

BCHA Negotiates Solutions to Keep Trails Open Nationally

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Back Country Horsemen of America has initiated positive changes in regards to the use of horses and stock in wilderness and public lands. Since its founding in 1986, BCHA has developed open channels of communication with various individuals and agencies as well as effective education and monitoring methods.

BCHA Chairman Mike Reedy has been a member for 12 years and has been using stock in wilderness areas since the early 1990s. A Leave No Trace Master Educator, he teaches Trainer Courses to people who then become Leave No Trace Trainers. Reedy has been involved with public land issues for over 15 years, serving on committees and boards in addition to doing volunteer trail maintenance.

Reedy feels without a doubt the biggest and most far-reaching issue BCHA is wrestling with

today is the U.S. Forest Service's new trail classification plan. As originally proposed, "it would have eliminated about 40 percent of pack and saddle stock use in the wilderness by lowering maintenance standards so the trails wouldn't be adequate for stock," says Reedy.

Although attempts were made to show the detrimental effects this plan would have and the fact that the public had not been consulted, BCHA felt they were not being heard. For the first time as an organization, they took the major step of litigation in filing suit against the methods used to implement the plan. Because of their persistence, the U.S. Forest Service was made to perform a public input process and revise their plan accordingly.

Exactly how can a non-profit organization like Back Country Horsemen of America take on the big guys and achieve results? First of all, by being involved with the issue right from the start. "Once plans are ready to be implemented, it's very hard

to change them," Reedy says. He relates one incident that was a difficult learning experience. "Mount Rainier National Park was proposing blocking stock. We weren't on top of that one, so few of us showed up at the meeting to comment. We ended up losing all but one trail within the whole park for stock use."

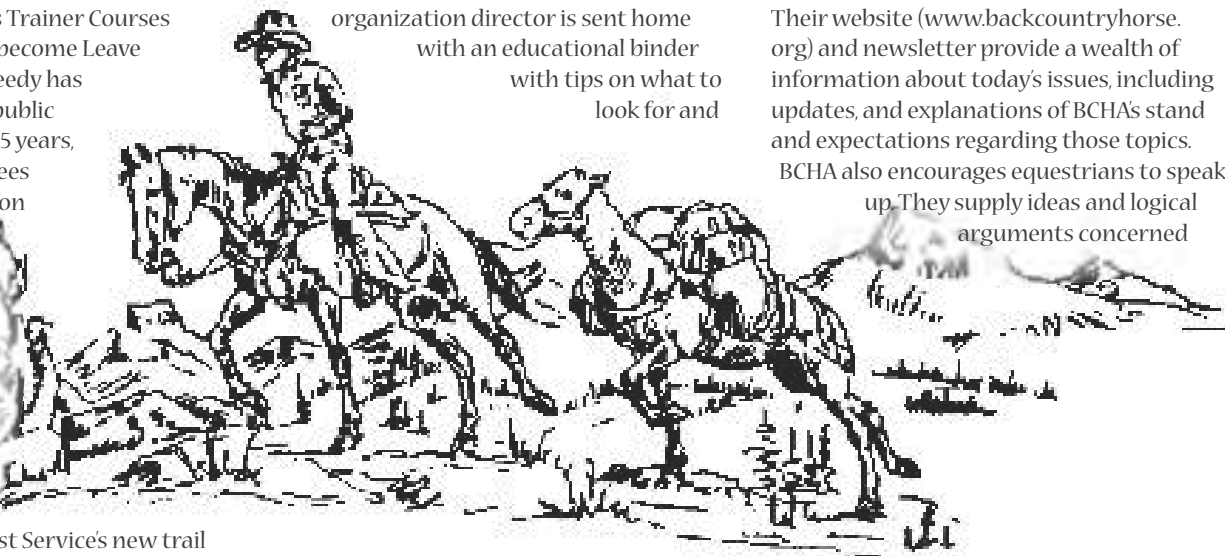
"But at other parks, when we had people at the meeting, we often came away with more than we expected. Now we try to educate our members about how to recognize potential issues and where to watch for public hearings. Every state organization director is sent home with an educational binder

with tips on what to look for and

with state and national organizations to further the cause of stock users. "We are a member of the American Horse Council and we partner off and on with various groups like the American Hiking Society and the Washington Wilderness Coalition. We also belong to many organizations that obtain funding for Forest Service projects and similar causes. We do try to form as many partnerships as we can," Reedy says.

BCHA recognizes the significance of individuals and empowers the average stock user to join in preserving stock use in wilderness areas and public lands. Their website (www.backcountryhorse.org) and newsletter provide a wealth of information about today's issues, including updates, and explanations of BCHA's stand and expectations regarding those topics.

BCHA also encourages equestrians to speak up. They supply ideas and logical arguments concerned



how to find out when the next forest or park management plan is due to take place. We find we are much more effective this way," says Reedy.

BCHA knows the value of a face-to-face conversation and seeks out meetings with people in a position to make a difference. In their efforts to avoid further litigation in the U.S. Forest Service trail reclassification issue, Reedy made a number of trips to Washington, D.C., to meet with Deputy Chief of the National Forest System Joel Holtrip, Director of Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers Chris Brown, and Director RHVR of Recreation & Heritage Resources Jim Bedwell. BCHA has also scheduled an on-the-ground meeting with them in an effort to demonstrate exactly how their original plan would severely impact pack and saddle stock use on public lands.

Appreciating the hard work and dedication of others, BCHA collaborates

citizens can use in their letters and emails to our legislators and other people of influence.

Through this multi-faceted approach, Back Country Horsemen of America is safeguarding our right to ride horses in the last few undeveloped acres of the United States. BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. BCHA has member organizations and affiliates across the nation, representing 24 states from coast to coast.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: www.backcountryhorse.org, call 888-893-5161, or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367.

The future of horse use on public lands is in our hands.