



It's not just another horse...

The responsibilities of becoming an Ojibwe horse Caregiver

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for New Caregivers

Helen Knibb PhD and Sallianne Patch RN

2023

This FAQ offers some guidance for new caregivers of the Ojibwe horse. It addresses the breed- specific needs, as well as the cultural responsibilities that come with this role. With the growing interest in these horses, their limited numbers, and the challenges of breeding from a small, dispersed population, looking after the Ojibwe horse requires a unique kind of commitment. This FAQ will help you work four key questions:

- Do I have the resources (land-based, financial, and knowledge) to sustain my horse- care over years, not just months?
- Am I willing to learn how to care for a breed which has not adapted well to grazing rich pastures?
- Am I willing to sustain careful, day to day monitoring of my horse’s food intake and body condition across *all* seasons?
- Can I be an advocate for the Ojibwe horse, acknowledging its importance to Indigenous culture and communities? Am I prepared to share my experiences and provide the horses with a sanctuary?

A Special Responsibility

‘Caregiving’ goes beyond traditional horse ownership. It celebrates the Ojibwe horses for their importance to Indigenous communities today, and in the future. The stories of these little horses and their resilience are now being told in collaborations among Elders, story tellers, artists, and caregivers. They are a source of cross-cultural inspiration and new understanding. www.greyravenranch.org madahoki.ca www.cbc.ca > [listen](#) > [live-radio](#) [The Return of the Ojibwe Spirit Horse | Unreserved with ...](#) nac-cna.ca > [en](#) > [bio](#) [Rhonda Snow | Biographies | National Arts Centre](#)

Their even temperament suits them to Equine Assisted Learning programs, www.ealnetwork.com > [what-is-eal](#) [Equine Assisted Learning | International Governing Body ...](#) and in re- connecting Indigenous communities and youth to their culture. www.cartierfarms.ca **CARTIER EQUINE ASSISTED LEARNING – They** are also used for school-based programs and community events, (*Aspens Ojibwe Horse Sanctuary, TJ Stables*) educating Canadians about the breeds near demise during colonization, and what is being done today toward their preservation.

Balancing Containment versus Re-wilding

Once, these horses were semi feral, forming their own breeding groups on the edge of the Boreal Forest, and areas of rough bush around the Great Lakes. They were grazers and foragers eating a diversity of native grasses, shrubs, tree shoots and herbs.

Preservation efforts have brought them to southern Ontario as well as Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the northern United States. Now, horses are 'contained' in the fields of more conventional farming systems. Often, the available grazing is on nutrient-rich pastures, better suited to dairy cattle. Like many heritage horses and ponies the breed is prone to Metabolic Syndrome or EMS, ehorse.com > 150629 > [identifying-and-managing](#) **Identifying and Managing Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS)** and laminitis *For this reason Ojibwe horse care is particularly challenging, especially for those new to horse keeping.*

Containment on more limited pasture, or dry earth lots, is one solution but limits the horses' freedom to roam, their natural behaviours, and foraging instincts. Without rougher terrain, hooves need to be trimmed more often. Limited access to bark and brush means teeth require attention. The ability to seek out breezes and shade in summer, or natural shelter and wind breaks in winter may be more limited. Modern stable management can also deprive these horses of herd based social relationships, and pair bonds. The Ojibwe horses are herd animals, happiest in groups or at minimum with a companion.

Our job is to respect the instincts and abilities of the horses and nurture their independence. As much as possible, we need to allow them to live as they would naturally. While the ideal is that they might one day find sanctuary in their native habitat, for the present, most care givers have the tough job of managing them in a more confined way of living.

How should I best feed my horse?

'Grassy' hay is best with no more than 11% protein (not mouldy or dusty). Small squares may cost from \$4-\$9 depending on your region and the hay year. Your Ojibwe pony will need to eat only 1 to 1.5% of their body weight. For example, a Shetland pony that weighs from 440 to 880 pounds (200 – 300 kg) needs about 4.4 to 13 pounds (1.9 – 5.9 kg) of hay per day. per day. Some feed hay year-round to

reduce risk of founder. Horses also need free choice, loose salt and a mineral mix suited to the regional soils, an equine nutritionist will assist you. At Aspens we have been gifted Linaya Pots expertise from the company www.deephollowranch.com › [how-much-hay-does-a-horse-eat/](http://www.deephollowranch.com/how-much-hay-does-a-horse-eat/) [How Much Hay Does a Horse Eat? \(Calculation Method\)](http://www.deephollowranch.com/how-much-hay-does-a-horse-eat/)

Like other semi feral horses, their climate beneficial use in conservation grazing and brush control is being investigated www.wcl.org.uk › [why-you-should-be-using-native-ponies-for-conservation-grazing/](http://www.wcl.org.uk/why-you-should-be-using-native-ponies-for-conservation-grazing/). All these activities including carefully planned breeding depend on the participation and collaboration of caregivers.

What skills do I need as a horse handler and trainer?

Some of the horses available for new homes may have had limited handling and training, and stallion behaviour around mares or other geldings can test even experienced handlers. So, it is important to be realistic in assessing one's level of horsemanship. You may be a competent rider but know little about training a 'green' horse, and it is easy to get hurt.

Although a natural curiosity and affinity with people makes handling easier, these horses still *need* to be handled enough that they can trust the farrier or the vet, be caught readily and, in emergencies, led or trailered to safety.

What if I need help training?

Finding a sympathetic and experienced local trainer who will work with you 'on farm' is a sound investment. There are also good online resources in natural horsemanship **you can** follow eg: [horse-canada.com › magazine › behaviour Training and How Horses Learn - Horse Canada](http://horse-canada.com/magazine/behaviour-training-and-how-horses-learn/)

What are the costs of care?

Horse keeping is expensive and must be sustained year-round. In 2023 it is reasonable to consider \$4000 a year *a conservative estimate of costs per horse* and you may also need to install fencing, shelter, and a water hydrant before your horse comes home.

How much land do I need?

One acre per horse is a *minimum*. Horses are tough on pastures, so fields require periodic re-seeding, checking for toxic plants, and manure management. www.all-natural-horse-care.com > [paddock-paradise](#) Paddock Paradise - Information on how to create it. Land should be free of hazards such as old farm machinery. Grazing tracks are sometimes used for 'easy keepers' like the Ojibwe horse, designed to simulate a more natural environment and movement across diverse types of terrain and vegetation. Biodiverse wildflower meadows are another option.

Do I need a barn and box stalls? At minimum, an appropriately sized run-in shed www.homehardware.ca > [en](#) > [10-x-20-x-8-6-horse](#) 10'x20'x8' 6" Horse Shelter Package, with Tack Room | Home ... is necessary, offering horses 24/7 access and protection from weather extremes and insects. Horses may also choose to push into wooded areas for shade and shelter.

What makes a good fence?

Horse-safe fencing and gates can be costly to instal, horseandrider.com > [how-to](#) > [field-guide-to-horse-fences](#) Best Horse Fencing Options - Horse and Rider and old fences like barbed wire, dangerous. There are many electric fence options, but *all* fences need to be maintained.

What about water?

Access to clean water 24/7 is essential for hydration, digestion, blood circulation, and maintaining body temperature. Most horses will drink between five and ten gallons a day, winter watering may require extra planning. horsesport.com > [bringing-water-horse-paddocks](#) Expert Advice on Bringing Water to Your Horse Paddocks

What about hoof care?

The Ojibwe horses are suited to a 'bare foot' trim. Hooves require attention every 6-8 **weeks** in summer, less often in winter. www.bluecross.org.uk > [advice](#) > [horseEssential care for horses hoofs | Blue Cross](#) A good farrier may be hard to find and retain, (they need safe working conditions), with trims costing \$40-50 per horse. Trimming is a special skill and requires expert training.

What if there is no horse vet or large animal vet in my area?

There is a shortage of veterinarians in Canada, especially serving remote rural communities. A vet can help with vaccinations, medications, nutrition, dental checks, parasite control, and breed specific issues such as laminitis and EMS, as well as emergency care, breeding, **and** foaling. ontarioequinevets.ca > [horse-owners](#) > [find-a-vet](#) Find a Veterinarian – The Ontario Association of Equine ... Having veterinary support is crucial and Virtual Support from veterinarians is becoming increasingly available.

What kind of horse tack do I need?

If you plan on riding or driving, getting well fitted tack is essential. It can be difficult to find and fit for small horses with broad backs and low withers. You may need expert help. You will also need basic grooming tools.

How much time does daily horse care take?

Do not underestimate the dedication needed daily to check pastures and shelters, provide clean water, manage hay. Winter conditions can be more challenging. Add to that handling, grooming, training, and public events.

Do I need additional insurance?

If you plan to go to public events or having visitors to your farm, make sure you have appropriate insurance and liability coverage. A good farm policy or regional equestrian association should cover this. Also, it is a legal requirement that livestock that meet the public must be up to date on rabies vaccines.

Some other considerations:

Trailing and Emergency Planning:

It is always a good idea to plan for emergency evacuation, which means having a trailer, or trailing service available. Also, a well-stocked veterinary supplies cupboard is useful. equinewellnessmagazine.com › [first-aid-kit14 first aid kit essentials for your equine](#) hcbc.ca › [equine-welfare](#) › [disaster-evacuation-resources](#)Emergency Planning Resources – Horse Council BC

Breeding and Reproduction:

Today, with so limited a breed population, so widely distributed, and so few stallions--there are big challenges in sustaining and growing the herd. To reduce the likelihood of in-breeding and genetic deformities it is essential that care givers consult with the Ojibwe Horse Society. The society keeps a registry and can advise on the most appropriate matches. Caregivers are asked to ensure offspring are registered and DNA samples shared. If you are considering outcrossing, again consult with the OHS for the best genetic fit.

Safeguarding Their Future:

Safeguards should be in place to ensure that in the case of personal illness or an unexpected disruption in one's life, these precious horses are not lost to the sale barn or the meat pipeline.

This is a just a brief overview of some of the considerations of care giving for Ojibway horses. The OHS can also connect you with other care givers who can help answer any questions you may have. ojibwehorse.ca

The symbiotic relationship you will develop with an Ojibwe horse is incomparable, as well as being a journey of unique discoveries and learning.