

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
between
BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF MONTANA
and
MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

PURPOSE

Back Country Horsemen of Montana (BCH) was formed in 1973 to perpetuate the traditional use and enjoyment of horses and pack stock in Montana's backcountry.

The Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) was formed in 1958 to conserve the remaining wilderness of Montana and the outdoor traditions these public lands sustain.

In 1974, the Montana Wilderness Association published the Nation's first "Guide for Using Horses in Mountain Country" in order to "insure that saddle horses and pack strings will always be a part of the mountain way of life."

Travel by pack and saddle stock is an honored and long-standing part of the culture, skills and western traditions of Montana wilderness.

Back Country Horsemen of Montana's mission provides for the continued commitment to assisting public wildland management agencies with trails maintenance and wildland management decisions protecting Montana's wild places, while also educating all users in wise and ethical stock use, using latest "Leave No Trace" principles on Montana's wildlands.

Members of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and the Montana Wilderness Association pledge to support the ethical and traditional use of pack and saddle stock in wilderness "as part of the mountain way of life."

For a quarter century, members of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and the Montana Wilderness Association have worked shoulder-to-shoulder to safeguard and pass on undiminished our western heritage and freedom to enjoy Montana wilderness, quiet mountain trails and outdoor traditions.

In the 1980s, MWA and BCH leaders joined forces in a successful effort to prevent energy exploration and leasing throughout Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness Country.

In the 1980s and 90s, MWA and BCH leaders worked together in the Montana Wildlands Coalition to press for passage of legislation to help complete Montana's unfinished wilderness legacy.

MWA and BCH members worked together for a 2001 Montana State Trails Plan that recognizes the rightful heritage of quiet mountain trails and assures a fair share of state trails funds be made available for nonmotorized trail projects.

TRADITIONAL MONTANA TRAILS

Montana pack, saddle and foot trails were originally established and maintained for generations as quiet mountain paths for traditional travel by people and pack stock.

Today there is increasing pressure for mountain pack trails to be converted into all-terrain vehicle roads, increasing conflicts and displacing traditional trail uses. Results of the Montana Trail User Survey¹ show that less than 16% of backcountry equestrians agree that off-road vehicles are compatible with horseback riding on Montana trails.

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are neither historic nor established traditional uses of Montana backcountry trails. Modern ATVs were effectively prohibited on all national forest trails by the “forty-inch rule”—until this rule was eliminated by the Washington Office of the U.S. Forest Service on June 25, 1990.

This unwise decision was made without consulting principal stakeholders such as the Back Country Horsemen of Montana and the Montana Wilderness Association.

Chief of the Forest Service Dale Bosworth describes “unmanaged” OHV recreation as one of the four principle threats to the future of America’s national forests.

Without responsible limits and effective management, unmanaged OHV traffic will reduce public access to the traditional mountain solitude and backcountry character cherished by so many national forest visitors.

Back Country Horsemen of Montana and Montana Wilderness Association agree that the first step for restoring wise management is to set effective and responsible limits to off-road vehicle uses that safeguard wilderness, nonmotorized backcountry areas and quiet mountain trails.

In order to protect traditional use and enjoyment of Montana’s roadless backcountry, the U.S. Forest Service should manage historic mountain pack, saddle and foot trails for traditional, nonmotorized uses.

HERITAGE TRAILS

Montana is home to outstanding mountain heritage trails that traverse multiple ranger districts, parks and national forests. Examples include the Sapphires Crest Trail,

¹“The Montana Trail Users Survey, Aug. 1994, Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, p13 “Horseback Riding”

Stateline Trail, Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, Nez Perce Trail, Gallatin Crest Trail and Swan Alpine Trail.

These are historic mountain trails established for traditional foot, pack and saddle travel that merit a special commitment to maintain and manage for traditional foot and pack stock travel, uses and enjoyment.

Members of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and the Montana Wilderness Association pledge to work in common purpose to so protect and perpetuate the traditional use and enjoyment of Montana's quiet mountain trails and backcountry.

Further, members of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and Montana Wilderness Association will assist federal land managing Agencies in identifying, restoring and maintaining in perpetuity a system of Montana heritage trails.

PRIMITIVE ROADLESS BACKCOUNTRY

The U.S. Forest Service has inventoried approximately 6.4 million acres of unroaded backcountry lands, traversed by trails. These roadless backcountry lands and trails offer a multitude of outstanding recreational opportunities including backcountry hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and travel by foot and pack and saddle stock.

The presence of backcountry trails and conditions—beyond the reach of roads and traffic—is increasingly recognized as a valuable recreational asset, a defining feature of Montana's western heritage.

Members of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and Montana Wilderness Association pledge to work together to encourage and support efforts by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management to manage large tracts of public lands as wilderness and high-quality primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized recreation offering traditional backcountry enjoyment by foot and pack and saddle stock.

PARTNERS IN MONTANA'S WILD PUBLIC LAND HERITAGE

Members of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and Montana Wilderness Association have a long and honorable history of working for the benefit of future generations to conserve, maintain and enjoy our western mountain heritage. We pledge to continue that partnership for the wise use, conservation and enjoyment of Montana wildlands, wilderness and quiet backcountry trails as stated herein,

Signed

Date

Date