Decker Dispatch


OUR PURPOSES
- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America’s back country and wilderness.
- To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
- To assist various agencies responsible for the maintenance and management of public lands.
- To educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustained use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public, commensurate with our heritage.
- To foster and encourage formation of new Back Country Horsemen organizations.

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Youth Education on the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch
August 3rd, 2016 by Bernie and Sherri Lionberger, Last Chance Back Country Horsemen

Our adventure in education actually began on the afternoon of August 2nd when we arrived at a meadow on the ranch to prepare for introducing around 15 youth, ages 14 to 17, to the joys of dealing with the Equine species. Sherri and I were soon joined by Merlyn Huso of the East Slope Chapter of Back Country Horsemen. We were sitting around discussing our plans for the following day when Merlyn looked up on a small ridge about eighty yards away and said, “well look at that bear.” This rather large bear was characterized by a rather large hump in the area of the front shoulders and rather small ears. We were rather shocked at what we saw, but the bear ambled along like he was on a mission, and never even turned his head to look at us, and so the adventure was off to a lively start!

Greg Schatz of the Flathead chapter soon arrived, fresh off of a packing trip into the “Bob”. More discussion of our plan for the next day was had, we high lined the horses and mules and headed for a restful night’s sleep, the vision of grizzly bears dancing in our heads.

Around eight AM, Mark Himmel arrived and our cadre was complete.

[continued on the page 4]
LCBCH has had a very busy summer packed full of projects. (No pun intended!) While you read on you will get a good glimpse of what we’ve been up to directly from the individual project leaders. We were also privileged to receive a 2016-NHPA 50th Anniversary Historic Preservation Award for our contribution of the Tizer Cabin preservations and the pack support for the Carroll College Archaeological Project in the Gates of the Mountain Wilderness.

(National Trails Day) The LCBCH headed to the hills for a huge project of clearing three wilderness trails in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness. We had a good turnout with 35 members splitting up into 3 groups to clear 20 miles of trail of 197 trees. Later that month members participated in the Mann Gulch project which provided pack support for a group of smoke jumpers that set out to build and maintain the trail to the Mann Gulch Memorial site. The totals for that project were: Skilled Packing Hours = 106, traveled 165 trail miles, 72 actual hours to and from project, truck and trailer miles to and from Willow Creek =1,644. Number of Stock used 28 riding animals and 27 pack animals.

In July we corralled the animals long enough to work on some Forest Service Cabin projects. The Tizer Forest Service cabin got a new crown. Thanks to the diligent labor of our skilled volunteers the cabin roof was stripped and re-shingled with cedar shakes. Then later in July members showed up with tools in hand to clear the downed trees and fix the Forest Service pasture fence around the Kading Cabin.

We volunteered for multiple Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation projects. The first was Devils Glen/ Dearborn River Project, pack support in and out for trail maintenance crew on the Dearborn River Trail. We packed a weed crew in and out of Webb Lake, followed up by packing a trail crew in and out of Pretty Prairie.

Members provided pack support to the Elk Park aid station for the Helena Ultra Runners League (HURL) in the Elkhorn Mountains, 160 pounds of supplies were packed in.

In addition to riding, packing and building, we took time to be involved with the younger set by displaying packing equipment and animals for a kid’s day at Montana Wild and presentations at the Youth Education on the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch.

That wraps it up for LCBCH’S summer adventures. We are so thankful for the involvement of our members. Happy trails everyone, and until next time.
Hello again!
It has been a busy summer and that made the time go by way too quickly. I hope all of you had a fun and safe summer.

Since the last state board meeting and newsletter I’ve had the opportunity to represent you as your chairman. Our Regional pack trip up Monture Creek in June was very successful. Most of the group wanted to ride past camp to see Burnt Cabin. By the end of the first day we put 14 miles in the saddle. This took a lot of pre-planning and work to pull it off, but it will stay in the minds of our Region 1 Forester, Leann Marten, and her staff a long time, I’m sure. Smoke is very wise when he says there’s nothing better for a relationship than spending time around a campfire after a day in the saddle. Many thanks to all who made the trip possible.

I was asked to represent BCH on a panel of multiple user groups during a portion of a 3-day leadership seminar at Region 1 attended by Regional USFS staff as well as several Assistant District Chiefs. I sat between the bicycle and off-road users. During introductions we were asked to give a little information about the group we represented. I gave a quick history of BCH starting in Region 1 and what we accomplished in 2015 on the trails, as well as explaining we are one of the oldest partners of the USFS. Unlike any other group there, the BCH introduction brought a round of applause. We are very respected on state, regional, and national levels because of the work each and every one of you do and I thank you for that.

And I’m by no means the only one representing us. Thank you Charlie Russell chapter for providing a packing demo at the Wildfest in Great Falls in September. And thanks to each of you, as you -- perhaps unknowingly -- represent BCH each and every time you’re out on the trails, whether for pleasure or participating on trail project.

My vision for the state organization is to be more of a big brother, offering help to the local chapters. That doesn’t mean the directors have to take on more work but if we, as a state organization, can facilitate the sharing of talent our members at large have, we can help other chapters succeed.

Happy trails,

Brad Pollman
BCH Montana

New Saw Policy Notes
By Mark Himmel, Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen

Your current certification is good until it expires, at that time requirements under the new policy apply and you start using the new curriculum (if completed) or the current curriculum.

As soon as new sawyer database is completed, your credentials will be entered into the national database.

Volunteers can still be certified or recertified by Forest Service (FS) agency personnel. All certifications are good for three years.

All volunteers who use saws (chainsaw and/or crosscut) on National Forest System lands will be required to receive training, evaluation and certification (this includes those chapters currently working under a challenge cost share agreement.) You have one year from the policy effective date of July 19, 2016, to complete training, evaluation and certification (must be completed no later than July 19, 2017). This requirement applies to other operators and partner groups using saws as well.

Sawyers will still be required to be current in first aid and CPR prior to any saw training, evaluation or certification, and anytime while operating saws. Blood borne pathogen training is not required. Cross cut saw trainees are not required to have first aid and CPR.

For those volunteers who have the skill sets to advance to C level bucking and limbing there is an avenue. First the sawyer will have to demonstrate the ability to cut in highly complex situations (multiple leaners, spring poles etc.) Next the sawyer will have to demonstrate they can teach the course. None of this is really difficult, instructing the course is a lot like teaching Horse safety.

B Sawyer – Felling and Bucking – this sawyer will be able to conduct classroom and field training (but not certification) for A and B sawyers with prior written approval from the Forest Service Regional Saw Program manager.

I have been in contact with Todd Wilson, Acting Regional Saw Program Manager for Region 1 and hope to meet with him in early September and do some field training. We have also expanded the spreadsheet that you filled in earlier, we’re looking for sawyers’ info that will be transferred to the on line date base at some point. This will also give us an idea where training will be required before the next season starts.

The new training deals a lot with safety, bottom line we want our volunteers to know how to use their equipment and come back safe at the end of day.

Additional information and a copy of the Forest Service policy and Forest Service Saw Operations Guide can be found at: http://www.fs.fed.us/about-agency/regulations-policies/saw-policy
five instructors along with fourteen horses and mules. The kids arrived soon after, we had introductions, and found that they were all from South Carolina, and most had little to no experience with horses, but were ready to learn all they could in the time allotted to us.

We began by explaining what Back Country Horsemen was all about and the kinds of things we do out here in the wild west. We went through horse safety and the basics of the leave no trace principles, showed them our electric fences, high lines, as well as how picket pins and hobbles were used to contain the animals.

Right after lunch, hands-on began with the kids grooming and saddling both riding and pack stock. They man- teed up their loads and they packed up a string for Greg to lead through the meadow.

The full realization of how limited some of the kids experience really was, came when I overheard one say, “I’ve never seen a horse pee before”, another commented that she didn’t realize that horse poop doesn’t stink!

So, the day ended in late afternoon with the cadre discussing how things might be improved, especially in involving the kids with even more hands-on, if we are asked to do this again next year.

Editor’s note: We will have a follow up article in the next edition highlighting BCH’s participation in other camps.
By John Chepulis
National Director, BCH Montana

An update on U.S. Senate and House Bills BCHA has been watching:

**HR 845**—National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act was sponsored by Rep. Lummis R-WY, and Rep. Walz D-MN in February 2015. To date it has 84 co-sponsors, 43 Republican and 36 Democrat. Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-MT co-sponsored it in Feb. 2015. On 3/16/2015 the bill was referred to the subcommittee on Federal Lands for their consideration. No action taken since then. This Bill would significantly increase the role of volunteers and partners in National Forest System trail maintenance, and for other purposes.

**S.110**—National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act was sponsored by Sen. Enzi R-WY, and Sen Bennet D-CO in April of 2015. To date it has 23 co-sponsors, 14 Democrat, and 9 Republican, including both Sen Steve Daines, and Sen. Jon Tester who signed on in June of 2015. This Bill was introduced in the Senate in April 2015 with no further action taken. This Bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to publish in the Federal Register a strategy to significantly increase the role of volunteers and partners in National Forest System trail maintenance.

**HR 167**—Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, sponsored by Rep. Simpson R-ID, and Rep. Schrader D-OR. It has 147 co-sponsors, 81 Democrat, and 66 Republican. Rep. Zinke co-sponsored it in March 2015. Last action was on 3/2/2015 when it was referred to the Sub-Committee on Federal Lands. No action taken since then. This Bill would provide for adjustments to discretionary spending under section 251 (b)(2) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 to support wildfire suppression.

**S.235**—Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2015, sponsored by Senator’s Wyden D-OR, Cantwell D-WA, Risch R-ID, Bennet D-CO, Gardner R-CO, Balswin D-WI, and Senator Steve Daines R-MT. It has 21 co-sponsors, 17 Democrat, and 4 Republican. S.235 was introduced in the Senate on 1/22/2015 and no further action has been taken. Senate Bill S.235 is to provide for wildfire suppression operations.

I don’t believe any action will be taken on these Bills until after the election, but continue to write and support our congressional delegation to keep these Bills moving forward.

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The first time I met Reba, brand US131, was at the Salmon Base Camp trailhead in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in August 2010. The tall, leggy redhead was going to pack in Charly’s gear. “Can you string her with your mule, I’m going to hike in,” Charly asked me. “Sure,” I said, planning to put my grey pack mule behind her. SPWBCH member, Terry Reed, and I were headed to Swet Lake Cabin to help Charly Mabbott, West Fork Wilderness Ranger, repair some broken boards in the porch floor of the cabin. It only took a few steps at the trailhead to realize that my molly mule was not going to let another lady get between her and Gus, my saddle horse. Making the quick switch we rode the next 10 miles to the cabin without a bauble. Over the next few years I did other projects with Charly and Reba and became quite fond of her.

I could tell right away what a great mule Reba was, and secretly thought to myself, “Gee, I sure wish I owned that mule!” Little did I know that fate would step in five years later in the fall of 2015 when the Forest Service decided to retire some of their mules. The FS was going to place them in good homes through non-profits for light duty and lots of TLC in their golden years. When I heard the news I immediately inquired about Reba. She had already been spoken for, and my heart sank. Several others were still available, so we began the process to acquire one. Joe and I had just lost a horse and a mule, 13 days apart, to broken legs… to this day we still don’t know how.

Then, to my surprise, I got a call from Deb Gale, Bitterroot National Forest Program Manager. She told me Reba was available if I still wanted her. “You bet,” I said and jumped with joy! And, so began Reba’s new career as an educator, continuing her career to help promote Back Country Horsemen and the ways of packing and wilderness.

Reba has spent the summer of 2016 accompanying me to local packing demos and two of our BCHMT summer Youth Camp demonstrations. Her calm, sweet nature, big brown eyes, aging slips of white hair down her big long head and those beautiful, long swiveling ears have endeared this sweetheart to all who meet her. Despite her height of over 16 hands, the kids have loved brushing and saddling her. The FS purchased Reba in November 1994. Best guess from their records is that Reba was foaled in ’88 or ’89, so even at age 28 a retired FS mule can ‘continue to serve’.

I asked Charly, who is now retired himself, to write a few thoughts about Reba. They confirm how special she is.

“Reba Gets a Promotion” by Charly Mabbott

I was out on an eight day hitch. Not that it takes me eight days to throw a hitch - but I was never going to make it in rodeo. Funny the things that come in eights. Like a week of work as a trail crew or Wilderness Ranger for the Forest Service in the Idaho Wilderness takes eight, ten hour days. Eight days a week. They call that a hitch.

I had worked with enough horses that thought the backcountry was a good place to hold a rodeo to be happy to be out, by myself, with two mules. At Red River I always ended up with last pick of the stock. Only a few years before Reba graced my stage with her presence, I was assigned to a horse named Doc and mule named Fool. It turned out Doc was an idiot and Fool’s first name was Nobody’s! I rode Doc one hitch before I switched to packing a horse and riding a mule. It was a conversation starter.

Fool had a reputation as a bad ass. Sort of like he was a biker mule. Black mule, black leather, big attitude. He would buck people off just to let them know he could. I let him know that I agreed that he was not only smarter than the average mule, but smarter than me, and pellets were priority one. He could work with that. He did.

Fast forward a few years to after the Swet Fire. I am working for the West Fork Ranger District on the Bitterroot National Forest. I still get last pick of the stock. The new riding mule turns out to be a little spooky? Give him to the Frank Church Wilderness Ranger. And give him the too tall red mule that slips her pad? Here we go on an eight day hitch with 99 and Reba.

They are both good mules. Only thing is 99, the one I’m riding, besides being a little spooky, is a bit head shy. Reba the pack mule is gentle as a dog and likes her ears scratched. We go up the Selway River and spend the first

[continued next page]
night in Swet Creek. The next day I have the bright idea of taking a short
cut to Mormon Camp and going cross
country through the wet meadows in
the head of Harrington Creek. 99 did
not like the squishy ground. Knee deep
in squish is nobody’s idea of a good
time. After some creative problem
solving we still arrived at Swet Cabin
with plenty of time for grazing before
dark.

In the morning 99 does not want
to take the bit – had enough of being
yanked around by the mouth in the wet
meadows the day before I guess. He’s
a big mule. We are not getting off to a
good start on our day. I look at Reba
standing there sweetly waiting to get
going. I look at 99, back at Reba… 99
has a few pounds on her but otherwise
they are close to the same size.

"Reba", says I, “how would you like
to be a riding mule?” Ten minutes later
99 is outfitted with a pack saddle, and
Reba is looking good with no notion it
seems of what is up next. I’m up next.
First standing on one side two times
with no reaction before swinging my
leg over and into the saddle. She runs
down to the barn and stops. That’s it.
Ten minutes later the three of us are
off to Harrington Saddle with Reba in
front. It all started right there. Reba
was my #1 safe, sweet ride for 13 years.

Reba proves mules can talk, and lis-
ten. I was in upper Swet Creek camped
at a fine level spot next to the creek.
This campground comes complete with a
spruce hotel, a saddle tree, and graz-
ing across the creek. I had done a lot
of work naturalizing this site, breaking
down developments and packing stuff
out. Now I was getting to just camp.

I was working with a big white
horse named Smoke at this time. One
of his strong points was being good
on a picket rope. It’s so great to picket
a horse and let your mules be on the
loose. At this camp the grazing is across
the creek, and mostly out of view. I had
just sat down to eat when Reba comes
over from the meadow, stands on the
edge of the creek and stomps her foot,
swings her tail, tosses her head, and
turns in circles – everything short of
barking to get my attention.

I got the message. Time to follow
Reba to go untangle the horse!

**BCHA Donates Over $11 Million in Volunteer Value**

Trail maintenance is the main-
stay of Back Country Horsemen of
America’s mission to keep trails open
for horse use. In every season, in all
weather, on any given weekend, BCH-
ers across the country commit them-
selves to the hard, exhausting, some-
times grueling work of making trails
accessible and safe.

In 2015, BCHA members logged
$11,238,375 of volunteer value, with
over 300,000 volunteer hours, and
over 1.5 million travel miles from 25
different states. BCHA is first and
foremost a service organization, so
every year is a high volunteer dona-
tion year. The grand total of BCHA’s
volunteer value for the last 20 years is
4,432,081 hours with a remarkable do-
nated value of $126,651,135.

Many of those volunteer hours
were spent improving multi-use trails,
multi-use trailheads, and sometimes
even trails where horses are prohib-
eted.
A couple years back Greg Schatz and his wife, Deborah, were giving a horse packing demonstration at a Montana Wilderness Association event. In the background there was an older fella watching the Columbia Falls couple, leaning up against a tree.

Deborah was intrigued by the man and struck up a conversation, while Greg continued his demonstration. When Greg was done, he walked up to the pair and Deborah looked at Greg and said, “Hey, you want to go to Mongolia?”

Turned out the man leaning up against the tree was Cliff Montagne, the director of Bioregions International, a nonprofit group that shares ideas with other regions of the world, particularly with Mongolia, which has a lot in common with Montana, despite being a half-world away.

Montagne was attracted to the Schatzes way with horses and their knowledge of the backcountry and he thought they’d be of value to Mongolian herders tucked in the Northwest region of the country, who were also trying to start their own outfitting businesses for tourism.

One thing led to another and the Schatzes were on a plane to Mongolia earlier this summer, embarking on an unforgettable trip and cultural exchange in the towns of Ulan Uul and Rechinkhumbe.

The journey involved three trips by plane and a 10-hour ride in an old Russian four-wheeled drive bus. The road was a two-track rut in the grassland, a sea of green and mountains that looked a lot like the Rocky Mountain Front, but went on what seemed like forever.

Only two rivers had bridges, the rest they drove across, the Schatzes explained.

The program isn’t a heavy-handed American-knows-best approach, Greg noted.

“We weren’t pushing American stuff on them,” he said.

It was a sharing of ideas. For example, the Mongolians showed them how they attach a pack to a horse and then Greg showed them how it’s done in Montana. An interpreter bridged the communication gap.

The Schatzes also taught them Leave No Trace methods, such as using a fire blanket to avoid scarring the land from campfires.

The Mongolians were very interested, Greg noted. They treat the land and water with great respect. They don’t cut down live trees and use only dead wood to make their fires. Water is sacred, so they don’t fish much and they utilize 300 different medicinal plants.

“They ask for forgiveness before they kill a plant,” Greg said.

The Mongolian landscape in that region of the country looks a lot like the Flathead or Helena valleys, the Schatzes said. They spend the seasons moving their herds from grassland to grassland, going higher in the mountains in winter to graze the windswept slopes where temperatures drop to 60 below.

There are no fences. It’s all open range. The herders stay in gers — moveable round tents. But in the summertime, some of them simply slept on the ground — no tent, no pad, just on the grass, their arm under their heads.

All told, the Schatzes spent 14 days in the Darhad Valley, along with a medical team, soil experts, members of Montana’s Crow tribe and other staff from Bioregions.

They slept in a tent of their own. The Schatzes are no strangers to the backcountry. Greg grew up in South Dakota, Deborah in Minnesota and the two met in college. They decided to move out West after they were married and they’ve been here for 26 years. Greg is a homebuilder. Deborah is the office manager of a local real estate company. When they first moved here they joined the Backcountry Horsemen of the Flathead and they’ve been packing in the region’s wilderness ever since.

Greg estimates they’ve probably logged 25,000 miles in the backcountry. Deborah also trains horses, has worked with them since she was a kid. In Mongolia, horses aren’t just for riding. They milked the mares and fermented the milk into a drink. Their diet was mostly meat and dairy products.

Butter, salt and tea makes a wonderful brew, Deborah noted.

She’d like to go back to Mongolia and teach horse whisperer training techniques to the herders. It’s a more gentle approach to training and breaking horses. Mongolia is rife with horses — all the same breed the Schatzes said. They’re not very tall, but they are stout animals. Greg had a stirrup break and his feet nearly touched the ground.

Deborah would also like to show them how to grow vegetables — crops that would grow fast, like spinach, that would be mature by the time the herders had to leave the valley floor.

The Schatzes hope to return some day soon, share more ideas. There’s a sea of grass and mountains just like home out there.
Mongolian herders received certificates of completion for the Back Country workshop taught by Greg and Deb, as well as the First Aid workshop taught by the health team. Greg and Deb’s Leave No Trace presentation was very well received by the herders, and they also enjoyed exchanging packing techniques.

Chuck Miller awarded plaque for his decades of service to BCH
Submitted by the Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen

At our August 18, 2016 meeting at the Como group picnic area, members recognized Chuck Miller for his many years of service and commitment to Bitter Root BCH, BCH of Montana and BCH of America. Chuck is a legend in his own time!

Here is his story:
As a young boy Chuck hunted and fished, and at 14 he went on his first pack trip to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Being miles away from cities and waking to the sound of elk passing by so close he could see their shadows on the tent walls was heaven on earth for this Montana boy. Chuck fell in love with packing in the backcountry.

It took twenty years before he was able to buy his own horses and mules and return to packing and traveling in the backcountry. In 1980 Chuck and his family joined Back Country Horsemen and started doing volunteer work to keep public trails open. Over time Chuck expanded his pack string to six mules and became heavily involved in volunteer projects with the Forest Service and Bitter Root BCH.

When Chuck was asked what he has packed during his 35 years of volunteer projects he said, “The mules have been pretty tolerant of this old packer. We’ve hauled all kinds of lumber (6’ & 8’ lengths), 4x8 plywood sheets, cement, tar paper, paint, nails, windows, wheelbarrows, culverts, propane bottles, gravel, all kinds of trail maintenance tools, rubber boats, rusted barbed wire and even explosives.” Projects included restoring backcountry cabins and lookouts, and trail maintenance — chainsaw work, bridge construction, turnpikes, water bars, culverts and packing in camps for trail crews. He and his mules have volunteered 300-500 trail miles a year since he retired 22 years ago.

Besides his volunteer packing, Chuck has served many years as an officer, project committee chair, packing clinic co-chair, board member and state director for Bitter Root BCH. He has served 12 years as Montana’s National Director on the Back Country Horsemen of America board and served on BCH of A’s executive council for two years. He is currently a board member for the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Wilderness Foundation.

When asked why he has dedicated so many volunteer hours and dollars to working on trails Chuck replied, “I have always believed in the BCH purpose of keeping public trails open for horseback use for future generations. I’m sure there’s another 14-year-old out there who will be just as passionate about trail riding and packing as I am.”

Thank you, Chuck, for all you have done and continue to do for Back Country Horsemen.
Missoula BCH Chapter Adopts a Trailhead to Combat Noxious Weeds in the Rattlesnake
By: Shantell Frame-Martin, Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign

Noxious weeds are a growing threat to Montana’s recreational activities and pristine back country ecosystems. Noxious weeds can be spread many ways, including transport by trail users of all kinds. Trailheads are ideal for weed establishment because there is frequent concentrated activity in a relatively small area; this repetitive disturbance through human activity increases the dispersal of weed seeds and creates the perfect habitat for weeds to become established.

The Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign, which is housed in Montana State University’s Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences, has partnered with Montana Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Program, Montana Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to promote noxious weed awareness and prevention further up trail systems through “Adopt a Trailhead Montana” or AATM. This program enrolls the assistance of a civic group or organization to adopt a trailhead and be responsible for noxious weed removal and general trail maintenance annually.

The Missoula Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen adopted trailhead #517A on the Lolo National Forest in the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area. This is the second AATM trailhead adopted in the state since the program’s inception last summer. The group’s kick-off event occurred on Saturday, August 26, where a total of 22 BCH members participated in a weed pull and sign installation. In a little over two hours, the volunteers pulled 18 bags of weeds that weighed in at 173 pounds! Weeds pulled included spotted knapweed, houndstongue, sulfur cinquefoil, and common tansy.

Once established, noxious weeds slowly make their way up trail systems, often hitchhiking as seeds in the mud in the treads of mountain bikes, ATV’s or other motorized vehicles; on the socks, shoelaces or gear of hikers and hunters; or in the hair or fur of pets, riding and pack animals as well as through the use of un-certified noxious weed seed free hay and pellets. The Montana Department of Agriculture requires that all horses and/or pack animals traveling onto any state or federal land be fed certified hay or pellets for at least three days before a trip as to allow any weed seeds ingested to be passed through animals’ digestive tracts.

The newly adopted trailhead will feature educational signage to promote both the “PlayCleanGo” campaign and its nationwide message to “Stop invasive species in YOUR tracks,” as well as the Montana Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Program. AATM trailhead kiosks include a boot brush station so that recreationalists can clean their footwear and gear before entering and before leaving trailheads to reduce noxious weed spread.

For more information about the AATM program or if you would like to volunteer at an AATM event or adopt a trailhead please contact Shantell Frame-Martin at 406-444-9491 or shantell.frame@montana.edu. For more information about the NWSFF program, contact Kim Antonick at 406-444-7819 or kantonick2@mt.gov.
HAMPTON – For the first time in 40 years, the Bitterroot National Forest has an updated travel management plan.

The effort follows nine years of public involvement, a record 13,400 comments and court decisions that altered the process midstream before the final document could be released to the public.

Forest Supervisor Julie King signed off on the Bitterroot Forest’s Travel Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision on Wednesday.

The plan dictates how both summer and winter motorized use is managed on the 1.6 million acre national forest.

“Today’s decision is well crafted and incorporates public comments received throughout the entire process,” King said. “This decision will provide quality recreation experiences for both motorized and non-motorized users, reduce conflicts, and protect the forest’s natural resources and wildlife.”

While the travel plan designates 2,246 miles of forest roads and trails open to motorized use – which equates to nearly the driving distance between Hamilton and New York – and 543,840 acres open to snowmobiles, there will some who lose motorized access to their favorite places.

In particular, mountain bike riders, motorcyclists, ATV riders and snowmobilers won’t be allowed to access more than 180,000 acres of lands designated as Wilderness Study Areas and Recommended Wilderness Areas.

The plan goes into effect immediately, but forest officials said their initial focus will be on providing education about the change as they fan out across the forest to begin marking the routes that will be open to motorized travel.

Visitors looking to steer clear of closed routes will need to stop by any Bitterroot Forest offices to pick up a couple of new maps.

New Motor Vehicle Use Maps and Over-Snow Vehicle Use Maps are now available free of charge. The maps identify the areas open to motorized use, the types of vehicle allowed and any seasonal restrictions that might apply.

The black and white maps provide limited geographic detail. They are designed to be used in combination with the Forest Visitor Map to clearly locate and identify routes open to motorized travel.

“I urge all motorized users to obtain a free travel map from their local Forest Service office before going out so they know where they can ride,” King said. “Riders are responsible to know which routes are open.”

The travel plan maps could be updated annually to incorporate changes on the ground, including potentially adding new motorized routes. The travel plan designates 30 miles of new roads and trails and proposes to add another 10 miles of new trails for vehicles 50-inches wide or narrower.

It also closed about 355 miles of road to motorized travel, including the popular Chain of Lakes Trail in the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area.

King said most of the roads and trails that were removed from the system weren’t being used as regular travel routes. She predicted that most people traveling through the national forest won’t notice a difference.

The plan also reduces the area open to snowmobiles by about 205,000 acres. Most of that’s found in either Wilderness Study Areas or areas recommended for wilderness.

Most of the contention over changes in the travel plan focus on the 101,974-acres set aside by Congress in the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 as Wilderness Study Areas in the Sapphire Range and the Blue Joint areas.

Congress ordered that the two areas be managed “so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for including in the National Wilderness Preservation System.”

Back then, Congress suggested it would make its determination in a five-year time period.

Congress has yet to act.

A Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in 2011 that ordered national forests to manage Wilderness Study Areas in accordance to the kinds of recreational use those areas experienced in 1977 was one of several reasons that it took so long for the Bitterroot Forest to complete its travel plan update.

“It set us back,” King said. “We had to do a good deal of research to learn what kinds of uses those areas saw back then.”

Of course, there was no mountain biking back then. Snowmobile use was extremely light, and ATVs really weren’t on the scene yet, either.

The court’s ruling made it clear that the Bitterroot Forest had to back off all motorized use in the WSAs to match those prior levels of use, King said.

West Fork District Ranger Ryan Domsalla will lead the implementation effort for the new travel plan.

Initially, Domsalla said the focus will be educating user groups and individuals and getting maps distributed while crews spread out across the national forest to begin marking the routes that will be open for motorized travel.

“Enforcement will still be one of our tools,” Domsalla said.

Unlike in years’ past, when routes were considered open to motorized travel unless signed closed, the new travel plan follows national standards that totally change that equation.

Under the new travel plan, if a road doesn’t carry a sign that shows that it’s open, it is to be considered closed.

Domsalla expects that it will take Bitterroot Forest employees this summer and into the next to get all the routes signed.

“Until then, the maps are ultimate authority,” he said.

During the first season, motorized users may find some instances where the new travel maps don’t match the travel plan. There will be forms available at all the Bitterroot Forest offices to document those inaccuracies.

The travel plan and its accompanying maps are available electronically at fs.usda.gov/bitterroot. Copies also are available for review and on CD at all Bitterroot Forest offices and at local libraries.

In the past Domsalla said that he’s heard people say the Forest Service is attempting to lock people out of national forest lands during the travel management process.

He said that’s not true.

“The national forest is still open to the public,” he said. “This doesn’t preclude people from going to a certain area. It just restricts their mode of travel.”
BCHA announces the 2016 Horse and Mule Packing and Wilderness Skills Young Adult Scholarship Winner
Submitted by Mack Long, Mission Valley BCH

BCHA and Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters in Montana are excited to announce Madeline Baker of Post Falls, Idaho as the recipient of this year’s scholarship. Madeline was selected from a field of 30 excellent applicants. While it was challenging for the Education Committee of the BCHA to narrow down the applicants, Madeline demonstrated the interest and dedication that BCHA was looking for.

The five day horse and mule packing class included a “hands on” pack trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness that started on June 11, 2016. The class of 10 students spent the first day learning the basics and then practiced those skills over the five day period while traveling by horse and pack string in the 1.5 million acre Bob Marshall Wilderness. Each student earned a Leave No Trace certificate as well as learned wilderness skills such as camping, cooking, care of livestock and how to be a good wilderness steward.

Below is the essay of no more than 250 words that Madeline submitted.

As a three year member of the Panhandle Back Country Horsemen, I have developed a passion for our spectacular public lands. Being able to preserve the lands while on horseback has further fostered my appreciation of the talented steeds we ride. Packing has been of interest to me since I joined our Panhandle chapter and watched the careful thought and planning it takes. I want to learn how to pack so I can take my horses on overnight trips and safely carry supplies when I ride with the PBCH group.

Horses take my breath away. I have personally experienced their grace, strength, personality, heart, versatility, intelligence, and sensitivity shine through in western pleasure shows, o-mok-sees, and on the trail. Being a primary caretaker of our family’s horses has given me a strong work ethic. When I joined the PBCH and started to branch out in terms of trail ride locations, I was blown away by God’s creation and by the wisdom in our chapter’s members. My passion and appreciation for the outdoors continues to grow. Being surrounded by nature is a testament to the glory of God for me.

If given the privilege to participate in this packing trip, I will use my knowledge to better assist the PBCH outing and work parties, and will be a safer, more thoughtful rider. I plan to share the knowledge I will gain with others, including our local 4th graders during their Idaho History Rendezvous, to promote safety and knowledge on the trail.

A second class of 10 students that was sponsored by individual state BCH organizations started on June 26, 2016, and had two Montana BCH scholarship winners, David Sanchez of Darby and Sara Sylte from Helena, who attended. In addition, the Michigan BCH sponsored a scholarship winner, Jordyn Hausler, who attended the Packing and Wilderness Skills class.
Elser, Greany among new inductees into Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame


Acclaimed Missoula outfitter Smoke Elser and Paul Greany of Drummond, who at 90 is still active in the winter chariot racing sport of cutting, are among the ninth class of inductees into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Elser, 82, was feted with the Living Award for District 11, which encompasses Mineral, Missoula and Ravalli counties. He’s been featured in recent years in National Geographic for teaching wilderness skills to Navy SEALS and FBI agents, and in the PBS documentary “Three Miles an Hour” about packing trips into the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Legacy Awards for District 11 go to Charlie Yerian of Corvallis and Elton Vanleir Brechbill of Stevensville. Yerian, who was known throughout the Northwest for his prized draft horses, died in December 2014 at age 94. Brechbill, whose adventure with a pack string was memorialized in a painting by his friend Charlie Russell in the 1800s, was 76 when he died in 1943.

Greany’s 90th birthday was recently celebrated at the Drummond rodeo grounds with a dance, barbecue and team roping that drew more than 90 contestants. He received the Living Award for District 12, a six-county region that includes Granite, Powell and Silver Bow counties.

Legacy Awards for District 12 went to Don Harrington of Dillon and Sam McDowell of Wisdom. Harrington, a National Finals Rodeo announcer and quarter horse breeder, was inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City in 2002. He was 88 when he died in 2013. McDowell, a rodeo standout and long-time rancher in the Big Hole Valley, was 86 when he passed away in March.

Les Baldwin of Polson and the Park Saddle Horse Company of Glacier National Park were feted with Legacy Awards in District 10 (Flathead, Lake, Lincoln and Sanders counties). No one was named for the Living Award in District 10.

Since the initial round in 2008, 274 inductees have been honored by the Big Timber-based Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame. Inductees are chosen from a field of candidates nominated by the general public for contributions to the history and culture of Montana.

Volunteer trustees from around Montana vote on nominations for the districts in which they reside.

“It gives the local communities a strong voice in who will represent them in the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame,” Hall president Jeff Bolstad said in a press release. “The Hall of Fame exists to honor those who have made an impact in their part of the state and represent Montana’s authentic heritage for future generations.”