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## **Back Country Horsemen of America Welcomes Pennsylvania Equine Council as Advocacy Partner**

By Sarah Wynne Jackson

The leading organization in our fight to preserve our right to ride horses on public lands from coast to coast, Back Country Horsemen of America welcomes the Pennsylvania Equine Council as their newest Advocacy Partner. The PEC shares BCHA's vision of saving trails for horse use through volunteerism, education, honoring good outdoor ethics, and hard work.

### Pennsylvania Horse Council

The PEC aims to make horse ownership and participation in equestrian sports easier, safer, more affordable, and more enjoyable in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Specifically, they represent and promote the interests of the entire equine community and industry in the state; provide educational programs that lead to effective management, a higher standard of safety, and opportunities for equestrian activities; enhance communication among all equine enthusiasts; and protect and preserve Pennsylvania's equine heritage.

The people of the PEC accomplish those goals in a variety of ways. For example, they gathered experts at the Pennsylvania Horse World Expo to educate horse owners on a variety of topics from nutrition to manure management. In 2003 and 2004, the PEC organized two events to bring horse related issues to the attention of state legislators. In addition, the organization has trained numerous fire departments how to deal with the special situation of horses caught in a barn fire.

### Saving Trails for Horse Use in PA

As it is for Back Country Horsemen of America, preserving our right to ride horses on public lands is a big concern for the Pennsylvania Equine Council. Not long ago, the PA Game Commission was considering shutting down access of game lands to users other than hunters. The Allegheny National Forest, 513,000 acres in Northwestern Pennsylvania, proposed in their mandated Long Range Plan to limit equestrian use to only 12% of that land. The 2.4 million acres of

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources State Forest and State Park trails are also in jeopardy.

The PEC Trail Committee meets these challenges head-on, using the same principles of partnership, responsibility, and sweat equity that BCHA values. The PEC seeks to build a working relationship with groups that have the same interests and the agencies who manage the over five million acres of land that Pennsylvania riders want to access. They offer educational programs, trainings, and assistance not only to promote good relations on shared and single use trails, but also to support conservation efforts to preserve open space.

In many cases, trail closures are due to lack of funds and/or volunteers for maintenance. The PEC answers with their three-phase Trail Stewardship Program. Phase one entails three-day workshops combining concepts and application of effective multi-use trail design and maintenance, which are attended by equestrians, other user groups, and public land management personnel. In the second phase, trained PEC Trail Stewardship Coordinators teach trail design and maintenance to their local stewardship groups. Packing and Leave No Trace workshops are also offered. Phase three focuses on educating Pennsylvania's trail riders in outdoor ethics and sound equestrian skills at various saddle club meetings, youth groups, 4-H gatherings, and horse expos.

### Taking an Active Role

In addition to joining Back Country Horsemen of America in fighting the good fight to preserve public lands for equestrian use, the Pennsylvania Equine Council teaches new and prospective horse owners about the care and costs associated with horse ownership through the Equine Learning Center. The PEC takes a stand on equine welfare, proactively addressing the issues surrounding the proper care and handling of horses across their state. In an effort to better represent and serve the horse industry in Washington DC, the PEC is involved with the American Horse Council's Congressional Cavalry Program.

### Success, From Coast to Coast

Back Country Horsemen of America welcomes the Pennsylvania Equine Council as their newest Advocacy Partner. BCHA commends the PEC for the hard-won successes they have already accomplished in saving

trails for horse use in their state, and looks forward to a future of horseback riding on public lands from sea to shining sea.

#### 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](http://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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