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**Back Country Horsemen of America's 2012 Volunteer Value is  
the Highest in its History**  
**By Sarah Wynne Jackson**

As the leader in protecting our right to ride horses on public lands, Back Country Horsemen of America is proud of their record of service. For 40 years, they have volunteered their time, skill, and resources towards keeping trails open to horse use and promoting responsible recreation in a myriad of ways.

BCHA commends its members across the nation who continue to make public service a priority, despite economic and weather-related difficulties. In fact, 2012 was their best year yet, with a total of \$12,515,563 in annual volunteer value donated; the highest in the history of the organization.

Is There Anything They Don't Do?

What can twelve-and-a-half million dollars of sweat, skill, and time do? We're glad you asked! As they have every year since 1973, BCHA's now 13,000 members from over 185 chapters and affiliates in 26 states spent the last year clearing trails of deadfall after storms, repairing gates and fences, building bridges, hauling gravel to fill washouts, and creating new trails.

In order to protect our enjoyment of wild lands by horseback, they attended public planning meetings, assisted land managers in making important decisions that affect all trail users, and wrote to people at the state and federal level who make legislative decisions.

But their goodwill isn't limited to the trails. BCHA folks also invested many hours in educating adults and children in responsible recreation practices, packing, trail riding, and trail cooking. They participated in food drives, restored historic trail structures, picked up litter, and transported fish for stocking.

Protecting a Century-Long Legacy

Throughout 2012, Back Country Horsemen of America has been following up on their work with the US Forest Service trail classification system. In 2005, BCHA was forced to file suit against the USFS for failing to seek public input before developing a new trail classification system. This new system immediately and arbitrarily downgraded 59% of our trails to a level below equestrian standards. It changed the standards for time-tested horse trails that have evolved over nearly a hundred years.

A federal judge ruled in favor of BCHA, allowing the US Forest Service to keep their new trail classification system as designed, but preventing them from assigning a trail a new classification without public input on the proposed change.

Across the nation, BCHA members donated many hours attending meetings with USFS representatives to see how each Forest or Ranger District has implemented the new trail classification system in their area. For example, in the Willamette National Forest in western Oregon, most of the 173 trails that had been categorically downgraded from pack and saddle stock standards to bike and hiker only standards have been reinstated. The trails will be managed for other uses in addition to stock, but they must continue to be managed to include horses. Any trail work will be expected to meet and maintain design standards for equestrian trails.

### It's Just Another Day of Trail Work

Last year, as every year, Back Country Horsemen of America kept a strong focus on trail maintenance. In June, the San Joaquin Sierra Unit of Back Country Horsemen of California spent a number of days camped in the Sierra National Forest, clearing Edison Lake area trails designated for maintenance by the USFS. The 22 person work party, including seven hard working women, divided into two groups. Collectively, the groups cleared over 15 miles of trail, removing more than 60 trees from the Goodale Pass Trail and the Graveyard Meadow Alternate Trail.

Starting out from camp each morning, the crew rode the trail until coming upon a downed tree. After tying up their horses, they put on safety gear and pulled out their cross-cut saw, bow saw, loppers, hammer and wedges. Some trees also required the axe or the peavey. As the group worked, one crew member walked ahead to clear as much as possible by hand, then came back and reported to the others how far ahead the next work site was.

On the Graveyard Meadow Alternate Trail, the crew found many groups of downed trees pinned by a larger uprooted tree. These can be very dangerous to remove and called for careful planning in order to be cleared safely and efficiently. The skilled and experienced BCHC volunteers accomplished this with no injuries or mishaps.

### Investing in the Future

The folks at Back Country Horsemen of America know that children truly are the future of our country, and too many of them never have the opportunity to meet a horse. In August, the Mountain Riders Chapter of Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen teamed up with the Douglas County Fox Trotters and the Ava Area Frontier Girls to change that for one group of girls aged seven to ten.

Held at the Ava Saddle Club, Get To Know a Horse Day paired each girl with her very own horse and its owner for the day. The girls learned how to safely move and work around a horse, how to brush a horse, check its hooves, and properly put on a saddle. With the horse owner's assistance, each girl rode her horse, which was the first time several of the children had sat on a horse. The girls also learned about basic horsemanship and the principles of Leave No Trace responsible recreation.

The day was designed to help these Frontier Girls earn a Merit Badge in Horsemanship. They went home with pink Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen T-shirts, notebooks of information on horses, and huge smiles on their faces.

### About Back Country Horsemen of America

The year 2012 was certainly a good one. In the years to come, Back Country Horsemen of America will continue their work in maintaining trails, ensuring the USFS trail classification system is fairly implemented, teaching others about horses and responsible recreation, and the countless other ways they protect America's heritage of traveling through our wild lands by horseback.

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](http://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!

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