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**Back Country Horsemen of America is Recognized
by Local and National Organizations
By Sarah Wynne Jackson**

When you ride your horse down a well-groomed trail with level footing, no low branches, sturdy bridges, and safe water crossings, do you stop to think what it took to make that happen? Ask any Back Country Horsemen of America member and they'll tell you: long hours of hard work, lots of sweat, and personal funds spent on fuel and supplies.

Maintaining trails for horse use is far from glamorous, but without it, where will we ride? It may seem like a thankless job, but Back Country Horsemen of America are happy to do it and organizations large and small see the difference BCH folks are making.

Just Doing What They Do

All Back Country Horsemen believe in the value of volunteerism, so it's no wonder that many of their accolades center around trail work. On a rainy day in September, seven members of Hoosier Back Country Horsemen of Indiana volunteered their time and equipment to repair storm damage at Youngs Creek Horse Camp in Hoosier National Forest.

Straight-line winds had hit the camp, blowing down large trees which damaged the water trough, fence, and highline posts. The folks from Hoosier BCH cleared debris, repaired the fence, and installed new highline posts. They used a tractor to remove fallen trees and large branches. They also performed general maintenance, such as trimming tall grass in the fenced area.

Nancy Myers, Outdoor Recreation Planner of Region 9, Hoosier National Forest, Tell City Ranger District, recently recognized Hoosier Back Country Horsemen on the US Forest Service's "Success Stories" web page for their assistance in cleaning up Youngs Creek Horse Camp.

Nancy wrote, "The Hoosier Back Country Horsemen are a great partner and very willing to volunteer for trailhead and trail projects. They even agreed to help on another trail gravelling project on the German Ridge Trail in November. The Tell City recreation staff is very appreciative of the Hoosier Back Country Horsemen's hard work and willingness to enhance recreation opportunities for equestrians on the Hoosier National Forest."

Making the Connection

Back Country Horsemen across the country go out of their way to nurture good relationships with public land managers. Back Country Horsemen of Middle and South Georgia have a strong working relationship with the folks at A.H. Stephens State Historic Park. They volunteer throughout the year on various projects, such as trail work days, special events, securing grants, and hosting and assisting with several equestrian programs.

As a result, the equestrian facility is now more user friendly with higher visitation rates, generates more revenue, and has receive positive feedback from guests. Andre Mclendon, Park Manager at A.H. Stephens State Historic Park, recently sent a letter of thanks to Back Country Horsemen of Middle and South Georgia.

Andre ended his letter with this sentiment, "Words cannot express how much we appreciate your support. Every day we take one step closer to achieving our goal. It is to be the best equestrian facility that our Georgia State Park system has to offer. With your support I am confident that we can attain our goal. Thank you so much for your contributions. All of our accomplishments from this past year are proof that we can make a difference."

National Recognition

Responsible recreation is a major tenet of Back Country Horsemen of America and has been a focus of Back Country Horsemen of Washington since their formation in 1976. BCHW's current Leave No Trace educational program has been in existence for 15 years, and is funded mostly from grants through the US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration Recreational Trails Program.

The Coalition for Recreational Trails, a federation of national and regional trail-related organizations, gives seven achievement awards each year to recognize outstanding use of Recreational Trails Program funds. In 2010, BCHW's Leave No Trace Educational Program received the award in the category of Environment and Wildlife Compatibility.

The entire BCHW Leave No Trace program is run by volunteers dedicated to teaching others responsible recreation. This national award is a great honor for all BCHW members who work and support this educational program with their time and effort. Back Country Horsemen of Washington members also made donations to cover the travel expenses of three BCHW officers to accept the award in person in Washington, D.C.

Share the Trail

Back Country Horsemen of America believes in sharing trails amiably with other users, and BCH Eagle Creek of Kentucky exemplifies that ideal with their outstanding cooperation with the Kentucky Mountain Bike Association.

The two organizations recently worked together on a clean up work day on a county-owned reservoir multi-use trail system.

Chris Lockard, President of the Bluegrass Chapter of the Kentucky Mountain Bike Association, sent BCH Eagle Creek a warm letter of appreciation. He wrote in part, "I just wanted to take a moment and thank you for extending an invitation out to the KY Mountain Bike Association to participate in the trail day sponsored by the Back Country Horsemen of Eagle Creek. You and your group were great to work with. The local mountain biker community found it rewarding to work with the equestrians on trail improvements at the county reservoir property."

Chris also pointed out the benefits of different trail user groups working together toward a common goal, something well understood by Back Country Horsemen of America. Interactions between user groups helps foster understanding and positive relationships, as well as respect and value for each other's right to a quality trail experience.

About Back Country Horsemen of America

It's clear that public land managers, other trail users, and national organizations recognize the huge difference Back Country Horsemen are making. Responsible recreation and protecting our right to ride isn't just a philosophy; it's a responsibility that requires action in a variety of forms. Back Country Horsemen of America is proud to live up to that and get the job done.

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes regarding the use of horses and stock in the wilderness and public lands.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: www.backcountryhorse.com; call 888-893-5161; or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367. The future of horse use on public lands is in our hands!