

Double Diamond Award Nomination

Back Country Horsemen of South Carolina (BCHSC)

Nominated by the Board of Directors, BCHSC

I. Description of Project

On September 26th, 2024, Hurricane Helene took an easterly turn and barreled through Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina, causing extreme flooding, massive power outages, and spawning numerous tornadoes within its bands. These bands just happened to pass directly through two of our most scenic and treasured horse trail systems, Croft State Park and the Buncombe Horse Trail located within the Enoree Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest. Our treasured Rocky Gap Trails in the foothills were decimated and the Woods Ferry Horse Trails also sustained overwhelming damage. On the Buncombe Trail and at Croft State Park, the trails really could not even be located in places as blowdowns of mature hardwoods and pines, many three feet in diameter, covered the trails for miles. It was a destruction like none ever seen in the inland area of South Carolina. We have tornadoes occasionally, but never this many that caused this level of destruction over such a wide area.

Clean-up did not begin immediately due to safety concerns and harvesting of downed trees in certain areas by the United State Forest Service (USFS). When clean-up efforts did begin, BCHSC was instrumental in organizing the trail clearing efforts in collaboration with the wonderful public lands managers at all sites. The project continued for basically all of 2025, with BCHSC organizing work weekends, getting more members chainsaw certified to work on USFS lands, and small groups of chainsaw certified volunteers reporting for duty every chance they had. The time, sweat and

expense our volunteer trail crew expended was enormous. For these reasons, the Board of Directors for BCHSC is nominating our state chapter for the coveted Back Country Horsemen of America's Double Diamond Award for the unbelievable dedication of our trail crew.

II: Project Details

A. Who did the work?

This project was undertaken by dedicated chainsaw certified members of the state chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of South Carolina. Members from all over the state traveled to the different sites many times to tackle the aftermath of Helene. Several of these certified members are also members of the Woods Ferry Horse Trails Association and they focused their work on those trails for the most part.

B. What work was done?

Approximately 75 miles of horse trails throughout the upstate of South Carolina were cleared of massive blowdowns by volunteers over a 6 to 9 month period. Members hauled heavy equipment to sites as well as chainsaws, stock, and hand carts for transporting equipment. In many instances, the use of stock was not always the most efficient method for transporting equipment to a work site. Many days would see only 100-200 yds of trail being cleared in a 6 hour period due to the level of destruction. Our USFS Recreational Trails Technician would bring the trail "dozer" when the terrain was favorable to move the massive logs and decrease the number of cuts required per tree. She worked tirelessly with us. By the end of 2025, BCHSC had cleared more miles of trails than we had ever thought possible.

C. Where did this project take place?

This massive project took place in four different counties in South Carolina. The public lands included federal and state lands. The Woods Ferry Horse Trails are in the Enoree Ranger District in Chester County, SC. The Buncombe Horse Trail is also located in the Enoree Ranger District and is in Newberry County, South Carolina. Croft State Park is a 7000 acre park located in Spartanburg County, SC, and is managed by the South Carolina Parks and Recreation and Tourism department. The Rocky Gap Horse Trails are located within the Andrew Pickens Ranger District in Oconee County, SC, in the foothills of the mountains bordering Georgia.

D. When was this work done?

The Back Country Horsemen of South Carolina members who are also members of the Woods Ferry Horse Trails Association began clearing the Woods Ferry Horse Trails as soon as the USFS would allow them to do so and their work continued well into 2025. Work began on the Buncombe Horse Trail very early in 2025 and continued into September. Members began working at Croft State Park in late 2024 and it continued into the spring of 2025. The Rocky Gap Horse Trails were tackled by members during the months of March, April and May of 2025. We held a huge celebration of all volunteers at Whetstone Horse Camp at the Rocky Gap Trails in early May of 2025.

E. What facilitated the need for this work?

Hurricane Helene made landfall on September 26th, 2024. The hurricane traveled through the Big Bend area of Florida and then made its way through south Georgia, into western South Carolina, and into North Carolina. South Carolina was on the “dirty side” of the storm. The impacts of Hurricane Helene and its associated lines of tornadoes wreaked havoc on our trail systems. All public lands managers at the sites

referenced above reached out to BCHSC and our chainsaw certified volunteers with pleas for assistance. The Enoree Ranger District Recreation Division is drastically understaffed, and for 9 months all work done on the Buncombe Horse trail was completed by our volunteers and the one employee. Croft State Park personnel needed to focus on clearing roads and campgrounds along with other facilities. Woods Ferry Horse trails, being in the Enoree Ranger District, also relies on volunteers from BCHSC and who are also members of the Woods Ferry Horse Trails Association. The Andrew Pickens Ranger District personnel helped to organize workdays and assisted in coordinating efforts of BCHSC volunteers to open the trail system along with other volunteer groups.

F. How was the work accomplished?

The work on these four trail systems was accomplished using primarily chainsaws and stock, but on occasions we were able to use sub-compact tractors on the trail to move larger logs. The USFS trail “dozer” was used on multiple occasions to assist in moving massive logs. Our BCHSC members hauled stock to numerous locations and used the stock to transport themselves and equipment to work sites. Our chainsaw certified members coordinated many trips to open the trails, all in cooperation with personnel at the abovementioned locations.