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BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN AND THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY COMMIT TO WORKING TOGETHER, FORMING GROUNDBREAKING PARTNERSHIP

Groups Explore Common Ground for Wilderness

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

Seattle, WA –The Wilderness Society and Back Country Horsemen of America today announced that they are teaming up on public lands issues to encourage appropriate recreational experiences on all public lands. Both organizations pledged their mutual intent to insure that traditional and historical pack and saddle stock use is recognized, protected, supported and sustained, consistent with the capabilities of the land, in America’s wild places.

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, Howard Zahniser and 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.”

“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,” added 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 welcomed the partnership and acknowledged that Back Country Horsemen of America is a natural partner because of the common heritage of protecting public wild places and the opportunities to experience them, which follows closely with The Wilderness Society’s mission statement, “to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places.”

Scott Brennan, Northern Rockies forest program director for The Wilderness Society and participant in The Wilderness Society and Back Country Horsemen of America meetings noted, "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. The Wilderness Society believes that pack and saddle is an historical, appropriate, and accepted use of wilderness."

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 increasing funds for trail maintenance on all public lands and working to ensure that newly designated wilderness areas accommodate appropriate use by pack and saddle stock.

"We were originally a little uncertain about initiating this effort," said Dennis Dailey, executive director of issues and policy for Back Country Horsemen of America, "because of some of the resentment over management practices in parts of the country, but the unanimous vote of support from the Back Country Horsemen of America board of directors for continuing the cooperative effort with The Wilderness Society was very encouraging."

"The Wilderness Society and Back Country Horsemen of America share a deep connection and respect for wild places. It's pretty exciting to have the opportunity to work together. I'm looking forward to the progress we can create," added Cynthia Wilkerson, Washington state program manager and participant in The Wilderness Society and Back Country Horsemen of America meetings.