



2025 Annual Report



Accomplishments

Trail Maintenance

2025 was a fantastic year for us in many ways. With trail maintenance at the heart of our mission we were still active in youth activities, campground improvements, and a variety of training for our members. We gained several new members this year who eagerly pitched in beside all our longtime folks and together we donated many hours of time. The totals below include our organized workdays along with efforts by members working individually on their own time. Many thanks to all who helped us achieve this awesome effort!!

Miles of trails maintained:
Wilderness – 118 miles
Non-wilderness – 358 miles
Total – 476 miles

Structures installed/maintained:

Total volunteer hours donated: 1,199

Total miles driven: 14,668

Total stock days donated: 96

Total heavy equipment hours: 26

Total value donated: \$69,970

National Saw Policy Implementation –Crosscut Saw Training

The Forest Service National Saw Policy was signed in 2016. Finally, we were able to get four trainers certified in 2024. This turned about to be very timely because there were no Forest Service trainers available in 2025. In fact, the Black Hills National Forest ended up asking us to conduct a crosscut certification class for their employees in June 2025. Three of our members assisted with this training.

We currently have 14 members who are certified crosscut sawyers. We also have 10 members who are now certified chainsaw operators.



Figures 1 & 2. BHNH crosscut saw training participants...with BH BCH instructor Jim Allen.

4-H Youth Trail Challenge and Ride

As we sit around our meetings and look at all the grey-haired folks in our outfit....we realize that we need to get some younger folks interested in trail riding! We started working with the local Black Hills 4-H clubs in 2023. This was our third annual event which was held on June 21-22.

We started out Saturday morning with our teaching horsemanship skills and working with the youth to learn to negotiate various trail obstacles. After a break for a hot lunch which was provided by Black Hills Energy the kids had a chance to test the skills they had learned by completing a trail challenge competition. This competition offered the chance to earn prizes. Many thanks to BH BCH members Don and Alan for organizing!

On Sunday, we met up in the Hills for a trail ride. Long time BH BCH members Brad and Jayne provided a brief packing demonstration at the start of the trail ride. Thomas the mule was happy to pack in the trail lunches. Its always so much fun to see these young equestrians come out to practice trail skills in the arena and then get out to enjoy the trails in the beautiful Black Hills. This year we had one participant come all the way from the other side of South Dakota to join us!



Figures 1. Seven 4-H kids participated in our third Trail Challenge clinic and competition.



Figure 2. Youth were coached through several types of trail obstacles.



Figure 3. The trail bridge is always a challenge for young riders.

We spent Saturday June 1 developing the next generation of trail riders. In cooperation with Pennington County 4-H and Black Hills Energy, we took a group of young equestrians on a trail ride in the beautiful Black Hills. All of the participants from our last three 4-H Trail challenge clinics were invited to attend a trail ride with us. Now was the time to put their skills to the test outside the arena. Several of the kids showed up and some of their parents rode along with us as well. We packed lunches into a meadow near the Empire Mine where the kids and their parents learned about mining history. Mother Nature did her share and we had a gorgeous day. They all did fantastic and are looking forward to their next trail ride!



Figure 4. BH BCH members Brad and Jayne demonstrated packing with their mule Thomas.



Figure 5. Our 4-H trail riders on the trail to the Empire Mine in the Black Hills with Thomas packing lunches.



Figure 6. 4-H riders enjoying the vistas of the beautiful Black Hills.

Iron Creek Horse Camp Work Weekend – May 16-17, 2025

This is one of our biggest trail clearing efforts each year. This year was no exception. Over the course of the weekend 12 Black Hills Backcountry Horsemen of South Dakota gathered at Iron Creek Horse Camp to assist with clear/maintain the trails in the Black Elk Wilderness area and Norbeck Wildlife Preserve. The first day was too windy to go out on the trails as there are many standing dead trees in this area. So we did minor maintenance on the campground facilities including fence repair, tightened the highline, and other improvements. The next day we cleared 13 miles of trail. Our work weekend immediately precedes the opening of the horse camp and ensures that trail riders visiting the Black Hills will have unobstructed trails to enjoy.



Figure 7. There were plenty of opportunities to put our crosscut skills to use on the Trail to Mt. Rushmore.



Figure 8. BH BCH Trail clearing crew...Shara, Phil, Landon, and Steve cutting up a big one in the Black Elk Wilderness out of Iron Creek Horse Camp.



Figure 9. Cutting complete!



Figure 10. Doug and Jim tightening the highline.

Old Baldy Trails

We held our annual trail clearing weekend June 12-14, 2025. Members cleared 25 miles of trail including all of Old Baldy, Rimrock, and Little Spearfish Trails. We removed 27 trees from the trails and clipped overhanging branches. Three members contribute a total of 56 volunteer hours. Thanks to Brad and Jayne for organizing!



Figure 11 and 12. Perfect weather this year for trail clearing on the Old Baldy, Rimrock, and Little Spearfish Creek trails!!

Alkali Creek Horse Camp Corrals

Our members have been involved with the construction and continued maintenance of the Alkali Creek Horse Camp at Ft. Meade Recreation Area outside Sturgis, SD since its inception. Continuing in this tradition, on Monday September 15, 2025 eight BH BCH members assisted with the installation of 2 new corrals and enlargement of seven existing corrals at the horse camp. We also provided the skidsteer to help with moving the corrals into place and spreading gravel inside the corrals.



Figure 13. Doug with his skidsteer placing gravel inside the new corrals.



Figure 14. BH BCH crew “packing in” the new corral panels.



Figure 15. New corrals are complete at Alkali Horse Camp, Ft. Meade Recreation Area, Sturgis, SD.

Palmer Creek Bridge

The Palmer Creek trail bridge on the Hell Canyon District of the Black Hills National Forest was originally constructed in 2009 to mitigate erosion into Palmer Creek, protect riparian habitat, and to provide a safe crossing of the stream for all users including equestrians, hikers, and backpackers. The bridge was completely burned by an arson-caused wildfire in 2022. The soil at the creek crossings is soft loam and there is a spring on the bank making the crossing very boggy and unsafe for stock as well as inconvenient for hikers. For the past three years the conditions at the crossings have deteriorated to the point where it is very hazardous for horses to attempt to cross due to the boggy conditions. Hikers attempt to cross using small logs which is also risky.



Figure 16. Palmer Creek bridge on Trail 2 in 2013. BH BCH spread gravel on bridge approaches in May 2013.



Figure 16. Palmer Creek bridge immediately after wildfire in 2022.



Figure 17. Palmer Creek crossing at old bridge site on Trail 2 in Spring 2025.

Because the wildfire was arson-caused, the BHNF had hoped to obtain restitution funds through prosecution of the arsonists to reconstruct the bridge. However, that lengthy process is still underway and any funds are unlikely to become available any time soon. Black Hills Back Country Horsemen (BH BCH SD) expressed their safety concerns to the Forest leadership in early 2025 and offered to assist with replacing the bridge. Public safety was a top concern for this project. The Forest was able to obtain some internal funds for the bridge but not enough to completely construct and replace it. BH BCH SD negotiated with the Forest and with Wheeler, a Midwest bridge building company, to obtain the bridge materials at a feasible price. As of this time, all of the bridge materials have been purchased and delivered. We hope to construct the bridge at a nearby off-site location in spring of 2026. Once the bridge abutments have been constructed at the Palmer Creek site this summer, the bridge will be moved into place. We expect the project to be completed by fall of 2026.

E-Bike use on Non-motorized Trails

During the 2024 session of the South Dakota state legislature, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks proposed legislation to allow use of ALL classes of e-bikes on the Mickelson Trail, a 111-mile-long Rails-to-Trails project that was authorized and developed in 1991 as a non-motorized trail. The legislation was tabled in committee due to the high level of controversy that the proposal elicited.

In January 2025 new legislation was introduced in the South Dakota Legislature to allow only Class 1 e-bikes on this trail. Several BH BCH members contacted their legislators and requested that NO e-bikes be allowed on the trail for safety reasons. In February 2025, legislation did pass limiting e-bike use on the trail to Class 1 only. This legislation became effective on July 1, 2025. New signs have been installed at all trailheads in 2025. The signs include language that encourages slower speed with e-bikes and addresses several of our safety concerns.



Figures 18 & 19. New signage on Mickelson Trail after South Dakota passes new e-bike legislation in 2025.

Other Projects

BCHA National Board Meeting

The 2025 BCHA National Board Meeting (NBM) was held in Prescott, AZ in April. Our two NBM delegates were in attendance along with several other members. The National Board guides the direction of the BCHA for the upcoming year.

Fundraising

Runnings promo

BH BCH member and PR coordinator, Deb Black, set up a display table in the front entrance to our local Runnings farm store from 10 am – 4 pm on April 26, 2025. We sold raffle tickets for ½ beef, discussed memberships, and handed out coloring sheets to kids. We had our BH BCH tool trailer set out front and gave tours to interested people. We had our historical photo albums inside with brochures and membership applications. We ended up with two new memberships and sold over \$400 worth of raffle tickets.



Figure 20. BH BCH members Don, Alice, Deb and Jim manned the promotional booth at Runnings farm store.

Bingo

BH BCH member Shara Kelley set up two bingo fundraisers at the Silver Dollar Saloon in Hill City, SD. The first one was held on February 23 and the other on October 12, 2025. A bunch (12) of us showed up and had a great time playing

bingo and enjoying the food. We raised \$955 for BH BCH between the two events. Plus we had a fun time!



Figure 21. Photos from BH BCH bingo fundraiser at the Silver Dollar Saloon in Hill City, SD.

Beef raffle

One of our members, Landon, who is a local rancher generously donated $\frac{1}{2}$ of one of his cattle to our chapter to be raffled off. At the current price of beef, it was a very generous donation! We started selling tickets in March 2025 with the final drawing held in February 2026. We made \$3975. The winner was a local woman from Rapid City who only bought one ticket! Congratulations to Jolene!



Figure 22. Beef raffle winner, Jolene from Rapid City with her box of beef!

Facebook

Our chapter continues to maintain a presence on Facebook primarily to inform equestrians about horseback opportunities in the Black Hills and surrounding areas. We use it to provide current information on trail conditions and hazards during the riding season. We also encourage interaction with users on local and national issues that may affect equestrians who travel to the Black Hills. We respond to numerous messages and questions from horsemen and women regarding specific trails, campgrounds, and equestrian facilities.

Find us at: <https://www.facebook.com/bchofsouthdakota>

Safety

We are proud to say that we again have had a clean safety record for 2025 with no reportable accidents!!

Challenges in 2026

Forest Service Staffing Levels for Recreation

We realize that this issue affects all BCH units. The recent “purge” of probationary employees at the Forest Service and the temporary ban on issuing grants or hiring seasonal employees will be a challenge until we get more information. We will continue to discuss options to increase funding to local Forest Service and BLM units and to increase the effectiveness of the land management agencies with our Congressional delegation.

Increasing OHV use in the BBNF

Motorized travel in the Black Hills NF has always been popular and widely allowed. For the last decade motorized travel has been restricted to open roads (3,000 mi) and motorized trails (700 mi). However, in the last couple of years, use of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use has mushroomed on the Forest. Numerous private enterprises have started renting OHVs to visiting vacationers. These folks are not aware of travel restrictions, and many are inexperienced with handling the machines. Trail rutting, excess noise, and travel off approved routes is occurring. This use has overwhelmed law enforcement capabilities and has resulted in conflicts with equestrians and other non-motorized users such as bicyclists and hikers. Our members are working with the Black Hills National Forest, local authorities, and other user groups to develop solutions so that all users can continue to enjoy the Black Hills NF.

Opportunities in 2026

Partnerships with other Recreation Organizations

Our current president is a member of the Northern Hills Recreation Trails Committee composed of recreation personnel and Chamber of Commerce members from cities of Lead and Deadwood along with folks from BLM, USFS, State Parks, bike organizations, equestrian organizations, and hiking organizations. The committee collaborates to build trails in and around urban areas of Whitewood, Spearfish, Sturgis, Deadwood, Lead and Central City. The goal is to create a network of trails connecting these towns in the northern Black Hills. The group has already built an estimated 35 miles of trails in the Deadwood and Lead areas. The funding comes from various sources including city and federal funds, grants, and donations. We hope to continue our involvement to ensure that equestrian use is given equal consideration.

Several other volunteer groups assist with trail maintenance in the Black Hills including Black Hills Trails (mountain biking), and Off-Road riders (motorized trails). By dividing up trails among the groups and sharing information, volunteers make a substantial contribution to maintaining recreational trails in the Black Hills.

BHNF Forest Plan Revision

The Black Hills National Forest is in the initial stages of the forest plan revision process. We have asked to be involved in all phases of the process to ensure that equestrian interests are considered, as recreation is a major topic for the Black Hills National Forest plan revision. This is a huge opportunity to preserve and enhance equestrian access and facilities in the Black Hills for future generations. We plan to stay actively involved and hope to work together with other recreational interests to provide a high quality non-motorized recreational experience for all users of the Black Hills NF. However, considering the direction of the current administration, we do not anticipate much progress on planning efforts in the near future.

Alice Allen

Alice Allen

Backcountry Horsemen of America

Volunteer Hours Report

January 1 - December 31, 2025

Black Hills Backcountry Horsemen of South Dakota

	P1 Totals	Rate per hour/mile/day	Total Value	
Total Basic Hours	168	\$34.79	\$5,837.76	Calculated per hour
Total Skilled Hours	87	\$52.19	\$4,540.53	Calculated per hour
Total Trail Recon Hours	158	\$34.79	\$5,510.74	Calculated per hour
Total LNT - Education	123	\$34.79	\$4,279.17	Calculated per hour
Total Public Meetings	91	\$34.79	\$3,148.50	Calculated per hour
Total Administrative Service	278	\$34.79	\$9,671.62	Calculated per hour
Total Travel Time	294	\$34.79	\$10,238.70	Calculated per hour
Total Hours	1199			
Wilderness Trail Miles	118			
National Scenic Trail Miles	0			
Other Trail Miles	358			
Total Trail Miles	476			
Personal Vehicle	10450	\$0.67	\$7,001.50	Calculated per mile
Stock Hauling	4218	\$1.35	\$5,694.30	Calculated per mile
Total Travel Miles	14668			
Power Equipment	15	\$35.00	\$507.50	Calculated per hour
Heavy Equipment	11	\$140.00	\$1,540.00	Calculated per hour
Total Equipment Hours	26			
Total Stock (Pack and Saddle)	96			
Total Stock Days	96	\$125.00	\$12,000.00	Calculated per day
Total Donations	\$0.00		\$0.00	
		Total	\$69,970.31	

