

Back Country Horsemen of America

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www.bcha.org

Spring 2023

Back Country Horsemen Celebrates 50 Years

By Mark Himmel, BCHA Vice Chairman, member of C.M. Russell Back Country Horsemen, Montana

50th ANNIVERSARY
1973-2023

Public wants bridge across Big Salmon Creek

Hungry Horse News, August 30, 1979

By Mel Ruder

More than 100 persons attended the Monday public hearing called by the Flathead National Forest (FNF) on the future of the Big Salmon Creek Bridge.

All who spoke at the 2 1/2 hour hearing favored a bridge, with retired Ranger Charlie Shaw of Spotted Bear introducing the possibility of a less expensive cable with bucket for foot travelers and fording at a safer site for horses.

Congressman Dick Shoup noted public emphasis in having a bridge and questioned Supervisor Ed Corpe of the Flathead National Forest.

Corpe's conclusions near the end of the hearing were that it would require about \$80,000 to build a new bridge in this day and age, including compliance with OSHA. "Our overall annual budget for the Flathead Forest trail program is \$80,000."

Corpe continued, "If a bridge



across the Big Salmon is necessary, it would need an alternate site. If I took the course of action of repairing the present bridge, I'd be in serious trouble with my bosses."

Then he referred to Ranger Shaw's idea of a cable crossing for pedestrians and using available and more suitable crossings for horses, as helpful.

Corpe asked if "we could participate in overall planning," and he questioned if "Big Salmon was the best place to invest our limited dollars." He asked, "Do you want a bridge at every crossing? How do we arrive at priorities?"

Corpe also mentioned that the Wilderness Act discourages structures in the wilderness, and referred to the Northern Region being even more stringent in this regard than is the case nationally.

The start of the meeting saw

Jack Dollan, Wilderness Ranger, refer to the bridge being built across Big Salmon Creek in 1942. He referred to unstable banks, repairs including bridge deck replacement in 1963, debris removal after the 1964 flood, and a June 22, 1973, inspection which showed the structure unsafe with rotting timbers, settling foundations, washed piers and sag. More deterioration was noted af-

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"I'm speaking now for Back Country Horsemen, an educational, service organization interested in the maintenance and management of our roadless back country lands."

Roland Cheek, Co-Founder BCH

The very first Back Country Horsemen project

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Dave and Lester Morris pack planks and concrete for the new bridge.

ter the 1974 high water. Slides were shown.

After the 1973 inspection, Dolan said it was recommended that the bridge be dismantled and removed. A “secretive” June 26, 1974, bid opening for destruction of the bridge took place.

It was Roland Cheek, president of Back Country Horsemen, who brought the bridge disposal without adequate public notice to light. Through help of Senator Lee Metcalf and others, a public hearing was directed.

Presiding at the Monday evening hearing was Bill Covey, FNF long range planner, with Dale Dufour, wilderness ranger, acting as reporter. Ranger R.J. Saylor of Spotted Bear was at the table, but made no comments.

Mike Whittington, FNF hydraulics engineer, told of his August 15, 1974, inspection. He said the 1942-built bridge was 130 feet long with 112 feet in the main cable tower-

supported span. He reviewed various factors of deterioration, and noted, “The bridge site is a loser.”

Public participation started at 8:12 p.m. with Roland Cheek presenting his two-page statement.

This included: “I’m speaking now for Back Country Horsemen, an educational, service organization interested in the maintenance and management of our roadless back country lands.”

“We speak for the continuance of the Salmon Forks bridge. To us, no other action is thinkable. The stream crossing is undoubtedly the most dangerous in the Bob Marshall. Other Forest Service administrations recognized the very hazardous nature of the crossing early and caused a bridge to be placed there 32 years ago. This present Forest Service administration does not recognize - or does not give due consideration to - those hazards.”

After much more testimony in support of the bridge, the meeting ended with Corpe saying, “No ques-

“Perhaps the reason that Back Country Horsemen started in the Flathead Valley of western Montana has more to do with geography than with the individuals involved. Our proximity to the Bob Marshall Wilderness has given us many opportunities and some far-reaching problems. The Bob Marshall was one of the Nation’s first designated Wildernesses and the first to have a Wilderness Management Plan.”

Ken Ausk, Co-Founder BCH

tion but we underestimated the public interest in the bridge.” [end of Hungry Horse News article]

On Memorial Weekend of 1975 volunteers from the Back Country Horsemen met at the Meadow Creek trailhead. On Saturday and Sunday they packed 76 loads of bridge parts and hay to the Black Bear cabin which is 10 miles upriver, returning to the trailhead each day. Two weeks later members with long strings of pack stock totaling 28 head loaded up at Meadow Creek, went into Salmon Forks, which is 17 miles upriver, and returned to Black Bear for the night. They spent the next couple of days shuttling the remainder of the bridge planks and parts to Salmon Forks. The hay previously packed in was used to feed their stock.





From the saddle to the podium...

By Sherry Copeland, BCHA National Chairman

As I head from the Saddle to the Podium of the National Board of Directors meeting, things are getting exciting as we continue the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Back Country Horsemen of America. In preparation for this milestone, Mark Himmel, Vice Chairman (among the many other assignments and duties he has assumed), has been revisiting the historical data from the first 50 years of BCHA, and sharing significant documents and perspectives with me. Mark has had the distinct privilege of being the recipient of many of these firsthand, and has graciously shared these experiences with me (and anyone else who will listen!)

Of significant interest to me was the announcement and invitation to the first organized BCH Annual Convention, shown here.

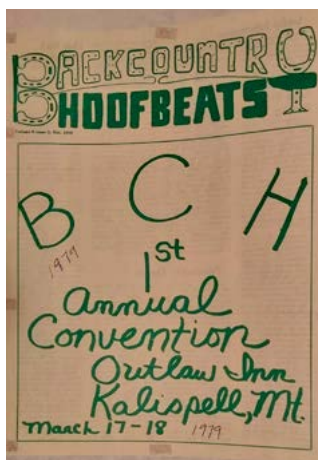
While the invitations may have changed, the purpose and necessity for the annual gathering has not – the business and future of Back Country Horsemen.

I want to encourage all members, chapters and state organizations to consider what that future of BCHA looks like.

On April 16-19, your representatives will once again gather in Kalispell, MT, to celebrate the accomplishments of the first 50 years of BCHA; but more importantly, take action to set the course for the continued success of the founding purposes:

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 stock 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 organizations.

What does that look like? The National Board of Directors, your representatives, will determine actions, processes,



You are invited!

50th ANNIVERSARY
1973-2023



2023 National Board Meeting

April 16 - 19, 2023

Red Lion Inn, Kalispell, Montana

[National Board Meeting Registration Here](#)

*Support your National Directors
who are going to Kalispell*

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.

platforms and leadership, through a collaborative effort, to set the pathway. So expect your National Directors to return and share the exciting course for the start of the next 50 years for BCHA.

As I speculate on what the Chairman's thoughts were heading to Kalispell in 1979, I realize the Chairman's perspectives, while unique, were most likely as consistent as the BCHA mission of service, education and advocacy; and focused on the thousands of volunteer members dedicated to and fulfilling that mission which has sustained for 50 years.

So, it is with admiration for those BCH boots on the ground members I have had the privilege to represent, and it is with appreciation for the great organization I have had the privilege to serve, that I head to Kalispell for the final gathering under my chairmanship.

While usually not a person of few words, in conclusion I want to leave you with just two...

THANK YOU!

Happy Trails, *Sherry*

Public Lands Update New Agreement with National Park Service

By Randy Rasmussen, Director of Public Lands and Recreation

BCHA recently entered into a new General Agreement with the National Park Service (NPS). NPS Director Charles Sams signed the agreement on February 15, 2023, making this 5-year agreement active through that date in 2028. BCHA has maintained similar agreements with the Park Service since 2003.

BCHA's agreement with the Park Service can be found on our [web-site](#). Use [this link](#) for a map of NPS units, which include National Parks, National Monuments, National Preserves, National Battlefield Parks, and National Historical Sites or Parks.

Agreement Encourages BCHA Chapters to Work with NPS Managers

In short, the new agreement provides a framework for cooperation and encourages BCHA chapters to work with NPS park managers and superintendents to identify and implement volunteer projects and activities in which they may participate. Such activities could include training seminars, living history events, ecological restoration activities, Leave No Trace™ equine education programs, and service projects including trail and horse camp maintenance. Yet by no means is this a complete list of all such mutually-beneficial activities that your chapter might want to undertake.

According to the NPS, "partnerships with recreation service organizations such as BCHA are a proven means of enhancing agency capacity and advancing professional practice. The NPS and BCHA share a commitment to exemplary stewardship and public enjoyment of America's parks, and wish to promote appropriate opportunities for sensible use of horses by organized enthusiasts to be active

in supporting parks and public lands." Through the new agreement, BCHA chapters are encouraged to provide local park units with expertise and guidance on use of stock animals for recreation and management of resources and trail infrastructure.

Among the opening clauses in the agreement is the following from its Statement of Mutual Interests and Objectives:

"Both parties to this Agreement wish to increase the engagement of BCHA members and other equestrian users with national parks, and to foster cooperation and volunteer assistance that helps NPS maintain and protect

resources under its jurisdiction."

To What Exactly has the Park Service Committed?

Provisions that NPS officials at the national level (i.e., the Washington DC office) have committed to undertake in support of the agreement include:

1. To communicate the existence of this Agreement throughout the NPS;
2. To collaborate with BCHA to produce educational materials and training programs related to horse and pack animal use within the national park system;
3. To encourage park superinten-

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Public Lands Update

[continued from pprevious page]

dents and their staff to work with BCHA at the local level to identify potential opportunities and locations for BCHA activities that are compatible with and appropriate to the identified sites; and

4. To provide training in maintenance techniques and standards for trails, trailhead facilities, parking areas, etc., sawyer training and certification, and other training necessary to promote the safety of volunteers and partners in performance of this agreement.

In turn, the agreement lists actions that BCHA is expected to undertake, including:

- To assist NPS in the development and conduct of trails planning educational workshops for NPS personnel and stakeholders, and to cooperate in facilitating sessions for NPS managers and the public on partnership development and methods to enhance the NPS trail system, including best management practices to define and describe recreational outcomes in general management plans and other relevant trails-related plans; and
- To provide input and assistance to NPS sites in managing equestrian use, determining best management practices that protect and preserve park resources, especially in those park units where equestrian use is allowed but whose trails management plans lack specificity regarding equestrian issues.

Agreement Does Not Commit NPS Units to Spend Funds

Unlike a challenge cost-share agreement, a General Agreement of this nature does not commit the Park Service to expend an amount of funding we think necessary to implement its provisions or to support

our volunteer crews on the ground. It serves primarily as a guide in your discussions with local agency officials, many of which might have either real or perceived budgetary constraints. Yet, the agreement could help to change perceptions or to open doors within the agency that have previously been closed. Importantly, the agreement cannot be viewed as a tool to force agency staff to the table when they otherwise are reluctant to partner with BCHA. As I've written before, it has always been the passion, diplomacy and commitment of BCHA volunteers that have served as the foundation for our strong partnership with the agencies over time.

How Does the Agreement Benefit Your Chapter?

The NPS does not require that an agreement like this remain in force in order for your chapter to conduct or continue volunteer service projects in local park units. Several BCHA chapters currently enjoy excellent working relations with local NPS personnel. Yet some BCHA chapters do not currently enjoy such relations and could benefit by discussing with local park staff the possibilities encouraged in the agreement. In such cases, BCHA recommends that

your chapter find ways to make this agreement work for you, in order to advance your interests alongside those of NPS personnel in national park units important to your chapter. Share the agreement with local park staff as proof positive that BCHA, and its ethic of volunteer service, continues to carry the "stamp of approval" of the NPS Director's office.

Similar Agreements Between BCHA and Federal Agencies

BCHA maintains similar national agreements with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (expires March 2029) and US Forest Service (expires December 2026). Both agreements encourage cooperation between the agencies and local chapters. BCHA encourages your chapter to take advantage of the opportunities and possibilities these agreements might offer. They represent yet another example of how BCHA collectively works to keep trails open for all.



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Come Ride with Us!

Culvert Operations - Larry Creek Trail Project June 11, 2022

By Dan Maiyo, Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen (BRBCH) newsletter editor

BRBCH members showed true grit and with a show of force overcame rain and mud to repair water bars, cut and clear downed trees, and, in cooperation/coordination with the Forest Service, install two culverts in soggy bog areas on a main trail within the Larry Creek trail system.

The Larry Creek Campsite is located approximately 3.7 miles north of Stevensville on Hwy 93. The project site is accessed from FS road #1316 at the terminus of Bass Creek Road, 3 miles west of the intersection of Hwy 93 and Bass Creek Road. Located within the Bass Creek Recreation Area, the site is administered by the USDA Forest Service, Stevensville Ranger District.

Thanks to Dan Brandborg for the use of his backhoe, the Stevensville Ranger District for assisting with their tractor and personnel, and the BRBCH volunteers for the use of their pack stock for a successful day of work, fun and food!



One of two bog areas on trail before improvements.



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Hike the Hill Summary

Submitted by Randy Rasmussen, Director of Public Lands and Recreation



In mid-February, 2023, BCHA's vice chair Mark Himmel and recent past chair Darrell Wallace accompanied BCHA's Director for Public Lands & Recreation to the annual Hike the Hill® (HTH) event in Washington, DC.

HTH is organized by national partner organizations American Hiking Society (AHS) and the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS). The purpose of HTH is to:

Bring together the trails community to advance shared trail priorities with congressional and federal agency leaders including: trails funding, public lands management and conservation, equitable access, and other top priority issues that sustain trails and improve access to public lands.

Agency Briefings

This is the first year BCHA boasted three representatives in the week-long HTH event. It kicked off on Sunday afternoon with agency briefings from national trail program leads for the US Forest Service (USFS), National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) who provided an overview of key issues affecting the federal agencies and their plans for 2023.

Meetings with Agency Leaders

The following day, HTH participants were afforded a series of face-to-face meetings with the Director of the BLM, Tracy Stone-Manning; the Chief of the USFS, Randy Moore; and the Director of the NPS, Charles F "Chuck" Sams, III. The evening was capped with a trails celebration at the REI DC Flagship Store, where



Hike the Hill® participants with US Forest Service Chief Randy Moore (last row, 7th from the right)

Director Stone-Manning and other dignitaries joined the group to toast the importance of trails to the American public.

Congressional Meetings

On Tuesday and Wednesday, AHS and PNTS hosted a series of meetings on Capitol Hill with staff of the:

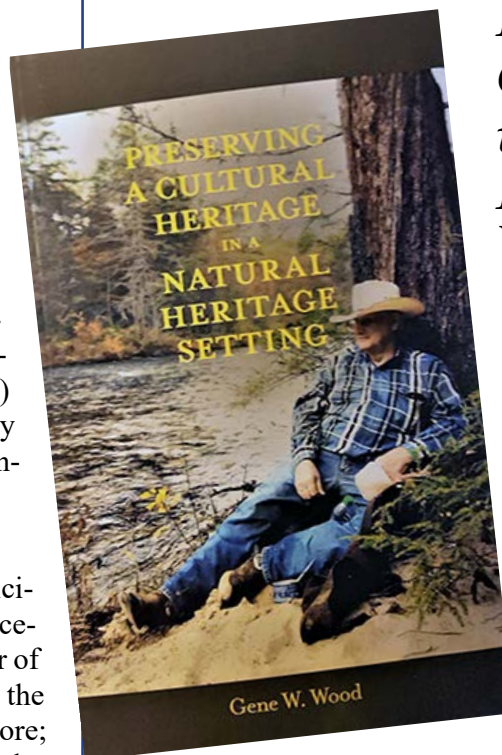
- US Senate Committee on Appropriations (i.e., funding),
- US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (with

oversight of federal land management agencies),

- US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, and
- US House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources.

During those days and the following, BCHA met individually with representatives of eight congressional offices, including: Senators Daines (R-

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Preserving a Cultural Heritage in a Natural Heritage Setting

Written by G. W. Wood

Equestrian trail riding as an American cultural heritage is rarely articulated by either equestrians or managers of lands in which horse trails are embedded.

As a professional ecologist who spent my last 40 years with trail horses and horse trails at the center of my being, I offer glimpses of my experiences and suggestions for preserving a cultural heritage in a natural

heritage setting.

170 p., 2022, \$9.95

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Hike the Hill Summary

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MT), Tester (D-MT), Cantwell (D-WA), Wyden (D-OR), Merkley (D-OR) and Klobuchar (D-MN). They also met with staff of Congressmen Zinke (R-MT) and Hoyle (D-OR). During a break in the action, Mark and Randy had a chance to sit in the Senate Gallery and watch a drawn-out vote as each senator appeared to either approve or reject a federal judicial court nominee.

Key Takeaways

Topics discussed with agency leaders and lawmakers during HTH included:

- **The need for robust funding** (appropriations) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 for federal agency field staff, including those who work with and support volunteers, and the need to continue modest increases in agency budgets related to recreation, trails and wilderness to account for inflation.

Takeaway: The House has yet to establish funding priorities for FY 2024, yet leadership of the majority stressed its desire to tamp down agency budgets across the board.

- **The need to continue prioritizing outdoor recreation and public access to federal lands.**

Takeaway: There is bipartisan support for a large (“omnibus”) public lands bill, the America’s Outdoor Recreation Act, that among other things would:

- Streamline permitting required of outfitters and guides,
- Improve data collection regarding public visitation and make park and public land passes available online and digitally, and
- Direct federal agencies to designate long-distance bik-



2023 Hike the Hill® participants in US House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee hearing room, from left to right:

Randy Rasmussen, BCHA staff, Public Lands & Recreation

Jennifer Tripp, Pacific Crest Trail Association

Mark Himmel, BCHA Vice Chair

Jeff Kish, Pacific Northwest Trail Association

L. Fisher, Continental Divide Trail Coalition

Kevin Thusius, Ice Age Trail Alliance

Andrea Ketchmark, North Country Trail Association

ing trails on federal lands.

The bill is expected to be reintroduced in the Senate the first week of March.

- **The need to reauthorize the Great American Outdoors Act’s Legacy Restoration Fund** (i.e., maintenance backlog funding) prior to that program’s expiration after FY 2025.

Takeaway: The Fund has been used well and transparently by the US Forest Service to reduce its maintenance backlog, but more funding is needed post-2025 to finish the job. Some appropriators want to exercise greater oversight into how the Park Service is addressing its maintenance backlog; questions remain about whether or not the House majority believes this is a good use of spending.

- BCHA’s request to not legislate solutions that benefit an e-bike industry that seeks greater access to non-motorized trails on federal public lands.

Takeaway: BCHA believes that e-bike related decisions should be made at the local level, with public input and environmental analysis, consistent with recently revised e-bike policies adopted by

the BLM and USFS. We and our partners would oppose legislation prompted by the e-bike industry that attempted to bias, dictate or compel any outcome related to e-bike authorizations at the local level.

- **The need to pass the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) Completion Act**, which was introduced (but did not pass) during the last session of Congress. The Act, if passed, would direct the Secretary of Agriculture and the Interior to prioritize completion of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail in time for the CDT’s 50th anniversary in 2028, by eliminating gaps between sections of the Trail and relocating existing portions of the Trail where necessary to maximize conservation and enjoyment of the Trail corridor.

Takeaway: There is bipartisan support for this bill and it is likely to be reintroduced by mid-2023.

- **The need to pass the Volunteer Driver Tax Parity Act**, introduced last session yet Congress failed to advance. If passed, the Act would address a critical update to the IRS code that creates an unnecessary tax burden on some volunteers who are reimbursed—in part or in whole—for personal use of their vehicles.

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Hike the Hill Summary

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This is an issue that BCHA (Darrell) recently spearheaded after a tax advisor hired by BCHA Washington identified the unintended tax burden, which could force individual volunteers to report 1099 taxable income for any reimbursements they receive in excess of the (long outdated) IRS-deductible rate of 14 cents per mile.

Takeaway: BCHA made significant headway on this issue! We spoke with staff of the bill's Senate sponsor (Klobuchar), the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee (Wyden) and members of that committee (Daines, Cantwell). They requested our help to secure additional cosponsors to make this a bipartisan bill, which could be reintroduced as early as this summer.

Special note to BCHA members: Please review [the list of US senators](#) on the Finance Committee. We expect to soon distribute an action alert seeking your help in requesting that these senators support and cosponsor the Volunteer Driver Tax Parity Act.

Conclusion

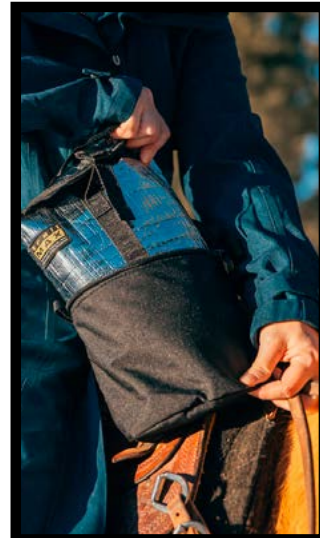
Hike the Hill® is an annual event that vividly demonstrates the power and durability of BCHA's national partnerships. Year after year, agency and congressional leaders make themselves available and are responsive to the needs and desires of this partnership and its member organizations. BCHA remains a critical component of the partnership, serving for years among PNTS' Advocacy & Policy Committee. We are the only national organization consistently present on this national stage to express the needs and desires of horsemen and women and BCHA's dedicated 12,000+ volunteer-stewards.

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Florida Chapter raises the bar for invasive species removal

By Charlie Kemp, Nature Coast Back Country Horsemen, Florida



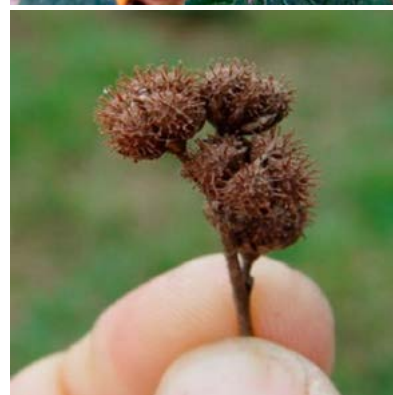
Recently Nature Coast Back Country Horsemen (NCBCH), out of Brooksville, Florida, tackled an invasive species project in the Withlacoochee State Forest aimed at eradicating Caesar's weed from an equestrian trailhead in the Croom Wildlife Management Area (WMA) of the Withlacoochee State Forest. Caesar's weed was originally brought into the Caribbean as a fiber crop and for medicinal purposes. It is a member of the hibiscus and rosemallows family but reportedly spread through unintended cultivation in the late 1800s.

Caesar's weed spreads by a bristled fruit that clings to fur, clothing, and equipment. It spreads and grows rapidly, attaining anywhere from two to seven feet in its first year. Caesar's weed responds well to various herbicides, but herbicides don't prevent the seeds from further sprouting. The weed has been known to take over entire easements and areas where the soil has been disturbed by recreational or agricultural activities.

At the opening of the 2022 Florida riding season, 25 NCBCH volunteers committed to eradicating Caesar's weed from one of the most popular trailheads in the 22,000 acre Croom WMA in the Withlacoochee State Forest. Our volunteers pulled over 750 pounds of Caesar's weed and bagged the weeds which were

then taken to the incinerator at the landfill. Though this will not prevent the seeds that are already in the ground from sprouting, this project is a giant step in the right direction. NCBCH is proud to partner with the Florida Forest Service by doing our part in preventing infestation of non-native species in an otherwise pristine tract of Sand Pine Hills and Oak Hammocks.

This project was the first of its kind for the Withlacoochee State Forest and will become an ongoing effort between NCBCH and the Florida Forest Service. Mitigating invasive species outbreaks at recreational trailheads is everyone's responsibility and NCBCH members set the bar for future projects.



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