

**A Training Program
to assist BCH Chapters Monitor Implementation of
The Forest Service Trails Classification System**

Part 2 – Understanding the Key Trail Fundamentals (what we need to know to monitor implementation of the Trail Classification System):

Background: As we established in Part 1, the new Forest Service Trail Classification System changed standards for pack and saddle stock trails that evolved over, and were time tested for, nearly a hundred years. When BCHA first got involved in the process, we were concerned that managers would assign trail classes and design parameters that would not accommodate pack and saddle stock on trails that were historically accessible to stock. The task ahead is to determine if that has taken place through the implementation of the new system, and if it has, whether the agency has involved the public and followed an approved land management planning process as agreed in the court decision.

Past BCHA Chair, Mike Reedy, arranged for a Forest Service Trails expert to conduct a two hour training session at the 2009 National Board Meeting. A video of that presentation is available on the BCHA Website. The “Trail Fundamentals and Trail Management Objectives,” Training Reference Package used in presenting that program is also available and can be used as a reference source for gaining a more in depth understanding of the new classification system.

Trail Fundamentals:

The new classification system establishes 5 trail fundamentals for consistently recording and communicating the guidelines for trail design, construction, maintenance, survey and assessment:

- **Trail Type** – terra (land), snow, or water (normally horsemen will only be interested in terra).
- **Trail Class** – the development scale of the trail.
 - Trail Class 1: Minimal/Undeveloped (there are no design parameters for pack and saddle stock use; if a trail is intended to be managed for pack and saddle stock the minimum Trail Class will be 2)
 - Trail Class 2: Simple/Minor Development (the minimum development scale intended to sustain pack and saddle stock use.)
 - Trail Class 3: Developed/Improved (the fully developed trail intended to accommodate the type and level of use typically found in a backcountry and wilderness environ)
 - Trail Class 4: Highly Developed (accommodations for passing and double lane when necessary, and other features of a nature not normally associated with wilderness; however all trail classes may occur in all settings)
 - Trail Class 5: Fully Developed (this class is commonly associated with visitor centers or high-use recreation sites, and normally has a hardened or asphalt surface. There are no design parameters for pack and saddle stock use.)

*The photo examples given in the Trail Fundamentals Training Reference Package are valuable in understanding what the various trail classes actually look like.

- **Managed Use** – the modes of travel actively managed and appropriate on a trail (there may be more than one; for example hiking and pack and saddle) as determined by applicable land

management plan, travel plan, or trail specific decision (a specific document that has involved the public and undergone appropriate NEPA review).

- **Designed Use** – the managed use that requires the most demanding design, construction and maintenance parameters (there can only be one designed use per trail or trail segment; where pack and saddle stock is considered an appropriate managed use, it will also generally be the designed use).
- **Design Parameter** – the technical guidelines for the survey, design, construction, maintenance, and assessment of a trail based on its Designed Use and Trail Class (what used to be called design guides or standards)
- **The Trail Management Objective (TMO):** Each trail or trail segment will have a TMO! The TMOs synthesize and document, in one convenient place, the management intention for the trail and provide basic reference information for subsequent trail planning, and management. It is a composite document incorporating the 5 trail fundamentals listed above plus additional information on management intent.

*** The TMO does not necessarily reflect the actual condition on the ground! It reflects the 'management intent' or 'objective' for the trail – the conditions that would ideally be on the ground if resources were available to manage it as intended ***

The TMO form also will list the ROS/WROS Class for the immediate area containing the trail or trail segment. This refers to the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum or the Wilderness Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and relates to the intended experience provided in that setting. ROS or WROS are normally established by the forest plan or wilderness plan. A trail may fall in several ROS/WROS classes. In such a case a TMO will be established for each segment of trail. The Trail Class Matrix in the Training Reference Package suggests typical Recreation Environs (settings) and Experiences for each Trail Class. *However, all Trail Classes may and do occur in all settings!*

“Target Frequency” indicates how often a routine task should be completed to maintain the trail to standard. Lack of budget will often result in this frequency being less than desired or necessary.

The Trail Management Objective must be approved by a line officer (District Ranger or Forest Supervisor) and reflects the guidance in forest plans, wilderness plans, travel management plans or trail specific decisions – a plan that involved the public and complied with NEPA requirements.

The two fundamentals that are of most importance to horsemen are **Trail Class and Designed Use**. Although it will be of valuable to understand the interrelationship of all five fundamentals, these two will give a good indication of whether the trail will accommodate the type and level of use that was historically accommodated before implementation of the new system!

Trail Class: There isn't a simply 'crosswalk' for comparing the older mainline, secondary or way classes to the current trail classes. Way and secondary trails that were commonly used by pack and saddle stock before the new system was implemented might currently be managed as a Trail Class 2 or 3. Mainline/primary trails will commonly be managed as a Trail Class 3 or 4. Trail class alone will not tell us if the trail will accommodate pack and saddle stock use. For example: a trail managed as a Class

4 for Hiker/Pedestrian traffic might only have a clearing width parameter of 4'—insufficient to accommodate pack animals. *Trail class communicates the scale or level of development, not the type of use the trail will accommodate!*

Designed Use: Managed and designed use tells us if the trail will accommodate pack and saddle stock. If a trail is managed for pack and saddle stock, the designed use will also generally be pack and saddle stock. If it isn't '*designed*' for pack and saddle stock, it will be necessary to search or inquire further to determine the specific parameters to determine if the width and height limits are adequate to accommodate pack and saddle stock use.

Generally, the *red flags* to look for are trails that were historically available for pack and saddle stock use that are currently being designed as hiker/pedestrian trails or TC 1-3 bicycle and motorcycle trails. If there is any question, the specific parameters are listed on the Trail Management Objective form. The specific clearing height and width parameters will give an indication whether or not the trail is adequate for pack and saddle stock.

The Deputy Chief of the Forest Service, Joel Holtrop, has committed to make the information contained in the TMOs available. BCHA has requested a listing of trails on each Ranger District that will give us the managed and designed use for each trail. This information will make it simpler for horsemen to determine if current trail objectives are consistent with historical classifications. This will be the subject discussed in Part 3.