for the horse, but the big, noisy vehicle will frighten the horse and cause it to rear, buck, whirl, and run, possibly dumping the rider and possibly racing into the path of an oncoming vehicle. Even with protective gear, riders can be permanently injured or killed in a fall from a horse, as can a driver or passenger who is in a vehicle that strikes a loose horse.

While a quick search on google did not reveal any written accounts of horses and power plants, one can only wonder if that is because most power plants are located in industrial areas away from horses. Indeed, people own horses to enjoy nature - not power plants. When one is riding, one expects twittering birds, clean air and a wooded trail, not a path that takes one past a power plant.

## Economic and Environmental Impact on MBLA, Local Equestrians, and Others Who Enjoy the Trails

People who own horses do so to enjoy the intense interaction with a living, breathing animal. Horsemen may enjoy certain forms of equestrian sport, but all require the ability to be "in the moment" with the horse. Those who ride trails with their horses or who participate in such sports as hunting, eventing, or pacing all share an enjoyment of riding out in the countryside. Whether ambling down a wooded trail, racing across a field, or leaping over a stone wall, these equestrians all share a common love of nature with those who hike, jog, cycle or cross country ski. While any of these other people could technically walk, jog, cycle or ski along a road in an urban setting, most if not all of their joy comes from doing so in a rural or wooded setting. With horsemen, it is not just a matter of enjoyment but also one of safety for both horse and rider.

As noted in our previous statement of January 27, 2015 to the CT Siting Council in this matter, Connecticut ranks third in the density of horses nationwide. The horse industry in Connecticut is thriving and contributes to the overall economy of the state. Horse ownership in Connecticut contributes to the appeal of the area as a tourist destination. For example, the MBLA hosts rides and an annual hunter pace which attracts riders from as far away as New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. These competitors share a love of nature with the members of the association and have often commented on the lovely vistas and trails available to those riding the pace. A power plant would have a definite negative impact on the association's ability to attract riders to the pace and also to attract members who pay dues to help preserve the local trails. It would also





## **Middlebury Bridle Land Association**

have a negative impact on the region's tourist appeal. No one spends money to spend a day next to a power plant or even within ten miles of a power plant.

Those of us who live in this area would be the most impacted of all. We would see our beloved trails destroyed by the view of an industrial behemoth, both we and our horses would be breathing in potentially hazardous pollutants, and we might be endangering ourselves by unknowingly riding into a hazard that is clear to our horses but not to us. For horsemen in the area, there is no upside. We would not receive a reduction in our taxes, we would not benefit from any of the twenty-some jobs that will be offered by the plant, we would not use the electricity generated by the plant (as it is admittedly destined for another state), and the reduction in our electric bill is so miniscule as to be meaningless (the reported annual savings amounts to less than a week's feed for our horses).

This beautiful rural area that is home to several hundreds of acres of open space is no place for an industrial plant that features smokestacks that will be visible for miles around from those very same acres. Those of us who own horses or who hike, jog, cycle or cross country ski in this region were here first. Some of us grew up here; others moved here to enjoy the rural surroundings. None of us want to risk our lives for a few dollars off our electric bill.

Thank you. Nancy Vaughan, secretary, MBLA

