

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 15, 2009

Contact: Peg Greiwe

Back Country Horsemen of America

1-888-893-5161

www.backcountryhorse.com

**Back Country Horsemen of America
Participates in Trail Work Days Across the Country**

by Sarah Wynne Jackson

Back Country Horsemen of America is the leading organization in saving public lands trails for equestrian use, but they share their passion for protecting our wildernesses with a wide variety of other organizations from coast to coast. Some of those groups promote conservation of the natural character of the land while others are more focused on a particular activity such as hiking or mountain biking.

In an effort to make the public more aware of their cause and to give folks a can't-miss opportunity to get involved, many of those organizations host special events throughout the year. In order to develop and sustain valuable relationships with other trail user groups and public lands advocates, Back Country Horsemen of America seizes upon these designated days as perfect occasions to improve and maintain trails for everyone's use.

As BCHA members labor alongside those from other organizations, a unique camaraderie and mutual understanding emerge, and the differences between them disappear as the lands we all care about are preserved.

Take Pride in America Day

On May 2, the Hoosier National Forest held their 23rd annual Take Pride in America Day. Located in the hills of south central Indiana, the Hoosier National Forest encompasses 200,000 acres of rolling hills, back country trails, and rural crossroad communities, along with some rare ecosystems. Take Pride in America Day is a special time set aside to encourage volunteerism and enjoyment of our nation's public lands.

Hoosier Back Country Horsemen of Indiana couldn't resist the chance to get involved with caring for a national forest. HBCH covered 36 miles of trails in the Charles C. Deam Wilderness on foot, de-berming and cleaning water bars. They also picked up trash on the trails and around the campground. In all, 151 water bars were maintained in Hoosier National Forest and 37 cubic yards of trash were removed.

In the true spirit of Back Country Horsemen of America, HBCH worked alongside other trail users, such as hikers, Boy Scout Troops, and school groups. They were some of over

200 volunteers that took part in various work projects, making it possible to accomplish more than had been planned for Take Pride in America Day.

The Deam Wilderness in Hoosier National Forest is one example of the need for horses and mules in maintaining back country trails. Since its designation as a wilderness in 1982, visitor use in the area increased to a point that significant damage was occurring. Regulations were put in place to protect these 13,000 acres from the impact of people. Because those regulations prohibit the use of wheeled vehicles (including non-motorized carts and wagons), pack stock is the only way to bring in the gravel, tools, and other materials that are needed to maintain the trails and campgrounds.

Horses and mules are also used as a replacement for mechanical equipment, such as tractors. A Vulcan hillside plow, a traditional horse- or mule-drawn agricultural implement for plowing on steep ground, is used to dig trail corridors before the trails are graded to a smooth surface. Without this natural "horsepower," the Deam Wilderness would be subjected to excessive damage from wheeled vehicles or would have to be allowed to deteriorate.

National Trails Day

The American Hiking Society, a fellow organization in the pursuit of preserving wild lands, held their National Trails Day on June 6. An annual event since 1993, NTD is a time to inspire people nationwide to discover, learn about, and celebrate trails while participating in educational exhibits, trail dedications, gear demonstrations, instructional workshops, and trail work projects. Of course, Back Country Horsemen of America members see it as the perfect opportunity to put their hands to the worthwhile effort of caring for our wilderness trails.

Bob Gish, President of Back Country Horsemen of Washington, encouraged local BCHW chapters to organize NTD projects in their area and urged the formation of partnerships with public land management agencies. Ten BCHW chapters responded by getting involved with various projects throughout Washington State: Lewis County, Pierce County, Ferry County, Scatter Creek Riders, Inland Empire, Buckhorn Range, Oakland Bay, Okanogan Valley, Grays Harbor, and Northeast chapters.

The Lewis County Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Washington celebrated National Trails Day by organizing a work party to clear two Packwood Lake trails in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The popular trails lead to the pristine Goat Rocks Wilderness and are usually cleared before Memorial Day weekend. This year, however, winter snow accumulation and a late spring snowmelt kept the two trails into Packwood Lake covered until after the end of May.

The Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee also participated in a National Trails Day project last year. SABCH volunteers put in 86 hours of work constructing a bridge over a segment of the Bullet Creek Trail on Starr Mountain in the Cherokee National Forest. The bridge was needed for control of natural and man-made

resource damage to the banks at the creek crossing. This is a multi-use trail with horseback riding and hiking use.

The project was submitted to the American Quarter Horse Association for their 2008 National Stewardship Award. The SABCH group was awarded one of ten regional prizes of \$1,000 for the completion of this project. SABCH has been and is currently involved in a number of trail building projects in the south portion of the Cherokee National Forest, and donated over 1300 volunteer hours in 2008. In the last three years, they have built 41 additional miles of trail and flagged an additional 33 miles for projected clearing in portions of the Cherokee National Forest.

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!

###