

BCHA Public Lands Call April 13, 2020 **FINAL**

Attending: **Jerry Bentz; PLC Chairman**

WEST REGION: Kathy Young Jason Ridlon

SE REGION: Roy Cornett, Tom Thomas

ROCKY MTN REGION: Brad Pollman, Jim Allen

SW REGION: Rod Player

NE REGION : Dick Kleinhardt, Yvette Rollins

Randy Rasmussen, Director Public Lands & Recreation

**South West:** Rod held first SW region meeting. The group talked primarily about the forest plan revision for the Gila National Forest. NM is getting active and giving attention to the Forest Service actions.

**South East:** Tom, Nantahala -Pisgah Forest Plan Revision is in progress. Included is the FS proposal to ban off-trail travel when few equine trails are formally designated. Also included is the proposal for no new trails in Wilderness. This forest has few miles of designated horse trails, but does have hundreds of miles of legacy trails which are used by equestrians and bicycles. The planning group is working to make ensure that those historic trails are not dismantled, but will be recognized by the Forest Service and retained.

Roy: Fed Highway, RTP funding is still in place as of last week.

**Rocky Mtn.:** Jim. Rocky Mtn. region meeting was on April 1st . Webinar information was shared. Forest Service Region 2 closed all the developed sites thru May 31. Trailheads or trails are not closed.

Montana is managing to do some projects, with appropriate measures for distancing. They are leaving work project selection up to the local FS. Restrooms are closed, trails are open. Brad has observed that trails are being used more with better weather.

Brad reported on the pilot program implemented in Region 1 that would allow firearms to be carried by certain members of a work/volunteer crew. The Regional Forester had concerns with the FS firearms policy and FS employees. The Volunteer agreement makes us employees and subject to the firearms policy. The training to comply to the policy was too extensive. BCH Montana worked with FS to simplify the FS firearms policy and obtain an approval letter. Volunteers will get a self-reporting document, and background check. They will then be issued an authorization/permission to use firearms for stock euthanasia. There is no substantive tracking and background check info is confidential, available to law enforcement only. In Region 1 this is now mandatory, and the procedure is being shared with the other FS regions.

**North East:** Regional group did not meet due to the covid19 pandemic.

Yvette: The Dept. of Transportation is proposing a bypass through the Hoosier National Forest that would take out a lot of the forest and horse camps.

Due to covid19 the Governors decision has been to shut down all horse trails and camp grounds.

**Far West:** Kathy: BCHW is fairly well shut down at this time due to the “essential travel only” order that Washington State has put into place. Most state agencies are operating on minimal staff and most state lands are closed. Forest Service trails are open, but developed sites are closed.

Washington is continuing to plan for our annual statewide work party in July. Work on trails will be delayed or postponed, depending upon how quickly the agencies are able to get back to work. Many chapters have cancelled their fun rides and fundraisers.

BCHO is working with US Forest Service Region 6 to implement a volunteer agreement that will be for the state, rather than requiring each chapter to initiate an agreement with each district that they work in. Oregon is getting close to finalizing this and is waiting to meet with the FS to sign off. BCHW is also working on an organizational Volunteer agreement for the Washington as well, and at this time is waiting to review the outcome of the Oregon effort.

**Protocol for addressing agency issues/challenges:** As a follow up to Jerry Bentz’s request from the previous public lands committee meeting, Brad Pollman provided a draft document that outlines a process for resolving public lands issues with the US Forest Service. The draft document originates from the step-by-step process that BCH Montana currently uses. The process is designed to initiate at chapter level and escalate as necessary to the BCHA level. The draft is being reviewed and is not yet finalized.

### **Randy Rasmussen: Director of Public Lands and Recreation**

**The COVID-19 pandemic** has resulted in widespread impact to public lands and stewardship. Recognizing that small rural communities do not have the available healthcare support that large cities do many organizations have ceased work and cancelled events for the time being. National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) hosted an April 2nd webinar, “The Impact of Covid 19 on the Wilderness Stewardship Community”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeUjYYpEABo&feature=youtu.be>

BCHA and other organizations are requesting that USFS, BLM, etc. extend all public comment periods.

**Bureau of Land Management/ US Fish & Wildlife:** New e-Bike rulemaking proposals by BLM, USF&WS have been announced. BCHA is working with national coalition to consider how to comment. The 60-day comment period closes June 8. BCHA will submit comments and will also consider signing on to coalition letters. BCHA states and individual chapters are encouraged to submit their comments on this proposal. BCHA will be providing some bullet points for states to use as they see fit.

**USDA Forest Service:** The litigation against the opening of trails to e-bikes in the Tahoe National Forest has been completed and the FS has rescinded the invitation that was extended allowing e-bikes to use non-motorized trails. BCHA will consider a press release on this at a later date. It is expected that the FS will reinstate this issue using the proper public process to open some of these trails to e-bikes in the near future.

**Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and HR 5797/S.1527:** The RTP coalition (CRT) is asking congressional leaders to include RTP in current infrastructure bills. BCH members can help by thanking Senate sponsors and should ask their House representatives to sponsor this legislation.

**BCHA 2019 Minimum Required Analysis (MRA) resolution:** BCHA (Randy) needs to hear of examples of where BCH chapters have been denied a MRA.

**Congressional Appropriations** Randy would like to see BCHA states/chapters taking coordinated action each year to increase agency recreation/trail budgets. There has at least been modest progress toward not letting the trails budget slip. Our national coalition has held the line for 5 years. BCHA is considering its strategy to be part of the solution to increase the trails budget. Jim Allen suggested that BCHA consider coordinating lobbying with a national "Call Your Congressman Day". Talking points and how-to's would need to be provided to members to accomplish this.

**The takeover of horse camps by non-equestrians:** Results of the recent survey by R.Marquis were provided. Using these results how might we (collectively) push to secure a solution to this problem? How might BCHA best share this information with the agencies (primarily USFS)? What specific solution(s) might we propose in order to rectify this clearly national problem? (Survey included with notes for posting to BCHA website)

**BCHA and US Army Corps of Engineers** have a new Memorandum of Understanding in place. There will be a webinar on this topic that will be announced after the BCHA National Board meeting. Randy would like to hear of any Army Corp work project examples from BCHA regions. Are there any suggestions or opportunities that we see in using this MOU?

**Sipsey Wilderness (Alabama):** - Historic wagon use in this wilderness has been halted abruptly by USFS. The local equestrian and driving groups are actively engaged, reviewing documents and considering legal issues to challenge this halt. Horse drawn wagon use existed on this landscape prior to its wilderness designation. BCHA is considering what role it should take on this issue. Jim Allen spoke to the BCHA mission to ensure access for recreational stock. BCHA could/should consider providing some support and advocacy. It was noted in the discussion that a Wilderness Study area within the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument includes a historic wagon road.

Respectfully submitted

Kathy Young, BCHW

Attachment: RMarquis Equestrian Camp Use Survey

