Sharing Trails

Beginning in 2013 the Judith Basin Chapter (JBBCH) of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana (BCHMT) in partnership with the Lewistown Montana Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) crafted an approach to educate youth about multiple trail use and the etiquette required when meeting other users on the trail. The youth participants are 6th graders from public schools, Hutterite Colonies and home schools.

The event is called "Sharing Trails Education Day" and is held one day a year in the month of April at the County Fair Grounds. The presenters are members of groups/organizations that use the trails e.g., Horsemen, ATV/Motorcycle, Bicyclists, Snowmobile, Cross County Skiers and Hikers. The presentations consist of describing their organization and the desired trail etiquette when encountering other users. There are also presentations on trail safety, leave no trace, weeds, Search and Rescue and bear aware. The Forest Service, Fish Wildlife and Parks and BLM also have information stations. Throughout the day the following educational themes are stressed: Respect for the land and each other, be responsible for your own actions and be safe.

In addition to youth education, sharing trails also accomplishes the development of relationships between diverse user groups, creating partnerships to support future endeavors and reduces user conflict on public land trail systems. Since the inception of sharing the trails in 2013, the information has reached approximately 875 students. With the unforeseen Covid Pandemic reaching us in the beginning of 2020 sharing the trails has been suspended through 2022.

The road map that we followed in development of sharing the trails is as follows:

- Secure commitment from your own organization
- Secure funding early
- Identify a common theme, preferably neutral with the partners
- Bring diverse trail user groups together in support of that common theme
- Establish what's in it for me
- Allow stake holders to contribute in the development
- Allow for the passion of their activity
- After each event, do a lesson's learned and secure commitment to participate in sharing trails the upcoming year

Any questions, feel free to call at 406-538-2688

Thank you, Henry Gottardi