



Groomer Volunteer Manual

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Mission:

To provide children, youth, and adults the opportunity to grow and develop through therapeutic, educational, and recreational activities with horses.

Role Overview

Grooming is one of the most meaningful skills of safe and effective horsemanship, and often the place where the relationship between a volunteer and a horse truly begins. Grooming brings the chance to get comfortable, learn basic handling skills, and start recognizing how horses communicate through body language. As volunteers advance, grooming becomes more than a cleaning routine—it becomes a purposeful assessment of the horse's comfort, condition, and readiness to work. Advanced grooming requires greater attention to detail, awareness of subtle physical changes, and the ability to work independently. Whether at the beginning or advanced level, grooming is an essential way to support our horses and deepen the connection that makes equine-assisted work so special.

The **groomer** prepares horses for lessons by ensuring they are clean, comfortable, and ready to be tacked. This role focuses on grooming tasks and careful observation of each horse's condition prior to lessons, helping support horse welfare, lesson safety, and program consistency. Groomers do not tack or untack horses and do not provide direct participant support. All responsibilities are carried out under the direction of instructors and program leadership.

Required Knowledge & Skills

- Safety
 - Approaching a Tied Horse
 - Moving around a Tied Horse
 - Transitioning Roles During Lessons
 - Moving the Horse Sideways
- Horse Behavior
 - Body Language
- Emergency Procedures
 - Loose Horse
 - Releasing Quick Release Knot
- Grooming
 - Identify grooming tools
 - Understand purpose
 - Demonstrate correct use of tools
 - Examine Horse for Concerns



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Benefits of being a Groomer

Horses help us overcome emotional challenges, offering comfort, strength, and unconditional companionship. Grooming is one of the simplest ways to tap into that healing power.

Improves a person's physical awareness and provides a light workout for the arms and shoulders.

The quiet, rhythmic process provides a calming, meditative, and grounding experience.

Time Commitment

- Arrival time will vary depending upon number of available groomers.
- Typical arrival time is 30 minutes to 1 hour prior to scheduled lessons – stay until assigned horses are groomed (30 minutes – 1 hour)
- Commit to a consistent schedule for a minimum of 1 session.
- Schedule with Director of Equine Wellness and Volunteer Operations

Physical Requirements

- Stand for up to 1 hour, while grooming.

Training & Supervision

- Complete all orientation and groomer training
- Report to Directors and/or Instructors

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Benefits of Grooming

Grooming is one of the most meaningful ways to connect with a horse. Grooming offers incredible physical, mental, and emotional benefits—for both horse and human.

Grooming also plays an essential role in their overall health and well-being. Regular grooming:

- **Stimulates circulation:** Brushing increases blood flow, promoting a shiny coat and healthy skin.
- **Supports muscle recovery:** Grooming after a workout helps reduce tension and soreness, especially in active horses.
- **Allows for early detection:** As you groom, you can check for cuts, swelling, or any abnormalities, ensuring your horse stays in peak condition.

Emotional Connection through Grooming

Beyond the physical benefits, grooming creates a unique opportunity for connection. Horses are deeply intuitive animals that thrive on trust and consistency. Spending time grooming allows the horse to relax and feel cared for, fostering a bond that strengthens every time you interact.

Horses have an incredible way of grounding us, and grooming is a perfect example of that. As you care for a horse, you become fully present, setting aside the distractions of daily life. Grooming offers a sense of calm and mindfulness, making it a therapeutic experience for people of all ages.

Groomer Responsibilities

Note: This section of the manual assumes you have arrived, signed in, checked the posted lesson schedules, understand your assigned horses, and are ready to carry out the following responsibilities. If at any time you are unsure of expectations, procedures, or priorities, ask an instructor, lesson assistant, or director for clarification.

Prior to Lessons

Horse Preparation & Grooming

- Confirm assigned horses with staff or posted lesson schedules
- Retrieve the appropriate grooming bucket for each assigned horse
- Safely approach and groom horses as trained (please see grooming instructions at the end of this manual), including:
 - Rubber Curry
 - Stiff Bristle Brush
 - Soft Bristle Brush
 - Mane & Tail Brush
 - Pick Hooves

Horse Observation & Safety Awareness

- Observe each horse closely throughout the grooming process for any new or unusual concerns, including both physical changes and behavioral responses.
- Physical concerns may include:
 - Cuts, scrapes, rubs, or wounds
 - Swelling

- Heat or tenderness
- Signs of soreness, stiffness, or discomfort
- Behavioral or body language concerns may include:
 - Pinned ears
 - Tail swishing or wringing
 - Tension, flinching, or avoidance when touched
 - Increased agitation, anxiety, or resistance
 - Any behavior that feels out of character for the horse
- Immediately report any concerns to the volunteer coordinator, director, or instructor before the horse is tacked or used in a lesson.
- If a horse exhibits unsafe behavior during grooming, stop grooming, prioritize your personal safety, and notify staff immediately.

Equipment Handling

- Keep grooming tools organized and off the ground when not in use.
- Remove excess hair and dirt prior to returning grooming tools to the bucket.
- Empty grooming buckets of excess hair and dirt when necessary.

During Lessons

- Remain to assist with additional grooming needs only if horse leader or staff is available to bring horse to aisle.
- Do not enter the arena or handle horses unless specifically instructed.

After Grooming

- Notify horse handler or staff that horse is ready to be moved to its assigned stall/paddock or lesson location.
- Return grooming buckets and tools to their designated storage locations (in the tack room of the main building).
- Communicate with staff regarding any observations or concerns noted during grooming.

Role Boundaries

- **The Groomer role does not include:**
 - Haltering, Leading, or Tying Horses
 - Participant support

Maintaining clear role boundaries supports horse welfare, participant safety, and program risk management, in alignment with PATH Intl standards.

How to Groom a Horse

Beginning Grooming

Goal – Build comfort, safety, and familiarity with basic horse grooming.

Purpose

- Learn the rhythm of grooming
- Build trust between volunteer and horse
- Keep horses clean enough for daily handling and simple lessons

Routine & Structure

Our horses work with several different volunteers throughout the week; therefore, consistency in grooming is essential. Structure and routine help our horses feel safe, understand what to expect, and remain calm and cooperative during preparation for lessons. Grooming is not only about cleanliness—it is also an important part of setting the tone for the horse's physical comfort, emotional regulation, and readiness for work.

For this reason, all groomers are expected to follow the established grooming order, use consistent techniques, and handle horses in a predictable, quiet manner. Sudden changes in routine, rushed movements or inconsistent handling can increase anxiety, lead to behavioral concerns, and impact safety for both horses and volunteers.

By grooming each horse the same way, in the same order, every time, groomers help:

- Reduce stress and confusion for horses working with multiple people
- Support positive behavior and relaxation prior to lessons
- Improve safety for volunteers and staff
- Maintain consistency across the program, regardless of who is grooming on a given day

Following the program's grooming structure ensures our horses receive clear, consistent communication and allows them to do their important work comfortably and confidently.

Grooming the Horse

Begin grooming the horse's neck on the left (on) side and work methodically toward the chest, shoulder, back, and barrel, continuing to the croup and hip. Grooming should follow a consistent top-to-bottom and front-to-back pattern. Be aware of where the saddle and cinch or girth will sit on the horse, ensuring these areas are especially clean. Also, be mindful of the horse's flank; this is a sensitive area and should only be brushed if necessary.

- Start with the **rubber curry comb**, using firm but gentle circular motions, helping to loosen dead hair, dirt and debris. Avoid bony areas and sensitive regions.
- Move to the **stiff bristle brush** to remove dirt and hair brought to the surface by the curry. Use short, firm strokes, brushing in the direction of the hair coat. A gentle flick of the wrist at the end of this motion helps with this process.
- Follow with the **soft bristle brush** to remove remaining dust and smooth the coat.
- Use the **mane and tail comb** as trained. Begin at the ends of the mane or tail and work upward gradually to minimize hair breakage. Do not pull forcefully or rush this step.
- Finish by cleaning the hooves using a **hoof pick**. Always stand close to the horse, facing the rear, and run your hand down the leg before asking the horse to lift its foot. Pick from heel to toe, removing dirt and debris while avoiding the sensitive frog.
 - Please ask the lesson assistant or staff to assist with this if you are not confident in performing this task.

Throughout the grooming process, remain aware of the horse's body language and behavior. If the horse shows signs of discomfort, tension, or unsafe behavior, pause grooming and notify staff as outlined in the Horse Observation & Safety Awareness section.

Moving the Horse's Hindquarters

If your horse moves too close to the wall sideways, you may need to move him to be able to groom. You are going to ask the horse to move his hindquarters away from the wall (**yield the hindquarters**) so that he is

standing facing the wall. You do this **without pulling or pushing your horse.**

1. Position Yourself

- Position yourself near the horse's **ribcage**, slightly toward the shoulder on the side you want the horse to move away from.
- Face the direction you want the horse to move.

2. Control the Head

- Hold the lead rope about **12–18 inches from the halter.**
- Gently **turn the horse's nose slightly toward you.** This helps prevent the horse from walking forward and gets them ready to move their hindquarters away from you.

3. Ask With Your Body

- Step **toward the horse's ribcage**
- Apply **light steady pressure** behind the girth line on the barrel with your fingertips
- Remember: Horses move away from pressure.

4. Release at the First Step

- The moment the horse steps **away**, even with one hind foot:
 - **Stop pressure.** Release of pressure = reward
 - Soften your body
 - Praise the horse

5. Repeat until horse is where you need him

Check your surroundings any time you are moving a horse. Keep in mind that some horses are not sensitive or willing to move, others can be very sensitive and move fast.

Advanced Grooming

Goal: Prepare horses correctly and confidently for lesson-ready conditions, with minimal supervision. Advanced grooming goes beyond “getting the dirt off” and moves into evaluating the horse's comfort, condition, and readiness to work.

Advanced grooming typically includes:

- **Precision & Thoroughness**

Grooming routine remains the same; however, you will also begin to groom for function, not just cleanliness.

- When using a curry comb, be intentional. Apply pressure that is firm, yet comfortable. This helps increase circulation, which helps warm muscles prior to work.
- Begin learning how to carefully groom sensitive areas (face, legs, belly, hindquarters) with appropriate tools

- **Mane & Tail Care – Dealing with Burrs, Tangles, or Mud Clumps**

The mane and tail should be handled with care to prevent discomfort (pulling, yanking), hair breakage, and unnecessary stress for the horse. Burrs, tangles, and dried mud should be removed slowly and methodically using patience rather than force.

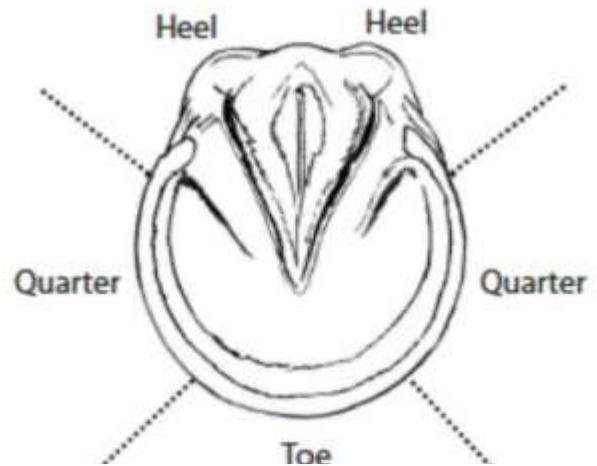
- Begin by **separating the hair with your fingers;** gently pull the hairs apart above and below the trouble area. This helps loosen dirt, mud, or debris before using any tool.
 - When burrs or tangles are present, **work from the bottom of the hair upward,** addressing small sections at a time.
 - Use a mane and tail comb only after major tangles have been loosened by hand.

- For dried mud, gently crumble and remove it with your fingers before combing. Do not pull or rip through hardened areas.
- If resistance is felt, stop and continue working the area by hand rather than pulling through it.
- Adding oil (mineral oil, olive oil spray, etc.) helps lubricate hairs and make it easier to remove burrs without breaking or damaging the hair.
 - Burrs have not been a frequent issue on this property; please ask for assistance or training if you have never learned how to properly perform this task.

- **The Hoof**

A horse's hoof is composed of the wall, sole and frog. The wall is simply that part of the hoof that is visible when the horse is standing. It covers the front and sides of the third phalanx, or coffin bone.

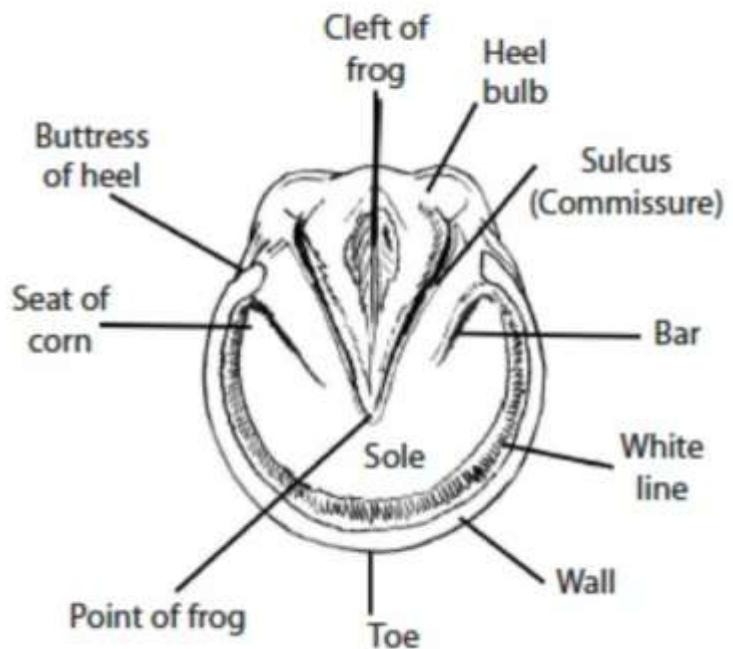
The wall is made up of the toe (front), quarters (sides) and heel. The wall, bars and frog are the weight-bearing structures of the foot. When the foot is lifted off the ground, the sole and frog are visible, as well as the bars of the wall and the collateral grooves.



- **Hoof Care**

When it comes to maintaining the overall health and performance of horses, hoof care is paramount. Proper hoof care can significantly impact a horse's well-being and success. Among the many aspects of hoof care, cleaning the hoof daily is crucial. This simple yet essential practice helps prevent a host of issues, ensuring that horses stay sound and comfortable.

Stand close to the horse, facing the rear, and always keep one hand on the leg as you ask the horse to lift it. Lift the hoof gently and support it throughout the process. Begin by removing dirt, packed mud, and small rocks with the hoof pick, working from the heel toward the toe while avoiding the sensitive frog. Take care to maintain control of the leg and keep your body positioned to avoid being struck if the horse shifts.



While cleaning, check carefully for signs of concern such as cracks, chips, loose or missing shoes, heat, odor, thrush, or unusual tenderness. These observations should be reported immediately to an

instructor or director. Proper independent hoof picking not only keeps the horse's hooves clean and comfortable but also helps identify potential problems early, contributing to overall horse health and lesson safety.

- **Body Check & Wellness Awareness**

- Run hands over the horse to identify:
 - Tender spots, swelling, Heat
 - Cuts or scrapes
 - New bumps or soreness
- Notifying staff appropriately.

- **Fly & Skin Care**

Typically, horses will have fly spray applied as they leave the stable to enter the arena. This task should be taken care of by the horse leader or staff.

Thank you for fulfilling this important role and for being part of the Bluff & Ridge Team!

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Site/Mailing Address: 23797 County Highway CM,
Tomah, WI 54660

Phone: 608-343-7740

Email Address: info@bluffandridge.org

Web Site: www.bluffandridge.org

Facebook: [@bluffandridge.org](https://www.facebook.com/bluffandridge.org)

Volunteer Coordinator: Renee Stroh: (608) 387-9248

CONTACT INFORMATION

EMERGENCY: 911

VETERINARY: Cranberry Country Equine Vet: (608) 351-3040

ADMINIATRATION:

Becky Deist:

Phone: (608) 343-7740

Email: bdeist@bluffandridge.org

Martha Airth-Kindree:

Phone: (608) 462-7574

Email: mairthkindree@bluffandridge.org

Renee Stroh:

Phone: (608) 387-9248

Email: rstroh@bluffandridge.org