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Contact: Peg Greiwe, BCHA

1-888-893-5161

**Back Country Horsemen of America Gets the Job Done
by Sarah Wynne Jackson**

Of all the trails advocacy organizations in the United States, Back Country Horsemen of America has become one of the largest contributors of volunteer service. In 2010, they gave 345,000 hours of volunteer service with a value of over \$7,500,000. Considering today's economy, that's quite an accomplishment.

What exactly do Back Country Horsemen do during all those volunteer hours? From clearing trails and hauling gravel for improving campsites, teaching folks responsible recreation habits and how to pack, improving water crossings and building camping facilities, there's plenty to get done. BCH people even do some things you've probably never thought of!

Transporting Fish?

Back Country Horsemen are always eager to show how useful pack stock can be, especially in remote and protected areas where motorized vehicles are impracticable or would damage a delicate ecosystem. The Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee is reestablishing the Southern Brook Trout Hatchery at Pheasant Fields in the Tellico Ranger District. The rebirth of the hatchery is part of a larger brook trout restoration program that has the support and the horsepower of the Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen behind it.

Late last year, a coalition of the Cherokee National Forest, Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Trout Unlimited and Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards came together to conduct a trial run of one important element of the Brook Trout Restoration Program: transportation.

The test was a big success. Using pack stock provided by members of Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen, 140 rainbow trout were moved two miles with a 100% survival rate for the fish. This test was critical to determine the viability of using horses and mules for transportation, as many of the habitats and locations for restoration are isolated or in federally designated Wilderness Areas.

In the future, pack stock will be used to transport brook trout from existing population centers to the reopened Fish Hatchery just before spawn. The offspring of this breeding cycle will become the foundation of future population restoration efforts. Back Country Horsemen members will be called back into action when the time comes to transport these offspring to their new habitats, returning native brook trout to their historic rivers and tributaries.

Promoting Safety

Head injuries account for approximately 60 percent of deaths resulting from equestrian accidents. Because horse racing organizations require approved helmets, jockeys now suffer fewer head injuries than pleasure riders. Despite those facts, some people remain averse to wearing helmets when riding, especially those who ride western. Wyoming Back Country Horsemen put a priority on changing that.

WBCH volunteered their time to raise the funding to buy fifty helmets in various sizes to create a "lending library" of helmets. People will be able to check out one or more helmets when they need one for a short time, such as when members have visiting children who want to ride. Wyoming Back Country Horsemen especially targeted young people, hoping that the helmet-wearing habit will continue into adulthood.

In addition to the helmets, they volunteered their time to acquire funding for professionally made safety posters aimed at horsemen. Young Cloud Peak BCH member Mariah McFaul modeled for the safety poster. She posed with her horse putting on her helmet and as a wounded horsewoman. The posters will be displayed in schools, hospitals, and other appropriate places.

Keeping Trails Open for Everyone

Each year, volunteers from the Gila Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico clear many miles of forest trails to keep trails open to equestrians and other recreational users. Over the last four years, the Gila Chapter has cleared over 260 miles of trails.

Even though the snow caused them a late start, they still cleared 50 miles of trails in 2010. GBCH trail work has taken place primarily in the Silver City District and the Wilderness District of the Gila National Forest. Trails cleared have included parts of the Continental Divide Trail, trails along the Mimbres River in the Aldo Leopold Wilderness and several other popular

recreation trails. To accomplish this work, they put in 777 accident-free volunteer hours and 119 stock use days.

In 2010 their most ambitious project was opening trails along the Mimbres River. From June 30 to May 3, volunteers camped at the Mimbres River Trailhead and cleared the first seven miles of the main trail. Weather added to the challenges; on May 2, they rode out in a snowstorm. By the time it stopped, there were four inches of snow on the ground.

The second project to clear Mimbres River Trails took place May 7-13. GBCH volunteers along with the Wilderness District Trail Foreman packed in 600 pounds of horse feed for the upcoming work. They then rode horses and packed camp equipment and food into the camp spot near the forks of the Mimbres River.

On May 9, clearing work began. The group worked on the lower portion of the Middle Fork Trail and the South Fork Trail for the next four days. By the time the group packed out to go home on the 13th, over 100 trees had been cut with crosscut saws or moved from the trails and another four miles were clear. This trail had not been cleared in over four years, so downed trees had entirely blocked the trail.

The efforts of the Gila Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico resulted in the completion of the South Fork Mimbres River Trail and completion of the North Fork Mimbres River Trail (an additional seven miles).

About Back Country Horsemen of America

Obviously, BCHA folks understand the value of hard work. Protecting our right to ride isn't just a philosophy; it's a responsibility that requires action in a variety of forms. Back Country Horsemen of America is proud to live up to that and get the job done.

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes regarding 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!

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