I can’t believe that summer is already gone! I don’t know about you, but my summer went by so fast. I had some great trips into the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness areas; I met some great people and made a lot of new friends. I hope all of you had an enjoyable summer as well.

I had never been to D.C. before and boy did I feel like a country girl! The first hurdle we faced was trying to figure out the Metro subway. I have to laugh just thinking about how foolish we must have looked to the seasoned commuters. If the folks there had not been so friendly and helpful, I don’t think we would have ever figured it out. After spending a week there, we felt like seasoned commuters ourselves.

Montana had excellent representation in D.C. at this event. There were representatives from the Montana Wilderness Association, the Montana Sierra Club, and Back Country Horsemen of Montana, by Ken and Phyllis Ausk and Mack and myself. Ken wore a silver belly western hat and Mack wore a black western hat, the only western hats at this event. We soon discovered that wearing western hats quickly gets you noticed. Back Country Horsemen of America was represented, as well, by current chairman Jim McGarvey and his wife Cindy; Allen Hill, Public Liaison; and Randy Rasmussen, Public Lands and Recreation Advisor.

BCHA did an excellent job making contacts and informing D.C. folks about Back Country Horsemen. They had twelve congressional meetings and six agency meetings in two days! One of the highlights was signing and renewing an MOU with the Park Service. Although Mack and I were involved with BCHA while in D.C., we spent the majority of our time pushing Montana wilderness issues to the Montana congressional leaders and staff. With BCHA taking one path and Mack and I taking another, BCH as a whole was well represented and listened to at a lot of different venues.

Letters from the Chair
Connie Long, Chairman, BCH Montana

Back Country Horsemen of Montana Mission Statement
• Perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of America’s back country and wilderness.
• Work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
• Assist various agencies responsible for the maintenance and management of public lands.
• Educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustained use of the back country by horsemen and the general public, commensurate with our heritage.
• Foster and encourage formation of new Back Country Horsemen organizations.
Letter from the Chair continued

The most important thing that I learned during my time in D.C., is that we horsemen and women cannot be silent regarding issues related to equestrian use on our American trails. I have always avoided getting involved in politics, as I have never liked it much, and I really never felt like my voice would make a difference. But after being in D.C., talking with and getting to know our congressional folks, I realized that we can make a difference. We have to let them know how we feel on issues that are important to us.

I have always avoided getting involved in politics, as I have never liked it much, and I really never felt like my voice would make a difference. But after being in D.C., talking with and getting to know our congressional folks, I realize that we can make a difference. We have to let them know how we feel on issues that are important to us.

The Pew event was very well organized. Twenty-three states were represented at the Wilderness Week festivities. There were workshops and panel discussions related to how to get youth involved and engaged in the wilderness. Our own Zack Porter with Montana Wilderness Association was one of the panelists. Other panel discussions included public land managers and their struggles with decreasing funds and decreasing knowledge-base related to wilderness skills. There was a social media discussion with representatives from Facebook and Twitter. The Smithsonian Museum of Natural History hosted a wilderness photo exhibit and had a kickoff event that was outstanding. The week ended with a top notch banquet at the Mayflower Hotel. There were several political figures at the banquet who felt this event was important enough to attend, including Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewel, Congressman Harry Reid, and Tom Tidwell, Chief of the Forest Service, along with our Senator Jon Tester, to name a few. It was an honor to be among all of these supporters of wilderness.

There is another topic I would like to take time to address, and that is of public perception and ethics. During my wilderness travels this summer, I came upon several camp sites where the previous horse group could have done better. There were trees girdled from stock being tied to them for extended periods of time; several of these trees had wells pawed at the base. There were sites where stock had been tied too close to lakes and streams. What was even more disgusting were “Charmin lilies” just a few yards away from level tent sites (this could have been non-stock users as well). Folks not taking care of campsites and not protecting the resource are giving horsemen a bad name by other user groups. We must to better.

Another situation: After a ten-day trip, I was driving five of my guests, all from out of state, out of the Benchmark trailhead to Augusta. Shortly after we started our trek to Augusta, I came upon a pickup truck towing a horse trailer that was traveling very slowly. I have no problem with the truck driving slowly, as those who have towed horse trailers on the road to and from Benchmark know how rough and dusty is can be. The problem was, this truck would not pull over at turnouts so I could pass. After passing several turnouts, I could tell the driver was not going to pull over to allow me to pass. I indicated to the driver that I would like to pass. This is where the problem began.

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<td><strong>Chairman</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Connie Long</td>
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<tr>
<td>406.644.7889</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:long@montana.com">long@montana.com</a></td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Vice-Chairman</strong></td>
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<td>Brad Pollman</td>
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<tr>
<td>406.546.6492</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:bpollman@aol.com">bpollman@aol.com</a></td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rich Carl</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>406.231.5447</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:Rich.Carl@transystemlic.com">Rich.Carl@transystemlic.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>Secretary</strong></td>
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<td>Nancy Pollman</td>
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<tr>
<td>406.546.6492</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:npollman20@aol.com">npollman20@aol.com</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>State Newsletter Editor</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Noorjahan Parwana</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>406.782.3682</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:nparwana@hotmail.com">nparwana@hotmail.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>National Directors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dave Crawford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>406.675.4293</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:cbardiamond1@ronan.net">cbardiamond1@ronan.net</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chuck Miller</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>406.961.5453</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:circlemr@cybernet1.com">circlemr@cybernet1.com</a></td>
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<td>(Alternate) John Chepulis</td>
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<td>406.322.4823</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:barcdiamond@gmail.com">barcdiamond@gmail.com</a></td>
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When he saw that I wanted to pass, instead of being courteous, he pulled more into the center of the road to block me – not once but several times. My guests were astonished and appalled by this rude behavior and asked me why he was acting this way. I did not have an answer for them; I was embarrassed.

In no way do I think these situations represent BCH folks, but they were horse people and BCH could be unfairly judged by their behavior.

Now my soap box: We need to be doing things better than any other back country and wilderness users. We need to be showing folks that horsemen and women are courteous both on the trails and on the roads when hauling our stock. We need to be protecting the wilderness and back country resource and leave our camp sites better than we found them. This includes using certified weed seed-free feeds, pulling weeds, packing out others’ trash that they left behind, using high lines and electric fencing, and not tying stock to trees for extended periods of time or close to water sources. All users need to be using pit toilets or digging a “cat hole” to take care of our human waste, where the decomposing happens much faster.

We need to be showing folks that horsemen and women are courteous both on the trails and on the roads when hauling our stock. We need to be protecting the wilderness and back country resource and leave our camp sites better than we found them.

The bottom line, we should be practicing the Leave-No-Trace principles for stock users when in the back country and wilderness. We need to be courteous both on the trails and on the roads when hauling our stock. Finally, we definitely need to continue to educate.

Until next time,
Yours on Wilderness Trails,

The plan for this five day project (July 18-22) was to travel from Big Creek Trailhead up to Big Creek Lake, camp there, continue on to Pack Box Pass, camp near the White Sand Lake Trail intersection in Idaho, continue on the trail back into Montana, camp at Bryan Lake, and then travel to Bear Creek Trailhead on the last day, clearing trail as we went. Nine riders and six support packers loaded and packed bags of feed to the Big Creek and Bryan Lake campsites ahead of time to prepare for the project.

The backcountry trip went well even though we did not “close the loop” so to speak. We base camped at the narrows on Big Creek Lake where we had dropped feed the week before. This was a beautiful camp with good fishing and swimming right next to camp. The trail had been cleared into Big Creek Lake yet had not been maintained above the lake for several years. Our first day of trail work was full of downed timber. It was worth a few photos as we had eight logs of 18” that had made a jack straw pile covering over 100 feet of the trail. After five hours of hard labor with 22 cuts and some winch work, we cleared the trail by midday. We traveled farther but did not make the pass this day and returned to the lake camp.

The next day we cut another 19 logs to make it to Pack Box Pass for lunch and a good view down the canyon. After a break, Wilderness Ranger Bill Goslin took off for Pearl Lake to take a water sample and the rest of us headed into Idaho. We had many questions as to how this section of trail would look and were surprised to find an almost clear trail on the upper reaches.
We found beautiful avalanche meadows with grass as deep as a horse’s belly and several good-looking camp spots. Both elk and wolf tracks were seen and there was no question about enough horse feed. As we progressed down Pack Box Creek to the confluence with Garnett Creek we encountered more downfall but cleared the majority of this, took a break and scouted up Garnett Creek for a mile. These two creeks join to form Colt Killed Creek, named from the Lewis and Clark expedition. As Lewis said, “a bold, clear and handsome flow of water”.

The tough decision was made to head back to Big Creek Lake and not come back to this valley as previously planned. We still had two or three miles ahead of unknown trail and a north face which holds snow just below Bear Creek Pass and decided to work out of our base camp the following day. On the fifth and final day we improved the trail around the lake through the lush undergrowth and moved a few boulders to make clearing a weeping wall a bit easier. We pulled camp midday and got back to the trailhead around 6:00. The Big Creek Lake overflow crossing was decent, only 10” or so of water, and after some debate the staircase was handled with everyone in the saddle and the packs staying on in good form.

All in all it was a great trip. The food was great and the company splendid indeed. Hats off to this bunch of hard working volunteers: Mike Foster, Bill Goslin, Becky and Dan Brandborg, Keith Brown and Sherri Harris.
W
hile we are called the Back Country “Horse” men, many of us have mules. Some of us ride mules and many pack mules. If you have ever considered owning a mule for the first time we wanted to share some common thoughts regarding mules. Mules require a kind and firm hand…and lots of patience. Once you’ve earned their trust they make amazing partners. Why would you prefer a mule to a horse? Here are some of the qualities of our beloved longears according to Betsy Hutchins, Secretary of the American Donkey and Mule Society.

Mules endure heat better than horses do. It has been scientifically proven that the donkey is similar to the camel in its ability, when water starved, to drink only enough water to replace lost body fluids. Most mules inherit this ability.

Mules have fewer feeding problems than horses do. Many ranchers keep their draft and work mules together in pens with feed available at all times, yet the mules rarely overeat to the point of colic or founder. Mules from pony mares, however, may grass or grain or road founder, so the idea that a mule never founders is not true. Mules require no fancy hay—just plain, clean, fresh hay suitable for equines. People who buy cheaper weedy hay find that their mules clean out the weeds first.

Mules eat less than horses do. Mules that are not working usually don’t need grain at all. Good pasture or clean hay is the usual maintenance ration, unless extra fat is required for show purposes. Many a man has complained that his mules won’t fatten because they won’t eat enough, requiring the owner to spend extra money buying richer food to put the fat on. When mules are working, their grain ration is usually about 1/3 less than that of a horse of the same size. Of course, a mule must be fed enough for its size, its metabolism, and the work it is doing.

Mules rarely have hoof problems. Mules naturally have small, upright, boxy feet—which is part of the secret of their surefootedness. Mules that work on pavement, stony ground, etc. are shod, but most pleasure animals, or mules that work on softer ground, never see a shoe. Regular hoof trimming keeps them just fine. Their feet are strong, tough, flexible, and usually not as brittle and shelly as those of a horse. They have less of a problem with splitting, chipping, and contracted heels.

Mules excel in physical soundness. Mules last longer, are more “maintenance free,” and are less expensive at the vet’s office than horses are. Leg problems are far less likely in a mule than in a horse, and when leg problems do occur, they are far less severe. “Why do they stay sound?” wonders Robert Miller, DVM. “Seeking answers…equine practitioners exposed daily to the tragedy of lameness in beautiful horses, look at the mules, run their hands down the tough little legs, and wonder.” Not only legs, but wind, “innards,” and all other parts of the mule including his hide are tougher and more durable than comparable parts of the horse. Hybrid vigor explains a lot of this; the tough physical and mental qualities of the donkey explain the rest.

Mules live longer productive lives than horses do. Ranch mules average 18 years to a horse’s 15 years. When the mule is a companion animal doing lighter work and getting better medical care, better feed, and good management, the mule can give its owner good riding and packing at age 30; 40-year-old retirees are not at all uncommon.

Mules can be more easily handled in large groups than horses. Mules can be corralled on ranches 30 or 40 to a group, or up to 500 in a feeding pen, without the injuries or other consequences commonly seen with horses.

Mules have a strong sense of self preservation. This is one good reason why mules physically
last longer than horses do. If they are overheated, overworked, or overused for any reason, mules will either slow down to a safe pace or stop completely. Mules are not stubborn. Neither are donkeys. Yes, if you want them to work too hard, for their own well-being, especially in hot weather, they will be “stubborn.” We have never heard of a messenger running a mule to death the way legends say they ran their horses! The facts that mules are inclined not to panic, that they think about what is happening to them, and they take care of their own physical well-being prevents many accidents that might happen if they were horses.

Mules are surefooted and careful. Their surefootedness is partly physical and partly psychological. On the physical side, the mule has a narrower body than a horse of the same height and weight. He gets this from the ass side of the family. His legs are strong and his feet are small and neat. This narrow structure and small hoof configuration enable him to place his feet carefully and neatly. On the psychological side, mules have a tendency to assess situations and act according to their views (most of which have to do with self-preservation). A mule will trust its own judgment before it trusts yours.

Mules don’t look like horses. This is the thing about a mule that is most obvious to the casual observer—of course they look different. Well, you see, mule lovers like the look of a mule. We love those magnificent big ears. We love to watch those ears flop in a relaxing rhythm on a placid drive, or prick rigidly forward when the mule spots something interesting. We begin to think there is something wrong with those tiny little useless-looking ears of a horse. We like the mule’s look of strength without bulk. We enjoy being different, knowing that a mule will draw attention where only the most outstanding and expensive horse will stand out from the crowd. Everyone looks at a colorful Appaloosa, but everyone “oohs” and “aahs” over a colorful Appaloosa mule. We like the way a mule sounds, too—kinda silly, but fun.

Mules are loaded with personality. This is the most difficult thing to define. Yes, mules are intelligent. They can be very decided about how they want to do things. They are great at running a bluff, a trait they undoubtedly get from the donkey. Rather than pit your strength against the tremendous strength of a mule, either outthink him or use some physical means to calmly outmaneuver him. By physical means, we mean gadgets—yes that horrifying word. Gadgets that come immediately to mind are tying up a fore or hind foot; draw reins; twitches; chain leads; etc. Any of these, used carefully to achieve a specific goal, will allow you to call your mule’s bluff. Once you do that, you have won. The key to handling mules is to do things simply, calmly, and firmly. Don’t lose your temper and don’t push too hard until you are ready and sure you can make it stick. The big secret to having a calm mule that never kicks and doesn’t have bad habits is to handle it firmly but gently from the time it is born, or from the time you acquire the mule.

So you think you want a mule? The Selway-Pintler Wilderness BCH chapter is going to offer you a chance at winning one at the Montana BCH State Convention next March in Hamilton, MT. Raffle tickets will be sent statewide with your State Directors in December 2014 following the meeting in Missoula.

The raffle mule is a young, bay john named “Jasper”. He will be a 2 year old when raffled and should mature to around 15 hands. Jasper is gentle, willing and eager to learn. He has a great disposition and has been socialized all summer at events valley wide. He ties, leads, loads and is good with both his ears and feet. Hundreds of hands have stroked him with not even the slightest concern. He has taken everything in stride from skateboards, balloons, baby buggies, large crowds and marching bands to even the three cannon shots at the Darby Bull Riding Event where he never flinched! He is going to make some lucky winner a very nice mule.
September 3, 2014 commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act of 1964. No other environmental law, save perhaps the Endangered Species Act, so clearly articulates an environmental ethic and sense of humility. The system the law created is like no other in the United States. Once designated by Congress, a wilderness area is to be managed to preserve its wildness, meaning that these special places are to be free from human control, manipulation, and commercial exploitation. Celebrations are being planned throughout the country and each will undoubtedly take a look back at the history of this law and the land it now protects. But what is the future of the wilderness system?

The story of wilderness is far from finished. Most at stake are lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Both agencies manage millions of acres that are potentially suitable for wilderness designation. For the USFS, this includes land that is currently managed pursuant to the 2001 roadless rule (35.7 to 45 million acres depending on the inclusion of the ever-contested Tongass National Forest), and state-specific roadless rules covering Idaho (9.3 million acres) and Colorado (4.2 million acres). Also at stake are wilderness study areas (3.2 million acres) and places recommended for wilderness designation by the agency itself (5 million acres).

The BLM manages 528 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) totaling approximately 12.8 million acres, most of which were identified in the initial BLM inventory of its lands in the late 1970s. The agency is currently updating its inventory of other areas with wilderness characteristics, and a very rough estimate is that an additional 5 to 10 million acres will be identified – not including Alaska. The first inventory for areas with wilderness characteristics on lands managed by the BLM in Alaska has started, and perhaps 40 million acres will be found.

These lands provide the base from which future wilderness designations on USFS and BLM lands may come. Complicated planning processes, interim management measures, and politics will ultimately determine whether or not these lands are protected in some form in the future. The politics of wilderness is more complicated and challenging in 2014 than it was in 1964. We believe that three interrelated factors will shape wilderness designations in the future: extreme political polarization, trends in collaboration, and increasing demands for the manipulation of wilderness.

Congressional Polarization

We begin by focusing on the increasing polarization of Congress and its impact on wilderness politics. Since the Wilderness Act requires an act of Congress to designate wilderness, what happens in this institution necessarily impacts what happens to wilderness-eligible lands.

The history of the Wilderness Act makes clear that Congressional partisanship and ideology have always factored into wilderness politics. After all, Congress considered some 65 versions of the law over an eight-year political process. Politics notwithstanding, the U.S. House of Representative still passed the law by a vote of 374 to 1, and in the previous year, the U.S. Senate passed a version of the Act by a 73 to 12 margin.

What has so remarkably changed since these votes is the degree of partisan and ideological polarization of Congress. The so-called “orgy of consensus” that ostensibly characterized the environmental lawmaking of the 1960s and 1970s has all but disappeared in a loud and angry falling out of the center.

Political scientists show the extent to which the parties have polarized, or become more ideologically consistent and distinct, since the 1970s. A drastic homogenization and pulling apart of the parties is evident. A task force convened by the American Political Science Association shows there to be a major “partisan asymmetry in polarization.” According to the authors, “Despite the widespread belief that both parties have moved to the extremes, the movement of the Republican Party to the right accounts for most of the divergence between the two parties.”

Polarization has already impacted wilderness politics. For example, the 112th Congress was the only Congress to actually decrease the size of the Wilderness System. And we cannot recall a House session that has introduced or passed so much anti-wilderness legislation.

There is little reason to believe that polarization will abate any time soon so chances are good that gridlock and dysfunction will characterize wilderness politics, as it does in so many other policy areas. Designations will become more difficult and those opposing them will ask for a more absurd list of political concessions. If legislative channels remain blocked, we also suspect that a wilderness-friendly President will take more protective actions in the future, such as using...
Executive powers to withdraw lands from mineral development or by using the Antiquities Act to designate national monuments.

Compromise and Collaboration

Some wilderness advocates have embraced more collaborative approaches to wilderness politics, an approach whereby those seeking additional wilderness make deals with an assortment of interests that want something else, from rural economic development to motorized recreation. While collaboration could potentially break long-time wilderness stalemates, we fear that those collaborating in today’s polarized political context may make deals that collectively threaten the integrity of the Wilderness System.

The move towards collaboration in contemporary wilderness politics is understandable for a couple of reasons. First is the nature of the remaining wilderness-eligible lands managed by the USFS and BLM. Many wilderness battles of the past were focused on protecting “rocks and ice,” high altitude alpine environments with fewer pre-existing uses than found on lower elevation lands. But many current wilderness proposals now aim to protect lower elevation landscapes—and thus places with more “historic” uses and entrenched interests associated with them. The growing use of motorized recreation also helps us appreciate why some wilderness advocates have a sense of urgency when it comes to making deals to get wilderness designated sooner rather than later. Wilderness advocates fear that these machines will increasingly intrude into potential wilderness areas and make their protection more difficult in the future because of associated impairments and claims of “historic use.”

That compromise is part of wilderness, as it is for politics more generally, is not the dispute. What is disputed is whether these compromises have gone too far in recent years and what precedent they set for the future of the Wilderness System. We suspect that multi-faceted negotiations, in which wilderness is but one part of larger deals, will increase in scale and complexity. Wilderness may become currency in lop-sided negotiations—providing something to trade in return for more certain economic development on non-wilderness federal lands.

We are also concerned that those interests collaborating will view the original 1964 law as simply a starting point for negotiations and that there will be increasing calls for non-conforming uses and special provisions in newly-designated wilderness areas, such as language pertaining to grazing, wildlife management, motorized use, and fire. Precedent is a special concern in this context because of how often special provisions—to meet the desires of those opposed to wilderness—are replicated in subsequent wilderness laws. There appears to be a disturbing trend in the collaborators representing “conservation” interests negotiating away central tenets of the Wilderness Act in exchange for simply getting an area called “Wilderness” designated. As a result, recent legislation appears to be enshrining the WINO—Wilderness In Name Only.

Wilderness Manipulation

The third issue pertains to what we believe will be increasing demands to control and manipulate wilderness in contravention of the law’s mandate to preserve wilderness areas as “untrammled.” Such demands will likely be made in the context of ecological restoration and efforts to mitigate and adapt to various environmental changes, such as threats posed by climate change. We suspect that future wilderness designations and the politics surrounding them will increasingly use climate change—whether as a legitimate concern, or merely an excuse—to focus on issues such as water supply, fire, insects, disease, and invasive species.

The relationship between water and wilderness will be particularly problematic in the West. Testifying before Congress on the proposed San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act of 2011, the USFS shocked many by opposing the bill’s provision to prohibit new water development projects in the new wilderness areas.

The water issue is also likely to manifest itself through the artificial delivery of water to wildlife populations in wilderness. The USFWS acquiesced to the state of Arizona’s request to build two artificial wildlife waters to benefit bighorn sheep within the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness, despite the presence of over 60 such installations already in the area. However, this decision to manipulate the wilderness ecosystem was contested, and in 2010 the Ninth Circuit ruled that the USFWS failed to adequately analyze whether these “guzzlers” were necessary to meet the law’s minimum requirements. It seems that the courts will defend the undeveloped nature of an untrammled wilderness where the agency charged with its stewardship will not.

Recently introduced legislation goes even further—beyond simply providing artificial water: the Sportsmen’s Heritage Act of 2012 version that passed the House would guarantee that any action proposed by a state wildlife agency would automatically satisfy the “necessary to meet minimum requirements” test mandated by Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act.
Manipulating wilderness ecosystems frequently involves placing structures or installations in areas that are, by law, supposed to be undeveloped. They may make the area less natural, even though the law requires wilderness to be “protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions.” And, uniformly, they manipulate areas “where the earth and its community of life are [supposed to be] untrammeled.” These demands may end up as bargaining chips in the designation process – part of the increase in collaboration and compromise that is the hallmark of recent legislation. Manipulating wilderness ecosystems, which now seems acceptable to some “conservation” interests, may become a de facto political requirement in an increasingly polarized political climate where it seems one side seems to not care how an area is managed as long as it’s called “Wilderness,” and the other side doesn’t care what it’s called as long as it’s not managed as wilderness.

So, is “Wilderness” an idea whose time has come and gone?

We reflect on the words used by Congress in establishing the Wilderness System in 1964:

In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.

The italicized words are emphasized because they explain why the reasons for adding to the Wilderness System are stronger in 2014 than they were fifty years ago. In 1964, the U.S. population was 192 million, it is now approaching more than 319 million. Along with this increasing population has come a staggering expansion of settlement, especially in the American West, and a phenomenal increase in the amount and power of motorized and mechanized use on public lands. The Wilderness System remains vital in protecting places and values that are increasingly rare in modern society.

Now, more than ever, we need the transcendent anchor provided by Wilderness. This is not asking for too much when we consider that roughly 5 percent of the entire U.S. is protected as wilderness, and a mere 2.7 percent when Alaska is removed from the equation. Nor is it too much when we consider that the majority of the U.S. has already been converted to agricultural and urban landscapes, with much of the remaining lands networked with roads. We are not so poor economically that we must exploit every last nook and cranny of our wild legacy for perceived gain; we are not yet so poor spiritually that we should willingly squander our birthright as Americans.

This is why we must fight for “Capital W” Wilderness, as originally envisioned, and make a stand for those last remaining roadless areas with wilderness characteristics that deserve our protection. It also means pushing back against the tide of compromising away the very essence of wilderness, and resisting the urge to manipulate wild places as if they were gardens to produce some desired future as if we knew what was always best for the land.

We need Wilderness, real Wilderness. Now, more than ever.

This column first appeared as a Mountain West Perspective of the Mountain West News, online news aggregator site. www.mountainwestnews.org, on September 10, 2014
Girl Power
–by Deborah Schatz, Flathead Chapter BCHM

The ladies of Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead (BCHF) received a request to provide packing support for a Girl Scout trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. The eleven girls and their leader would spend five days at Webb Lake in the Scapegoat Wilderness, clearing brush and doing trail maintenance on area trails, along with their Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation crew leader and organizer, Megan Ballard.

The ladies of BCHF were honored by the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation's (BMWF) request to help the Girl Scouts experience the back country. The BMWF is an organization that helps volunteers, including youth, give back to the Wilderness by organizing volunteer efforts to bring the projects together. The project was so successful, we hope to make it an annual partnership.

The Girl Scouts' leader, Sarah Megyesi, from Missoula, MT wrote such a wonderful comment on the trip, I will let her tell you the story.

Hello, Deborah.

Thank you so much for volunteering to pack our stuff for the girls' trip. The girls really enjoyed the hard work and pushing themselves on the trail. Without your help, the hike in and out may have just been a little too rigorous.

The work the girls performed does more than allow easier and safer access and passage for hikers and for horse packers. I feel that the girls had a hand in increasing the opportunity for people to venture into the Wilderness, and that by engaging in activities in the Wilderness, people are more likely to become stewards for the environment, and want to protect our sacred, wild places and help preserve them for future generations. In preserving natural spaces, stewards also help ensure the wild places are healthy and hearty enough to harbor wild animals and ensure their habitats can sustain the animals' needs.

Not only that, the girls have become very active stewards! Now, they will be more likely to take action for the environment in the future. They have found a connection to the wild and to their inner strengths that will hopefully last a lifetime.

I interviewed the girls every day about how the work and the Wilderness experience was affecting them. In the end, one Scout explained how the trip was a "life-changing experience." She went on to explain that she has found an inner strength she didn't know she had. She didn't know she could hike that far, work that hard, and live so long without her cell phone, TV, or internet access. She can't wait to return to the Wilderness for another trip – maybe even a longer one next time.

Many of the girls shared the sentiment that they felt stronger, they felt their work was very much appreciated, and that they thought it was great to be disconnected from society and social pressures for a little while.
Bedding

Bedding is loose, removable material placed on the floor of a stall where an animal is kept. Horse bedding comes in many types, each with various advantages and disadvantages.

When a horse stands in the stall, bedding creates a cushion between the stall floor and the horse’s hooves, reducing fatigue. Bedding provides warmth, reduces floor-level drafts, and keeps the horse from being bruised when lying down. Most bedding is absorbent, soaking up urine and other fluids. Finally, bedding protects the floor of the stall from moisture and wear. Read more at:


Wood shavings are probably the most widely used bedding now, usually pine. They are compact and easy to store but they vary a lot in quality. Look for one which is thoroughly dust extracted as some owners find that they can cause breathing allergies. In this case they can be bought as pellets which are really clean and dust free. Once an unwanted by-product from sawmills, as demand has increased companies have started selling wood shavings specifically produced for bedding. Wood shavings are more absorbent, so more of the urine and ammonia is absorbed, which reduces the bad odor and the risk of damage to the horse’s lungs. Since the urine is absorbed by a smaller amount of shavings, a smaller amount of soiled shavings needs to be discarded compared to straw, which can make for an overall saving. A thin layer of shavings is more comfortable than the same amount of straw… Read more at:

http://www.horsemart.co.uk/general-equine/different-types-of-horse-bedding/1545#zktsIGpBZUYshwP.99

The Childhood of an Equestrian

An equestrian fell from his horse. A nursemaid moving through the wood espied the equestrian in his corrupted position and cried, what child has fallen from his rocking horse?

Merely a new technique for dismounting said the prone equestrian…

– by Russell Edson

Big Sky Shavings, LLC

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

Lisa Anderson
Copper Springs Ranch, Bozeman, MT

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever.

The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down; and hasteth to his place where he arose.

The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

All rivers run to the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from which the rivers come, thither they return again.

– Ecclesiastes 1: 4-7

photo courtesy Bruno Engler
The Great Burn: Keep It Wild

—by Dan Harp, Missoula Chapter BCHM

Where can you spend a week on horseback, encounter no one, enjoy the shade of cedars and firs and sleep under a carpet of stars? As Dean Hoistad, Randy Kappes and I found out, that place is the Great Burn, west of Alberton.

Our trip began July 30. We left I-90 at the Fish Creek exit, turned up the West Fork of Fish Creek and passed the Hole in the All Lodge on the way to Clearwater Crossing. After concluding our drive of 20 miles on a good gravel road, we saddled up three riding animals and six pack animals. We rode up the West Fork trail five miles, turned left up Indian Creek. We were amazed by the cedar trees so big around that a 30-foot lead rope would not be nearly long enough to tie your horse to one.

Our boots were polished by the luxurious growth of huckleberry and thimbleberry bushes. Small stream crossings were frequent – not surprising in this inland temperate rain forest. The forest opened into a meadow where tall grass and flowers obscured the trail as we approached the headwall. Waterfalls, a snowfield, and rocky ridges were our prize on arrival.

As we climbed the switchbacks on the steep trail, Juneberry, alders, and alpine spirea were as high as the backs of our horses. The trail leveled as we approached Mud Lake. We found our campsite (previously cleaned by the BCH of Missoula) in a meadow encircled by bear grass.

The hike to Cedar Log Lake was short but steep. We found an abundance of flowers, frogs and fish. On a day ride on the State Line Trail, my young mule turned twice on a cliff edge to study the terrain something that I have never seen a horse do.

Each night the stars seemed closer than the problems of the world. The dying embers of the fire helped focus the discussion on the values and rewards of Wilderness along with a debate on the merits of the Decker Diamond.

On day four, we packed down Indian Creek five miles to the West Fork Trail and turned upstream to Foley Basin. The only people we saw on the trip were two Good Samaritan friends on a day ride to bring us cold beer.

The Foley Basin camp provided good water and grass, but approaching darkness spurred rapid rigging of high lines, tent and kitchen. The trail from Foley Basin to Lower Siamese Lake is rough and steep, but doable. It leads to a beautiful basin with towering walls plastered with thick green vegetation highlighted by jutting rocks, waterfalls, and patches of snow.

On the last day, Dean Hoistad gave a lesson on a quick and tasty breakfast: a freeze-dried scrambled egg breakfast with hot water added to the package eaten right from the bag with a long-handled spoon. Quick and easy start to our last day in the Great Burn.
Dear Back Country Horsemen Montana,

Thank you for your lead effort in establishing the Ernie Strum trail. I will convey my thoughts to BLM, DNRC and USFWS as well.

My wife and I hiked in to the area last week. I can’t ride like I used to but hope to get in there with horses too.

Public access to and via BLM-administered public lands as well as via other public points is very important, and very valuable. A great example is the Ernie Strum trail that has now provided a sliver of carefully crafted access to a State section and thereby to USFS lands off of West Rosebud Creek Road. If those little pieces of BLM and other public lands are lost or ‘consolidated’ the public loses – forever possibly – opportunity to realize access to larger and special parcels of other public lands. The Strum Trail allows public access to beautiful aspen dominated basins, ecotypes very largely controlled by private parties along most of the Beartooth Absaroka lands. The State section and the adjoining USFS expanses were previously only accessible to public if they were able to pay or somehow gain the favor of the private land owners that otherwise had land locked access, or took convoluted primitive routes from distant USFS access points.

Thank you very much for making this trail a reality. In the future I hope to contribute some time, effort and maybe some money to trail acquaintance, better parking ... and a better gate!

Best Regards

Steve and Deb Regele, Joliet, Montana
On January 1, 1940, I was assigned as Assistant Regional Forester in charge of Wildlife Management under Regional Forester Evan Kelley. One of the wildlife problems of that time was excess population of deer and elk. This resulted in overuse of the land and caused range depreciation and winter die-off.

The Flathead elk herd was estimated at approximately 5,000 head. The herd was very much under-utilized. The range, particularly on the South Fork of the Flathead and on the White River, was badly overused. This, of course, was due to the remoteness of the country, the terrain and the abundance of escape cover. The Thompson River and Fisher River deer herds, located on the old Cabinet and Kootenai Forests…were very much under-utilized, so the range suffered serious degradation...

The future looked dim. So, why not give the nearby Flathead Indians special dispensation to take a specified number of elk and deer from these areas of overuse on a permit basis in order to get the game herd in balance with the range? I thought we owed it to them after the way we had shoved them around, in violation of the Treaty of 1855.

I discussed the matter with Regional Forester Kelley…and Joe Severy…a member of the Montana Fish and Game Commission. We rolled the idea around a while and agreed that I should make the contact with the Indians...

My contact with the Indians was Aeneas Granjo, Chief of the Flathead Tribal Council at that time … We had many discussions about the Indians hunting the Thompson River and Flathead country. Over the years Aeneas had taken many parties over the old Indian trail into the South Fork of the Flathead via Pyramid Pass. Granjo endorsed my proposal with as much enthusiasm as the average Indian displays to the white man. He agreed to bring Chief Charlo and others who were interested into Missoula to see me.

Several weeks passed by, and I thought he had forgotten. One day as I opened my office door…there to my left, sitting in a row of chairs reserved for callers, were Chief Charlo, Aeneas Granjo and Ninepipes. Neither Charlo nor Ninepipes would speak in English. Granjo acted as their interpreter. I spent the next 2 hours in the most interesting powwow of my life…

Charlo started out on the exodus of his tribe from the Bitterroot in 1891. Next, from his shirt pocket he pulled the original parchment copy of the Treaty of 1855 made with the Indians at Council Grove, near Missoula. Once again I heard the story of the earth being the mother of the Indian, that it produced their clothing, their cover and their food. He pointed to that part of the treaty that said “…as long as the grass grows, as long as the river flows…,” etc. He told me the tribe had dwindled to not more than 35 or 40 full-blood families that still clung to the tribal custom of the annual hunt. He told me that each of these families needed at least 4 elk and 12 deer per year to furnish their needs for meat and clothing. Granjo in his turn pointed out that if these Indians were granted a special limited license, it would mean a drain of only 160 elk and 480 deer out of the over-populated area of the Flathead and the Fischer, Thompson River country.

This meeting gave me something to go on. I reported back to Joe Severy. He told me that his discussions with the other commissioners favored further investigation of the proposal. To further acquaint the public with my proposal, I arranged for Chief Charlo and Granjo to appear on the program at one of the annual Western Montana Fish and Game Association banquets, held at the Elks Club. Charlo appeared in all the regal splendor of an Indian chief—eagle feathers, bonnet and all. Charlo repeated the speech made previously to me in my office, while Granjo interpreted. It really made a big hit as entertainment, but I could read in the faces of my fellow sportsmen that there were many skeptics. Not many of my fellow Americans were yet ready, even partially, to right the wrongs that had been inflicted on the Flathead Indians after the Treaty of 1855.

Nevertheless, we went ahead with further discussions with the Flathead tribe prior to presenting the matter to the Montana Fish and Game Commission. Granjo arranged a meeting for us with the tribe at the Moiese Council house. This was a memorable meeting. After the necessary formalities, Severy and I stated our proposals. continued
Chief Charlo continued

We were seated at a table with chairs in the middle of the room, along with the members of the tribal council, the Flathead Indian Agent, the interpreter and a few others. There were a few chairs on one side of the hall for those who wished to sit on them and a section bare of anything for those who wished to sit on the floor. The floor by the east wall was occupied by blanket squaws who sat like graven images, never uttering a word to one another, but listening intently to all that was said.

Aeneas Granjo, chief of the tribal council, opened the meeting with a brief introduction, saying he hoped it would result in more and better hunting for older Indians on the reservation. In typical Indian English, Granjo eloquently outlined to the long-hairs on the blankets the prospects of a better hunting ground. This was interpreted in Salish.

One Indian speech was most noteworthy. It was given by a long-haired, moccasined, blind Indian whom I recall as Moses Chouteh. Like all American Indians, as well as those of us who profess Christianity, he began with the creation. These may not be his exact words, but I am sure they express his message accurately:

"Many, many, many snows ago, when the Great Spirit made the earth, so long ago only Mother Earth knows. From the ground there sprang the first Salish people. The earth is my mother, and from her comes all the things her children need: food, shelter, clothing, and all the other essentials of life ... As he proceeded, the interpreter began to leave the monotone he was using and entered into the oratory of the speech ..."

The speaker went on to say, "The Flathead Indians lived in peace with other tribes for so many snows that the older chiefs could not remember when they had been on the war path. Then the white man came... All Indians were troubled. The Great Spirit had forsaken them; no longer could they hunt the buffalo; other tribes went on the warpath with them because there wasn't enough for all. The white men made wire fences, turned the earth upside down. No longer could it produce the feed for our ponies and grass for the buffalo. Our mother earth was being destroyed."

Chief Charlo continued

When the idea of having the Indians harvest the surplus of elk and deer had been proposed, I was quite aware of the attitude of the average western Montana sportsman toward the Indians would be the same as it had been for 200 years ... mostly negative. Nevertheless, I was bitterly disappointed when Joe Severy advised me that the Montana Fish and Game Commission had unanimously turned down my proposal.

Actually, I never knew exactly what had motivated me to make the proposal in the first place. Perhaps it was to assuage that corner of my conscience that would not forget the time when as a Cub Ranger I had backed up Bill Hill, Montana District Game Warden, with a Winchester carbine while he searched the two Indian tepees on the ancestral hunting grounds of the Salish Indians on the Thompson River: His instructions to me had been, "Shoot the damn squaws if they get the drop on me!"

About 20 years after the Moiese meeting, while I was crossing Higgins Avenue in Missoula, I saw an old long-haired, moccasined Indian. He was coming out of the Oxford Bar. His shoulders were rounded; he was quite stooped; his gait was slow. But it had to be Aeneas Granjo.

He returned my salutation and I said, "Have you hunted the South Fork of the Flathead lately?" "No," he replied. "The trail is too long for an old Indian. Sometime soon, though, I go over there. Nobody use the old Flathead hunting trail through Pyramid Pass any more; beside, not many elk left. White man now hunts all over the South Fork of the Flathead. No room for the Indian."

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Montana Back Country Horsemen State Chapters

Beartooth
PO Box 614
Absorakee, MT 59001

Bitterroot
PO Box 1083
Hamilton, MT 59840

Cabinet
PO Box 949
Libby, MT 59923

Charlie Russell
PO Box 3563
Great Falls, MT 59404

East Slope
307 N Main
Conrad, MT 59425

Flathead
PO Box 1192
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Gallatin Valley
PO Box 3232
Bozeman, MT 59772

Hi-Line
PO Box 1379
Cut Bank, MT 59427

Judith Basin
PO Box 93
Lewistown, MT 59457

Last Chance
PO Box 4008
Helena, MT 59601

Mile High
PO Box 4434
Butte, MT 59702

Mission Valley
PO Box 604
Ronan, MT 59864

Missoula
PO Box 2121
Missoula, MT 59806

Selway-Pintler Wilderness
PO Box 88
Hamilton, MT 59840

Three Rivers
PO Box 251
Dillon, MT 59725

Upper Clark Fork
PO Box 725
Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Wild Horse Plains
PO Box 398
Plains, MT 59859

If you would like to join, please contact a chapter in your area.