

Maintenance Overview at Sunset Farm Park

By Robbie Harris

For the Friends of Sunset Farm

www.friendsofsunsetfarm.org

October 2025

Table of Contents

- Table of Contents.....2**
- General Schedule of Maintenance Required.....3**
 - Early Spring..... 3
 - Late Spring/ Early Summer.....3
 - Late Summer/ Early Fall..... 3
 - Late Fall..... 4
- Arena Maintenance.....5**
- Round Pen.....6**
- Paddocks.....7**
- Water Complex.....8**
- Cross Country Jumps..... 8**
 - Cross Country Jump Cables/Locks.....10
- Cross Country Field.....10**
- Trails.....12**

General Schedule of Maintenance Required

Early Spring

- a) Field mowing and weed whacking begin on an every week basis in late March or early April. Timing depends on weather & soil moisture.
- b) Weed spraying of all gravel surfaces and around arena/ round pen/ paddock posts begins as soon as the weather allows.
- c) A trail clean up work party is organized to clean up dead fall, winter storm damage and to clear brush
- d) The water complex is cleaned of algae/ weeds and inspected for holes.
- e) Cross country jumps are inspected and made ready for use by removing the blocks they are set on for the wet season.
- f) Arena, round pen and paddock fencing is inspected and posts/ rails needing repair are identified.

Late Spring/ Early Summer

- a) Field is opened to horses.
- b) Field mowing and weed whacking continue but hopefully slow down as there is less rain.
- c) Repairs to fencing and jumps are conducted.
- d) Cross Country jumps get pressure washed and stained.
- e) Weed spraying takes place as weather allows

Late Summer/ Early Fall

- a) Mowing and weed whacking continues, but has slowed down.

- b) Major projects generally take place at this time.
- c) Painting/ staining projects wind up by this time.

Late Fall

- a) Field is closed to horses for the wet season and signage is put up.
- b) Cross country jumps are put up on blocks for the wet season to keep them from sitting in standing water.
- c) Water jump is drained.
- d) Temporary fencing is put up around the cross country field to keep determined riders OUT.

Arena Maintenance

The arena fencing should be inspected for loose boards and rotten posts yearly. Replacement posts must be pressure treated, and rated for **ground contact**. Existing posts are 4x4 with 4x6 posts at the corners and gates. Rails can be treated or not, but must be primed and painted with good quality white semi gloss exterior latex paint.

The arena fencing should be pressure washed yearly and repainted about every three years. In 2025, a single volunteer pressure washed the fence over two days (5-½ hours) and painted the arena fence over 9 days (15 hours). It took about 6 gallons of paint.

Weed spray should be used around the posts and perimeter of the fencing to minimize the need for weed whacking up against the posts, which damages the paint and makes rotting more likely.

The footing should be pulled away from the perimeter back into the track periodically and dragged as often as weekly if volunteer availability allows. There is a home made drag (made of heavy timbers and chain link fabric) available to use. **NO OTHER TYPE OF DRAG MAY BE USED.**

Gates and latches should be inspected yearly for soundness, and repainted/ repaired/ replaced as needed.

Round Pen

The round pen fencing should be inspected for loose boards and rotten posts yearly. Replacement posts must be pressure treated, rated for **ground contact** and no smaller than 6x6 or 8" round (bigger is OK). Rails should be 2x6 treated.

The round pen fencing should be pressure washed yearly and stained about every three years. ***Ideally, this would alternate with the arena fence maintenance so as not to overburden volunteer labor.***

Weed spray should be used around the posts and perimeter of the fencing to minimize the need for weed whacking up against the posts, which damages the wood and makes rotting more likely.

The footing should be dragged as often as weekly if volunteer availability allows. There is a home made drag (made of heavy timbers and chain link fabric) available to use. **NO OTHER TYPE OF DRAG MAY BE USED.**

Gates and latches should be inspected yearly for soundness, and repaired/replaced as needed.

Paddocks

Posts and rails should be inspected several times a year, starting in the early spring and especially before any organized event where they may be in heavy use.

The original paddocks were built in 2006 with 4x4 posts from an apparently defective batch of treated material and rotted much too quickly. As they failed, they have been replaced with no smaller than 4x6 posts and sometimes larger, depending on what is available to us.

Weed spraying *just around the base of each post* should happen in the early spring, so as to minimize weed whacker damage to the posts. Signs should be posted at the time of weed spraying and left up for 24 hours. As of this writing the weed spray product being used is Roundup.

Weed whacking inside and around the paddocks needs to begin in late April/ early May and continue on an every second or third week schedule until the grass growth slows down. If the paddocks are in use over a weekend for an organized activity, they won't need to be weed whacked for at least one 2 week cycle.

Because some damage to the posts from weed whacking is inevitable, the bases of each post should be sprayed/ coated yearly with a copper naphthanate based preservative. This would be just the few inches above the ground level of the post... weed whacker damage is easily seen in this area.

Water Complex

The water complex should be drained in the fall and allowed to dry out. The drain plug is a 4" sewer and drain pipe fitting, located in the revetted wall in the SW corner right below the overflow pipe opening. It unscrews with a large pair of channel-lock type pliers. The attached pipe drains the water to the SW, on the downhill side of the large pile of rocks.

A work party to clean up the base of the water jump of the dried "pond scum" and pull any weeds/ cat tails that have grown up should be organized in the spring. The best tool for cleaning up the dried organic material is a plastic manure fork. A "Pulaski" pick ax will work to get out any grassy weeds that can't be pulled by hand. With 6 volunteers, each armed with a plastic manure fork and a tractor with a bucket, this process takes about 1-1/2 hours or less.

The paneling on the side walls should be inspected and replaced as necessary. Best practice is to use treated 1x6, stain both sides and the ends after cutting to fit. Keep fasteners above the water line, two at the top and one in the middle just above the water line mark.

Cross Country Jumps

At the end of the season (usually late October or early November), the portable cross country jumps are put up on blocks with the use of a tractor with pallet forks. The blocks are scraps of varying sizes of treated lumber that are stored on pallets in the horse barn. This keeps the jumps from sitting in standing water all winter and will help lengthen their useful life.

In the latter part of the spring (usually somewhere in early May to mid June) when the soil in the cross country field is dry enough to get a tractor on without causing damage, the jumps can be taken off the blocks and set on the ground. Personnel needed for this are someone driving the tractor with pallet forks and two to four volunteers to remove the wood blocks from underneath the jumps and stack them neatly on pallets.

When the jumps are lifted with the pallet forks of the tractor, it is fairly easy to identify if they have loose fasteners or other issues. Many of the larger jumps have logs or timbers that are fastened together with short lengths of ½” rebar. Some of the smaller jumps are put together with timber-lok screws that use a ¼” nut driver. If the jumps have 2x boards as part of their construction, they are generally fastened with torx head (aka star drive) or square drive screws.

If there are enough volunteers, this is an excellent time to pressure wash the jumps that need to be stained or painted. During the pressure

washing, a closer inspection of the jumps condition should be done. Ideally about 1/3 of the jumps are pressure washed and restained/ painted each year, so that each jump is on a three year cycle of being pressure washed and restained/ painted.

The jumps do have a finite life though, and financial resources must be maintained to be able to dispose of jumps (or parts of jumps) that have reached the end of their useful life (ie: take the rotten bits to the dump!). Setting aside a percentage of funds raised from activities into the “Disposal Funds” savings account is required (currently 10% of income from activities) as the cost of disposal is FOSF’s ultimate responsibility according to our MOU with Whatcom County Parks.

Cross Country Jump Cables/Locks

In 2018, our insurance coverage demanded that we no longer allow the cross country jumps to be used at will by the public, so we were forced to figure out a way to secure them from unsupervised use. We settled on cables with padlocks (all keyed alike) set on tee posts covered with PVC conduit for safety. The cables have white signage with a large red “X” painted on it. Some of the jumps are cabled individually, but most are in groups of three so as to lessen the need for posts/ padlocks. The same keyed alike padlocks are in use on the yard hydrants that supply water to the arena and water jump.

Cross Country Field

Per our agreement with Whatcom County Parks, it is our responsibility to keep the cross country field mowed at least twice per year. We are allowed to do it ourselves or have a farmer make hay or silage off of it (farmer must provide a certificate of insurance to County Parks prior to the work).

We have in some years done it all ourselves, but that is a drain on volunteer labor. Leaving the whole field to be taken as hay doesn't serve the Park users very well either, as making hay in Whatcom County is usually accomplished in late June or early July. That is a long time to keep users off the field.

The compromise we have been using for the last few years, that addresses both of the above issues is this:

FOSF volunteers start mowing the center block of the cross country field and perimeters of the hay fields with a 60" zero turn mower as early as possible in the spring (around the first week in April). A farmer then takes the rest of the grass off as hay in June/ July, weather depending. The farmer does not usually mow the rough/ filled area south of the main field below the arena, so that also has been our responsibility to mow down with a tractor as soon as it is dry enough.

Mowing and weedwhacking has usually been accomplished with work parties. During the pandemic that started in 2020, when group activities

were severely curtailed, all the mowing was done by one volunteer all season long.

Currently, field mowing is being done by two regular volunteers. Three or four regular mowing volunteers would be the most efficient. That way they are very familiar with the machine and with the property but the work is less of a burden to any one individual.

Keeping the entire field mowed at all times is the best case scenario for the Park user, as the whole field is available to ride on and keeping the grass short helps the field dry out faster in the early spring. Volunteer availability is the limiting factor here.

Trails

A work party should be organized in the early spring to walk all the trails, cleaning up fallen branches, cutting out trees fallen across the trail. A weed whacker with a blade attached is a very useful tool here for pushing the brushy growth back and keeping the trails wide enough.

There had been a bridge across one of the seasonal creeks in the forest, but it was difficult to maintain safely as it was very slippery with wet leaves and algae, which needed frequent cleaning. One solution we tried was attaching roofing material to make it non-skid, but then it was difficult to inspect for rot. Ultimately it was destroyed in a winter storm when several trees fell on it.

Culverts (8" or 12" x 20' corrugated plastic depending on the size of the water course) set on geotextile fabric and covered with 5/8" minus crushed gravel have been determined to be the best answer to wet area crossings in most cases. We will be trying a "ford" crossing this summer (gravel laid in a ditch and filled with large quarry spalls) for one particular wet spot.

New trails are not to be built (per Parks Dept. regulations), but **existing, overgrown trails can always be redeveloped.** According to a long ago conversation with Kay Lowery (property donor), the forest had trails **everywhere**. We just have to find them again.