My Recollections of the Bear Creek Fire by Al Koss, Fire Public Information Officer

August 20, 2015, Spotted Bear Ranger District

On August 12, 2015 a number of fires were ignited by lightning storms that passed through the Spotted Bear Ranger District. As the fires across the Spotted Bear Ranger District grew and became more complex, I was assigned as a Public Information Officer for the Spotted Bear Fires on Andy Huntsberger’s Type II Incident Management Team. My duties were to provide information regarding the fires to the media, Forest Service employees and the general public. Each day I prepared a fact sheet that included fire suppression strategies and updates for that day. I was in close contact with all the local newspapers, TV and radio stations, and other media outlets. I also gathered photos from firefighters who were working on fire suppression activities.

One of these fires, the Bear Creek Fire, was located on the upper slopes near the head of Bunker Creek. This fire remained small until the afternoon of August 20th.

On Thursday, August 20, I had the opportunity to travel with Incident Commander, Andy Huntsberger, as he made a routine check of the Bear Creek Fire. We traveled to the Bear Creek Fire in the Bunker Creek drainage. We stopped and visited with Beth Gardner who was serving as a Fire Behavior Analyst. She was watching the fire and noting weather conditions and progression of the fire. She told us that the fire was approximately 460 acres. She also mentioned with the cloud inversions covering the fire area, activity was about the same as it had been for the past few days. The fire was making short uphill runs and not increasing in activity or size. This was at approximately 1:00 p.m. After watching the fire for a while, we decided it was time to head back to the ranger station.

On our way down the Meadow Creek Road we met outfitter Pat Clanton who has a trailhead camp at the Gorge Creek Trailhead. He was on his way to town. We mentioned to him if the Bear Creek Fire increased in size, his camp at Gorge Creek Trailhead could possibly be burned over if the fire moved down Bunker Creek toward the trailhead. Andy suggested that he might want to move his employees and family out of the area, but it wasn’t necessary at this time. His employees just needed to keep a good “heads up.” Andy said he’d keep Pat’s employees and family updated of fire activity.

Just after visiting with Pat, we received a radio call from Beth Gardner who said that the cloud inversion had lifted, the temperature had raised, the winds increased and the relative humidity had dropped. The Bear Creek Fire was increasing in size and moving down the Bunker Creek drainage rapidly. We turned around and headed back to Beth’s location. After assessing conditions and seeing how the fire was moving and building up steam, Andy decided that Pat Clanton’s Gorge Creek Trailhead camp needed to be evacuated. He also suggested a precautionary evacuation at the Meadow Creek Trailhead.
THE PURPOSE OF BCH
The Back Country Horsemen is organized to:

a) Perpetuate enjoyable common sense use of horses in the back country.

b) Assist government agencies in maintenance and management of the resource.

c) Educate, encourage and solicit active public participation in wise and sustaining use of horses and use by people commensurate with our heritage and the back country resource.

BCH Meeting Calendar
All GENERAL meetings are held on the SECOND Tuesday of each month. All BOARD meetings are held on the FOURTH Tuesday of each month. Everyone is welcome!!! Meetings are held at the Fish, Wildlife and Parks building, 490 Meridian Rd. in Kalispell and begin at 7:30 PM.

March
8th — General Meeting
22nd — Board Meeting

April
12th — General Meeting
26th — Board Meeting

May
10th — General Meeting
24th — Board Meeting

President’s Corner by Ralph Hopkins
We are starting a new year and there will be many opportunities for all of our members to participate in chapter activities.

As a service organization, we focus our energies on education of resource users and boots on the ground work to help maintain the resource. Our activities are planned around the organization’s purpose. These activities should promote BCH as a service organization and educate our members and other resource users on best methods.

In preparation of the upcoming project season, recertification in cross cut and chainsaw use, emphasizing safety, will be performed in April by the Spotted Bear Ranger District. Thank You Spotted Bear! Please contact Gary Dalen or me if you are interested in renewing your saw certification.

First aid training, required for saw certification, and Defensive Horse Safety, will be offered to members before projects begin. Contact Gary Dalen or me if you are interested in this training. Also, please be sure you are current on your training requirements, fill out a Volunteer Application and read the Job Hazardous Analysis forms provided by the Forest Service.

We have projects planned for every month during the summer, so please watch your email, BCHF website (http://www.bchmt.org/flatbch/) and the Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/bchflat) for more information. We will be updating them regularly. After completing all this training, why waste it by not joining us on a project and giving back to the Wilderness.

Camping of some sort is usually a part of a project so wear your work clothes cause you will get dirty from the trail and smoky from the campfire.

See you at the hitch rack or on the trail.

Ralph

“The idea of wilderness needs no defense, it only needs defenders.”

-Edward Abbey

Check out BCH of the Flathead’s new website at: http://www.bchmt.org/flatbch/

Please send comments/additions to your webmaster Deborah Schatz.
Additional firefighters from Spotted Bear were dispatched to help move people from Gorge Creek Trailhead. All of the people at Pat Clanton's Gorge Creek Trailhead camp were moved to safety. By this time it was evident that the fire was moving quickly and it would be necessary to remove any people and horses from the Meadow Creek Outfitters' Packer's Roost area. There were about 70 head of stock at Packer's Roost. District Ranger Deb Mucklow dispatched all of the stock trucks and trailers from Spotted Bear to help in the removal of stock. Outfitters in the area also came to help. Firefighters and outfitter employees helped catch up stock and get them loaded into the trucks and moved them out of the area to safety. As the last few horses were being loaded up, ash and fire brands were beginning to fall in the corral area. Andy Huntsberger ordered all personnel to leave the area. The fire had moved down Bunker Creek and was very near the Meadow Creek Trailhead area.

All of the stock was removed from Packer's Roost safely and no injuries occurred. A few outfitter vehicles, tack sheds, trailers, hay tents, and corral poles were burned as the fire spread through Packer's Roost. Unfortunately most of Pat Clanton's camp tents, hay, and tack vehicles were burned as the fire moved through the Gorge Creek Trailhead.

Fifteen vehicles were parked in the public parking area of Meadow Creek and astonishingly none were damaged. The trailhead area and Packer's Roost have had two vegetative thinning projects in the past few years. It is believed these thinnings created a fuel break to protect the vehicles in the parking area, along with the trailhead bulletin boards, loading ramp, feed bunks, hitch rails, the Meadow Creek Bridge and many of the structures not near hay piles at Packer's Roost. The thinned trees and the reduced ground vegetation appeared to slow the fire down in the trailhead area. It allowed the fire to move from the tree tops to the ground, creating a less intense, slower fire. Thinning projects at the Gorge Creek Trailhead apparently saved two of Pat Clanton's campers and the trailhead facilities.

When fire personnel assessed how much area had burned from the Bear Creek Fire on August 20, they determined that the fire burned over 17,000 acres in just over six hours. The fire grew from approximately 460 acres to over 17,700 acres that afternoon.

The fire continued to burn south into the Bob Marshall Wilderness for the next few weeks. A number of miles of the Eastside South Fork Trail #80 were burned over, prompting a trail safety closure. After fire activity subsided, trail rehabilitation began and occurred throughout October and the trail was eventually reopened in early November.

The Bear Creek Fire burned over 70,000 acres from August through October.
13 TRAIL PROJECTS TOTAL covering 437 miles outside the Wilderness and 146 miles inside the Wilderness. This included 6 projects that packed in tools and equipment for BMWF, MCC and CDT. It also included 7 projects for FS and GNP, doing ground work installing waterbars and treadwork and packing materials.

COMMUNITY SERVICE - 1068 hours Family Forestry Expo involved 104 hours of volunteer time presenting to school classes from around the valley. Rebecca Farms involved 846 hours of volunteer time to promote THE EVENT and horsemanship.

EDUCATION - 94 TOTAL HOURS Members were on hand for the Boone & Crockett summer camp, Boy Scout High adventure trip, and the CDT Wild Fest. Members also attended 24 hours of Forest Service Plan Revision Public Meetings.

INCOME TOTALED $17,180 (Dues = $4,380, Fundraising = $2,050, Donations = $10,750 includes $10k received 12/30/14). EXPENDITURES TOTALED $11,500 (Dues = $2,800, Newsletter = $1,500, Training = $550, Administrative = $5,180, Equipment = $1,470).
Ken Ausk Service Award

In memory of the exemplary leadership, dedication and service Ken Ausk gave to the Back Country Horsemen organization, the Ausk family created the “Ken Ausk Service Award” to be presented to the individual who, during any given year, best demonstrates and upholds the tenets of public land stewardship as endorsed by the Back Country Horsemen.

The first Ken Ausk Service Award was presented to Ralph Hopkins at the February general meeting. Ralph showed a tremendous amount of leadership in keeping the Flathead chapter following the purposes of the organization while serving as the chapter's president in 2015. He motivated other people to get involved in keeping our backcountry open to horse use. He kept our meetings interesting and varied with several events - from a visit to Stu Sorensen’s historic museum, to a hideaway up in the backcountry at Happy Rhodes’, to an awards and bonfire potluck at his house. His computer savvy and understanding of budgets and grants is very valuable. He stays in communication with the Forest Service and other agencies, and keeps chapter members informed via email and Facebook. Congratulations and thank you, Ralph!

Your Officers for 2016 by Keni Hopkins

After elections held at the December general meeting, the members of BCH reelected Ralph Hopkins as President, Steve Barker as Vice President, and Keni Hopkins as Treasurer.

Ron Stuber was elected to a two-year term as State Board Director, and Keni Hopkins was reelected as Alternate State Board Director (one-year term). Deborah Schatz is our holdover State Board Director and will serve another year in her current term.

With four positions open on the Board of Directors, we elected Gary Dalen, Jonah Libsack-Maynard, Andy Maynard, and Greg Schatz for two-year terms. Our holdover Directors who have one year remaining in their terms are Verna Barker, Ed Langlois, Kay Lewis, Stu Sorensen, and Jim Thramer.

A big thank you to all our Officers and Directors who give unselfishly of their time and talent. Thanks also to Nominating Committee, Committee Chairs and all those who help keep BCH a vital and growing organization for present and future Wilderness riders.

Become a member in 2016!!!

Dues are $45 per year for a family, or $35 per year for single membership. This price includes all newsletters - local, state and national. Please fill in this form and mail it to BCH of the Flathead, P. O. Box 1192, Columbia Falls, MT 59912.

Name ____________________________
Spouse’s Name ____________________________
Mailing Address ____________________________
City/State/Zip ____________________________
Phone (very important) ____________________________
E-mail: ____________________________

____ $45 Family (# in family _____)     ____ $35 Single
____ New Member     ____ Renewal

A 501(c)(3) Non-profit Organization
December 5th Board Meeting, BCHMT

RTP Grants – It is time to think about next year. Brad advised against applying for MCC crews through RTP as these requests were not awarded in 2015. Instead, apply for our own RTP grant if that is what we need. Chapters who were not awarded funds can reapply for the same project. We can also apply for a project that takes up to three years to complete and we will get paid in three installments as we turn in our reports. Brad suggested we would receive about half of the funds we apply for – as this is how it went last year. Letters of support from cooperating agencies are very important.

Constitution Changes – the state board is considering three changes to the state’s constitution. First, they are considering removing the term limit of state directors (it is currently six years). Second, they are considering changing the term of state directors to a calendar year (it is currently from the post-convention meeting through the pre-convention meeting). Thirdly, they are considering defining primary and secondary memberships (currently not addressed in the constitution). We will likely vote on these at the 2016 convention in Great Falls, April 1-3, hosted by the East Slope chapter.

Chairman’s Award – Connie asked all chapters to think about nominating their chapter or someone in their chapter for her Chairman’s Award. Describe a project or event that we feel qualifies and email this to Connie Long.

Convention – Resolutions are due eight weeks before Convention. All resolutions will be posted on the state’s website, so chapters can avoid duplication and work together on a topic if desired. We have a packet with convention registrations and raffle tickets. Raffle items are a gun, pack saddle and $500 gift certificate to Towne Pump.

FS Agency Liaison – The state is considering hosting an overnight trip into the backcountry for Region One’s Forester LeAnn Marten and other higher up FS employees, similar to the trip we did in 2014. The purpose is to get the FS into the backcountry so they understand the issues we face with trails.

Belt Buckles – The state is considering ordering a lady’s belt buckle, similar to the one we have now only smaller, so it is more comfortable to wear. This design was the favorite. Is there any interest? Please let Deb or Ron know. Price would be around $110.

Volunteer Agreements – Joni Packard described a new kind of volunteer agreement she calls a Tandem Agreement. Our chapter would enter in to our usual Volunteer Agreement with the FS to obtain the Workman’s Comp coverage, and also enter into a Cost Share Agreement IF we want to be paid anything more than mileage and per diem (food).

Joni also clarified that under a Cost Share Agreement, the FS can not require us to carry comp insurance. They can deny us the project is we don’t have it, but since there is really nowhere to obtain such insurance, they likely won’t do that.

Volunteer Hours – BCH MT’s volunteer contributions for 2015 totaled $1,036,000. This included 25,038 hours and 112,591 travel miles.

Member Lists – Chapters are asked to update their member lists on the BCHMT website. Also, please consider opting for the state newsletter via email, this saves the state much needed funds.

Volunteer Agreements – The Youth Challenge committee reported on plans for 2016. We will again participate in the Boone and Crockett’s Outdoor Skills Camp near Dupuyer in June. We had one full day last year and hope to get more time this year, as there are 14 young people and a lot of things to cover. We will also participate in Montana Natural Resources’ Youth Camp at Lubrecht Experimental Forest near Greenough, July 10-14. During this camp, we will give two-hour demos throughout one day. We will also participate in the Jack Creek Preserve Foundation’s Youth Camp, August 6-9, with a one-hour demo, repeated throughout one day.

The Youth Challenge committee needs your help. We have committed to developing a youth program and can’t do it without your help. Please contact Greg Schatz or Kathy Hundley to sign up.

Welcome New Members!

Please welcome new members: Thomas Hickey, Denise Bickford, Gyle Nix and Sheila Richards. Also welcome back returning members: Rick Maedje and Gina Swartz.

Annual Membership Dues are Due!

$35 single • $45 family
Remember - you must be a paid member to vote at meetings!!

Welcome New Members!
2016 Back Country Horsemen
STATE CONVENTION
Hosted by: East Slope Back Country Horsemen
Convention Theme:
Reminded of our Past, Planning for our Future

Holiday Inn
Holiday Inn and Convention Center 1100 5th Street South
Great Falls, Montana 59405 Phone: 1-888-HOLIDAY
Local: (406)727-7200 Fax: (406)268-0472

There has been a block of rooms reserved at the Holiday Inn for all convention attendees, just let them know that you are attending the Back Country Horsemen State Convention. More rooms are available if needed.

Featured Banquet Entertainment
Wylie Gustafson
Wylie is an American singer-songwriter who has toured nationally and internationally with his band Wylie and the Wild West. Wylie also breeds and trains cutting horses.

Live Auction
Auctioneer: Zane Drishinski (Z-Man) Renowned rodeo clown and auctioneer.

Each Chapter is asked to bring one item for the State Organization as this is the fund raiser for BCHMT. (Item should be at least $50.00)

Silent Auction
Dance
To the music of The Crawford Bros. Band

Auction items will be on display at the convention. Individuals can also donate items. Any chapter can also donate an item for the silent auction. Contact: LeAnn Hermance (406)278-5378 (hermance@3rivers.net)

Vendors
The vendor areas will be on display throughout the convention. If you have or know of somebody interested in having a booth, please let us know. Contact: R. Fred Fitzpatrick (richfitz@3rivers.net)

Crosscut Saw Competition! Photo Contest! Workshop/Seminars!
Sunday Church, officiating Clete Gregory with Marty Metz Music

We Hope the 2016 Back Country Horsemen of Montana State Convention will meet your expectations!
Winning applicant will learn the hands on skills of packing horses and mules on this 5 day, 4 night wilderness (LNT) educational trip. Only $1725.00 PER PERSON!

Students learn by doing the hands on work which is the best way to retain packing skills. We have a classroom setting the first day. We start with teaching you the benefits of the Decker Pack Saddle and the traditional packing methods that have been developed over the years. Next is proper saddling and adjusting of the Decker. We then teach you how to manty, load, balance and watch the loads on the trail. Other skills that we cover are stock care, saddling, riding your trail horse or mule, stock management in a wilderness setting, Leave-No-Trace (LNT) techniques for stock use and much more. We also cover backcountry meal planning and preparation. We plan to move camps every day so there is plenty of practice. This is a working, learning trip and is not intended to be a relaxing vacation. There will be down time to relax, but we want you to learn as much as possible in this short time in the Wilderness.

This class will benefit anyone who wants to learn horse and mule packing skills and learn how to practice Leave-No-Trace techniques to protect our wilderness resource. Stock users have a responsibility to be good stewards of the land, and this is the philosophy that we want to share with you. We teach you how to select a camp site, how to set it up and what equipment is light, comfortable and packs well. Both Connie and Mack are LNT Master Educators for Stock Use and students will receive a LNT certificate of completion. Students will also receive a certificate for completing the Packing Skills Class.

**Application for Back Country Horsemen Montana Scholarship**

Target age range of participants is 18 to 25 years of age. The chosen participant needs to provide their own transportation and be at the North Fork of the Blackfoot trailhead at 10 am on Saturday, June 11th to begin the class. Scholarship applicants can go on-line and fill in the form OR write an essay OR provide a short video with the answers to the questions. Applications are due by March 1, 2016. The scholarship will be awarded April 1, 2016.

Apply on-line at: http://www.bchmt.org  Mail essays and video DVDs to: Greg Schatz, 4720 Trumble Creek Road, Columbia Falls, MT 59912 or Kathy Hundley, 3448 Wright Way, Darby, MT 59829. Questions? Call Greg 406.261.5450 or Kathy 406.363.8230.