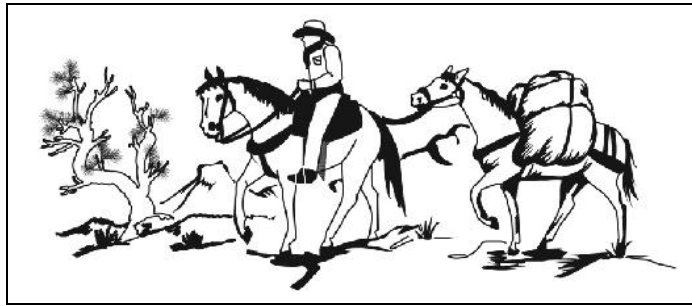


Back Country Horsemen of America



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Dear Back Country Horsemen and Horsewomen;

We are pleased to announce a significant accomplishment from our **'Wild Riders'** partnership with **The Wilderness Society**.

As many of you know, the BCHA Wilderness Committee, in its initial meeting in 1999, proposed that members work with their legislators to have wording inserted in new wilderness bills that would preserve our historical access. The wording approved by the Board of Directors was: *"Traditional recreational saddle and pack stock use is recognized as an appropriate and historical use of wilderness."*

As the result of wilderness planning efforts that we've been involved in since that time, BCHA is of the opinion that the original wording is insufficient to address the inappropriately restrictive practices being recommended by some of the more extremist advocacy groups and individuals. These extreme groups have not proposed that horses be totally eliminated; however, their efforts to reduce the development scale on a significant portion of the trail system would seriously limit the amount of wilderness that is actually available for pack and saddle stock use. As such, we have discussed amending the wording to include *"maintenance of a trail system and associated trailhead structures to a sufficient standard to accommodate historical saddle and pack stock."*

Last spring we asked our Wilderness Society "Wild Riders" to jointly sponsor wording of that nature, and after extensive deliberation they have responded with language that they would not oppose. The following language is a huge improvement over what BCHA originally proposed and language that appeared in the 2009 Omnibus Bill:

HORSEBACK RIDING.—Nothing in this subtitle precludes horseback riding in, or the entry of recreational or commercial saddle or pack stock into, an area designated as wilderness by this subtitle—

(1) in accordance with the Wilderness Act and

(2) in accordance with House Report 95-540 of P.L. 95-237, 1978 and using the minimum tool necessary to enhance wilderness character where appropriate and/or necessary

(3) subject to any terms and conditions determined to be necessary by the Secretary.

While this language does not specifically mention trail maintenance, it addresses our concern by reference to House Report 95-540. HR 95-540 admonishes the Forest Service for their "purity criteria" and provides specific instruction on how the 1964 Wilderness Act is to be interpreted as it relates to certain uses and activities that are important to many

of our members – including hunting, fishing, fish stocking, historic cabins as well as trails, bridges and signs. In the report, Congress specifically stated **that trails, trail signs and bridges “... are often important to the recreational access and use of a wilderness area. Trail construction or maintenance can include the use of mechanical equipment where appropriate and/or necessary.”** This renewed focus on Congress’s intent, as defined by the Endangered American Wilderness Act directives, is a particularly important achievement.

The Wilderness Society has stated their preference to help BCHA address overly restrictive practices through intervention in administrative processes and policies rather than through statutory or committee report language. In recent communications they have re-stated their commitment to working with BCHA on the administrative policies and practices front. However, they agreed to review proposals we send their way. They have honored that commitment through a lengthy and thoughtful deliberation, now it is our responsibility to use this tool when and where it is appropriate to do so.

The 1964 Wilderness Act did not identify uses that would be considered appropriate, only those that were prohibited or allowed by exception. Pack and saddle stock were a dominant and accepted presence in the original wildernesses and an integral part of the wilderness movement. In a speech commemorating Aldo Leopold's contribution to the concept and establishment of wilderness areas in the United States, Harvey Broome, President of the Wilderness Society, quoted an article that Leopold wrote in 1921 in the Journal of Forestry in which Leopold identified wilderness as “a space which would absorb a two weeks' pack trip. The man who wants wilderness” he said, “wants not only scenery and hunting and fishing and isolation, but riding, daily movement, and the variety found only in a trip through a big stretch of back country.”

Values and attitudes have changed since 1964. Eighty percent of our population currently lives in an urban environment. Horses are not part of the image that they have of ‘wilderness.’ The suggested wording for new wilderness bills is simply a reminder that the “pack train,” and opportunities for primitive travel and subsistence, are “touchstone[s]” to our past and the very genesis of the wilderness movement.

We are aware that some chapters and states have not currently seen the need for such language to re-establish our cultural and symbolic heritage. It is their choice, of course, whether or not they wish to pursue language in new bills – although we see little harm in doing so, and potential value of having the language in the future. We are also aware that some chapters and states will not support “one more acre of wilderness” without some assurance that pack and saddle stock will continue to be recognized as an appropriate use. Hopefully this wording will provide that assurance.

We are also aware that some states and chapters with very little wilderness feel that we are spending an inordinate amount of time on wilderness language. However, when we recognize wilderness as the most restrictive land classification on our public lands, acceptance of pack and saddle stock as an appropriate use in wilderness would make it increasingly difficult to make the case that it is not acceptable in a less restrictive classification.

Where the proposed wording is supported by local BCH chapters/units, we suggest that members get involved in ‘campaigns’ as soon as they become aware of new wilderness proposals by contacting their legislators and the grass roots organizations that are proposing the legislation, and ask that the language be included.

Please address any questions or concerns to SeniorAdvisor@backcountryhorse.com.



Dennis Dailey, Senior Advisor
Wilderness, Recreation and Trails