

For Immediate Release

Bring Back Country Horsemen of America to Your Area

By Sarah Wynne Jackson

Back Country Horsemen of America is the leading organization in saving public lands trails for equestrian use. They have achieved such unsurpassed national credibility that they are actively sought to speak and represent their interest in wilderness and back country issues at the national level. BCHA is also well respected by land management agencies such as the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service.

BCHA began in the early 1970s by a few farsighted horsemen who understood the eventual implications of the trend toward restrictions on horse use in the back country. They felt that to be credible and effective, the organization must work in cooperation with the public land agencies that make and administer back country policy. They also felt the need to educate the equine community to become better stewards of the land.

Are you seeing “No Horses” signs at your favorite trailheads? Is your local government making decisions against horse use on public lands? Are you wondering where you’ll ride your horse in the future? Take action now, before it’s too late. Join with Back Country Horsemen of America by forming your own local BCH unit. It’s not as difficult as you might think!

Not Your Typical Saddle Club

Although BCHA offers many of the same experiences as social riding clubs, such as group rides, educational meetings, and social events, Back Country Horsemen of America go a step further. They commit themselves to protecting our heritage of back country stock use across the country.

Those aren’t idle words. They stand behind that commitment with action, expending their own personal sweat, effort, and resources in a huge volunteer effort accumulating to over \$5 million in volunteer value each year. BCHA members also travel far distances to inform politicians, government leaders, and other decision makers about their mission. They diligently attend events large and small with handouts and informational materials to educate the public of our need to preserve our right to ride horses on public lands.

That is the work ethic of Back Country Horsemen of America. There’s nothing wrong with riding clubs focused on enjoying our beautiful landscape from the back of a horse. But BCHA is dedicated also to preserving our opportunity to have that experience. BCHA membership is not for everyone. But if you’re ready to pick up the reins to join the hard hitters and the big players in the effort to preserve our “right to ride,” you may be ready to accept the responsibility of BCHA membership. If you know others in your area who are just as committed as you, it’s time to consider starting your own BCH unit.

What Does BCHA Do for You?

BCHA membership may have its responsibilities, but it also carries benefits you and your neighbor horse users won't find anywhere else. Association with other horsemen who love the wilderness can enhance your skill, expand riding opportunities, and make recreational equine use a much more enjoyable activity. Perhaps the most important benefit is the satisfaction of helping protect our wild lands and preserve the place of the horse in our national heritage.

BCHA members receive the national newsletter, which is published quarterly. It contains information regarding the activities of the National Board of Directors and the committee chairs (Education, Public Liaison, Wilderness, and Media Communications) along with news from various BCH units. When your group is affiliated with BCHA, it will take part in valuable sharing of information with other back country users; including new ideas for working with public lands managers, fund raising, rides, education, insurance, liability, recruitment, and work party recommendations.

The national organization assists BCH units in many ways. The Wilderness Committee is in place to advise the state organizations in their dealings with public lands managers to keep the back country open to stock use, including instances in which plans come out to block stock users for one reason or another from the back country.

The Education Committee compiles information with regard to gentle use on the land and other information that supports BCH units in their quest to keep the back country available for stock use through education. Several BCH groups have extensive programs in place that serve as models for newly formed units. The Education Committee is also in the process of preparing educational materials that local units can use to teach children about caring for our wild lands.

Groups affiliated with BCHA also gain a national presence on "the Hill" by representatives from the Public Liaison Committee. They make several trips to Washington, D.C., annually to maintain our visibility with our legislators. Their example and protocol gives BCH units a model for approaching their local government.

Membership Options

BCHA offers different classifications of membership. If there aren't any local units near you, but you can't find enough like-minded individuals to form a new BCH group, you are welcome to become an at large member, with annual dues of \$45. You will receive the national newsletter and partnership with other stock users across the nation. At large members are encouraged but not required to travel to the nearest meetings and events as often as their schedule permits.

Local groups wishing to become united with Back Country Horsemen of America have three options: classification as a state organization, a chapter of a state organization, or as an affiliate. A state organization is a coalition of two or more chapters within a state, with a minimum of 40 members and no less than 15 members in each chapter.

If your state already has a BCHA state organization, your group can become a chapter within that state organization. A chapter should have at least 15 members or meet the membership requirements of their state.

An affiliate organization is a single chapter within a state which does not have an official BCH state organization. A single chapter cannot become a stand-alone affiliate if its state already has a state organization. It can only join BCH as a chapter of that state. An affiliate must have a minimum of 15 members. Affiliates have a voice but no voting rights on the National Board of Directors.

Membership with Back Country Horsemen of America identifies you and your local group as a responsible voice for recreational stock use on public lands. This representation goes far beyond the local community and the trails we ride. It reaches coast to coast, joining us with other stock users in our quest to preserve our right to ride horses on public lands.

About Back Country Horsemen of America

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes in regards to the use of horses and stock in the wilderness and public lands.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: www.backcountryhorse.com, call 888-893-5161, or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367. The future of horse use on public lands is in our hands!