

# Back Country Horsemen of America

Volume 33, Issue 4

[www.bcha.org](http://www.bcha.org)

Fall 2022

*Let the Celebration Begin...*

**50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
**1973-2023**



To Kick off the 50th Anniversary, please send us your early BCH photos and photos of founding members from your state or chapter. We will be using them in monthly updates and during the 2023 National Board Meeting. Let's show all BCHA members the last 50 years.

**Stay tuned...**

Stay tuned for more events, articles, merchandise, promotions, specials, and activities as we celebrate BCHA's 50 years of Service, Education, Advocacy and *Keeping Trails Open For All*.



Send your pictures with the name and year to [michellewade@bcha.org](mailto:michellewade@bcha.org)



## From the Chairman's Saddle

By Sherry Copeland, BCHA National Chairman

The Back Country Horsemen of America 50th Anniversary logo is official! As you can see on the front page, plans are developing as we look forward to reflecting, celebrating and building on all the accomplishments and challenges of the past 50 years of volunteer service, education and advocacy. Expect to see details and information in upcoming Monthly Updates and Newsletters!

In the meantime, despite challenges of extreme heat, drought, floods, and fires, BCHA Members, Chapters and States continue to accomplish amazing results. Just a quick glance at social media shows an abundance of trail projects, advocacy actions and educational programs across BCHA.

With Members, Chapters and States involved in many projects, on all levels, I am excited to recognize some specific groups for accomplishments within BCHA.

In a BCHA coordinated effort, Members, Chapters and States are coming together to report non equestrian occupation of equestrian horse camps – providing critical documentation for future discussion with the US Forest Service. Keep the information coming and Thank You!

Member Data Coordinators have worked diligently and conquered the reporting of State Membership information facilitating a gain in advocacy efforts and effective communications – Congratulations and Thank You!

National Directors continue to lead the momentum and direction of BCHA thru monthly calls, committee participation and as the liaison for the membership. Let your National Directors know you appreciate their work and representation!

BCHA Committees are always hard at work and here is a brief update:

[continued next page]

## BCHA Mission Statement

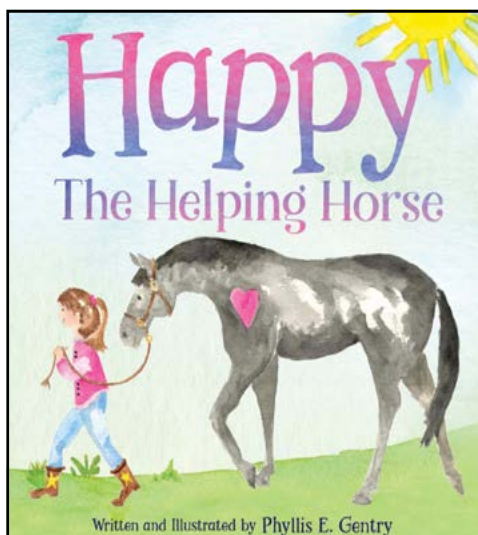
1. To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness areas.
2. To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational use.
3. To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.
4. To educate, encourage and solicit active participation in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage.
5. To foster and encourage the formation of new state Back Country Horsemen's organizations.



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# From the Chairman's Saddle

Chapter Support Grants Committee is gathering completion reports from the successful grant recipients for publication in the Monthly Updates and future Newsletters.

Education Committee is surveying the needs of States and Chapters, updating training modules, and exploring an easily accessible means for Members to view all the educational material available.

Expansion Committee is evaluating several inquiries and is working with individuals and groups from states with potential to become BCHA affiliated.

Marketing & Media Committee is continually updating the website, keeping pictures and information current, and maintaining BCHA presence on social media.

Membership Committee is evaluating the existing member benefits and exploring additional member benefit opportunities.

Public Lands Committee is staying informed of issues from States and Chapters and continuing to work

on gaining representation from all BCHA States to participate on the Regional Public Lands Committees.

Volunteer Hours Committee is reviewing current categorical rates to determine if increases should be recommended.

Youth Committee is gathering programs being used by Chapters and States and developing committee operating description with a goal to be developed as a Standing Committee.

Director of Recreation and Public Lands, Randy Rasmussen, along with Partnerships Committee and Public Lands Committees, remain diligent on the leading edge of working with our national partners on issues, participating in sign on letters to agencies, developing webinars for membership, and continually gathering information and opportunities valuable to BCHA Members, Chapters and States.

Vice Chairman, Mark Himmel and I are staying busy (to say the least!) with almost daily discussions on opportunities and challenges –

from engaging members, answering questions and receiving feedback on a variety of issues, advancing consistency and capacity with the US Forest Service for their Saw Training Certification Program, and following the legal process for the development of the Light On The Land program; to generating the process for assessment of fundraising needs, means and methods, planning for the 2023 National Board of Directors Meeting, and promoting the celebration of the BCHA 50th Anniversary.

So, that's a brief update on the activities within BCHA. Now, let's hear from YOU!

What are *You, Your Chapter and Your State* accomplishing as the effort continues to “*Keep Trails Open For All?*”

See y'all on the trail,

Sherry

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# Tahoe Rim Trail Association Crews Get Pack Support

By Lucy Badenhoop, Back Country Horsemen of California Mother Lode Unit

Every year, the Tahoe Rim Trail Association (TRTA) requests pack support for its volunteer trail crews working in the mountains surrounding Lake Tahoe. Usually, the Bayview Trailhead near Emerald Bay is used for a 10 or 12 mile round trip hauling camping gear, food, and occasionally tools or signs. Mostly, Mother Lode Unit packs them in, and they hike out with the lighter loads a week later.

On August 1st, 2022, a crew of seven volunteers and one TRTA leader were packed into Middle Velma Lake. This area of the trail is heavily used and routinely requires maintenance to cut back brush that encroaches on the trail.

The steep elevation changes and severe winter storms inflict extensive erosion on the trail tread. In some sections, rocks were used to armor the trail tread or create steps. In other sections, a total of 15 down trees were cut off the trail using the cross cut saw.

The packers were supported by a grant from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance.



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# Time to start planning your youth program for next year

By Greg Schatz, Youth Committee Chair

Did you have time to share your excitement for horses and backcountry with a young person this summer? If not, now is the time to start planning for next summer so you don't miss out on continuing the legacy of stock use on public lands.

The first step is to find the young people. You don't need many to be successful, three or four is a start. How do you find them? Is there a summer camp in your area that you can partner with? It can be any kind of camp, 4H, YMCA, Farmers Union, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, church camps. Most camp directors are looking for programs which entertain and educate their campers in outdoor skills. Camp directors and their staff are buried in work in the summer time. Now is the time to meet with them to see if they

are interested for next summer.

The next step is to create a program with the horse skills you have. A simple program, lasting about an hour, can show young people what you do with your horse in the backcountry. What we have found is that if we get the young person's attention with a one-hour program, they'll be very excited the next year for a half-day program. This builds into full-day and weekend-long programs.

Having taught young people about stock in the backcountry for several years, we are seeing success as young people become adults and find work and enjoyment using stock in the backcountry.

There are many suggestions about programs and how to find young people

in the BCHA Google Drive youth committee folder.



## Southern Appalachian BCH & Cherokee National Forest Join Forces to Repair Damaged Bridge

Submitted by Barbara Childress, Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen, Tennessee

SABCH (Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen) was approached by the Cherokee National Forest Service (CNFS) in Tennessee to provide pack support for a damaged bridge over South Fork Citico Creek on North Fork Trail in the Tellico Ranger District. As this is not a horse trail, SABCH received special permission to use our horses. On August 9, 2022, a large group of SABCH members, along with Bob Wagner, who is an experienced packer, his wife, and folks from the CNFS joined forces to pack in 651 pounds of pressure treated lumber and 261 pounds of equipment/supplies to repair the damaged bridge. The creek crossing was up to two feet deep with a swift current. We had four pack horses and several support riders. What a fun and rewarding day in our National Forest!





# Wasatch Front Chapter of BCH Utah holds spring training and packing clinic

By Susan M. Rady

The Wasatch Front Chapter of Back Country Horsemen of Utah (BCHU) was busy this last spring with a CPR and Wilderness First Aid clinic, Chain Saw Certification and recently a pack clinic held at North Fork Park, Utah. The pack clinic, held in May, was attended by Linda Price, Julie Heavirland, Melody Beutler, Lafe Feller and Nancy McKay; who all packed horses that were new to this type of work and that performed well during the training and following trail ride. They were assisted by several others member who showed up to help and observe.

The event was instructed by Ron Hales, Ron Auger, Lafe Feller and Jerry Opheikens, who helped explain the importance of proper balance, weight limits and pack types; as well as the various knots and cinches required to easily secure and loosen a load.

As a followup to the pack clinic, the Wasatch Front Chapter will be participating with the Bridgerland Chapter of BCHU in an overnight pack trip using their newly trained pack horses to pack in food and supplies for three days and two nights. This pack trip will hopefully help to ensure the riders remember their training and prepare them for service in our public lands. Hopefully, with safety as the priority, everyone on the adventure will have fun and enjoy a few days and evenings of camaraderie and being out in the greater wilderness. The training and practice pack trip is definitely hard work and requires meticulous planning, but remains important to our BCHU commitment to stay connected and involved in the support of back country wilderness areas.


As a vital part of Back Country Horsemen of America's (BCHA)

mission, this event is one of the many support programs BCHA and state chapters provide to assist the many federal, state and county entities in continuing to have maintenance support with equine access in difficult to reach wilderness areas. The art of equine packing into the back country is declining at a rapid rate with the aging out of our legacy members. For the Wasatch Front and Bridgerland chapters, instructing the next generation to retain this vital skilled resource is an enormous responsibility that remains a high priority.

The Wasatch Front and Bridgerland chapter members are dedicated to educating the younger equestrian population on these amazing and needful practices. The future of our public lands remaining open and accessible to equestrian and other public land users relies heavily on the efforts of equestrian groups, such as BCHA, to share and teach new generations of equestrians the many elements of trail work and packing techniques. This is both a privilege and an honor! BCHA is passionate about keeping the United States of America's trail systems open and accessible to equestrian use for many generations to come.



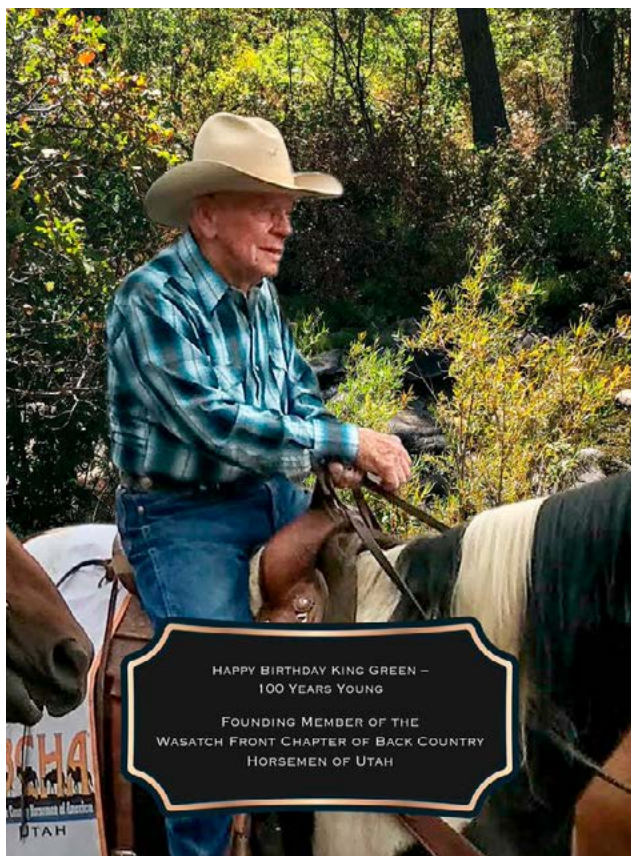
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## Happy 101st Birthday to O. KING GREEN, a Back Country Horseman

Submitted by Susan Rady, Wasatch Front Country Chapter of BCH Utah




Mr. King's first horse, 1949.



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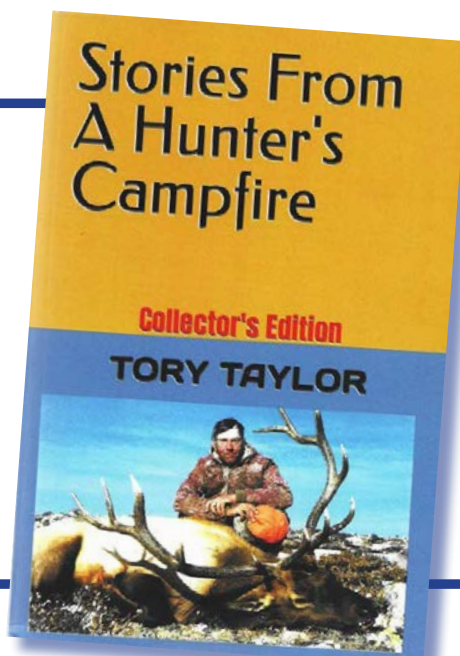
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# 2022 Cumberland Gap National Historic Park

By Joanne Mitchell

## “Some things don’t go as planned”

On Thursday morning, May 19th, 2022, when Darryl Day of Cumberland Gap National Historic Park called Joanne Mitchell (BCH-TN) on her cell phone, she thought she had been butt-dialed. The last time we packed for Cumberland Gap NHP was five YEARS ago. Darryl had called to see if we were still doing volunteer pack trips for an upcoming opportunity sometime in the next six weeks, and said that they needed three pack animals. Joanne replied to give her the weekend to see who/what were available.

By Tuesday, May 24, Joanne called him back with a few possible packers, from KY, TN and VA. Once the date and time were decided by National Park Service, we would decide who was available. Date decided, got three packers and three pack animals.

On the Saturday before the Monday pack trip, the young gentleman from VA called to say he and his wife (two packers) would not be coming because a bear had gotten into his pasture the night before and scared many of his equines. Eleven head of horses and mules went walking about during the night and had gotten badly injured in some neighbor’s barbed wire. That meant two of the three pack animals would not be coming. Dang. Joanne sent out an emergency Facebook request for two pack animals.

On the morning of Monday, June 13, 2022, Joanne and Bobby Mitchell of BCH-TN and Edith Conyers of BCH-KY met at the Cumberland Visitor Center for the required safety meeting. Joanne had also gotten some friends from church the day before to act as “ground crew” for the pack trip.

We then drove the 10-mile paved backroads to Shillala Creek Trail/Road, a four-wheel drive gated road



photo credit Darryl Day, NPS

that led to the destination trailhead, Hensley Settlement, for the ACE (American Conservation Experience) trail crew out of Asheville, NC, that were going to help with an eight-day hitch for trail construction.

Edith, a matron in her eighties, planned to go up first with her Dodge 4500 4WD, pulling her three-horse stock trailer loaded. Then she would come back to the bottom and pick up Joanne and Bobby Mitchell and their tacked-up horse and mule. Their equines were both barefoot, due to their farrier’s kidney surgery, but were the pinch hitters to make the requested three pack animals. However, Edith’s truck transmission light came on twice making her pull over to let the vehicle cool down. Texts flew since cell service was spotty. By the time Edith got up top with her truck and trailer, it was decided to let Joanne and Bobby with their loaded two-horse trailer head back home due to the climbing 90 degree heat of the day. Edith needed to get going on her (now solo) journey - just double up gear on her ponies.

Edith rode her 11-year-old white pony, Mikey, and led her two late-teenaged driving Halflingers named Tons and Stones for the trip. All ponies did fabulous. Part of the trail corridor had been widened for stock use and they took it like pros. The loads were light - pretty much the food (perishable), tents, and the camp stove and fuel. To make a long story short, the 2.5 mile trek turned into a 4.5 mile trek (per Edith’s two GPSs) each way and Edith got back to her trailer around 5pm. She got back home around 10pm. LONG HOT day. But the Park Service REMEMBERED US!

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# Public Lands Update: Electric Bikes on Your Favorite Trails?

By Randy Rasmussen, M.S., Director, Public Lands & Recreation

The pandemic drove a 240 percent surge in the sale of electric motorized bicycles (e-bikes) from 2020 to 2021. Most of these sales were of commuter-style e-bikes that are intended for use on roads and paved bike paths and thus have narrow tires. As sales continue to increase, public land managers are coming under increasing pressure to authorize e-bike use on non-motorized trails.

It's the all-terrain electric mountain bikes (eMTBs), which sport beefy knobby tires and often front and rear shock absorbers (i.e., suspension), that have horsemen most concerned. Manufacturers often advertise such e-bikes with pictures of young bike riders (donning motorcycle helmets) either flying through the air or tossing out a rooster tail of soil behind their rear tire (read: accelerated erosion) as they careen downhill, barely within the limits of control, with pictures accompanied by slogans [such as](#):

This e-bike is “*blazing fast over the toughest trails*,” and

“*It's like having four of you powering the pedals—amplifying your input by up to 410%.*”

The last thing that any safety-conscious person would desire to encounter is that type of eMTB rider on the trail. Magnify that through the lens of a horseback rider, and their sheer terror would be amplified by over 400%. But that's the demographic of eMTB rider being targeted in most ads—not the elderly or the mobility-challenged.

## E-Bikes Proposals on the Rise Despite Credible Science

In several states, there appears to be a rush to shoehorn in eMTB use on trails that have long been enjoyed by

hikers and equestrians. This despite the absence of scientific studies regarding the environmental, social and safety issues associated with introducing e-bikes onto shared-use trails. Reliable data or information on the impact of eMTB use is currently not available to adequately inform agency decision makers who are considering a leap into the non-motorized to motorized trail realm. Yet common sense tells us a lot.

The primary concern of horsemen is the difference in the speed of travel. Our horses travel at about 3 to 5 mph, whereas the motor-assist provided by eMTBs can propel the rider to speeds of up to 20 to 28 mph (or more with after-market modifications). Who would feel safe on the back of a 1,000+-pound animal if trails were to be shared with that potential for speed differential among users? How would that change our riding experience? The possibility of such shared-use trails represents the very definition of asymmetric trail conflict, where such conflict has the potential to fall upon a given user group in a disproportionate and significantly adverse manner. To quote one e-bike clinic guide: “We are the cars of the trail when we're on

## More Information on E-Bikes

To view a 2.5-minute YouTube video that includes eMTBs and the various e-bike classes, [click here](#).

For more information on current e-bike policies of the federal land management agencies, see [BCHA's Winter 2021 newsletter](#).

e-bikes. And cars are scary.”

Often our safety concerns largely go unheeded if agency planners feel compelled to accommodate this new form of trail-based recreation. Rarely do they consider confining eMTBs to either existing motorized (i.e., motorcycle) trails and two-track roads. Nor do they require e-bike proponents to design, build and maintain trails specifically to accommodate the design parameters for faster moving e-bikes. At the very least, standard single-track trails are not adequate nor safe when average eMTB riders approach speeds previously attainable only by professional mountain bike racers.

## Repeating Mistakes of the Past?

We've seen this before. Similar to the evolution of mountain bike use over the past few decades, are public land management agencies destined

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## Public Lands Update

to repeat the mistakes of the past by trying to shoehorn in e-bike use on non-motorized trails in the absence of thoughtful planning? Should horsemen be expected to share trails with eMTBs and—for that matter—each and every new form of trail-based technology that comes along? We as trail users and stewards bear the price. Would BCHA volunteers be expected to maintain such shared-use trails to e-bike standards?

What is the responsibility of eMTB manufacturers? Do they expect to dump, at the feet of public land managers, the costs and responsibilities associated with sorting out how to plan, manage and enforce user compliance associated with e-bike use? Would they help instead to resource the land management agencies as they grapple with how to accommodate e-bike use? After all, e-bikes have their place on public lands, they provide many benefits to the American public, and are here to stay. How might the industry position itself as a responsible player, a steward of public lands, and also see robust sales of e-bikes while avoiding public acrimony and ongoing debate about what comprises a non-motorized trail experience?

### Enforcement Not the Answer

If and where e-bike use might be authorized on otherwise non-motorized trails, we know that law enforcement by federal land management agencies—whose budgets always seem to be stretched thin—is not the answer to ensuring rider compliance. We need only look at existing non-motorized trail systems to know that a presence by law enforcement is essentially nonexistent and, where it occurs, is hit-and-miss and cannot be sustained. Add to this the complexity of even a trained eye being able to discern the difference in the field, for example, between a Class 1 and

a Class 3 eMTB. This makes clear the notion that proposals to either impose speed limits or ban certain e-bike classes while allowing others on non-motorized trails are doomed for failure.

Case in Point: USA Today quoted a spokesperson of the Tahoe National Forest as claiming that they, and just about everyone else in the (e-bike) controversy agreed that many rangers can't even tell the difference between an electric bike and a regular one (*An electric bike rode into the backcountry. Now there's a nationwide turf war. June 2022, Dennis Wagner*). This admission comes at a time when the Tahoe and several other national forests are moving forward to authorize the use of Class 1 e-bikes on hundreds of miles of currently non-motorized trails.

Clearly, any discussion about the role of law enforcement in protecting the non-motorized trail experience on backcountry trails should start with the recognition that, were e-bikes to be introduced, it would be next to impossible. Yet e-bike proponents turn to wishful thinking when they claim

that “e-bikes are really no different than regular bikes,” or “most riders want to comply with the rules”. These platitudes are no substitute for the fact that most trail users neither know the rules nor do e-bike riders know what class of e-bike they ride. Worse still, in many towns near US public lands the rental of eMTBs is outpacing rentals of regular mountain bikes, as shop owners replace their bike fleets with motorized versions that have broader appeal to the general public. Would such novice eMTB riders be cognizant of the class of e-bike they rented or be well versed in share-the-trail etiquette and related e-bike restrictions? The answer is a resounding “No.”

### BCHA and Chapters Respond to Local e-Bike Proposals

To date, BCHA has achieved a modest level of success in either altering or defeating proposals from national forests to authorize eMTB use on non-motorized trails. We can draw

[continued next page]

Photo courtesy of People For Bikes





## Public Lands Update

upon lessons learned to date, starting with the BCHA, et. al., [legal challenge](#) of the Tahoe National Forest's authorization of Class 1 eMTB use on over 130 miles of non-motorized trails. The forest's authorization was not accompanied by environmental review or input from affected stakeholders—a violation of agency policy.

The Tahoe NF lawsuit was quickly settled by the agency, which then issued a scaled-down proposal to add Class 1 eMTB use on 35 miles of trails that were constructed in more recent times primarily to accommodate mountain bikes. BCHA had few qualms with that proposal but continued to push the forest to comply with the [letter of the law](#). The resultant Environmental Assessment (EA) set the bar for other proposals by national forests that sought to authorize eMTB use. (Note: BCHA would not have enjoyed this success without the help of allies The Wilderness Society, Western Environmental Law Center and the support of BCH California, its Mother Lode Unit and two local co-plaintiff groups.)

### Prescott National Forest

Early this year, BCHA teamed up with Central Arizona Back Country Horsemen (CABCH) to develop a response to a proposal by the Prescott National Forest to authorize the use of Class 1 e-bikes on 138 miles of multi-use non-motorized trails. The proposal represented the entirety of all trails, current and proposed, throughout the Verde Ranger District with the exception only of trails located in designated Wilderness. BCHA worked with the chapter to develop talking points for members to include in their public comment letters to the agency. BCHA and CABCH teamed to submit an extensive public comment letter to the agency, outlining many of our concerns regarding safety, the potential for on-trail conflict, and the need to

preserve the non-motorized trail experience.

BCHA also reached out to, and coordinated a strategy for the submittal of public comments, with hikers associated with the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter. Our joint efforts clearly were part of a recipe for success, as the Prescott NF issued in June the following statement (in part):

"Through the public scoping process the Prescott National Forest learned that those that opposed E-bikes did so because they have motors and should not be allowed on non-motorized trails. Other issues presented by the public in opposition to E-bikes on non-motorized trails included concerns that they can exceed regular bike speeds and could endanger trail hikers. Equestrians stated that sharing trails with E-bikes cause issues by...attaining speeds that could potentially frighten horses...The Prescott National Forest eliminated this action item from the Verde Recreation Action Plan proposed action that allowed for the use of E-bikes on non-motorized trails, and it is not included as a part of this EA."

Another aspect of this success was based on the longstanding relations and mutual trust between CABCH, forest staff and among the Prescott Trails Alliance. In fact, this was probably the key ingredient that enabled forest staff to listen, and respond to, the concerns of hikers and horsemen associated with e-bike use.

### Lincoln National Forest

As reported in our Winter 2020-21 newsletter, BCHA chalked up a victory in its efforts to ensure an open public process and rigorous environmental analysis for an e-bike proposal by the Lincoln National Forest, located in southern New Mexico. The proposal included Class 1 eMTB use on two proposed trail systems, one non-motorized, the other motorized.

BCHA developed talking points for use by BCH New Mexico members in their individual letters. We jointly submitted a detailed public comment letter on the agency's draft EA, documenting concerns over safety, user conflict and the potential for e-bikes to displace traditional non-motorized trail users. Our comment letter also included the sign-on of local allies New Mexico Horse Council, New Mexico Sportsman, and New Mexico Wild.

Again, forest staff listened and changed their proposal based on our input. The Decision Notice read (in part):

"To be responsive to public comments on the draft EA, which were largely supportive of the project, but which were also focused on the incompatibility of traditional uses such as horseback riding and hiking and E-bikes on the proposed single track trail area #1 mainly due to the potential speed discrepancy (~20-28 mph versus 3-10 mph) and ensuing safety issues, I have decided to eliminate the use of E-bikes in single-track area #1; only non-motorized uses (hiking, horseback riding, and regular mountain bikes) would be authorized."

### Conclusion

In the three cases described above, our collective success with the Forest Service was achieved in part via:

1. The fact that affected BCHA chapter members did not want to see trails important to them be converted to allow use by motorized e-bikes.
2. BCHA working in concert with the state's BCH public lands officer, chapter members with knowledge of the trails in question, and local partners that include hiking and hunting interests to submit public comment

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## Public Lands Update

letters that described our collective concerns over adding e-bike use to non-motorized trails.

3. Refining our chief arguments to reflect local conditions, with our strongest arguments remaining the issues of safety and the potential speed discrepancy between eMTB riders and that of hikers and equestrians.

It's reasonable to assume that each BCH state will, sooner or later, be faced with an e-bike proposal (or proposals) affecting trails on public lands important to you. For example, BCHA is currently working with Arkansas BCH on a proposal by two national forests in that state to authorize Class 1 eMTB use among three currently non-motorized trail systems. However, we understand that some chapters and states might choose not to oppose e-bike use on shared-use trails for any number of reasons.

The decision whether to actively oppose, remain neutral or support e-bike use on trails near you is a local decision. BCHA and your regional public lands officer can work with you to help sort this out. Under either circumstance, BCHA has an interest in being engaged at least at a cursory level to ensure that federal agencies proposing e-bike use on non-motorized trails follow agency policy, understand the concerns of affected stakeholders, while maintaining a high bar if they choose to move forward and authorize e-bike use on non-motorized trails.

**Winter Sponsorship Deadline:  
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Contact Deborah Schatz

E-mail: [deborah.bcha@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.bcha@gmail.com)

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