



Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

# Decker Dispatch



## CHALLENGE at CHALLENGE Another step forward BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN

Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead has this idea, see! It's that collectively, the chapters all have splendid ideas that propel their individual groups to exciting prominence in their own areas – and we want to provide a relaxing, back country atmosphere where an exchange of ideas can take place between the chapters.

That's why BCH Flathead is determined to host an event on August 22-25, 2019, in the Challenge Cabin area of the Flathead National Forest – snuggled conveniently between Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall and Great Bear Wildernesses, while the Badger-Two Medicine area and Blackfeet Indian Reservation are just across a ridgeline. These areas will provide many trail riding opportunities for both members and guests during the four-day gathering.

A fundamental focus of this gathering is educational, re: the exchange of ideas. Also planned are evening campfire sessions to benefit members from any club: "Leadership" sessions, perhaps, or "How To Better Involve New Members." Outside speakers can be invited – we're at work on this.

The details will come together, but our primary objective right now is to invite members of your chapter in a timely enough manner that plans can be made in advance to take advantage of this innovative idea.

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Decker Dispatch

### OUR PURPOSES

- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country, roadless backcountry and wilderness areas.

- To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.

- To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.

- To educate, encourage and solicit active participation by the general public in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horses and people commensurate with our heritage.

- To foster and encourage formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.

- To seek out opportunities to enhance existing areas of recreation for stock users.



Connie and Kevin Rubens. She's the secretary (and newsletter editor) for the Charlie Russell Chapter of BCH (Great Falls). While very welcome, they were surprise visitors to a work project – trail ride of BCH Flathead out of the Challenge Cabin area near Marias Pass this past summer. It was Connie's and her husband's appearance that triggered the concept of putting together a state-wide convocation of BCH-ers as the "next step forward" for Back Country Horsemen everywhere.



Challenge Cabin, U.S. Forest Service, Flathead (Innocent appearing, isn't it? But its location is superb, right along the Crown of the Continent.)

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## National Director's Column

By Mark Himmel (Charlie Russell BCH)

National Director, BCH Montana

### National Board Report-Asheville, North Carolina

The National Board Meeting started on Monday, April 8, 2019. Thirty states were represented. The agenda for the meeting was posted on the web site and approved (minutes from 2018 board meeting, all correspondence from 2018, Executive Committee minutes from 2018).

The eleven active committees presented year-end reports and were approved. Legacy Committee (a restricted fund with the goal of raising \$500,000) presented their business plan. There is \$21,000 in the fund at this time. The treasurer's report for the year and new budget for 2019 were approved.

There was a discussion that all states must have an EIN number (Montana does); some states are still using the BCHA number. Erica gave a headquarters report, and Media & Marketing showed the Facebook presentation from the Montana State Convention. The Strategic Business Plan was presented by Sherry Copeland and approved by the board. Governance policy changes were presented by Darrell Wallace and approved by the board.

The two resolutions were presented. The first one on states reducing their Directors from two to one was debated, the discussion eventually turned to finding a less expensive location to hold annual meetings. A vote was taken and the resolution was defeated. The second resolution on MRAD or Minimum Tool Use was lightly debated and tabled by Montana for later discussion.

A discussion was held on member benefits. BCHA logo use was discussed. A presentation was given by Air Med and Equisure Equine Insurance.

The Meet & Greet was hosted by North Carolina. I was seated at dinner beside Bill Hodge (new Executive Director for Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation). We had a very good discussion about the Bob and BCH support.

### Day Two: Public Lands Workshop

We discussed the Trails Stewardship Act, presented by Chris Spurl and Debbie Caffin, Forest Service, Region 8.

We discussed Forest Planning & Participation, presented by Michelle Aldridge and Alice Cohen, Pisgah-Nantahala National Forest.

Christine Hoyer talked about the partnership with the Great Smokey Mountains National Park. The Park is designated Wilderness and their use of chain saws to clear trails initially each year was very well discussed. Some of our board members who presented the second resolution quizzed Christine as to why National Parks can use chain saws and National Forests do not. The discussion, in my opinion, started to get out of hand when Chris Spurl, FS R8, stepped up and stated how each land manager makes their own chain saw use decisions.

### Day Three: Committee Break Outs

Each committee designed their business plan for the upcoming year. Committee chairs presented their plans to the board assembled later in the day and were approved by board.

The second resolution was brought back up and amended by Missouri and Montana. (The amendment listed a progression of steps that should be undertaken before asking land managers to start MRAD or Minimum Tool.) The amendment was unanimously accepted, the second resolution did pass on the final vote.

Future meeting locations were discussed and approved with Kansas City, Missouri 2020, Cheyenne, Wyoming 2021, and Colorado in 2022.

Elections were held for open positions on the Executive Committee:

Chairman - Darrell Wallace (Washington)

Vice Chairman - Sherry Copeland (Missouri)

Treasurer - Mark Himmel (Montana)  
National Director 2-yr term - Latifia Rodriguez (Colorado)

National Director 1 yr. term [remainder of Mark's term] - Dennis Serpa (California)

Non-Director 2 yr. term - Brad Pollman (Montana)

At the Banquet later that evening, Legacy Fund Sub-committee Chair Steve McClintock announced that the fund had surpassed the \$71,000 mark with donations. Awards were presented and the BCHA 2019 board meeting ended.

Mark

## Letter from the Chair

By Rich Carl  
Chairman, BCH Montana

A lot has been going on in Montana since our annual convention. But first I want to thank Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen (CRBCH) for a great convention held the first part of March. Scott Kiser, Mission Valley BCH, presented CRBCH with a certificate of holding the coldest convention ever!

Back Country Horsemen of Montana (BCHMT) again will be having a Regional Forester Ride this year. Dates are June 17th through the 19th. On June 17th, there will be a potluck at the trailhead (TBD) and everyone is invited to attend. On June 18th and 19th, we will be doing an overnight with the Forest Service (FS). This is our time to build relationships with FS personnel. We are limited in who can attend this portion.

BCHMT is member of the Montana Trails Coalition (MTC). MTC has been very active in supporting legislation for Montana trails. They helped pass bill SB24, sponsored by Senator Terry Gauthier, which would increase the optional light motor vehicle registration fee from \$6 to \$9, providing increased funding for state park operations and maintenance and fishing access sites, and create a new made-in-Montana trails grant program. SB24 passed the Senate on March 12, passed the House on April 16, and was signed by the Governor on May 1. Bob Walker, chair of MTC

and advisor to Montana Trails Recreation and Parks Association, was the lead on this.

BCHMT is on the radar of other non-profit groups looking for our support. We will be discussing these as we go through the year. Being wanted by other organization is a positive thing for our organization. BCHMT is highly regarded by many and this is because of all of you. BCHMT wouldn't be where it is today without the hard working volunteers.

As BCHMT moves forward, we are building a culture for future generations. Our membership is what keeps us going. As we are always looking for new members, it is also important to keep our focus on the retention of our existing members. There are traditions that are important for us to hang onto also, to keep the legacy of the founding members.

All of us want a place that is inviting for just about anyone to be a part of. Respect for each other and the partners we work and volunteer with are important to our image. As newer members come onboard, we can teach them our traditions and engulf them in our culture. We will most likely learn new experiences from them, too. That is a part of growth.

Stay safe on the trail,

Rich



### Challenge at Challenge [continued from front page]

So mark your calendars to attend our first-ever! first-anywhere! back country assembly of associated BCH chapters as the next step forward in advancing the purpose and objectives of Back Country Horsemen everywhere.

BCH Flathead will provide breakfast and dinner for BCH members on Aug. 23 & 24 (Fri. & Sat.). Attendees must provide their own lunches, as well as breakfast and dinner for days other than those provided by the Flathead chapter.

Maps for trail riding options will be provided, as well as more detailed descriptions of each ride. Be advised that the Challenge Cabin area is a great trailhead for pack trips into the Great Bear and Bob Marshall Wildernesses and visitors will in no way be limited to the above listed dates.

By August 1st, BCH Flathead will need some idea of the numbers of folks from your chapter who may attend so that Flathead planners can assign parking and camping areas for each chapter. (There is no formal campground near Challenge Cabin, however horse water is available.)

BCH Flathead's next contact will be via email, providing more information about developing plans for Challenge at Challenge. In the meantime, have a wonderful spring and a splendid summer.

Rick Maedje  
Challenge at Challenge committee chair  
[sirandrewbriggs@gmail.com](mailto:sirandrewbriggs@gmail.com)  
406.892.0819

"Crown of the Continent"



## Finding Artifacts in the Backcountry

By Eleanor Eberts, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead

One of the many advantages to being in the backcountry on horseback is the ability to see much more of our surroundings. Sometimes we see wildlife, spring wildflowers, and occasionally we see evidence of past human presence. Often this evidence is in the form of a broken piggin' string, but an artifact much older can pop up. Montana has been occupied for many thousands of years. One might find evidence of homesteaders or miners in the form of metal cans, archers from small, intricate points, and of people who used large stone spear points.

If you find something that is interesting while out in the backcountry, it is always a good idea to take a few pictures. Take a few quick photos before picking up the object or exploring further, a few of the area, then some close ups. Taking a picture before touching the object and a photo of the area it is in ensures that there is a record to assist in recreating its original environment when you leave and can give clues to its use and history.

After you have finished admiring and contemplating your find, please put it back where you found it and try to recreate its resting place. If it was covered in leaves, kick some leaves over it with your boot.

**Practice leave no trace principles with your exploration so the next person can enjoy it as well.**

In addition to leave no trace ethics, do remember that any object that has been used by humans and is over 100 years old is protected by law on publicly owned land. If you see someone packing out artifacts, please stand up for everyone and remind them of this. Artifacts, whether they are cans from the 1910s or projectile points from 10,000 years ago, must be left where they are found by the average lay-person. In fact, looting from federal land can result in a felony! It is important for future research that the artifact is left in its resting spot because without the context of where the item was found it cannot reveal much about the past.

Before leaving the site, it is a good idea to record a GPS point. This can either be with a GPS unit or with the GPS included in a cell phone. This will make it possible for you and others to make it back to the site in the future, even if the landscape should change in the meantime.



After you are home the GPS point and the digital photographs can be emailed to the State Historic Preservation Office or other applicable institution such as the local Forest Service district office or a reputable local museum. By giving the information collected to the professionals the artifact can spark greater understanding of an area, and the artifact can be protected if needed. If the artifact should befall some unfortunate circumstance there would be a record of it that includes photos and the location, all thanks to you!

## What lies on the trail ahead?

By Melissa DiNino, recipient of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana Packing Skills Scholarship in 2018

Growing up in the suburbs of New England, the presence of both horses and wilderness were inconsistent in my life. Fortunately, I was able to get a taste for their magic early on, riding horses at my friend's farm in Connecticut and spending every summer at my family's cabin in the woods of Maine. While I didn't know it at the time, those moments in my childhood shaped much of who I am today.

Since moving to Montana, I have taken every opportunity to keep both horses and wilderness at the forefront of my life. The Back Country Horsemen of Montana Packing Skills Scholarship was one of those opportunities that I was very fortunate to receive last year, which allowed me to head into the Scapegoat Wilderness for my very first pack trip.

Guided by Connie and Mack Long of Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters, our class learned the ins

and outs of packing into the backcountry. Connie and Mack shared their passion and philosophy with us - everything from wilderness stock care to Leave No Trace techniques - so that each of us could grow as stock users and stewards of the land. I was humbled by all of the logistics and planning that must go into even a few days of packing stock into the backcountry.

Mother Nature also did her part to share a few lessons on the unpredictable nature of going into the backcountry. While you may think you're prepared, you never truly know what lies on the trail ahead, whether it's a storm that postpones your departure or a pack mule mishap that changes your course.

While I've worked with horses for years, mules were an unknown for me. I was lucky to be paired with Lily, a six-year-old molly, for the duration of the trip. Her sweet demeanor and

sure feet left me with a newfound love for mules, and I'm dreaming about the day when I can add one (or three) to a string of my own.

We also lucked out with a visit from Smoke Elser. The stories he shared gave me an appreciation for the landscape we traveled through, and they left me with a desire to explore even further. Being able to see new country in this way lends to a sense of place and a connection to home that most folks will never have.

Nearly a year later, I can't say I remember all of my hitches, but attending the Packing Skills Class gave me new skills, new friendships, and new ways to give back to my community. Without the scholarship, I couldn't have experienced this trip, and for that I am so grateful. Thank you to everyone with Back Country Horsemen of Montana for making this possible.



## National Director's Column

By John Chepulis (Beartooth BCH)  
National Director, BCH Montana

The value of BCHMT's volunteerism in 2018 is

# \$933,759.09

### Volunteer Hours

One of Back Country Horsemen's most important objectives is to perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's roadless backcountry, and to assist government agencies in the maintenance and management of public lands. By volunteering our time and resources, we ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock and pack use. We can also influence agency decisions concerning access to public lands by pack and saddle stock users. The value of these volunteer hours allows us to speak with all land managers, from the local ranger district, our regional offices, or all the way to Washington DC.

In 2018 Back Country Horsemen of Montana volunteered 21,645 hours, cleared a total of 1,681 miles of trail, drove 116,060 miles, worked 832 hours with power and heavy equipment, used a total of 1,257 pack and saddle stock, and donated \$3,443; for a total value of \$933,759.09.

However, I believe the hours and value of volunteer services by Back Country Horsemen are under-reported. It is the responsibility of each chapter to track and report these volunteer hours. Each chapter should appoint a **Volunteer Hours Coordinator** who would be responsible for reporting the hours that members work, the miles of trail maintained, and the expenses that they incur during their service. These numbers need to be recorded immediately after each event, otherwise memories go bad and hours don't get recorded correctly.

Reports should include basic, skilled, and recon hours; how many miles of trail cleared, either Wilderness or other miles; Education and LNT hours; public meetings; and administration hours. Also included is travel time, and miles driven going to a project as well as stock hauling miles, and hours you spend using a chain saw or other heavy equipment. You also count the number of saddle and pack stock used and how many days for each project. Keep track of money donated to a project by either yourself or your chapter.

BCHA has provided a Microsoft Excel workbook to facilitate and standardize the volunteer reporting process. This workbook can be found by going to [www.bcha.org](http://www.bcha.org) and clicking on Volunteer Service Hours.

Thank you for volunteering your time. Reporting your hours allows BCHA to recognize your work and report the value of your hard work to the various agencies.

If you have any questions on collecting and reporting volunteer hours, please contact John Chepulis at [barcdiamond@gmail.com](mailto:barcdiamond@gmail.com).

John

When you shop on Amazon and use BCHMT's charity link, Amazon donates .5% of the purchase price to BCHMT.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/81-0480297>

Please help spread the word by sharing this link on your social media.

**amazon**smile  
Org Central

## BCH Flathead partners with Spotted Bear Ranger District to put on packing clinic

By Deborah Schatz, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead  
 Photos by Annette Leverington and Marion Willmus

Forest Service packers Guy, Abby, Mike and Madeline, along with their horses and mules, attracted a crowd when they arrived in Columbia Falls on Saturday, May 4th, 2019. Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead partnered with the Spotted Bear Ranger District to present the packing clinic for BCH members and the general public.

Clinic participants came from as far away as Polson, MT, and Sandpoint, ID, to watch and learn the efficient, traditional methods of the professional packers. Hands-on practice followed the demonstrations.



Mike prepares to manta a load of loose duffle.



Guy shows how to tie the string together.



Abby checks the loads on her Mustang, Huckleberry.



Madeline explains how to balance the loads.

## Charlie Russell and Flathead apply for RTP grant

By Mark Himmel, Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen

Charlie Russell and the Flathead chapters each submitted projects for the 2019 RTP grant cycle. Our focus was on the Continental Divide and portal trails.

Shannon Friex wrote the grant which totaled \$47,500; we were awarded \$30,000.

Presently both chapters are re-

viewing their projects and re-submitting a budget back to RTP. I can say that our projects will include:

Spotter Bear Ranger District work on CD Trail, Rocky Mountain Ranger District on CD using Forest Service as contract labor, and two projects out of Falls Creek, the East side trail and West trail.

**Schedule for chapters' news article submissions**  
 E-mail to: [deborah.bcha@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.bcha@gmail.com)

**Fall issue:** articles due September 5th, 2019  
 Last Chance, Mile High, Missoula, Northwest Montana, Selway-Pintler Wilderness, and Trout Creek.

**Winter Issue:** articles due January 5th, 2019  
 Beartooth, Bitter Root, Cabinet, Mission Valley, Three Rivers, Upper Clark Fork, Wild Horse Plains, and convention hosting chapter.

**Spring Issue:** articles due May 5th, 2020  
 Charlie Russell, East Slope, Flathead, Gallatin, and Judith Basin.

## May is “Stop the Bleed” Month

By LeAnn Hermance, East Slope Back Country Horsemen



On April 11<sup>th</sup>, the East Slope Back Country Horsemen chapter participated in a “Stop the Bleed” training. May has been designated “Stop the Bleed” month and emergency responders throughout the state of Montana are doing a one-hour trainings on the use of tourniquets and QuikClot® bleeding control dressing hemostatic packs.

This training was motivated by the 2012 tragedy in Sandy Hook and the multiple tragedies that have occurred in the ensuing years. What has become known as the Hartford Consensus was convened to bring together leaders from law enforcement, the federal government, and the medical community to improve survivability from manmade or natural mass casualty events. The resulting injuries from these events generally present with severe bleeding which, if left unattended, can result in death. The participants of the Hartford Consensus concluded that by providing first responders and civilian bystanders the skills and basic tools to stop uncontrolled bleeding in emergency situations, lives would be saved. The first responder program has received very good response and is widely being used across the country. The next step is to focus on civilian bystanders.

Civilians need basic training in bleeding control principles so they are able to provide immediate, front-line aid until first responders are able to take over care of the injured person. Due to many situations, there may be a delay between the time of injury and the time a first responder is on the scene. Without civilian in-

tervention in these circumstances, preventable deaths will occur.

The American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma is leading the effort to save lives by teaching the civilian population to provide vital initial response to stop uncontrolled bleeding in emergency situations. This will be accomplished by the development of a comprehensive and sustainable bleeding control education and information program targeted to civilians that will inform, educate and empower the 300+ million citizens of the United States.

While all the clubs have taken first aid training, this program goes one step further on the use of the blood clotting packs and tourniquets. Through a grant, we received five bleeding control kits in vacuum packaging. They will fit nicely in the first aid kits. These kits consist of one C-A-T tourniquet, orange, one 4” emergency trauma dressing, one QuikClot® BCD hemostatic pack, one pair nitrile gloves, one permanent marker and one Just In Time instruction card. After discussing each item, we were able to practice with the tourniquet. For those who have the blood clotting packs, be sure to have the “heat free” type.

If you are interested in getting more information on this program and finding an instructor in your area, there is a website with the information. The links are:

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/public-health/emsts/traumasystems/stopthebleed>

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=77959fd5df-ca4a62b602276affca030f>

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Charlie Russell BCH  
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East Slope BCH  
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BCH of the Flathead  
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Gallatin Valley BCH  
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Judith Basin BCH  
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Last Chance BCH  
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Mile High BCH  
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Mission Valley BCH  
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BCH of Missoula  
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NorthWest Montana BCH  
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Selway-Pintler Wilderness BCH  
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Three Rivers BCH  
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Trout Creek BCH  
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Upper Clark Fork BCH  
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Wild Horse Plains BCH  
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If you would like to join us, please contact a chapter in your area.

Find more information on our website:

[www.bchmt.org](http://www.bchmt.org)

# SUMMER PACKING CAMP

Participants will meet at Indian Meadows trailhead near Lincoln, MT at noon on Thursday, August 1st, learning to pack in the afternoon, and attending a campfire chat along with a Dutch oven dessert that evening. Friday morning, August 2nd, campers will learn to load up pack stock, then hike into Fickler Meadows in the Scapegoat Wilderness and set up camp. Friday evening will include a campfire chat. Saturday, August 3rd, campers will hike to Heart Lake to do a rehab project and learn about the principles of Leave No Trace camping and stock use. Saturday evening includes a campfire chat. Sunday, August 4th, campers will pack up and return to the trailhead by noon. Parents are welcome to enjoy lunch prior to heading home.

Candidates should apply by going to [www.bchmt.org](http://www.bchmt.org), scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on "Youth Summer Camp Application."

This year we are fortunate to have the Nine Mile packstring help us.

Contact Greg Schatz 406-261-5450 or Kathy Hundley 406-363-8230 for more information.

for youth ages 12 - 17  
indian meadows trailhead  
August 1-4, 2019





# Will Your Horses Go Hungry Tonight?

By Allen Rowley, Forest Supervisor, Fishlake National Forest, Utah

What follows is a three-part series concerning the grazing of pack and saddle stock in the Wilderness. This series moves beyond the use of pickets, hobbles, and highlines. Instead, it focuses on the availability of forage, range condition, and utilization of the existing forage. The specific examples used here are from the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, but the principles apply throughout the west. This is a different twist to looking at Wilderness grazing, but a very important one.

## Part 1

After all day on the trail, have you ever pulled into a likely campsite and asked yourself if your horses will go hungry tonight? Most of you do answer this question, since abundant forage is a critical part of a good camp. Through experience, some people can make this determination with a quick glance around. But how do you know for sure if there will be enough feed for your horses? What impact will your grazing have on this campsite? Over the next three parts of this article, we will talk about avoiding hungry horses, and end with two tools you can use to answer the question for yourself.

This question is really best answered in three separate steps to be covered in this three-part series:

- First, how much forage does your stock eat?
- What is the condition, or health of the site where I want to graze my stock? This provides the answer to how much forage the site will produce.
- How much of the forage that is present should be consumed?

## How much forage does your stock need to eat?

This is the easy question. Animal science researchers have measured the daily feed intake requirements of horses and mules for years. These frequently cited figures range from 22-30 pounds, dry weight, of daily feed intake, depending on animal size. The most commonly used figure is 26 pounds, dry weight, for

a 1,000 pound horse each day. Poor quality or high quality makes little difference, a horse will still consume about 26 pounds dry weight of feed a day. Healthy, idle horses can maintain themselves on 26 pounds of good grass hay, or the equivalent in fresh grass per day. A horse being worked hard will also eat approximately 26 pounds of feed a day; but to stay in shape a larger percentage of this will need to be high protein supplements like pellets. To take in the required amount of forage, horses need 5-12 hours of free grazing. In a lush irrigated pasture some horses may only need 4 hours to graze the needed 26 pounds of forage. However, in drier or poor range conditions, a horse will need the full 5 to 12 hours of grazing to meet their forage requirements. On the average, 6 hours is what Wilderness travelers should plan for grazing their animals. Less time than this and there is the chance the horses will not find enough forage. The need for 6 hours of grazing is good news for most of us since on a Wilderness pack trip your horses and mules will seldom have 12 hours free for grazing. More likely, between time on the trail and on the high line at night so they don't run off, there are only 3-6 hours available for grazing.

If you do not have 6 hours to allow free grazing, then SUPPLEMENTAL feed should be supplied. In planning how much extra forage may be required consider the following table.

Hours of Grazing	Additional Feed Needed
0 hours	26 pounds
1 hour	21.5 pounds
2 hours	17.5 pounds
3 hours	13 pounds
4 hours	9 pounds
5 hours	4.5 pounds
6 hours	0 pounds

Based on this guide, if you can only allow 3 hours of free grazing a day you should plan on packing in 13 pounds of feed per animal per day.

So the answer to how much

feed your horses need is: each 1,000 pound horse or mule will need, on the average, 26 pounds dry weight of feed per day. Under free grazing, it will take your horse from 5-12 hours a day to gather this much forage. On the average, you should plan to allow your stock to graze 6 hours daily or plan on packing in supplemental forage.

This leads us to the next question; how much forage is available at a campsite? We will start to answer this next time.

## Part 2

In part one we discussed how much forage a horse needs each day, perhaps this was review for a lot of you. This article may be new and different as it amounts to several hours of college courses in range management, and/or years of practical experience boiled down to a page or two on range condition and what it means.

## What is the range condition, or health, of your grazing area?

Determining range condition can be complicated, but it is a critical tool for management because range condition has a strong control over how much forage a site may produce.

Range condition or health is measured by comparing the ideal amount of naturally occurring vegetation against what is actually on the site. Sites with the greatest amount of the ideal vegetation are in the best condition, rated as excellent. The ideal naturally occurring vegetation is determined by the soils, elevation, precipitation amounts and a number of other variables. These same factors also influence the productivity of the site.

Comparing the existing vegetation with the ideal vegetation has a real practical value for range management. On bunchgrass ranges the naturally occurring vegetation is the very vegetation that horse, mules, and wildlife desire, seek out and graze first. This is also the grass species that provides the most nutrition for grazing animals. Therefore

managing for good to excellent range condition is advantageous as it provides the most productive and nutritional forage.

In the Bob Marshall and surrounding Wilderness areas, there are three premier grass species sought out by all grazing animals; Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and rough fescue. These three grass species rank highest in productivity, palatability, and nutritional value for both pack stock and wildlife species.

The downside to these grasses is they are known as decreasers. Meaning they are so desirable that they are sought out and grazed again and again, until if unchecked, they may be reduced in numbers. Continual season-long grazing with no chance for the grass plants to regrow and build up an energy store in the roots will kill the plants over time. In our part of the country the regrowth happens typically in May through July when the soils are moist. At least one out of every three years, grass plants should not be grazed during this regrowth period. The various rest rotation and deferred rotation grazing systems are based on this principle of providing some rest, thus allowing regrowth during the summer.

In a Wilderness setting, you can see how a problem could develop. A party with horses and mules arrives at a campsite in mid June. There is plenty of grass so they free graze all of their stock and use very little supplemental feed. This group moves on the next day, but next week another party does the same thing. This continues all summer long, at this popular campsite week after week; the grass never gets the chance to completely regrow and build up an energy store. This is exactly the situation that is happening in the most popular areas of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, for example the area from Meadow Creek to Salmon Forks on the South Fork of the Flathead.

The following table shows the correlation of range condition to the amount of forage available. This information is taken from range surveys done in 1993. There is variation from site to site, but the chart does paint a clear picture of some poor

<b>Location</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Production (dry weight grass)</b>
Danaher Meadows	Good-Excellent	1100 lbs/acre
Babcock Creek	Good	700 lbs/acre
Bartlett Meadow	Good	420 lbs/acre
Spring Creek in the Danaher Meadows	Fair	870 lbs/acre
Murphy Flats	Fair	400 lbs/acre
Hodag Flats	Fair	250 lbs/acre
Big Slide in Young's Creek	Poor-Fair	220 lbs/acre
South end of the old Black Bear Airstrip	Poor-Fair	205 lbs/acre
Kelly Point (near Black Bear)	Poor	102 lbs/acre

condition range sites in popular areas, and how low their production is compared to a site in good or excellent condition.

As a rule of thumb, bunchgrass range sites in good to excellent condition produce 600 - 1,000 lbs. of grass per acre. The production on sites in poor or fair condition is dramatically below this level. The above chart is not a complete sample of all the areas in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, but note the number of sites in poor to fair condition along the popular South Fork corridor.

Now that we have some understanding of range condition, what it is, and how important it is, what can we do with the information? Two options are available. One, when camping in popular corridors use SUPPLEMENTAL forage as much as possible. You will be doing your part to allow the grass the needed rest. The Spotted Bear Ranger District is so concerned about this that we are planning to feed 100% supplemental forage for all government animals at the Black Bear Administrative site. One commercial outfitter is planning to feed 100% hay in the Black Bear vicinity. The second action for a Wilderness traveler to take would be to simply avoid areas in poor range condition and camp somewhere else.

In the next issue, we will wrap up with a tool to determine if there is enough grass to support your stock; and a method to determine how much the site has already been grazed.

### Part 3

In part 1 we discussed that the average 1,000 pound horse needs 26 pounds (dry weight) of forage per day, and it will take a horse at least

6 hours of free grazing to eat this much. In part 2 range condition was discussed. Condition was then correlated to forage productivity. In this final article we will attempt to tie together the range condition and your livestock's needs while protecting the long-term health of the site. To help, we will close by discussing two tools you can use to answer for yourself if your horses will go hungry tonight.

### How much forage should I let my horses eat?

Research has shown that range sites in good to excellent condition may withstand up to 40% of the current grass crop being removed by grazing. If more than this is consumed, range condition will likely deteriorate.

Grazing sites in poor to fair condition must receive less than 40% utilization to enable the range condition to improve. Poor or fair condition sites may still have a small population of Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, or rough fescue. But these few plants will be the first ones grazed. Remember animals will seek out these plants due to their superior palatability and nutrition. The stock that graze the area will seek out the same plants and graze these desirable plants again and again. This continued grazing prevents these desirable plants from ever being healthy enough to produce the needed seed to reestablish on the site. Only by reestablishing these desirable species can range condition improve. To allow desirable plants to reseed, the site utilization levels on poor to fair condition sites must be even lower than 40%.

In the Bob Marshall and surrounding Wilderness areas, the Lim-

its of Acceptable Change process set 40% as the maximum utilization level in the popular corridors. In these same areas the objective is to maintain range sites in at least a good condition. In the more pristine areas of the Wilderness 20% has been set as the maximum utilization level. The objective for more pristine areas is for the range condition to be excellent.

In summary, no more than 40% of the grass crop in popular corridors where the range is in good condition should be grazed. Range sites in poor or fair condition should have even less utilization. No more than 20% of the grass crop should be consumed in more pristine areas.

**Tools you can use**

Now that range management school is over, here are some specific tools you can use to determine if there is enough forage for your horses, and what the appropriate utilization level is.

**A Method to Estimate Available Forage**

A horse collects grass one mouthful at a time, until it has consumed 26 pounds. It just so happens that a person's hand is about the same size as a horse's mouth. So ask yourself, could you with one hand pull 26 pounds dry weight of grass, in 6 hours, at this camp site. Twenty-six pounds dry weight of grass is about the same size as 1/3 of a bale of hay. So look around before you unsaddle, could you collect 1/3 of a bale of hay for each animal at this site, in the 3-6 hours they will be able to graze. Try this simple experiment at home, or in the Wilderness where you plan to camp: With one hand try to pull, break, and twist off enough grass to equal 1/3 of a bale of hay. No clippers allowed, just your bare hand.

Doing this experiment will make you look critically at the available forage. If you cannot collect enough forage, then you will need to supply

supplemental forage, or move on to another site. While this is not an exact method, it does discipline yourself to look at the potential campsite from the horse's point of view; and indicate if there is enough forage available. If you are searching for handfuls of grass and only finding a few blades at a time, the site is either already grazed or in poor condition. Both are situations where your choices are supplemental feed or moving on.

**A Method to Measure Utilization (Grazing) Levels**

What follows is a simple method you can use to measure utilization levels. This is a tool you can put right to work to see if a site has already been grazed more than 40%. Or you can determine if your string of stock may push it over the 40% level.

The "Grazed Plant Method" is a simple way to measure utilization. This is a research-based technique where the number of individual grass plants that have been grazed is converted by a chart to the approximate percentage of grass removed.

To use the method on a bunchgrass site, you wander at random through the grazing area. Every time your right foot sets down, stop and look at the individual grass plant nearest the toe of your boot. Determine if it has been grazed this year or not. Keep a tally of the grazed and ungrazed plants. Continue this random wandering until you have examined at least 100 plants. Go to the following chart and find the percentage of plants grazed. Just below this figure is the approximate percentage of grass dry weight that has been grazed from a site.

If 60% of the bunchgrass plants have been grazed, approximately 34% of the grass has already been grazed. If I found a camp site that is already at this use level, I would plan on using feed I packed in or move to a new site.

Footnote: Allen Rowley served as Resource Assistant on the Spotted Bear Ranger District when he wrote this article for BCHF in 1995.



% Plants Grazed	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80
% Utilization	10	13	18	20	22	27	30	34	40	43	50	55



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## Convention Highlights

Story and photos by Mark Himmel, Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen

The BCHMT State Convention was held on March 1-3, 2019, at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls, hosted by the Charlie Russell chapter.

Clockwise:

Meeting: Kelli Rohloff starting the second seminar about Facebook at the Back Country Horsemen of Montana Convention.

Officers: Keni Hopkins, secretary; Rich Carl, chairman; Sherri Lionberger, vice chairman; Dan Marsh, treasurer.

June Burgau and Stu Sorensen

These two BCH members are an inspiration. They were at the very first BCH meeting back in 1973. They helped get this organization started and continue to support BCH with its mission. Thank you!

