Letter from the Chair

Connie Long, Chairman, BCH Montana

We are in the midst of winter. I hope you and your equine friends are faring well and keeping warm.

This is a hard message to write as it saddens me to think that we have lost another founder of our Back Country Horsemen community, Ken Ausk. I know there is a tribute to Ken later in this issue, but I wanted to share a few of my thoughts about this great loss. Ken stayed active, dedicated, passionate about the organization that he helped start. I know he never dreamed the organization would take off and be supported across the country.

I have known Ken and Phyllis for several years, but it hasn't been until the past 2-3 years that I really spent some quality time with Ken and Phyllis. This last year was the best. I am so humbled to have been able to be alongside Ken and Phyllis in Washington DC in September and help Ken celebrate his 80th birthday while there. Ken was a class act in DC. He stayed true to his roots and wore his silver belly cowboy hat. You know, good guys always wear a white hat and that was true of Ken. I feel there is a hole in Back Country Horsemen of Montana with Ken being gone, it will take a while, if ever, for this feeling to go away. He will truly be missed, but never forgotten.

I have been in contact with the Selway-Pintler Chapter and they are going to have a really great convention in store for us. It's sounds like it will be a little different than what we have been used to in the past due to space limitations at the venue, but they are a very creative chapter and are coming up with some real ingenious alternatives and making it work. I am really looking forward to what they have planned. If you haven't seen the trailer of the movie some of the youth in their area are making just for this event, please visit YouTube and search for “To the Town of Downing”. I think there are 2-3 trailers out there. What I have seen is very impressive. It's the Friday night entertainment, so come early so you don't miss this event. I am looking forward to seeing everyone there. I think it will have a real rendezvous feel.

This year, 2015, is looking like a very productive year with the filing of our very first joint Recreation and Trails Grant. This means no competing between chapters for the same...
grant money. This is very exciting to me. Brad Pollman taking on the chairmanship of the committee is doing an outstanding job in working towards the goal and getting the grant submitted. Let’s all keep our fingers crossed that we are awarded this grant.

There are so many exciting things happening this year for Back Country Horsemen of Montana. To name a few; the RTP grant, BCHM being asked to have a representative for the saw policy setting workshop in Florida where only a select few attendees are non-Forest Service – Mark Himmel will be our representative; the announcement recently that Mack Long was selected to fill the Executive Committee position that Ken Ausk held. This was open to applicants from across the nation. Montana will be well represented at the governing level of BCHA with Mack and Chuck Miller. Yeah! We have accomplished so much since the beginning when our founding fathers were sitting around the campfire contemplating the idea of this organization and if it would work. I am sure they had no idea that it would build into what it is today and start a fire in the bellies of so many folks. Let’s keep those fires burning and light new ones along the way. This is a great organization with great people. Let’s keep doing a good job and proudly represent Back Country Horsemen not only for Montana but as a nation.

Yours on Wilderness Trails,

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A human life, so often likened to a spectacle upon a stage, is more justly a ritual. The ancient values of dignity, beauty, and poetry which sustain it are of Nature's inspiration; they are born of the mystery and beauty of the world. Do no dishonor to the earth lest you dishonor the spirit of the man. Hold your hands out over the earth as over a flame. To all who love her, who open to her the doors of their veins, she gives of her strength, sustaining them with her own measureless tremor of dark life. Touch the earth, love the earth, honor the earth, her plains, her valleys, her hills, and her seas; rest your spirit in her solitary places. For the gifts of life are the earth's and they are given to all.

–from “The Outermost House” by Henry Beston

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photo courtesy Charlie O’Leary, View from Mt. Jefferson toward Granite Park on Noble Peak in the Tobacco Root Mountains BCHM

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### BCH of MT Contacts

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Selway Outpost

“The Horsemen’s Hangout”
Friday, Saturday & Sunday
Relax and enjoy yourself…spurs and boots allowed!
Games, cards and lots of “Trail talk”

Horses & Mules
Saddles & Saws
2015 MT Back Country Horsemen State Convention

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Wall tent camp…Step into the past for shopping, games, raffles, scavenger hunt & back country fun!

Saturday Night Entertainment

“Remembering a Legend of Country”

Saturday Night

Chuck wagon
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Jamaican Jerk
Beer Can Chicken
Flat Iron Steak

Selway Outpost

FRIDAY NIGHT
WESTERN YOUTH ENTERTAINMENT

“CONVENTION SPOTLIGHT”
RAFFLE PRIZES

Pack String Crosscut Saw
Mountain Man Original Metal Art
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Custom Saddle Stand
Crafted of fine woods with inlaid leather tooling, silver concho and horse hair tassel.
One of a kind!

“El Capitan at Sunset”
Framed original oil painting by Bitterroot Valley artist Steve Wilson

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Drawing Saturday, March 28, 2015
Bitterroot River Inn- Montana BCH banquet
For Information or Raffle Tickets Contact Linda Habeck @ 406-961-1435
Need not be present to win
The supply comes also from thousands of the not-quite baby horses into the world. Until their market completely collapses keep right on bringing people who actually make their living breeding horses, who breeders. But far, far more than that, it comes from thousands of yes, it comes from the handful of abusive or neglectful owners. To get to that heart of this issue, the first question is not very folks who so self-righteously condemn the canners.

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The same people who increase horse numbers obviously increase the demand for feed, but they also decrease the potential feed supply and thus raise costs. It’s a particularly ironic process when breeders of any scale operate from newly-subdivided, formerly agricultural lands. It’s a particularly ironic process when breeders of any scale operate from newly-subdivided, formerly agricultural lands.

Every time a small-farm idealist decides to try to “get a colt out of ‘er”, every time a small-farm idealist decides to try to “get a colt out of ‘er”, every time a small-farm idealist decides to try to “get a colt out of ‘er”. A second note casually it would be kind of fun to “get a colt out of ‘er”. A second note casually it would be kind of fun to “get a colt out of ‘er”. A second note casually it would be kind of fun to “get a colt out of ‘er”.

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Photo from collection of mark SyverSon

March 27, 28, & 29

Hosted by

Selway ~ Pintler Wilderness Back Country Horsemen

Location
Bitterroot River Inn
139 Bitterroot Plaza Drive
Hamilton, MT 59840
406 375 2525/fax 406 363 9700
www.bitterrootriverinn.com

Mail Registration to
Linda Habeck C/O SPWBCH
PO Box 88
Hamilton, MT 59840
406 961 1435 linda5117@msn.com

BCH Chapter Voting Delegate Registration

NAME
E-MAIL

Chapter
PHONE

Mailing Address

City
State
ZIP

Guest/Spouse/Non Delegate Registration

NAME
E-MAIL

Chapter
PHONE

Mailing Address

City
State
ZIP

Full Registration (all meals and activities) :
___$80 before Feb. 13 _________
___$90 after Feb. 13 _________

Saturday banquet :
___$32

Saturday lunch:
___$10

Sunday breakfast:
___$15

TOTAL ENCLOSED (make check to “SPWBCH”) $ _________

Make your ROOM RESERVATIONS directly with the hotel by calling, 877-274-8274.

Use the reservation code, “Back Country Horsemen”. Rate is $85.00 per night, plus applicable taxes. This block of rooms is available at this rate through February 27. After February 13, a portion of the rooms will be available to the general public. RESERVE EARLY!!

NO ONLINE RESERVATIONS  HOTEL IS NON-SMOKING  CHECK IN IS 3 P.M.
There was nothing flamboyant about my friend Ken. But there was a whole bunch of great qualities to him. For one thing, he understood most everything that confused me. Of course he understood what went on inside those mysterious electrical wires that so confounded me; after all, the guy was a qualified electrician. He was also a good welder. And he was the kind of automotive tinkerer and household repairman that always embarrassed me each time my wife watched “Mr. Fixit” Ausk repair something—just before she turned a comparative, critical eye on me.

Ken and I used to joke about how many times I called on him for a rescue, from a failed truck engine to an understanding of why a Norsky would leave the fjords of his homeland to take a dry-land homestead thirty miles north of Havre.

Kenneth Lyle Ausk.

When I left my secure lumber company job to begin outfitting and guiding other folks into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, my friend took vacation time to serve as an occasional guide. It was in that capacity that Ken and I, along with another friend, neighbor, and also part-time guide, Dennis Swift, spent considerable campfire time in the fall of 1972 discussing a serious bureaucratic threat to the future of horse use in wilderness. The outcome of those discussions was the formation of Back Country Horsemen (after his family and his electrical trade, the thing that became most important in Ken’s life).

Over the years, Ken and I had many debates over campfires and at each of our kitchen tables. Of the two of us, I was the aggressor and he was the observer. I was the rebel; he was more inclined to passive resistance. But God! Ken’s resistance was well thought out, clever, consistent.

The formation and operation of the new organization, Back Country Horsemen, provides excellent fodder for me to illuminate my friend’s quiet style. Ken Ausk was the observing supporter. Soon after forming, the group defined its purpose as three-fold: 1) to combat the agency’s drift toward regimenting wilderness horse use, 2) to do so through service to the resource, and 3) education of the wilderness using public to responsible horse use.

Dennis Swift served as our first project committee chair, Ken
Ausk volunteered for education committee, and as the nominal club leader, I became the “point man” in defense of our horse-using heritage.

One could easily suppose, under the circumstances, that my friend’s and my kitchen debates might tail off under the weight of our time-consuming commitment to the new horse group’s foundation, but not so. Instead of space flights to the moon, Nixon and Watergate, we now launched into late-night discussions about the organization and operation of Back Country Horsemen. And it was then that our management styles clashed.

As the more aggressive one, I wanted to take us farther, faster into conflict with the questionable bureaucratic dictums. Ken favored a more measured approach. Our wives would often wearily retire while we argued till a wee hour of the morning. When finally we parted, I invariably thought I was the victor, only to bump up against a stone wall of Ken’s argument in a board meeting a few days later. You see, I wasn’t the only one to which my clever and consistent friend talked. He had some quietly effective viewpoints (though to tell you the truth, he sometimes drove me batty with his quiet resistance). But that was tempered by years of friendship. And it was easy to overlook my frustration because of Ken’s sterling attributes, including being as steady as a rock, solid as a sphinx, and reliable as a sunrise.

Those were attributes that served Ken Ausk well for 42 years of close involvement in Back Country Horsemen. They were of tremendous value to the incipient group as they made the transition from a novice organization in a distant place to the respected representative for horseback trail riders all over America. When other clubs formed throughout Montana, Ken was there in the background as a trusted adviser. When Idaho, Washington, and California demonstrated interest, Ken was a quiet presence offering advice and a historical perspective about what worked for the club he helped found in the Treasure State.

Today, Back Country Horsemen of America reflects the values and attributes Ken Ausk brought to the table. And I’d be a fool were I not to recognize the sterling values my lifetime friend was able to impart to what became his own work.

God am I proud to have played a small initial role in the concept, the foundation, and the implementation of the outfit! But all the while, we all must give credit where credit is due—without Ken Ausk, Back Country Horsemen might not be the superb organization it is today.

One of my favorite quotes is an observation by Helen Keller: “The world moves not alone from the mighty shoves of its heroes. But by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each of us.” Ken Ausk’s multitude of tiny pushes made for one hell of a mighty shove! What a guy!

From Alan and Bev Hill

I was honored to attend my first National Board Meeting in Columbia Falls in 1993 as a representative of BCH of California. In attendance were the four founders, Lloyd Fagerland, plus many others. Unfortunately, I don’t remember all who were there, but Ken and Phyllis welcomed us all in their house. Lloyd took us out to his house for a ride. The hospitality extended from everyone was long remembered and greatly appreciated by Bev and me.

We knew we had found the organization that was so badly needed and one we were honored and pleased to be a part of.

Alan Hill serves as Public Liaison for BCH.

Ken’s wife Phyllis wrote to thank the “14,000 members who made Ken’s life so much richer by your dedication to BCH. Many of you attended the service, sent beautiful cards and contributed to the beautiful flower arrangement. I and all of Ken’s family thank you for the kind words and outpouring of love you have shown us. Keep up the good work.”

From Mylon Filkins

I recall a great BCH meeting in Columbia Falls where the Ausk and Fagerland families along with other Montanans provided great hospitality. Ken was the BCH treasurer during my tenure as BCH chair 1991-1993.

Mylon Filkins DVM is a past chairman of BCH.

From Jim McGarvey

We are deeply saddened that one of our BCHA founders, Ken Ausk from Columbia Falls, Montana passed away Monday night surrounded by his family. Ken was feeling well Saturday taking care of his horses and watching Montana Griz football on TV. Ken was 80 years old and married to his sweetheart Phyllis.

He was a wonderful husband, father, friend, and horseman and was deeply focused on preserving the right and privilege of horse use on public lands. In 1973, Ken, three others and their wives started the first Back Country Horsemen chapter in the Flathead Valley of Montana. That chapter grew to over 174 chapters in 29 states with 14,000 members. I can say with great certainty that Ken thought about the Back Country Horsemen every day of those 41 years. Even as late as this past Thursday and Friday, I received emails from Ken responding to questions on guiding BCHA on its mission into the future. Ken Ausk and the founders had a great dream; it is our responsibility to carry on that dream.

Jim McGarvey is the current chairman of BCH.
**From Chuck Miller**

Ken was a gentleman, an eloquent and effective voice for wilderness and backcountry equestrian traditions. I will never forget Ken’s leadership in the Bob Marshall Alliance -- from the dark days when the Reagan administration was pushing for the unthinkable -- to sell oil and gas leases covering every inch of the Bob Marshall, Great Bear and Scapegoat Wilderness. That’s when you realize your true friends. Ken was a true friend.

*John Gatchell is the long time conservation director for Montana Wilderness Association.*

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*John Gatchell is the long time conservation director for Montana Wilderness Association.*

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**From Mike McGlenn**

I was the first Chairman to have a voting Executive Committee. One of that Committee’s members was Ken Ausk. I was really concerned about how this would go with a Founding Father on a new Committee with a new BCHA Governance plan. I needn’t have been concerned. Ken was the consummate gentleman, mentor and friend. He really helped to make what could have been a difficult situation a good one instead. Ken was a valued advisor and friend.

*Mike McGlenn is a past chairman of BCHA.*

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**From Chuck Miller**

We may never know the exact words that Ken Ausk, Dulane Fulton, Dennis Swift, Roland Cheek or their wives spoke of over the kitchen table in Columbia Falls Montana, nor what was said in the wall tent next to the wood stove and hissing Coleman lantern in the Bob Marshall Wilderness during the early 70’s.

What we do know is that after a liberal sampling of Early Times Whiskey, the voices of reason began a plan a recipe and vision that would forever change the way horsemen think and act in the back country.

The back country was being loved to death by the placement of permanent camps, corrals, piles of garbage, not to mention human waste, and dying trees due to stock being tied to them causing root damage. The Forest Service was suggesting that many camping and prolonged use areas were to be closed to stock use.

Our BCH Founders found a recipe that was presented to the USFS, general public, recreational and commercial pack and saddle stock users. All found these use guidelines much more acceptable than the proposed closures and regulations. These four men and their supporters never dreamed that they were the initial developers of programs like Tread Lightly and Leave no Trace stock management programs, even before there was ever any thought those organizations. They also had no idea that this would spread within the United States from sea to shining sea with 29 state organizations and potential states as well as nearly 15,000 members of today.

Back Country Horsemen as well as the general public protect, preserve, and promote these proactive protective measures of equine use where ever we are, and remember that with this recipe and vision we stand on the shoulders of these Great Founders and Giants of the Back Country Horsemen of America.

Roland Cheek is the last remaining Founder alive.

*Chuck Miller is a member of the Bitterroot BCH and serves as a state director for BCHM.*

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**From Greg Schatz**

One of the things Ken was most proud of was his involvement with the Back Country Horsemen. In 1973, there were these three hunting buddies setting by their campfire on Pedro Creek in the middle of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, lamenting the fact that the forest service had a plan to do away with stock use in their wilderness. Then after a snort or two of the good stuff they decided they’d form this group of like minded souls to combat this way of thinking by the forest service. They would offer their support to help pack supplies and clear trails. The one thing they decided they’d do different from all of the other groups, was be nice to the forest service instead of yelling and screaming at them. Their plan actually worked, Ken, Roland Cheek, Dennis Swift, and Dulane Fulton, and their wives formed the Back Country Horsemen which has grown beyond any of their wildest dreams to include about 174 chapters in 29 states across the US. All of the founders need to be honored though Ken was the one who was active for 41 years in the local, state and national organizations. I don’t ever remember him missing a state board meeting or convention or a national board of directors meeting.

Teaching kids how to pack was very important to Ken. He loved taking his kids as well as his neighbor kids along on pack trips. He was proud to be able to pass his knowledge on to his grandchildren.

When we first joined Back Country Horsemen I remember being in awe that Ken would come to our local chapter meetings when he was the chairman of the Back Country Horsemen of America. I also remember that he’d get up at a meeting and tell of another BCH or forest service meeting or project that he was going to attend and then at break time he’d invite me to come along, offering that he’d drive and buy lunch. How can you say no to an offer like that.

For 25 years we rode backcountry trails and the highways
I am from Mike McGlenn friends. Ken was a true friend. Scapegoat Wilderness. That’s when you realize your true covering every inch of the Bob Marshall, Great Bear and was pushing for the unthinkable—to sell oil and gas leases from the dark days when the Reagan administration Ken was a gentleman, an eloquent and effective voice for weight of the world. I needn’t have been concerned. Ken a Founding Father on a new Committee with a new BCHA. I was really concerned about how this would go with how we managed our resources. We had the Leave no Trace stock management programs, even before the USFS, general public, recreational and commercial pack were the initial developers of programs like Tread Lightly and more acceptable than the proposed closures and regulations. They also had no idea that this would spread within Montana with Ken, going to hundreds of projects and meetings. Ken loved talking about Back Country Horsemen and the Bob, enough so that we could easily talk the entire ten hour round trip to Bozeman. After several years of this, I started to figure out that Ken kept repeating the same things which were his ideals of how Back Country Horsemen ought to be run, the interesting thing about Ken’s ideals is that they apply to all facets of life. Things such as:

In anything you do for BCH, make sure the betterment of BCH comes first, not your own agenda. Ken was often embarrassed by the praises poured upon him by others. He felt that BCH is what it is because of all of the members, not just one.

When deciding if BCH should be involved in an issue, make sure it furthers the purposes of the organization, always remember we are a volunteer service organization, not a riding club.

Fight your battles in the meetings, if the majority of the members vote in favor of a motion, support it, don’t take it to the parking lot and always, always remain friends.

On his last day we watched the Griz win their playoff game and we talked quite a bit about Back Country Horsemen.

Having worked on the road his whole life, Ken knew all of the finest eating establishments in Montana. The next time you go through Polson have a memorial donut in Ken’s honor at the Lakeside Bakery. One of Ken’s favorite things to say after a belly busting Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner was “Well...I’m not so hungry anymore.”

To honor Ken today we’re going to ride to Ken’s camp on Pedro Creek, in the Bob, so close your eyes and ride along. You’re riding up the headwaters of Indian Creek, there is the waterfalls cascading over the rocks, you ride around the corner and the high mountain cirque opens up before you, a carpet of thousands upon thousands of wild flowers in white, orange, purple, red and blue fill the basin. Eagles are soaring among the steep limestone cliffs of the great divide which tower around you. As your horses’ shoes clatter on the rocks, you look over your shoulder to check the mantled loads on your string of pack horses and everything is looking good.

You come up over White River Pass and ride up the White River with the great divide towering beside you and mountains all around you. You ride through Brushy Park and on the way to Larch Hill Pass you watch for the faint trail off to the left that takes you to Pedro Creek and there is Ken’s camp, up on the great divide.

Many of us gathered represent an elite group, not of money and power, but of concern for Ken’s and our way of life, packing stock along the great divide. Never doubt that a small number of concerned horsemen can change the world, because we all ready have.

Happy trails my friend, may your horses always be gentle, May your packs always ride well, and may your trails always be clear.

Greg Schatz serves on the board of directors for BCH of the Flathead. Greg read this memorial at Ken’s funeral.

From Merlyn Huso

Having accomplished a goal of moving to Montana to “Ride in the Bob” and skiing its mountains I learned of an outfit called the Back Country Horsemen. It fit well with my desire to explore, develop back country skills, and help to protect the wilderness from ourselves.

Later, when helping set up for a BCH convention in Shelby, Ken Ausk introduced himself, most likely after noticing the Hill County plate on my truck. That had been Ken’s home when growing up and where he met Phyllis, his bride to be. His unpretentious bearing left me to wonder who he was, only to learn that he was one of the founding members. We talked many times over the years, discussing various aspects of the BCH, its purposes, and mostly that it was all about “Preservation of the Resource”, which has been indelibly inscribed on my mind.

I grew to have a profound respect for Ken and his fellow members of the Flathead chapter when they interacted with the Forest and Park Services. Mostly because of the mutual respect demonstrated during these actions. And, mostly because they, too, had learned, and lived, “Preservation of the Resource.”

As the years passed Ken continued to stay engaged, serving on the state and national boards and most recently as a member of the national chairman’s executive committee. Ken had become the conscience of the Back Country Horsemen.

We will miss you and your wise council immensely, my friend. Vaya Con Dios.

Merlyn Huso is a member of the East Slope BCHM and a past chairman of BCHA. Merlyn read this memorial at Ken’s funeral.
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Gentle, willing & eager to learn-Great Disposition!

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Montana Back Country Horsemen
State Convention
Bitterroot River Inn Hamilton, MT

For tickets or information
Kathy Hundley
406-363-8230
montanakath@yahoo.com

Raffle Mule “Jasper”
Sponsored by Bauman Ranch
Steve and Luanne Bauman

Sire-Mammoth Jack
“Jumpin Jack’s Poker Charlie”
son of Black Bart

Jasper & Mom
“Freckles Dry Ice”
(Colonel Freckles Bloodline)
Regional Forester Faye Krueger will retire from her post at the head of the U.S. Forest Service's Region 1 headquarters in Missoula at the end of January.

“I've been eligible to retire for a while, and we decided it was time to reconnect with family and our grandkids,” Krueger said Friday. “I'm looking forward to that.”

Krueger, 59, took the top job on the five-state Region 1 almost three years ago. She joined the Forest Service as a seasonal worker in 1980.

Deputy Regional Forester Dave Schmid will serve as interim forester until a permanent replacement is chosen. Krueger said she planned to leave at the end of January.

Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, himself a former Region 1 forester, will recommend a replacement for Krueger to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. That process could take three to six months.

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The BCH Education Foundation directors are pleased to announce the availability of three $ 1,000 grants and two $ 500.00 grants to BCH chapters for equipment, materials and supplies for trail or trailhead building, maintenance and/or repair. These grants are a result of a DEW Foundation donation. Projects are encouraged which involve partnerships with public land agencies and other trail or youth groups. The grant application should include the trail or trails and type of activity planned. Photos of the project before, during and after are required along with a news article suitable for publishing in the BCHA National Newsletter and for the DEW Foundation and other media outlets. The Ron Arrington memorial donation has funded two $ 500.00 grants for youth education projects. These projects could include 4-H, FFA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or other youth groups and be oriented to education about saddle and pack stock and the wise and sustaining use of our backcountry resource. Application forms may be obtained from Peg and any questions can be addressed to her for a response from the directors. We would ask that applications be submitted by May 15, 2015 in order that the grants can be awarded June 1, 2015.

BCH Education Foundation directors Mylon Filkins, DVM, Randy Darling, Becky Hope, Michael Murphy and Karen Saner.

Peg Greiwe, Executive Secretary
Back Country Horsemen Education Foundation of America
PO Box 1367
Graham WA 98338
1-888-893-5161

Your service is amazing. We go through so many shavings and you have always fulfilled our orders. The shavings are always clean and the horses love them.”

Lisa Anderson, Copper Spring Ranch, Bozeman

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ABOUT COLD AND STAYING WARM

–from “A small book about the cold. And staying warm.”
by Woolpower, Osterlund

When the body gets cold, it tries to create heat by shivering. The body can increase its own heat production 4-5 times by shivering. The body also decreases blood flow to the hands and feet in order to prioritize heat to the heart, brain, and other vital organs, which is why you first feel cold in your hands and feet even though the rest of your body feels warm.

Women are often colder than men. This is because in general, men have greater muscle mass, which gives them better blood circulation and creates more body heat.

To perspire is a normal reaction when the body is too hot and needs to cool down the skin. The skin cools because the moisture – sweat – evaporates. This functions very well in a hot climate, but in cold weather, when you are wearing lots of clothes, heavy sweating can prove disastrous when the moisture actually makes you colder.

Dust free
Premium Grade
Super Absorbent
A ny time you try to summarize a good year of work by a volunteer organization, you’re apt to try naming everybody that pitched in, and any time you do that, you almost surely miss someone, plus you’re apt to launch into all kinds of praises which, though certainly well-deserved, sound a bit like flattery.

So let it be said from the outset then, the Wildhorse Plains BCH chapter had a busy 2014 (see the chapter’s website and particularly the video link mentioned there), a wide variety of people pitched in, all of them deserve honest praise, but none of them will be praised – nor flattered -- herein.

In fact, I’m going to take a hard left turn here from club activities and head off onto a topic that is old, yet current and perennially controversial. I have no startling new insights into this topic – just a set of biases which I harp on however I can, and this is another chance to do so.

It strikes me that the horse-slaughter industry, while certainly grim and sometimes abusive, has become the scapegoat for the real sins of the general horse-owning population, a population which probably knows but doesn’t want to hear the rest of the story -- those bedrock reasons the slaughter ghoul keeps popping back up from its coffin, despite the best efforts of its opposition.

That’s because those reasons – naivete, sentimentality, and ignorance – extend far beyond the purported cold-heartedness of the slaughter folks, right into the horse-loving hearts of the very folks who so self-righteously condemn the canners.

To get to that heart of this issue, the first question is not whether to allow or to forbid slaughter of horses. The first question is -- where does the endless supply of slaughter horses come from?

Yes, it comes from the handful of abusive or neglectful owners. But far, far more than that, it comes from thousands of knowledgeable, professional breeders -- responsible people, people who actually make their living breeding horses, who until their market completely collapses keep right on bringing baby horses into the world.

The supply comes also from thousands of the not-quite professional breeders, good people, nice people, people who naively (and often erroneously) assume they have the performance- and genetics-expertise required for breeding quality horses, and who just love baby horses, and who have the resources to keep a stud or two and a band of mares.

And just down the road are the small-farm folks, back-to-the-earthers, good people who think a barn and twenty acres should blossom annually with new life; add in here the thousands of even smaller backyard owners, one- or two-horse people, people like me who own a mare and think rather casually it would be kind of fun to “get a colt out of ‘er”.

And it comes from the hundreds -- maybe thousands -- of rescue folks, passionate and kind-hearted people blind to the fact that their mission enables the other groups to keep on breeding excess horses guilt-free. Include in this group those who medicate aged horses into years of artificially-extended life, as well as those who insist the wild-horse herds of the West must be allowed to expand as they will.

In my mind the nation’s horse population (those getting adequate care) is one big pasture with vast but finite resources. Unfortunately, this national pasture is chock-full and has been so for a long time, yet there still exist horde’s of horses outside that pasture desperately needing to get in. These last face starvation, slaughter, or both.

Every time even the most responsible breeder, whether large-scale or small, brings another horse into the pasture, some other horse gets marginalized in some way. We may not see it happen, but it does happen. There’s only so much pasture available, remember?

Every time a rescue operation artificially prolongs the life of an over-aged or crippled horse within the pasture, some other horse doesn’t get in. Every time a small-farm idealist decides to start a new breed, or to resurrect a “heritage” breed, pasture-space is removed for some other horses already in existence somewhere.

It’s a particularly ironic process when breeders of any scale operate from newly-subdivided, formerly agricultural lands. The same people who increase horse numbers obviously increase the demand for feed, but they also decrease the potential feed supply and thus raise costs.

When you analyze the horse slaughter problem from this limited-pasture perspective, it becomes plain that solutions don’t come from more rescues, more laws, more politics,
more pity, more idealism, more live horses.

The solution is for horse owners – all of us – is first to quit breeding those mares. This includes the mini-horse breeders who have proliferated in the past 30 years. They’re a significant part of the problem.

If every single possible breeder of any type would voluntarily cut breeding numbers in half for the foreseeable future, supply would drop immediately and dramatically. Need a new baby horse? Buy an existing weanling. That simple action means you don’t bring another horse into the pasture, and you do help one that was outside waiting for a spot – an ethical and numerical two-for-one.

The solution is for rescue people to quit assuming “rescue” solves an issue, and to incorporate earlier euthanasia into their plans for the animals they do rescue. I’m all in favor of rescue when it means an end to abuse. But “rescuing” a blind, 29-year-old crippled horse and feeding him to age 33 merely means four more years some other needy horse doesn’t get care.

The solution is for owners from all other categories to put down those aged or unsound horses at a reasonable time and on their own dime rather than trying to sell them cheap on Craigslist so as to pawn off the responsibility on someone else.

The solution is for breed associations to set more stringent rules for stud farms. I’d hate to see horses become so exclusive that only celebrities could afford them, but surely the associations could measure success in some terms other than annually-increasing registrations? Maybe a simple franchise with provisional approval and controlled numbers?

The solution is also for celebrities to use their brains for something besides hair fertilizer and quit jumping reflexively to the bleeding-heart side of the issue, buying vast Nevada ranches and stocking them with feral horses, or opposing control of wild-horse numbers.

Finally, the solution is for advocacy groups to quit pretending that by eliminating the slaughter industry in the US they’ve solved the related problems. In reality they’ve done exactly the opposite. Slaughter horses now take longer hauls (to Canada or Mexico), and hauling is one place where abuses commonly occur. Worse, Americans have given up any chance of overseeing the industry’s methods.

As a first step in seeking humane treatment, advocates would be far more effective to demand strict oversight while still allowing the slaughter folks in the US enough room to make a profit. Then work at step two – reducing the over-population of horses through owners’ self-restraint. When that second step is successful, the slaughter question will largely solve itself. (Fewer horses might also mean it’s more difficult for abusive or truly ignorant people to obtain horses.)

Where do BCH people fit into this issue?

Well, we first need to look deep into the mirror of the circumstances listed in the previous paragraphs.

And, secondly, we can be more forceful (though always tactful) when our neighbors talk about breeding their mares.

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**Food for Thought continued**

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**About Cold and Staying Warm**

—from “A small book about the cold. And staying warm.”

by Woolpower, Osterlund

0.5 – 1 liter (~0.5 -1 qt) of fluid evaporates from the skin every day. During hard work, the evaporation can reach several liters per hour.

A head without a hat works like a chimney, funneling a large amount of the body’s heat away.

If your feet are cold – put on a hat.

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**When the legends die, the dreams end. When the dreams end, there is no more greatness.**

—from ”When the Legends Die”

by Hal Borland

“As we close this year, we can’t help but think of our founding fathers whose vision started us all down this path and that some (or much) of the credit for the additional 67,000 acres to be added to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex can be attributed to the work of the Back Country Horsemen.”

– Deena Shotzberger, Cabinet BCHM
The Cabinet Back Country Horseman is a small group of dedicated members in the far northwest corner of Montana. While you may not see us hosting the annual convention or heavily involved in board meetings, we do fully support our mission and strive to demonstrate that support through our work projects and our educational and community service programs.

Our annual Christmas prime rib and potluck dinner gave our members a chance to relax, put their feet up, listen to some great music, and reflect on our accomplishments for the year. And oh, what a year it was! From concerts to campsites to the Canadian Border, the Cabinet Backcountry Horsemen members logged 1,189 hours, constructed two new campsites, offered six educational and public service events and cleared and brushed 48 miles of trail on the Kootenai National Forest for almost $41,000 of volunteer service.

After several years in the making; equine travelers now have two equine friendly campsites at the Pleasant Valley Campground along Highway 2, about 35 miles south of Libby. Cabinet Back Country Horsemen prepared, promoted and secured a RAC grant and partnered with the Kootenai National Forest to construct two new campsites complete with new pull through parking areas, 20 x 40 foot metal corrals, metal feed racks, picnic tables, and fire pits. A new 1/3 mile loop trail was constructed to access stock water on the Fisher River that will also provide access for non-equine campers. It seems like the larger the project, the greater the turnout; and this was no exception as the club contributed over 300 man hours on this project alone.

While CBCH members cleared trails across the forest and throughout the season, one of our annual and most noteworthy projects entails a long weekend working on 21 miles of trail in the Yaak River drainage on the Three Rivers Ranger District. These trails are some of the most rugged, heavily vegetated and challenging trails that we work on outside the Wilderness area. Many of the trails are part of the Pacific Northwest Trail System that connects the Continental Divide Trail to the Pacific Crest Trail. Two of the trails that were cleared offered members the unique opportunity to access the Canadian Line. Add a torrential daylong downpour to the mix and you have tired, wet, hardy souls with an enhanced appreciation of a good bonfire, an excellent supper, great company and uplifting music courtesy of our “youngest” member family and their seven member band.

continued next page...
We ended the year’s events with record attendance at our Dave Stamey Concert. It was a great concert, and a great group of folks who made it happen. As we close this year, we can’t help but think of our founding fathers whose vision started us all down this path and that some (or much) of the credit for the additional 67,000 acres to be added to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex can be attributed to the work of the Back Country Horsemen. As we struggle with how to raise funds to keep our organization afloat, or how to recruit younger members, and whether we really do make a difference; take a minute to reflect on how much we have all accomplished since Back Country Horsemen was formed in January of 1973.

It’s official: President signs first new Montana wilderness bill in 31 years

by Gabriel Furshong, State Program Director
Montana Wilderness Association.

Dusty Crary stood in the middle of a cow pasture on his ranch west of Choteau, a silk handkerchief tucked into the collar of his down jacket to hold off the chilly winds blowing along the Rocky Mountain Front. He faced a clutch of reporters who huddled with about 30 other Montanans.

“This is the Front,” Dusty began, gesturing toward the mountains behind him, a 110-mile stretch of public land that biologists consider among the top 1% of wildlife habitat in the country. “That’s our inspiration in the background, and that’s something pretty amazing to wake up to every day,” he continued.

“But ya know, the Front is also barbed wire fences and old post piles and irrigation ditches and horse manure…. It’s also people. In fact, probably the most important ingredient in the Rocky Mountain Front is people.”

That was the central message of a press conference that Sen. Tester and Sen. Walsh held to celebrate passage of the Heritage Act, a bi-partisan bill that recently cleared the House and Senate with unanimous support from Montana’s congressional delegation, including Congressman Steve Daines.

The Heritage Act permanently protects 275,000 acres of American public land along the Front from future development and degradation. The legislation includes 67,000 acres of land in the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness areas and designates 208,000 acres as a Conservation Management Area, a provision that prevents the expansion of motorized use, prohibits new permanent road building, and protects traditional horse and foot trails.

Several members of the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front spoke at the press conference. The Coalition began working on the legislation in 2007, although their work has resulted in many previous conservation gains along the Front over several decades, including the withdrawal of federal mineral leases on over 400,000 acres of the Front in 2006.

“You guys have been working on this forever,” Tester said when he took the microphone. “Since when?” he asked Gene Sentz, a retired Choteau school teacher and long time member of MWA.


“Long enough!” Tester replied. “As long as Sharla and I have been married!”

In the nearly four decades that have passed since then, members of the Coalition have consistently focused their work within local communities along the Front, prioritizing the input of community members in Choteau, Augusta, Dupuyer, Great Falls, and Helena. Countless kitchen table conversations and at least ten public meetings resulted in countless adjustments to the original proposal from folks who make their living along the Front.

And according to Tester, that’s why the effort has been successful over the long haul. “This is where all collaborative efforts need to start,” Tester said. “On the ground.”
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If you would like to join, please contact a chapter in your area.