

For Immediate Release: March 1, 2014

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Back Country Horsemen of Missoula Celebrates 40 Years

By Connie Basham

Following the vision of the original founding members from the Flathead Valley, it didn't take much convincing for a few Missoula horseman and packers joining in kindred spirits, to form the second affiliated chapter of Back Country Horsemen in the early part of 1974. On April 4-6, 2014 Missoula Back Country Horseman will celebrate their 40th year of affiliation as part of the national organization of BCHA.

BCH of Missoula will be sharing this celebration with the Wilderness Association for their 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The unification of these two chapters, later joined by members from Idaho, became the backbone of the Back Country Horsemen of America, as we know it today. Thanks to these charter members - Mike Chandler, Smoke Elser, Jim Brogger, Ray Roberts, Chuck Smith, John Lance and Fred Hartkorn, Missoula's chapter has grown to be one of the largest in the nation.

Developing a sustained working relationship with many agencies and organizations, Missoula Back Country Horsemen dealt with numerous issues over the decades which threatened stock use on public lands. Issues including, trail and trailhead closures and abandonment; access problems; endangered species; user permits; trail sharing disputes; and other land use concerns.

Working with local, state and federal agencies, BCH of Missoula members have spent countless hours, weeks, months and years pouring over forest management plans, congressional issues, environmental matters and a host of other concerns facing stock use of the back country. Vast amounts of time and labor, both human and equine, have gone into building, clearing and maintaining trail systems, trail head facilities, camp facilities, bridges and buildings to protect and promote horse use in Montana. These efforts have benefited numerous trail users insuring our continued presence while remaining a valued advocate for Montana's wildland.

BCH of Missoula/Montana have always been actively involved in wilderness designation and preservation throughout the state. The Missoula chapter was one of many that helped stave off drilling for oil along the Rocky Mountain Front of the Bob Marshall Wilderness preserving its untouched wildness forever.

With the objective of educating and encouraging sensible, responsible horse and stock use, Missoula BCH sponsored the Equine Expo for public involvement. They proudly and actively participate in the use and enjoyment of those successful efforts to uphold our horse heritage in Montana's back country.

For convention information visit: www.bchmt.org