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## Back Country Horsemen team up with Wilderness Society



(<http://wilderness.org/content/back-country-horsemen-team-wilderness-society>)

BY ANDREA IMLER ON NOVEMBER 12, 2009 - 7:30PM

**Aldo Leopold**, co-founder of The Wilderness Society and a preeminent voice in the conservation world defined wilderness as “a continuous stretch of country preserved in its natural state, open to lawful hunting and fishing, big enough to absorb a two week’s [horse] pack trip.” In his most famous book, *A Sand County Almanac*, he provided two examples of “primitive skills in pioneering travel...” one of these is canoe travel, and the other is travel by packtrain.”

### A Horse Rides Through It

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The Wilderness Society honors the rich history of horseback riding in wilderness through a new partnership with [Back Country Horsemen of America](http://www.backcountryhorse.com/) (<http://www.backcountryhorse.com/>).

The two groups first met in the spring of 2009 when Back Country Horsemen of America approached The Wilderness Society to request their help preserving opportunities to enjoy wilderness riding and packing and interpreting the history and significance of pack and saddle stock for managers and other wilderness advocates.

“A partnership between the Back Country Horsemen of America and The Wilderness Society makes sense, especially in light of how many of our visionary wilderness leaders, like [Aldo Leopold](http://wilderness.org/about-us/aldo-leopold) (<http://wilderness.org/about-us/aldo-leopold>), [Howard Zahniser](http://wilderness.org/content/howard-zahniser) (<http://wilderness.org/content/howard-zahniser>) and [Mardy Murie](http://wilderness.org/content/mardy-murie) (<http://wilderness.org/content/mardy-murie>), saw many of their greatest moments of clarity, insight and inspiration while riding a horse deep into the wild country of America,” said Bart Koehler, senior wilderness campaigns director at The Wilderness Society. “These moments gave them a bedrock solid sense of direction and helped them lead the way to securing protections for special wild places thanks to [The Wilderness Act](http://wilderness.org/content/wilderness-act-1964) (<http://wilderness.org/content/wilderness-act-1964>).”

The two groups hope to educate public lands agencies and the recreating public about the historical and traditional use of horses and pack stock on public lands and to increase the substantive and ideological support for maintenance of this use. This includes working to influence the FY2011 federal budget to include more funds for trail maintenance on Forest Service lands and joint scoping comments regarding management of newly designated wilderness areas.

“When the Wilderness Act was being debated in Congress, horsemen were among the advocates who testified for its passage. None of us imagined that later generations might question our privilege to enjoy that resource,” said Mike Reedy, past Chairman of Back Country Horsemen of America. “But that’s the situation we find ourselves in more and more often. The Wilderness Act passed because of broad citizen support and it is our hope that horsemen will be welcomed by more wilderness advocacy groups as partners in the continued support and enjoyment of wilderness.”

The Wilderness Society's history is founded on a deep acknowledgement of and personal connection to pack and saddle use in wilderness. Due to recent agency management and policy decisions, some horse users feel unfairly and unnecessarily excluded from wilderness. This is not consistent with both organizations' joint history and the two groups are working to reduce the real and perceived instances of unjustified limitations.

"The Wilderness Society believes that pack and saddle is a historical, appropriate, and accepted use of wilderness," said Scott Brennan, Northern Rockies forest program director for The Wilderness Society and participant in The Wilderness Society and Back Country Horsemen of America meetings. "Direct personal experience is what inspires people to care for wild places, and recreation, including pack and saddle stock use, is by far the most important source of such inspiration. This is why we seek to make common cause with Back Country Horsemen of America," he said.

The Wilderness Society is looking forward to working with Back Country Horsemen of America. "It's pretty exciting to have the opportunity to work together. I'm looking forward to the progress we can create," said Cynthia Wilkerson, Washington state program manager and participant in The Wilderness Society and Back Country Horsemen of America meetings.

photo: Two women riding horses in wilderness. Photo by Damon Parrish, Courtesy of REI.

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