

THE VIEW FROM HERE

by Dan Applebaker



The Purpose of the Back Country Horsemen, or Why We Exist.

Here are the purposes of our organization as taken from the Back Country Horsemen of America website. Please read, or reread, them carefully. They are the reason the Back Country Horsemen were formed in Montana in 1973 (about the same time the High Desert Trail Riders were formed). They are the reason we exist today.

The purpose of this organization shall be:

- 1. To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness.*
- 2. To work to insure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.*
- 3. To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.*
- 4. To educate, encourage and solicit active participation in the wise use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage.*
- 5. To foster and encourage the formation of new state Back Country Horsemen's organizations.*

The first two purposes define what our group hopes to accomplish by our existence. The third and fourth purposes give direction in the manner in which we accomplish the first two principles. The fifth purpose is directed at expansion of BCH to make it as strong an organization as possible to give us the power to accomplish the first two purposes as well. It is an original purpose that has been accomplished quite well, with BCH currently occurring in 30 states (17 State organizations and 13 Affiliates). For the same reasons we also need to encourage the formation of new Chapters in the states with an existing BCH organization

I have lifted another quote from the BCHA Website to further explain purposes three and four, simply because I could not say it better myself.

It was the original assumption that Back Country Horsemen would be a different type of organization, not the usual special interest one, normally operating as a protest group. It was felt that a service organization, doing work in the back country, would lend credibility to the group when it became involved in criticisms of agency management.

It was also recognized that some of the complaints against back country horse use were justified. Consequently, it was determined that an educational program should be a fundamental principle of the group.

So, service and education joined a determination to protect our heritage of back country stock use as composites of the "purpose" printed above. Our name was chosen because it signified an interest in much more than just wilderness. Back Country Horsemen are interested in perpetuating recreational stock use on virtually all public lands.

We try to limit our interests to the stated purpose. Many worthwhile organizations already exist to provide action programs in other fields, so anyone interested in those has adequate opportunities to become active.

Those are the reasons we exist at all three levels of BCH, National, State and Chapter. It is often difficult to not stray from these basic principles. Because we have limited resources of time and people, it is very important that our actions be firmly directed at these purposes. Although the Chapters have more autonomy to drift away from the principles than the State and National organizations do, there is a danger if doing that. Even the Chapters should strive to keep their actions and activities relating directly to the original purposes of BCH. I can tell you from personal experience that it is very difficult to get our state organization to discuss anything at a State Board of Directors Meeting that is not related to the purposes, and it is impossible to get the National Board to stray from the purposes. That is as it should be. I will discuss the three layers of the BCH organization in the next article.

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The Three Tiers of the Back Country Horsemen Organization

Our organization is structured like a pyramid with a very wide base and narrowing at the top. The base is made up of the individual members and Chapters. This wide base of people, just like you and I, are one of the main reasons we have the strength to accomplish the purposes for which we are organized. Our broad base of members are actually on the ground and are living the life of horsemen in the backcountry. We are working together to maintain the local use of our saddle and pack stock on public lands and by volunteering that gives us much of our political power. We are indeed a grass roots organization.

We currently have about 13,300 members in 47 states and 174 Chapters in 25 states. We are the horsemen that know the current and historical condition of the country we ride in. We know how to use our stock with as little disturbance to the backcountry as possible, and we know the impact that irresponsible use can have on the backcountry resource we enjoy. We are the ones that have invested over 286,000 hours of volunteer labor with a value of over \$6,600,000 nationally in 2008, to help keep the trails open and available for our use. We are the ones that have the knowledge and the credibility to educate other backcountry visitors (with or without stock). We also educate the federal agency people entrusted with the responsibility to manage the backcountry resource. We are the main strength of our organization. We are the High Desert Trail Riders Back Country Horsemen Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of Oregon.

The state Back Country Horsemen organizations are the next and narrower step up in our pyramid structure. The states are organized to work on a larger scale when dealing with Federal Agencies and State Legislators, The state organizations provide the opportunity for members and chapters to gain more insight into what other horsemen are experiencing in their states, and throughout the nation.

The state organizations are Boards of Directors with representatives from each Chapter in their state. Each Chapter member in the state is also a member of their state organization. In our case, every member of our Chapter is also a member of The Back Country Horsemen of Oregon, and receives the BCHO Newsletter, The Highline. Our Chapter dues include the BCHO

dues. Each Chapter in Oregon provides one representative that sits on the BCHO Board of Directors, The state organization gives us the advantage of a much larger group of interested people and constituents when speaking to Federal organizations, State organizations, and State Legislators. That larger voice means we have more strength in what we say and more power to achieve our goals. We send two members from BCHO, to represent our state, on the Board of Directors of the Back Country Horsemen of America as our National Directors.

At the narrow top of the pyramid is our national organization, The Back Country Horsemen of America. BCHA is a Board of Directors made up of two National Directors from each state that has formed a state organization. This Board is the highest level of our organization. They work to promote our purposes at the national level with the Federal Agencies (Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and the Park Service), the US Senate and the House of Representatives. They also network with other national organizations that have an interest in the backcountry in order to bring more public focus on issues determined to be in the best interest of the Back Country Horsemen. The list of other organizations that BCHA has partnered with, affiliated with, or joined is a very long and reputable list. They are in part: the American Horse Council, the American Hiking Society, the Wilderness Society, the Coalition of Recreational Trails, American Trails, the Continental Divide Trail Alliance, the National Recreation Trail Training Partnership, and several others. I will pass on a quote lifted from a resolution presented by the Back Country Horsemen of Alabama at the 2009 meeting of BCHA. *“The Back Country Horsemen of America is the national leader for advocacy of private recreational pack and saddle stock use of all public lands and the stewardship of those lands.”* We are the only national organization that promotes the use of private recreational pack and saddle stock use on our public lands.

Our Chapter has been active at the national level. Several members of our Chapter have served on the national Board of Directors and as national Committee Chairpersons. Every member of our Chapter is also a member of The Back Country Horsemen of America, and receives the BCHA Newsletter. The BCHO dues that are included in our Chapter dues also include the BCHA dues. When you pay your Chapter dues you are automatically a member of both the state and national organizations.

My next article will discuss what the state and national organizations do for us locally, why we need them, and why we should continually support them.

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What the Back Country Horsemen of Oregon and of America do for our Chapter.

I have noticed an undertone of feelings from members of our Chapter in the past concerning our relationship with our State and National BCH organizations. Let's take a look at what I perceive those concerns might be. What does the Back Country Horsemen of Oregon (BCHO) and the Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA) do for our Chapter (HDTR-BCH) and our members? Should we support these organizations, and if so how, and how much?

The BCHO Board of Directors is made up of one State Representative from each Chapter in Oregon plus the Officers. They meet three times a year. The first Board Meeting is in March with the annual Convention of the general membership. All Chapter members are also members of BCHO and March is the Annual General Membership Meeting and Convention for all members. The Board meets again in May at our Horse Packing and Wilderness Skills Clinic. They meet again in September. Usually one Chapter hosts a state Trail Ride and all members are invited. This year our Chapter is hosting the first state work party on the Yamsay Mountain trails and the north end of the Fremont National Recreation Trail that we have worked on for so many years. The current BCHO Chairman is our own Mike Letsch.

So what does our Chapter and the members get from BCHO?

BCHO gives us the opportunity to bring all of our members in the state together to work on issues and concerns that will affect the entire state. The Forest Service's Region 6 includes all of Oregon and Washington with the Regional Forester's Office in Portland. The Bureau of Land Management also has a State Office in Portland. The BLM has nine Districts in Oregon. Our District Office is in Lakeview, with an office in Klamath Falls. Many issues that come from these Agencies are statewide issues and our larger statewide organization is in a much better and stronger position to deal with them than any single Chapter would be.

We also have considerably more strength and credibility when speaking to our State Congressional Representatives as a statewide organization. We have met with these State Senators and Representatives on numerous occasions since BCHO formed in 1996.

BCHO also gives us better opportunities to put the BCH name in front of the public through booths in large horsemen's events, sportsman's shows

and outdoor shows. BCHO sponsors educational events such as Leave No Trace training, trail work clinics and Agency certification training for power and crosscut saws.

BCHO puts out a great Newsletter, The Highline. The Highline keeps us up to speed on what BCHO is doing. It also lets us know what other Chapters are doing, and who the contacts are for the Chapters, BCHO Officers and Board members. It is an excellent forum for networking with other horsemen in the state. There is also a BCHO Web- site: www.bcho.org

Through the State organization our Chapter is also a member of the National BCH organization, BCHA.

The BCHA Board of Directors is made up of two representatives from each State that has a state organization, one representative from a state that has at least one affiliate chapter but no state organization, the Officers, and the Standing Committee Chairpersons. The National Board meets one time each year at the Annual National Meeting. That meeting is hosted each year by a member state, so it is a different place each year. The National Meeting in 2010 will be held in Branson, Missouri. BCHA is currently organized in 25 states, so it is a fairly large Board of Directors.

So what does our Chapter and the members get from BCHA? I lifted this out of the BCHA website because it says it all and I could not have put it any better.

The National Newsletter published quarterly. The newsletter contains information regarding the activities of the National Board of Directors and the committee chairs (Education, Public Liaison, Wilderness, and Media Communications) along with news from the Twenty Five states represented in BCHA. This Newsletter is sent to public lands managers, legislators, and other organizations in addition to members.

The Wilderness Committee is in place to advise the state organizations in their dealings with public lands managers to keep the back country open to stock use. There have been, and currently are, several instances where plans have come out to block the stock users for one reason or another from the back country.

The Education Chair/Committee - works to compile information with regard to gentle use on the land/leave no trace/minimum impact and other information that will assist the states in their quest to keep the back country available for stock use through education. Several of the states have extensive programs in place now and are willing to share with states who do not have the wherewithal for one reason or another to put their own in place. A Junior BCHA program is in process. I will add here that our own Phil Hufstader from the Emerald Empire Chapter is the new Education Committee Chairman and Betty Applebaker held that job for several years.

The View from Here Continued.....

A National presence on the "Hill"- representatives from the Public Liaison Committee makes several trips to Washington, D.C. annually to maintain our visibility with our legislators. (Local contacts with the legislators are also extremely important.)

The BCHA Website: www.backcountryhorse.com

The BCHA Guidebook, publications and traveling display available

The Camaraderie with other stock users

The Strength in numbers (14,000 members)

The Sharing of information with other back country users which also includes many new ideas for your use in dealing with public lands managers, fund raising, rides, education, insurance, liability, recruitment, and work party recommendations.

BCHA Sponsors with a trickle-down effect (special arrangements for states and chapters/unit, i.e., trailer discounts, Camp Chef products discounted)

As you can see, we get a lot from our State and National organizations. They are a bunch of very dedicated and hardworking horsemen. We don't always see the results of their efforts unless we take the time to be involved with these organizations, and there are opportunities to get involved through our Chapter. Often the fact that we can use our recreational pack and saddle stock in the places that we do, and with no more restrictions on that use than we have, is a direct result of their work in keeping the trails open for all of us.

Our State and National BCH organizations are not some detached groups of people that don't represent us or know what are needs are. They are actually us. They depend on us. We are the Chapters and individual members that provide the grass roots base for the entire organization. We depend on them to give us the organization, and therefore the strength in numbers, to accomplish the purposes for which we all exist and work so hard to accomplish.

So do we need to support our State and National organizations? Absolutely, and we do. The question we have to continually address, is do we do enough? Your Chapter Board of Directors considers that question every time they make up a new annual budget. We have been strong in our support, both financially and in providing opportunities. I certainly hope that practice continues.

