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. Foster and encourage formation of new Back Country Horsemen organizations.

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Bitter Root BCH members take on challenging trail and their efforts get noticed
By Karen Phillips, photos by Nancy Pollman, Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen

Members of Bitter Root BCH took on a tough job when they chose to clear a Bitterroot Valley trail located near Stevensville called Burnt Fork Trail #321. The Stevensville Ranger District could not provide dates on when the trail had last been cleared, but at one time it was a popular hiking choice. At this point, however, it was so impassable that hikers just gave up. Project leader Taylor Orr and his crew faced formidable blowdown sections that were hundreds of yards long and four to six feet high. Shrubs and trees overcrowding the trail required cutting back and numerous talus rockslides were challenging for stock and humans to negotiate. On Sunday, August 16, Taylor, Joe Rogish and Mike Foster cut 654 small and 66 large trees with half of those trees coming from just one section of a microburst blow down area. Meanwhile, Betsy Ballard, Mark DeGrazier, Lynn Kiess, Patty Martin and Jeff Rinta were the brushing crew, working to cut back overgrowth. On Monday, Taylor cut over 200 trees as he plowed through to finish the blow down section that was started on Sunday, and he made it to within two miles of Burnt Fork Lake. He hiked those two miles to the lake and estimated another 175 trees needed to be cut in order to clear the trail to the lake, and there remained a mile+ of high priority brushing left to do. This trail presented quite a few challenges, no doubt about it, and would take another day to finish.

On September 13, stalwarts of Bitter Root BCH answered the call to finish clearing to Burnt Fork Lake. Brad and Nancy Pollman took a chilly, early morning ride in their trusty open-air jeep to the end of Willow Mountain Road and worked their way down the [continued inside - page 2]
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Bitter Root BCH members take on challenging trail and their efforts get noticed
[continued from front page]

trail from the lake. Meanwhile, Dan Brandborg, Bill Goslin, and Taylor Orr worked their way up from the bottom. With three chainsaws buzzing away it didn’t take long to cut the remaining 175 trees across the trail. On the way out, Dan and Bill continued brushing out the mile of trail below Boulder Basin.

Information on this project was placed on Bitter Root BCH’s Facebook page August 27 and Sept 17 with over 3,600 people reached, the biggest response our club has had for a single project. Years ago, Bitter Root BCH maintained this trail and it has now been reopened for local hikers and riders to enjoy. If Facebook interest is any indication, outdoor recreationists appreciate our efforts.

RTP Grants: Increase Membership and Participation on Projects
By Brad Pollman, BCHMT Vice Chair and BCHMT RTP Committee Chair

Our state BCH organization applied for a Recreational Trails Project (RTP) grant in 2015. This was an opportunity for the chapters to work together under one grant to apply in a price category where there isn’t much competition. Ten of our 18 chapters participated in the $90,000 application. BCHMT was successful, though at the reduced amount of $40,000. That grant should be used up during the 2016 trail season, unless we have a bad fire year, though they do have until September 2017 to complete the project.

There are many tasks and types of projects that can be reimbursed through RTP. After completing the first grant, it was determined that in order to work best our grants consisting of multiple chapters needed to be limited to the following: routine trail maintenance, with reimbursement for meal per diem, vehicle mileage, stock, and stock hauling. It was imperative to our organization that all labor be used as in-kind contributions, as Back Country Horsemen did not want to lose sight of the fact that we are a volunteer organization. The fact that there can be some reimbursement for meals, stock use, and travel expenses is an opportunity for us to reduce a bit of our personal expense when helping the BCH meet its purposes, which as you know can add up quickly!

The first reimbursement request has been processed. Four of the participating chapters chose to request reimbursement for a total of over $6,000, leaving $34,000 in future reimbursements available. Here’s an overview of the work being reimbursed so far:

- 9 work projects, some consisting of multiple trails
- 38 volunteers, many volunteering multiple days
- 138 meals
- 155 stock days
- 42 stock hauling days
- 3,707 vehicle miles, and
- 90 trail miles, 53 of which were in the wilderness

We will not be applying as BCHMT for an RTP grant in March 2016. However, we will be working all year to educate the chapters in hopes of getting them involved in a 2017 RTP grant. It is getting easier to participate and I encourage all chapters to get involved. The way to do that is to form at least a two-person per chapter committee to work with one of the people on the State RTP Committee. Your chapter committee will track project statistics which will help when creating estimates for the next grant application. They will also administer reimbursements for their chapter.

With your help, the BCHMT RTP Committee and I look forward to making RTP grants a valuable tool to increase membership and project participation. And for those members who don’t want reimbursement, you can always donate it back to your chapter, where those funds can get even more trail work accomplished.

Hoping all of you had a wonderful Christmas. I’m looking forward to seeing you at the convention. As always, Happy Trails.
This is my last Chairman’s message for the Decker Dispatch as my tenure as state chairman will end at our annual state convention in April. I would like to say how humble and proud I am to have had the opportunity to be state chairman for Back Country Horsemen of Montana. I honestly have enjoyed being your chairman.

I have learned a great deal over these last two years as chairman, but one thing really stands out and that is how dedicated our membership is to the roots of this great organization. This dedication is what keeps all of us volunteering our most precious resource which is our personal time. I am continually amazed each year at the number of volunteer hours, your personal time, which have been put towards Back Country Horsemen of Montana. Our membership is enthusiastic and devoted.

While being chairman I have done a great deal of research into why BCH began. What drove our founders and compelled them to start such a unique organization. I discovered that Montana BCH really isn’t much different now from when it started 43 years ago. Our founders started BCH for many reasons, one being horse use on some of our public lands was being challenged, threatened and limited on some key historical trails. There needed to be advocacy that equestrian use on these trails was important and needed to continue. There wasn’t an organization to accomplish this at the time. Another motivator; they saw a need to volunteer their packing skills and knowledge to the Forest Service to help with major projects, especially in the wilderness, that the Forest Service didn’t have the resources to undertake. There was a major pack bridge that was becoming unsafe and was going to be demolished in the heart of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. This pack bridge was needed as there wasn’t a good place to cross in the area as the water is fast and the banks are steep. For safety reasons, our founders felt it very important that this bridge be repaired. They worked with the Forest Service, volunteered their time and accomplished the first major BCH project to pack materials into the wilderness so the Salmon Forks Bridge could be repaired. They also saw the need to educate other equestrian users on how to limit equestrian impacts to foster positive relationships with other user groups. As an organization we are still doing this type of work and these types of projects today.

Our public lands need our packing skills, pack support and expertise for trail maintenance. In the wilderness areas the public land managers need our knowledge of primitive tools and how to use them safely and properly. Most of these skills are becoming a lost art. While some are trying to push away from primitive skills and advocating for tools that are faster and easier in the wilderness, I know these skills and knowledge will proudly continue to be part of Back Country Horsemen of Montana.

I will end by saying; it has been a great honor and pleasure being the state chairman of the BCH founding state. I want to thank you for your faith in me and for the support you have shown me.

With much gratitude,

Connie Long
Chairman, BCH Montana

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**Three Rivers Back Country Horsemen 2015 Adventures**

*By Dan Pence, Three Rivers Back Country Horsemen*

Members celebrated National Trails Day on June 6, 2015, by packing a bench, eight sacks of “Saccrete,” needed water and other supplies to a high ridgeline immediately west of Dillon for the Beaverhead Trails Coalition. We helped install the bench at a scenic overlook of Dillon, a major portion of the Beaverhead Valley and several mountain ranges. The coalition has since acquired title to 475 acres in the vicinity. We anticipate completing additional projects in the acquisition to make the area more horse friendly. The acquisition will be developed as the closest open rangeland area to Dillon accessible to horsemen, hikers and other non-motorized use.

Our first “fun ride” for the year occurred on a VERY windy, cold April 11. Our objective was to review a new trail planned by Bannack State Park immediately to the west of the historic Bannack town site. We supported applications for grants they received for signing and other improvements on the trail. Six members survived the ride and found the route quite satisfactory. A couple of members extended the ride to the east of the park to finish their day where they encountered a “singing” Powder River gate on a high ridgeline, thanks to the high wind that essentially blew them off the mountain. Besides, their mounts were not overly fond of singing gates.

We scheduled two rides per month from May through September. Weather, work conflicts for planned Trail Bosses, and other problems resulted in cancellation of several rides. Members made up for the cancellations by taking non-scheduled rides and inviting others. One member takes along a pack horse carrying a chainsaw to expand our trail clearing projects on many of our trips. Beetle killed lodgepole is blocking many of our trails faster than they can be cleared, so the chainsaw was a needed companion.

We’re looking for an exciting 2016 and are working on a ride schedule that should be completed at our February meeting.

Does any chapter know how to get more members to participate in scheduled rides? Only two or three members participated in all too many of our scheduled events.
Double Diamond Award Winners By Dave Heinle, Beartooth Back Country Horsemen (BBCH)
This is the story of the Ernie Strum Trail—a trail to Lily Pad and Crater Lakes—by possibly the largest coalition of volunteers and government ever with BBCH as its HUB!

BACKGROUND
The idea of a four-part trail complex to provide public access to McDonald Basin and the North Face of the Beartooth Mountain Wilderness took root in 1999. This area lies between the West Rosebud valley and the old Benbow mine. Located just outside of the official wilderness boundary, but just as remote, primitive and secluded as if it were officially wilderness, it contains the headwater drainages of Fiddler and Fishtail creeks including the forks of each. The West Rosebud is a magnificent, beautiful scenic valley leading to the heart of the Beartooth Wilderness that has never had horse trail access, apart from a short hunting season exception. However, it is one of the most popular and most used areas, with two developed Forest Service campgrounds but only one overused trail. Blocked by private holdings, the adjacent McDonald basin has no open public access short of a very tough bushwhack, and certainly not horse accessible.

Due to its high altitude, the upper reaches of the Beartooth country provides a short trail-user season; however, the North Face and McDonald basin area is a much lower elevation giving a seven to nine month user season.

The terrain definitely lends itself to being an awesome recreational area, full of opportunities and was described to BBCH by Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks biologist as the most bio-diverse area in Montana. “It feels good to see something wild and free.” This is a new, non-motorized, trail starting at the edge of a backcountry county road as it passes through a short section of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land surrounded on three sides by privately owned ranch companies. That land and our new trailhead entry had been posted and blocked by a livestock fence for well over 80 years. The fourth side abuts a Montana state-owned school section, containing Lily Pad and Carter lakes, which happens to be adjacent to the US Forest Service land.

VISION
Ernie Strum and other BBCH members had been told by “ole timers” of old, long abandoned hunter and sheepherder trails in this area. BBCH members began to talk the “vision” to all that would listen.

The seed sprouted and really began to grow in 2003 when the new BLM recreational planner was asked to contact the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FW&P) regional biologist about access to stock fish in Crater Lake. The following year she and the BLM field manager hiked from the West Rosebud Road over the ridge into the state school section containing the lakes, while talking about public access and seeing the added recreation opportunities potential. The FW&P stocked Crater Lake with rainbow trout and they continued to consider a public access trail to the lakes.

In 2005, BBCH members, the new BLM recreational planner and a Crow biologist were planning a group weekend campout for the BBCH and Montana Wilderness Association with tours of the Native American artifact sites of the area. During that day we learned by chance of each other’s desire to build a trail through their land to Lily Pad and Crater lakes. Perhaps “fate” played a role!

COALITION
With the circle now complete, the balance of 2005 was used to continue building a coalition of willing and motivated partners to bring this project to fruition. To start, a representative of Montana Department of Natural Resource Conservation (MT DNRC), BBCH members and Ernie set up a coalition meeting at the DNRC. At that meeting it was learned that the BLM land was not surveyed, so Ernie set about to fix that problem, which he accomplished. He asked Red Lodge Surveying to be a partner, the answer was yes, and a $20,000 survey was donated.

This project ultimately involved FIVE government agencies plus FIFTEEN private entities and numerous individuals, which took tremendous coordination by BBCH. As we look back, it was and is truly an All American accomplishment. Creating good and big dreams does take time but by putting all of these minds together we definitely created abundant synergy.

During the period of 1999 to 2007, BBCH pitched the project to various groups and held group meetings, which grew larger as the coalition grew, and the project edged closer to reality. The public reaction was and continues to be overwhelmingly supportive.

In early May 2007, BBCH planned a spring campout and barbecue for the coalition of government agencies and volunteers. We showed the proposed trail location on aerial photos. The USFS representative explained how
there were 15 miles of Forest boundary between Dean and the West Rosebud road with no access. He stated that the Forest policy strives for one access point in every five miles and agreed the McDonald Basin needed a trail behind the private land. All concurred that a small parking trailhead was feasible at the BLM location and the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) will be back on site in July. After visiting the trailhead locations and the discussion of the morning a goal had been set and accepted by everyone.

**COMPLETION**

The following years involved the EIS process, and then the actual on the ground non-motorized trail building, as funding permitted. The BLM Field Manager and the BLM Recreational Planner guided the construction while the USFS surveyed, plotted and marked the trail location on BLM land. By now Ernie was on the BLM RAC committee which enabled better coordination from the inside.

Many horsemen and other organizations donated their time and hard labor during the next years. In 2014 alone, a very busy Spring and early Summer of final construction; 480 hours labor, equating to nearly $17,000 plus 2,953 miles and signage were donated by BBCH members and partners in assisting Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) crews doing the trail building. In addition, BBCH chapter shared the actual dollar costs with BLM. MCC put us over the top by donating some weeks of crew labor in the construction process with a valuation in 2014 alone of 232 hours, equaling nearly $10,000 and 935 miles. One 2014 event among many stands out; that of the MCC crew, all younger folks, deciding all on their own to save a mature, stately pine tree in the middle of the trail corridor. They built a roundabout for the trail, around the tree, thereby saving that tree in the median.

**THE TRIBUTE**

The trail was first called the Lily Pad Lake Trail but was officially named the Ernie Strum Trail after his passing in late 2013, to commemorate his long and tireless work on the project. This tribute brings significance to the project, as this naming practice has not been used for many years. Ernie, a Beartooth Back Country Horseman from the first days of the organization, also brings lasting recognition and tribute to Back Country Horsemen by this partnership. By July 2014 the trail was completed with an additional side trail to a beautiful scenic overlook on BLM land we call Ernie’s Point, a place that will awaken your senses.

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**By Chuck Miller**  
National Director, BCH Montana

BCHA has embarked on a very large and significant change in its structure, and not without a great deal of thought and discussion. That change was to interview and do due diligence to find a company to do the day to day management of BCHA. BCHA has grown to the point that a single person, Peg Griewe, the Executive Secretary, cannot do all the membership, accounting, board of directors meetings, and so much more.

An Associated Management Company (AMC) that has a large staff can do that. There are nearly 300 management groups, but only 80 some have an accreditation and hold to very high standards. A committee of five were selected — Sherri Jennings, Tom Thomas, Don Saner, Freddy Dunn, and Jim McGarvey — to select and study nine accredited management companies. Three were then selected out to be investigated in depth. All three had a one-hour video interview by the selection committee during January 4, 5, and 6, 2016.

The one selected was Association Resources Inc. of West Hartford, Connecticut. This was voted on and accepted by the Executive Committee on January 12, 2016. They will provide some or all of the secretarial and accounting services needed including answering phone calls, faxes, or other electronic inquiries, providing the Chairman or Executive Director with daily action items, planning, project management and chapter development. They will be responsible for finding sustainable funding and increasing membership, as well as member retention.

The AMC will maintain historical records, be responsible for accounts receivable, payroll, website, and social media and update all information. They will produce the BCHA newsletter with initial help from Sherri Jennings and Deb Schatz. The AMC will also arrange all meetings, develop BCHA meeting sites for the national board meeting, as well as taking notes.

Outsourcing of some things such as legal, audits, proofreading, printing, and public relations will be done, of which some may not be covered by the financial arrangement between the AMC and BCHA.

The final agreement and responsibilities are currently being worked out, and the AMC will start work the end of March and early April 2016.

The price...$48,688 annually. Does that seem high? Yes, but the other two companies did not have the same enthusiasm or depth as the currently selected AMC and one was $65,800 yearly. The money is already available from the current executive secretary as well as other savings that will be made by this transition.

There will be a 90-day clause in the contract to provide either party an escape if needed.

I am very enthusiastic that this will work and will be something we and our founders would be proud of!

If you would like to review the three separate AMCs, contact me and I will email them to you. Most are twenty to thirty pages in length.
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
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!

We Hope the 2016 Back Country Horsemen of Montana State Convention will meet your expectations!
Thanks
2016 Back Country Horsemen of Montana
State Convention
Photo Contest and Display

Photo Contest Categories

- Animals; Horses, Wildlife, Dogs, Cats, etc.
- Scenery; Mountains, Lakes, Streams, Trees, etc.
- People; Friends, Kids, Family, etc.
- Work Projects; Club work projects, Activities or Events.

Photo Contest Rules

- Photos are by amateur photographers only and must be Back Country Horsemen.
- Photo size shall be 5 x 7 or 8 x 10 and must be dry mounted or matted (no frames).
- Name and address shall be attached on the back of the photo.

Photos can be registered on Friday evening and Saturday Morning
At the Holiday Inn Executive Room
(1st Floor straight up the stairs).

Photos will be judged by Convention Attendees.
Awards will be given and announced on Sunday morning.
There will be a people’s choice award for one over all entry.

Photos can be picked up on Sunday Morning
(Photo contest coordinators Joe and Helen Suta - Phone 406-434-2135)
RAFFLE DRAWING

1 for $5  
6 for $20

Drawing Date:  
April 2, 2016

Event:  
2016 Back Country Horsemen of Montana State Convention

Location:  
Holiday Inn  
Great Falls MT 59404

Each ticket is good for 1 chance at each item.

- Marlin Lever Action Saddle Gun in 45/70 US Gov't Caliber
- Original Handmade Decker Pack Saddle
- $500.00 Town Pump Gift Card

Custom Engraved  
Marlin Model 1895G 45/70 Gov’t Caliber Saddle Gun

Picture of Engraving on Rifle Receiver

Custom Hand Made Decker Pack Saddle  
by Saddle Maker  
Thales Mullanex of Hayford Saddle Shop  
Conrad, Montana

$500.00 Town Pump Gift Card to be spent at any Town Pump Store

For more raffle tickets;  
Contact: LeAnn Hermance  
406-278-5378 or E-Mail: hermance@3rivers.net
Conventional Registration
2016 BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF MONTANA
APRIL 1ST THRU 3RD, 2016

Hosted by: The East Slope Back Country Horsemen
Holiday Inn and Convention Center, Great Falls Montana

Convention Participant

Back Country Horsemen Chapter___________________________________________________
Name: ______________________________________  Voting Delegate: Yes_____    No______
Mailing Address: _______________________________________________________________
City: ______________________________________   State: ___________  Zip Code: ________
Phone: (_____) _____-___________                             E-Mail: ___________________________

Registration Fee: Until March 10, 2016 is $90.00 after March 10, 2016 the fee is $95.00
Registration Fees Include: Breakfast Saturday and Sunday with Lunch and Banquet on Saturday.

Registration Fee: $___________

Spouse and/or Guest’s of Participant

Name: ______________________________     Name:   ______________________________
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Please make checks payable to: East Slope Back Country Horsemen or ESBCH
Please mail form to: ESBCH – P.O. Box 967- Conrad, MT 59425
All registrations should be received by: March 10, 2016
Holiday Inn and Convention Center, 400 10th Ave. S, Great Falls, MT 59405  (406)727- 7200
For further assistance please contact:
LeAnn Hermance - Phone: (406)278-5378 / E-Mail: hermance@3rivers.net
Debbie Ries – Phone: (406)278-3727 / E-Mail: riesrd@outlook.com
The camp was all peaceful
Or one might assume
For the start of this trip
Would be great you’d presume.

The setting was perfect
‘Neath Montana’s big sky
Under the pleasant June night
Several members did lie.

But quiet’s not the word
To describe such a night
Those old men were a snoring
Which caused quite a fright.

The horses they stamped
And swished their long tails
Anxious they were
To hit rocky trails.

The Gibson was calling
And not far beyond
The Bob Marshall Wilderness
A name that is fond.

The start of Meridith’s trip
Had gear galore
That huge Yeti cooler
Was Deena’s night horror.

They tried and they tried
To load all that gear
But despite John’s great efforts
They got nowhere near.

Those were futile attempts
To make it all fit
That portable toilet?
Nope, just a pit.

With two horses to pack
Only so much could go
Just one more thing?
But the answer was no.

Ole Rio stood still
For try after try
To secure the great load
That made men want to cry.

Only four hours in
Adjusting this load
The crew was all mantied
Ready to get on the road.

Now that trip up to Arsneck
Went without much to do
But come the next morning
John did round number two.

And with that next day
Brought the second brave wave
Of CBCH’ers
And the challenge they gave.

For with these great folks
Came a gear pile sized large
There was no single culprit
But loads loomed like a barge.

And while the fishing boat beckoned
To ease that great pile
Stubborn old men
Packed their stock with a smile.

But one little Arab
And a stubborn old mule
Said enough is enough
This just isn’t cool.

They snorted and bucked
With outrageous packs
Trying to be free
Of the loads on their backs.

The mule was now loose
And boy could he run
Poor Jeff and Ole Ross
Their trips just begun.

Then Elmer was down
His Arab dancing atop
They screamed to let go
So the beating would stop.

That prancing and dancing
Softened weathered man pride
The rope was soon tossed
As Elmer did finally abide.

The little gray Arab
Would not pack that way
So Sonny the Paint
 Took the load for the day.

And to no one’s surprise
That Arab did pack
His somewhat bruised owner
Upon his great back.

From the trailers on up
Only a minor event
With one dented pannier
And a crew fully spent.

The camps were all set
In locations supreme
A place that’s so perfect
It creates man’s great dream.
Easy days with no packing
Just fishing and riding
Good food and great friends
A time well worth abiding.

And that fishing was great
With bite after bite
Those trout they did strike
From first light through the night.

Trail rides up the Sun River
Had sights to behold
The trips were so grand
The memories pure gold.

But soon it would end
As all good things must do
For John, no more relaxing
It was time to start something new.

So first off the hill
Was Meridith’s camp
Interesting for sure
Down that mountainous ramp.

Oh, that monstrous cooler
And a tin pannier cook shack
With a rock, rattle and roll
What an unsettling pack.

See that pannier was now
So much less full
And those cans and those bottles
They surely did roll.

And steady ole Paint
Was not so steady this day
With much bucking and racing
He did get his way.

So again to their rescue
Came beloved Ole Sonny
To pack out their gear
He was right in the money.

And to ease Sonny’s load
The fishing boat did tow
Back to the trailhead
Most of the gear without woe.

For group number two
Of their stocked camp
One fishing boat load
Was left at the ramp.

That ride out was peaceful
The trail nice and long
With matters made better
Jeff, Elmer, and Ross were in song.

My tale is now over
Thank God no one died
And next year I hope
You’re once again by my side.

Below: John, Ross, Meridith, Elmer, Carly, Deena, Jeff and Charlie dog.
On December 22, thirty-five members of the Bitter Root BCH club and their guests joined dozens of other volunteers at Stevensville’s St. Mary’s Family Center to help the Pantry Partner’s Food Bank make sure that hundreds of families in Ravalli County would have enough to eat on Christmas Day. From 8:00 a.m. until 10:30 a.m. they worked with students from Florence and Stevensville high schools and other community members, filling approximately 730 boxes for 365 families. Contributions included $6,000 worth of turkeys, along with everything else needed for a traditional holiday meal.

Club members began this tradition in the mid-90s under the leadership of Lee Scharff. He recruited heavily and the number of members helping out expanded. He then handed the baton (or we should say the clipboard) to Brad Pollman. Brad has now trained Joe Atencio to assist him so that we always have a knowledgeable member who can step in and direct traffic.

Standing side-by-side, members line up boxes and make sure the right numbers of items are included for each family. They start with small families (one box) and go all the way up to extra-large (four boxes). Brad Pollman directs students and community members to pick up the appropriate food items and away we go. They head down the line of boxes, dropping in the food they picked up. Meanwhile other members sort turkeys by size, haul food in, build boxes, recycle empty food boxes, and drop produce into family boxes. It looks like mass chaos, but in reality it is a smooth efficient process.

This is an ideal activity for our members at that time of year: trail projects are wrapped up, our critters are in winter mode and members want to stay involved with their community. The effort is something important that helps a lot of people, and we like to say we are practicing a different kind of packing skill.

On behalf of Montana Wilderness Association, I would like to wish BCH Montana a very Happy New Year! This is the time of year to look back on past accomplishments and plan ahead for the months to come.

We are grateful for all that 2015 brought to the CDT Montana trail stewardship program. Last summer our 159 volunteers worked their tails off to help maintain and complete the Continental Divide Trail. Our packers in particular were a shining example of the spirit of service, packing us in and out of five backcountry projects. Thanks for all your efforts!

In 2016 we have more projects in need of stock support. Check out our backcountry project listings online at http://wildmontana.org/our-work/stewarding-the-cdt/volunteer-packers.

We could use your help to work the trail in the Badger, Scapegoat, Anaconda Pintler Wilderness and more. Contact me at smazzullo@wildmontana.org or 301.651.5818 for more info.

Thanks again for all your help and we wish you the best in 2016!
Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack recently appointed 23 members to the inaugural Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Advisory Council under the authority of the National Trails System Act. The council will advise the Secretary, through the Chief of the Forest Service, on management of the Pacific Northwest Trail in Montana, Idaho, and Washington. One of America’s 11 National Scenic Trails, the Pacific Northwest Trail (PNT) is only the second such trail – alongside the Continental Divide Trail – to traverse Montana.

“We’re excited to assemble such a diverse group of volunteers to collaborate with us in developing a plan designed to improve recreational opportunities and experiences, and support our unique mix of gateway communities,” said Matt McGrath, Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Program Manager. “The strong interest in the council demonstrates the significance of the Pacific Northwest Trail as a truly national resource.”

The council is composed of citizens with diverse backgrounds chosen for their expertise in recreation-related issues, and ability to represent a balance of stakeholder perspectives and geographic areas. The council also includes representatives of the USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management, which manage sections of the trail.

First proposed in 1970, this 1,200-mile route from the Continental Divide in Glacier National Park to the Pacific Ocean at Cape Alava in the Olympic National Park is a unique pathway traveling through some of the most spectacular and scenic terrain in the United States, and connects people and communities of the Pacific Northwest. As directed by the National Trails System Act, the Pacific Northwest Trail and other National Scenic Trails are sited to provide for maximum outdoor recreation opportunity as well as the conservation and enjoyment of the surrounding scenic, historic, natural, and cultural resources.

In 2009, nearly 40 years after its proposal, Congress designated the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail. Establishing the council is a major milestone in the trail’s short history. The Forest Service is cooperating with many other federal, state, and local agencies as well as private landowners to develop a trail-wide comprehensive plan. Over the next three years, the council will provide recommendations on trail uses, signage, establishing a trail corridor, and prioritizing projects.

Stephanie Campbell is the new Regional Coordinator in Montana and Idaho for the Pacific Northwest Trail Association (PNTA), the major non-profit partner with the US Forest Service for the PNT. Stephanie is working with the local land managers in Idaho and Montana to coordinate activities in service of the Pacific Northwest Trail’s protection, preservation, and promotion. As PNTA is new to the region, activities for 2016 will focus on organizing and participating in events with partner organizations to raise awareness for the PNT including trail maintenance days with volunteers.

In Montana, current PNT work being done includes a project spearheaded by the Cabinet Back Country Horsemen, who recently received a two-year $10,000 expense reimbursement grant from the Recreation Trail Program to install drainage structures and haul gravel on the Midge Creek Trail, a section of the PNT in the Kootenai National Forest’s Yaak region. Additional 2016 Back Country Horsemen projects within the PNT’s Montana section are currently being coordinated by Stephanie and will be announced early next year.

For more information on the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail including a list of the newly appointed Advisory Council members, visit http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/pnt. For detailed maps of the PNT’s current route visit http://pnt.org/maps/.

Please contact Stephanie Campbell, Pacific Northwest Trail Association’s Regional Coordinator for Montana and Idaho with any additional questions including how to get involved. Diverse volunteer opportunities are available.

Read more on this story at www.wildmontana.org/wild-word
The Upper Clark Fork would like to spotlight a few of the younger folks involved in our horsemanship lives and the amazing draw that they have towards horses.

Katie is our niece from Oregon. She has spent a lot of time with us in Montana over the past years. We desperately wanted to get her into the mountains with the horses, but we had one big obstacle. Katie was terrified of horses. Every time the horses would come around Katie would be climbing over fences or climb on top of me to get away from them. We don’t have wild, bronky horses. Our horses are quiet, big gentle eyed quarter horses. That did not matter to Katie. When the animals came around they might as well have been grizzly bears. She wanted nothing to do with them. Fortunately that slowly changed. After a couple of years we finally had Katie confident enough to start doing some ground work with the horses. Having her “be the boss” of the horses by lunging them did wonders for her confidence. Eventually she was willing to try to ride in the small arena we have. She was pretty nervous at first but the calming power of the horse gave her confidence. As her confidence grew we finally were able to ride out into the open country and leave the protection of the arena behind us. We had been riding in some open country for about an hour when she rode up near me and, with a big grin on her face, she said “do you have any idea how fun this is?!” I had to laugh. Of course, I knew how fun it was. These horses have become my life. It was a touching moment. I had to turn and ride away as I got a little choked up. This little gal was growing up and her confidence was booming. Over the next few years Katie finally was able to get up into the mountains with us. She has been on multiple pack trips and covered many miles in these Rocky Mountains we call home. This year Katie went off to college in Portland, Oregon. Her father sent me a copy of her college application paper she had written. Her whole paper was about how she had spent so much time in Montana and how she had learned to take risks and to overcome her fears and gain confidence. She wrote a lot about the rewards that are waiting for us when we travel outside our comfort zone. It has been touching watching this young lady grow up and to watch the power of the horse as it changed her and gave her confidence.

Jordan is a shy 12 year old neighbor girl who lives a couple miles away from us. She is a horse crazy little gal who has grown up on the family ranch with her parents and grandparents. Unfortunately for her, they are a four-wheeler ranch family. They do not have one horse on the place. Her mother approached my wife, Lonnie, early last year about giving Jordan horse lessons. After a little thought Lonnie decided to donate her time and take on Jordan as her young apprentice. Last summer was a joy watching Jordan come out of her nervous shell and learn the skills of horsemanship. Lonnie has been very patient and thorough with the education to teach Jordan strong safety habits and also habits that keep the horses healthy and safe. At some point in her life the power of the horse had already grabbed hold of Jordan and has a strong hold. Fortunately for her, Lonnie has stepped up as a mentor to show her everything she can about horsemanship. Jordan and her mother stopped the other day with a big plate of Christmas goodies. We talked for a while about next year’s plans. It will be time to get Jordan into the mountains out on trail rides and hopefully on a pack trip soon. Just talking about riding in the mountains put an amazing smile on her face and a look of excitement in her eyes. Spring can’t come fast enough for that horse crazy little gal.

Leah is the oldest daughter in one of the newer families that has joined
In the News

Public to get new Rocky Mountain Front access
Reprinted with permission from the Great Falls Tribune, by Karl Puckett

The public will have access again this fall to 50,000 acres of public land in the Deep Creek area of the Rocky Mountain Front west of Choteau from the Salmond Ranch, just in time for the big-game rifle openers.

The access is the result of a settlement agreement approved by the State Land Board in July to create public access across the Salmond Ranch.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation said Wednesday it plans to open the Deep Creek Public Access in Teton County on Thursday.

“We worked hard to get it open prior to general rifle season for big game,” DNRC spokesman John Grassy said.

Erik Eneboe, Conrad unit manager for DNRC’s Trust Lands Division, said the access is a culmination of three years of negotiations between the Salmond family, DNRC, Russell Country Sportsmen, Teton County, Randall Knowles of Great Falls and other local sporting interests.

“It wasn’t an easy deal, but everyone stayed the course and found a way to make it work,” Eneboe said.

As part of the settlement, the Salmond family agreed to create a new public road along the border of its property to reach state trust lands managed by DNRC; the DNRC agreed to pay for a public parking area and to maintain weed control along the new route.

From the access, recreationists can reach more than 1,900 acres of state trust land, 38,000 acres of Lewis and Clark National Forest including the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and 10,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management land in the Deep Creek area.

Before, access to the area was only possible from 25 miles to the south or north, or from west of the Continental Divide, Knowles said.

Signs have been posted along the road, and a kiosk with a map and recreation rules has been erected in the parking lot, Eneboe said.

About 1.5 miles of the road passes through the Salmond family’s private land, and the DNRC is asking the public to stay on the main road to the parking area.

Overnight use is limited to two consecutive days on state land in the parking area only, Eneboe said. Use of motorized vehicles beyond the parking area is prohibited.

Forest Plans

The Bitterroot National Forest Travel Management Planning Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Draft Record of Decision (Draft ROD) have been prepared. These documents are now available for a pre-decisional objection period and can be reviewed at the Stevensville, Darby, Sula and West Fork District Offices, the Supervisor’s Office and the public libraries in Stevensville, Hamilton, Darby, and Missoula.

For more info visit:
http://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/
and scroll down and click on “Forest Plan Revision” near the bottom.

If you wish to submit a comment, please mail it to: Chris Fox, Bitterroot National Forest All Units, 1801 North First Street, Hamilton, MT 59840 or e-mail: cfrox@fs.fed.us

The Flathead Forest Plan Revision’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement is due out in April. There will be a 90-day comment period following the DEIS’s publication.
Back Country Horsemen: America’s best kept secret in Wilderness stewardship
Reprinted with permission from InsideNPS, by Rita Hennessy

Have you considered whether a local chapter of Back Country Horsemen of America might help with your unit’s maintenance and restoration needs? The National Park Service (NPS) maintains a five-year general agreement with Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA), signed by Director Jarvis in August, 2014. The agreement provides a framework for cooperation wherein BCHA chapters can work with local park units on mutually-beneficial projects, including training seminars, living history events, ecological restoration activities, Leave No Trace™ equine education programs, and service projects including trail and horse camp maintenance.

BCHA is a national non-profit organization. It maintains over 180 active chapters located throughout 30 states.

BCHA volunteers have been assisting federal and state land management agencies since 1973 to perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America’s back country and Wilderness areas. They coordinate with conservation corps, youth and veterans groups. BCHA strives to educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the sustainable use of the back country resource by the general public and horsemen and horsewomen commensurate with our nation’s heritage.

BCHA chapters work alongside national and regional partners like the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Pacific Crest Trail Association, and Continental Divide Trail Coalition. Hike-in crews can carry in tools and supplies only so far, while BCHA provides the muscle and “horse power” to keep backcountry segments of the Appalachian (GRSM), Pacific Crest and Continental Divide National Scenic Trails open and enjoyable to the public. BCHA is a long-time supporting member of the Partnership for the National Trail System (PNTS) and advocates each year with partners American Hiking Society and The Wilderness Society for NPS and trails-related appropriations during the annual “Hike the Hill” event.

Many BCHA chapters include certified crew bosses and certified sawyers (both crosscut and chainsaw), while other chapters can provide enthusiastic volunteers for light trail maintenance or for packing in supplies for work parties deep in the backcountry or Wilderness.

Back Country Horsemen are among the dwindling practitioners of wilderness tradition in their use of primitive tools to maintain trails and by their primitive mode of travel—a mode that was extolled and favored by wilderness champions that include Aldo Leopold, Teddy Roosevelt and Howard Zahniser. BCHA’s use of pack stock represents an important tool for land managers in their efforts to maintain and restore wilderness character.

BCHA volunteers documented in-kind contributions exceeding $14.4 million for various projects throughout the nation during the past 20 years. As such, they represent one of America’s “best kept secrets” in wilderness stewardship.
Lady Long Rider

Trego’s Bernice Ende has covered 22,000 miles on horseback in 11 years

BY TRISTAN SCOTT, Sept. 24, 2015 Reprinted with permission from the Flathead Beacon

As an equestrian explorer and so-called “lady long rider,” Bernice Ende has learned to ride through pain and discomfort while covering nearly 22,000 miles on horseback in the past decade.

With a mix of stoicism and grit, she can push herself past the brink, intimate as she is with her limits and resilience, and understanding that the path forward is rife with unknown variables.

She won’t ask her animals to do the same, however, tending to them with fastidious care and attention. As a former ballet teacher, she applies a brand of finesse to her epic rambles in a way that might seem at odds to an outsider, a stark contrast to her rugged, kerchief-adorned appearance. But it makes perfect sense to Ende, whose interest in ballet was born of her relationship with the horse, “a most gifted dancer indeed,” she says.

Ende lives in Trego, but spends much of the year traveling with her two horses, Norwegian Fjords Essie Pearl and Montana Spirit. On her current journey, which began in April 2014 and will tentatively conclude in December, her horses are taking her from Montana to Maine and back west through Canada to the Pacific Ocean before returning home to Montana.

Last week, she passed through the Flathead Valley on a hometown detour, stopping along the way to visit with friends, supporters and well-wishers, for whom Ende is a familiar sight as she has crisscrossed the country numerous times on her loyal steeds.

“I stop a lot when I come through Montana. My people are here, and it’s an excuse to rest the horses and visit with my friends and supporters,” Ende said.

According to the Long Riders’ Guild, a “long rider” is someone who has ridden more than 1,000 continuous miles on a single equestrian journey. Ende’s journeys have taken her more than 20 times that distance, and she’s got another 1,000 miles to cover before December.

She commenced her first long ride in 2005, riding 2,000 miles through the Rocky Mountains from her home in Trego to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

It was a learning experience, to say the least.

“I simply did not know what I was getting myself into. I rode on a wave of ignorance,” she wrote on her website, www.endeofthetrail.com. “I cried the day I left and I cried for weeks until fatigue finally broke the fear into tiny digestible pieces. I eventually found a life that tantalized and called to me, a life that suited me. I remember thinking, ‘how will I ever return to a normal life?’ Well, I guess I never did.”

The following year, she rode 5,000 miles in a sprawling circumnavigation of the western United States that took her through 15 states. She’s continued to push the limits of long riding, and when she completes her current journey, which she began in spring 2014, she’ll have kissed both coasts while traversing the northern and southern tiers of both the U.S. and Canada, respectively.

“I’m about 7,000 miles into an 8,000-mile international tour,” she said. “I’m hoping to be back here in December.”

Ende, 61, averages about 30 miles a day, and generally takes a five-day break every three weeks. She travels almost entirely on back roads, entering cities only to restock her food supply.

She eats rice, beans and dandelion greens, buys garden vegetables and eggs whenever possible, and doesn’t carry a cell phone.

She rides unsupported and alone, preferring the equine company of Essie Pearl and Montana Spirit and, on previous journeys, her beloved Claire Dog, who made her last long ride in 2012 and died earlier this month.

Although Ende plots out her route, she doesn’t follow a set itinerary, and while she visits friends and family along the way, she has no planned stopping points or planned accommodations, preferring instead to knock on the doors of strangers and camp on their land.

It can be dangerous, and while Ende has encountered hostility and carries a gun, she’s mostly met with support and praise, especially from women who are inspired by her courage and independence.

That’s an important piece of Ende’s journey, and last summer, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote in Montana, she made a special pilgrimage to visit the gravesite of Susan B. Anthony, the famed 19th century suffragist.

“It was amazing to be there and speak to women about my travels as a way to highlight suffrage,” she said. “It was a way to say thank you to the women who gave their lives to make what I do possible.”