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### **Why We Need Right to Ride Protection**

When Senator Hubert Humphrey introduced the first wilderness bill in 1956, he assured the American public that "existing uses and privileges are respected in this bill," "this bill will not interfere with, but will perpetuate, the present multiple-purpose administration of these national forest areas." Provisions were made in the law to protect uses not normally considered to be 'wilderness uses' such as grazing, airfields, and motor boats where these uses were already established. Use of pack and saddle stock was a dominant means of access, and it was beyond anyone's comprehension that it would someday be crowded out by increased backpacking or regulated out to provide opportunities for a minority of foot travelers who simply prefer not to share the areas with recreational stock users. We believe 'Right to Ride' legislation is necessary and timely to correct the nation-wide trend of federal land managers and federal agencies unnecessarily limiting equestrian access to public lands. We are in the process of cataloguing a more comprehensive list of examples of problems we are experiencing, however, we have included a few below to illustrate our point:

-- USDA's National Trail Classification System: this proposed federal rule proposes to change the current three category classification system for NFS trails that evolved over, and has been time tested for, nearly a hundred years. The proposed revision views trails in an entirely different manner -- as a recreational facility rather than a means of transportation-- which will result in traditional stock users being denied the ability to access huge areas of our National Forest that have historically been available to them. Based on the new classification scheme and erroneous wilderness management principles that assert that wilderness should be managed to provide recreation opportunities only at the primitive end of the spectrum, we expect that much of the wilderness trail system will be identified for minimal management not designed or actively managed for equestrians. As a result, we will be locked out of these areas. This appears to be an accommodation for the anti-stock element that selfishly demand that any other users who they don't like around, such as equestrians, be excluded. While generalized allegations have been made that equestrians damage the environment wherever they go, these blanket allegations have never been justified. These restrictions simply have no basis in any actual safety or environmental need and simply come down to one user group's aesthetic preferences.

-- Ansel Adams, John Muir and Dinkey Lakes Wildernesses; Inyo and Sierra National Forests, California: In a draft of a management plan for the Ansel Adams, John Muir, Dinkey Lakes, and Monarch Wildernesses, Forest Service planners recognized that some users do not like to encounter recreational stock in wilderness. To address the concerns of this small minority, the agency proposed an opportunity class system which "would be allocated to offer the user a variety of wilderness experiences." Opportunity class A would provide a setting where **any** encounters with stock parties would exceed limits of acceptable change and Forest Plan standards; opportunity class B was nearly as restrictive, and together they comprised 85% of the total area. As a result of public outcry and the intervention of California legislators, the agency re-thought their management approach abandoning the opportunity class approach. It persisted, however, in favoring the backpacker segment through a subsequent document that downgraded management standards on much of the trail system. Nearly 60% (485,568 acres) of these wildernesses would be accessed by trails managed to a standard that would either not accommodate, or would not safely permit access with, pack and saddle stock (including a number of trails that cross major trans-Sierra passes).

-- The White River National Forest Travel Management Plan, Colorado: This plan will close horse stock use in areas of the WRNF. This is the largest NF in the U.S. and is located in Colorado. This proposal

creates new areas where hikers will not run into any stock (limiting current horse access). Some of the trails are proposed to be closed to horses even though they are very lightly used. The managers have not demonstrated the need (safety, maintenance, etc.) to warrant these proposed changes.

-- In the Sawtooth Wilderness of Idaho, Forest Service planners proposed to limit camping with recreational stock to the most heavily impacted portion of the area and to require them to pack feed for their animals (a provision that would severely limit the length of time stock users could stay in the wilderness). After an extensive effort, including inquiries from Idaho legislators, the restrictions were limited to the eastern half of the wilderness. On a field trip with a Back Country Horsemen representative, the measures were defended by reference to a survey conducted by college students from an eastern university who determined that many visitors preferred not to see stock in the wilderness, and recommendations of a Forest Service researcher who determined that it is more efficient to prevent damage to high areas than to rehabilitate them. The areas covered by the restrictions (the more scenic and attractive portion of the wilderness) had been accessed with, and grazed by, stock since the late 1800s, however, and managers acknowledged that stock use had not increased (and may actually have decreased) since the areas were designated as wilderness. No monitoring data documenting impact trends were provided to justify the measures implemented.

-- Managers of the Bridger Wilderness in Wyoming, have closed some of the more scenic and attractive destination areas to camping with recreational stock. These sites were popular before the wildernesses were designated, and some of the attractive locations even had agency provided toilets to accommodate the impacts. Removal of these facilities did not, however, remove the evidence of use. Recreational use, especially backpacking, has increased considerably since designation; however, stock use is the only segment that has been prohibited from camping in these premier areas.

-- On the Hoosier National Forest in Indiana, in an effort to attract stock users away from the wilderness, a task force recommended a reduction in wilderness horse trails from an estimated 110 miles to 35 miles even though the Dean Wilderness was created over a network of old horse trails and roads serving early homesteads and communities. Horseback riding was recognized as a legitimate use of forest lands, and horsemen were promised an expansion of the trail system outside wilderness. Eventually trail opportunities for equestrians were created, however, even the 'sweat equity' donated by equestrian groups has not been enough to stop the recurring push to restrict and/or deny pack and saddle stock use even more. Prior to 1995, the Hoosier did not have a designated trail system so there were many miles of trails available for equestrians. Had the "right to ride" been in place those trails would still be available to ride today. The Hoosier National Forest now has a designated trail system that limits your riding experience to high user impact trails and severe ticketing if you ride off the trail to those scenic areas once available to riders. (For more information on trail management in the Hoosier National Forest see the 2007 forest plan revision: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hoosier/project\\_docs/scoping/cvr\\_ltr\\_new%20trail%20plan.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hoosier/project_docs/scoping/cvr_ltr_new%20trail%20plan.htm))

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