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Back Country Horsemen of America

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**Back Country Horsemen of America Build Relationships, Set New Goals, and Look to the
Future
by Sarah Wynne Jackson**

Just as a sports team has an occasional huddle to review their game plan, Back Country Horsemen of America invites members to a National Board Meeting annually. This year's huddle was held in April at Fort Worden State Park, Port Townsend, Washington. BCHA extends its sincere thanks to this year's hosts, the Buckhorn Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Washington and the Back Country Horsemen of Washington.

The annual Board Meeting is the perfect time to educate, inspire, and inform BCHA members and leaders of BCHA member organizations. This year, BCHA provided training on the new U.S. Forest Service trails classification system. They further strengthened their relationship with the U.S. Forest Service and developed new ones with the Wilderness Society and The American Hiking Society. A number of organizations and individuals who share BCHA's vision attended and also presented.

In addition, BCHA welcomed new affiliates that bring with them over 250 new members: Fort Harrod Back Country Horsemen, Inc. of Kentucky; Red River Back Country Horsemen of Kentucky; Big South Fork Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee; Pigeon River & Beyond Back Country Horsemen of Michigan; and Iron Mountain Back Country Horsemen of Virginia. BCHA is pleased that more folks from the east coast are joining with them in preserving our right to ride on public lands across America.

Finding Common Ground

Back Country Horsemen of America recognizes that keeping trails open for equestrian use takes more than the efforts of horse people; it requires the support and consideration of other trail users, too. That's one reason BCHA seeks out communication and interaction with others who enjoy our wilderness lands. The more common ground and mutual understanding they can attain with them, the better their chances of being understood and respected by public lands managers and other decision makers.

BCHA's annual National Board Meeting has often hosted speakers who aren't necessarily horsemen, including national program managers from both the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. National Park Service, as well as the Director of the Arthur Carhart National Training Center, where federal and state land managers are trained in wilderness management. The presence of such respected and influential people speaks volumes about their opinion of BCHA and its mission.

This year, attendees were pleased to hear from Joel Holtrop, U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief; three representatives from The Wilderness Society; and Randy Rasmussen, Senior Policy Manager at the American Hiking Society. In recent past, wilderness advocates and hikers were among those pressing for limitations on pack and saddle stock use in wild lands. But as the lines of communication have opened in the last year or so, they're finding that they have much in common.

Back Country Horsemen of America, hikers, bikers, wilderness advocates, and other trail users all share a deep attachment to the back country, and a strong commitment to preserving those lands for the common good of all Americans. When they work alongside these other user groups, BCHA presents land managers with a broader picture of the wild land constituency. The Wilderness Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers legislation, and laws creating our National Recreation Areas were all made possible because of a broad base of support from preservationists and user advocates alike, not one single interest group. Working together we can preserve wild lands and the opportunities for responsible users to enjoy them.

Mission: Possible

BCHA is pleased that they have surpassed their goal of \$6 million in annual volunteer value. At their National Board Meeting this year, it was announced that the dollar value of the work BCHA members did nationally in 2008 amounted to nearly \$6.7 million. That's 294,279 volunteer hours, plus other contributions from BCHA members, such as fuel, tools, and other supplies; training and certification; travel to work sites; use of power tools, heavy equipment, and horses and mules; and transport of equipment and animals to work sites.

The importance of keeping volunteer records isn't just so that BCHA members can take pride in their accomplishments. These reports demonstrate the immense contribution BCHA and its member organizations make each year to building and maintaining trails for everyone's use. They also stand as a testament to the vast number of United States citizens who enjoy America's wilderness lands by horseback. How can public lands managers continue to ban horses from trails when so many of those trails are maintained by horsemen and horsewomen?

Back Country Horsemen of America has set itself a new goal of \$8 million in annual volunteer value in 2009. Ambitious? Yes. Impossible? Absolutely not! BCHA membership is growing every day, as folks across the nation join them in their quest to preserve our right to ride in America's wildernesses. These are people who love the land and love to enjoy it the way our ancestors did: from the back of a horse. And just like the Americans that came before them, these are hard working individuals who see a job that needs to be done and go do it.

Continuing Education

As the leading organization preserving our right to ride on public lands, it's fitting that Back Country Horsemen of America is also the primary provider of low environmental impact training to stock users nationally. To fulfill that role, BCHA announced at their National Board Meeting that Bob Wagner has been appointed as Manager of the BCHA Low Impact Training for Stock Users Program.

Wagner graduated from the first BCHA Leave No Trace Master Educator Class in 2007. Prior to the Master's training, Wagner was already heavily involved in Leave No Trace training in Montana. After graduation, Wagner teamed up with Jerry Schottenhaml (Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen) and Jacque Alexander (Buffalo River Back Country Horsemen of Arkansas) to form the Midwest Regional Leave No Trace Education Cooperative. They teach LNT Trainer and Awareness workshops across Arkansas, Missouri, and Illinois.

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!

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