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Contact: Peg Greiwe

Back Country Horsemen of America

1-888-893-5161

www.backcountryhorse.com

**Back Country Horsemen Receive
Presidential Volunteer Service Award**

by Sarah Wynne Jackson

As the leading organization in our battle to preserve our right to ride horses on public lands, Back Country Horsemen of America knows the fight is futile unless there are trails to ride. That's why they spend thousands of hours each year cleaning, maintaining, and building trails on public lands across the country.

Recently, the Pecos Chapter of the New Mexico Back Country Horsemen received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award signed by President Barack Obama. In 2011, these hardworking folks volunteered over 1,900 hours in the Pecos Wilderness and on the east side of the Manzanos Mountains, in cooperation with the Santa Fe Forest and Cibola National Forest Service. The US Forest Service nominated the Pecos Chapter to show their gratitude for all the hard work and hours the group contributes, especially during these times of government budget cuts.

The Pecos Chapter BCH

Formed in 1991, the Pecos Chapter is the original and oldest Back Country Horsemen chapter in New Mexico. Each year, they pack equipment and supplies into their local public lands on their horses, mules, and donkeys. The strength and sweat of these folks goes to clearing deadfall and downed trees along trails. With their skills and know-how, they perform appropriate trail maintenance, including diverting water flow from snowmelt and rains to control erosion. This work enables hikers, bikers, and equestrians alike to more easily and safely navigate the beautiful mountains of New Mexico.

The Pecos Wilderness comprises the extreme southern extent of the Rocky Mountains. Deep and narrow canyons, long and broad mesa tops, heavily forested slopes, and rugged ridges with peaks above timberline characterize this breathtaking landscape. The Manzanos Mountains, named for the ancient non-native manzano apple trees discovered there, vary in elevation from about 6,000 feet to 10,098

feet. The steep and rugged terrain is cut with canyons and marked with rock outcroppings. Thousands of raptors migrate along the Manzanos in spring and fall as they make their way between Canada and Mexico.

In addition to trail work, the Pecos Chapter BCH actively supports other volunteer groups, such as Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, and provides pack support by hauling in tools and camping supplies for Outdoors and Wilderness Volunteers. They also help the US Forest Service maintain historical landmarks like Beatty's Cabin in the Pecos Wilderness and the facilities at Panchuela, a retired 1930's Ranger Station.

Recognizing Excellence

Created by President George W. Bush in 2002, the President's Volunteer Service Award rewards commitment to community service through presidential recognition. With emotions running high after the attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush saw the need to renew interest in volunteering. An initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Points of Light Institute, this award program honors the Americans who have achieved the required number of hours of service over a 12-month time period or cumulative hours over the course of a lifetime.

Our country has a long and proud tradition of volunteer service. Recognizing and honoring volunteers sets a standard for service, encourages a sustained commitment to civic participation, and inspires others to make service a central part of their lives.

The Value of Volunteering

Back Country Horsemen of America understands the value of volunteering because, for them, it is a lifestyle. Being a volunteer means having the can-do attitude that built this country. It means seeing a problem and being the solution, rather than expecting others to make it happen. It means taking responsibility for the condition of our world today and protecting it for future generations.

Volunteering earns the respect of state and national agencies, other trail user organizations, environmental groups, and the general public in a way that nothing else can. Donating time, effort, and sweat alongside folks from other organizations builds camaraderie, an

appreciation for others' ideals, and mutually beneficial relationships that also benefit our public lands.

Together with President Barack Obama, Back Country Horsemen of America commends the Pecos Chapter of the New Mexico Back Country Horsemen for their continued commitment to volunteerism. They set an example to horsemen across the country, showing how we can keep our favorite trails free of downed trees, washouts, and "No Horses" signs.

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 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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