

Preserving the Right to Ride on Public Lands

Your voice makes a difference

by **Laura Merritt**

If you like to ride in forest groves and sunlit plains, those opportunities may be disappearing. Unfortunately, some groups are trying to restrict access of public lands to everyone, including horseback riders.

The Right to Ride legislation is a proposed bill at the Federal level that keeps public lands open to pack and saddle stock. Under the proposed bill, trails could only be closed to pack and saddle stock after a public agency completed a full review process required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

Since 85 percent of horses are owned by recreational riders, that means there are a large number of you that can make a difference if you contact your legislators in the House of Representatives and the Senate at the national level. Please ask them to support bills HR 586 (in the House) and S 781 (in the Senate).

Backcountry Horsemen of Washington (BCHW) President Bob Shonka explains, "On the surface this looks like a bill that only impacts pack and saddle stock. Though we are a pack and saddle stock group, we build and maintain trails for the benefit of all user groups. Right to Ride affects many groups such as hikers, mountain bikers, and even ATV's in areas where land managers allow their use."

"We believe in multi-use whenever feasible," Bob added. What this means is that it is beneficial to encourage hiking and bicycling groups to join BCH in forming coalitions to keep public lands open to all groups.

The official title of the Act is 'Right-to-Ride Livestock on Federal Land Act of 2005'. The introduction of the bill reads: "To preserve the use and access of pack and saddle stock animals on land administered by the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, or the Forest Service on which there is a historical tradition of the use of pack and saddle stock animals, and for other purposes."

If you'd like to read the text of the bill, you can search the Internet for Right to Ride and you'll find the 2005 proposed bill language. If Congress does not pass the bill in October 2006, the bill will have to be reintroduced in January of 2007.

Bob offers this background; "We've had an historical presence in the backcountry and wilderness areas since the first conquistador and his mount entered what are now New Mexico and Colorado in search of the "Seven Cities of Gold." Daniel Boone's settling of Kentucky could not have been done without pack and saddle stock. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery could not have made it over the Bitterroot Mountains of Idaho without pack and saddle stock. The mountain men and emigrants coming to the western United States needed pack and



saddle stock. Audubon, Muir, Pinchot, Teddy Roosevelt, and many, many other early environmentalists used pack and saddle stock to venture into the backcountry and wilderness areas.

Congressman Radanovich (CA) summed up what the HR 586 and S 781 are about, when he said, "Trails and federal lands must be kept open and accessible to all those who desire to use and enjoy them including pack and saddle stock. Riding livestock across America's vast plains and throughout its extensive wilderness regions is a part of this nation's history."

"Horseback exploration of the backcountry is enjoyed by scout and church groups as well as families, and provides wilderness access to senior citizens and the disabled-groups who otherwise might not have the opportunity to enjoy such an experience." Bob adds, "To lose this heritage would be a shame."

"Part of our job is to educate people," said Bob. "This is



Laura and Shimmer enjoy stunning views in Oregon's Blue Mountains

especially true for land managers. They need to understand we build and maintain trails and promote healthy use.”

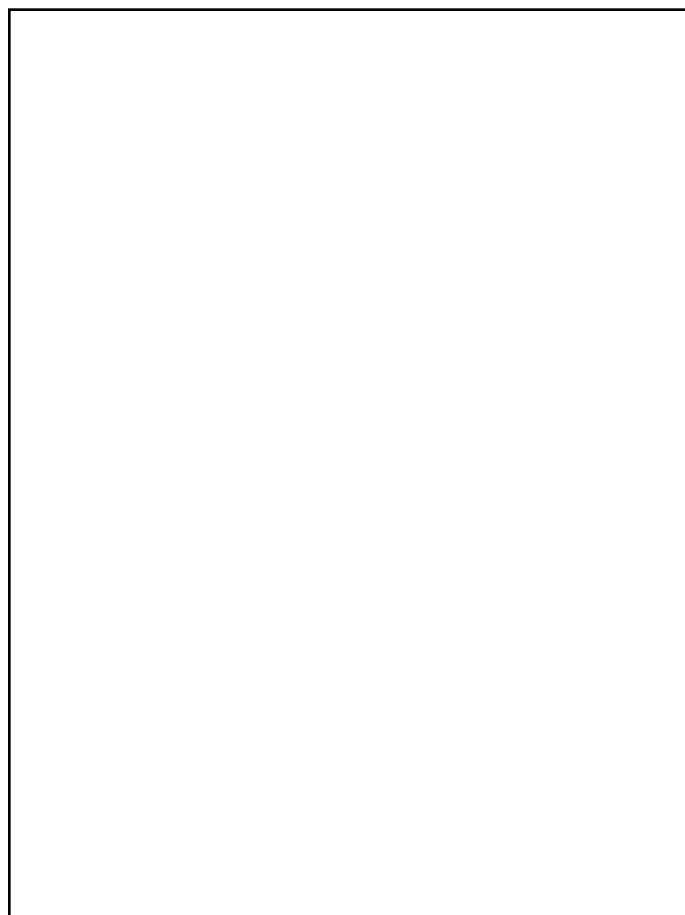
Your voice counts. And like Bob says, “Passion counts.” If you aren’t a member of Backcountry Horsemen, find a local chapter and join today. If there isn’t a local chapter – start one – or at least join the state organization. Get involved. Call and write your legislators at the state and national levels. Sign petitions. Be a good steward: volunteer for trail maintenance efforts and remember to always ride and camp in a way that “Leaves no Trace.”

Editor’s Note:

The Right to Ride Event in Yakima, Wash., May 19-21 is an excellent opportunity for our readers who wish to learn more about Preserving the Right to Ride. An Auction to raise money in support of BCHW’s efforts to keep trails open to horses and other stock is happening at the Yakima State Fair Park on Saturday, May 20th as part of the Yakima Right to Ride Rendezvous Event (details on facing page). We look forward to seeing you there as we all work to be part of the solution and retain our right to ride.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Getting Started with Trail Riding: Tips and Resources

by Erica Curtis

Know your horsemanship skill level and riding ability. Without a proper evaluation of your skill level and riding ability you take risk with yourself and your horse, and you are a liability to those who ride with you. Gain the skills and conditioning necessary to enjoy the sport. Some riders who are used to riding perhaps several times a week but for short duration are very surprised at how sore and sometimes raw certain parts of the anatomy can become when their horse is going uphill and downhill, negotiating turns and dips and trees alongside the trail, not to mention those lying across the trail. The old “knee-knocker” injury is common to new trail riders where the inexperienced trail horse doesn’t leave enough room for the rider’s knee as it bends around a tree growing close to the edge of the trail.

Know you horse. Arena horses don’t automatically adjust to the great outdoors easily, even if they have been classified as “bomb-proof” in the arena, or scored extremely well in the “trail class” during 4-H Fair! A typical trail ride is going to be about 2-3 hours long. A horse that is normally ridden for 45 minutes to an hour in the arena is bound to be challenged by the varied terrain and length of time they’ll have to carry their rider on an extended ride.

Set realistic goals. Investigate the kind of riding you like, and the kind of terrain you are comfortable riding. Consider hiking the trails you are interested in riding, so you know what the terrain is like; hazards, water crossings, bridges or fallen trees. Then you can decide before you get there with your horse if this particular trail is appropriate for you and your horse for a first outing. Try starting out slowly, with easier rides on less challenging terrain so both you and your horse can gain the skills and conditioning necessary to take on more difficult and longer rides.

Evaluate your tack. Most pleasure saddles (western style) that are used in the arena have longer bars, and may not fit the horse well. This may have never been an issue because the horse was ridden for such a short period of time on flat groomed footing in the arena. The saddle that has served you well for years in the arena could become a problem that injures your horse’s back and withers out on the trail. English saddles and dressage saddles on the other hand can make great trail saddles with the addition of perhaps a breast collar and a saddle pad that has “d-rings” attached for tying on saddle bags to hold first aid items, lunch, and perhaps water. Cashell actually makes a great “d-ring” pad specifically for this purpose.

Visit or join a couple of groups in your area that devote themselves to trail riding. In the Pacific Northwest, there are many active groups ranging from saddle clubs, which are usually social organizations that plan a fun, varied riding and social schedule throughout the year, to service organizations that have a non-profit designation and combine volunteer building and maintaining horse camps and trails with trail riding.

Learn all you can about trail riding. Read, visit websites and subscribe to a good trail riding magazine.

RESOURCES FOR TRAIL RIDERS

Trail Blazing the Northwest, By Rene Ogan & Josie Rusho

Over 215 trails to explore on horseback in Washington & Oregon

Grab Your Tails & Ride the Trails, by Josie Rusho & Rene Ogan

150+ trails to explore on horseback in Eastern Washington & Oregon

Riding Central Oregon Horse Trails, by Kim McCarrel

With over 1,000 miles of horse trails with detailed descriptions of terrain and scenery, and difficulty ratings, maps, photos and horse camp info

Trail Riding & Pack Trips in Washington, by Dick & LaDonna Woodfin

Members' Guide to OET

Complimentary to those who join OET, has a huge section of "Favorite Trails & Horse Camps in Oregon"

Preparing for Trail Riding by the Long Riders Guild

www.thelongridersguild.com/preparation.htm

Trail Rider's Checklist Day Ride, Back Country Horsemen of America www.backcountryhorse.com

Equestrian Land Protection Guide, Equestrian Land Conservation Resource www.elcr.org

Have Saddle-Will Travel by Don West

Low-impact trail riding & horse camping, 1-800-821-3607, www.havesaddlewilltravel.com

ONLINE RESOURCES

OET's resource page listing Oregon horse camps

www.oregonequestriantrails.org/resources

Backcountry Horsemen of America

www.backcountryhorse.com

Arizona: www.bchaz.org

British Columbia: www.bchorsemen.com

California: www.bchc.com

Colorado: www.bchcolorado.org

Idaho: www.bchi.org

Montana: www.bchmt.org

New Mexico: www.bchnm.org

Oregon: www.bcho.org

Washington: www.bchw.org

RECREATIONAL & TRAIL RIDING ORGANIZATIONS

Oregon Equestrian Trails www.oregonequestriantrails.org

OET is a statewide non profit Oregon corporation that builds & maintains horse camps & trails in Oregon; maintains communication with local, State & Federal land management agencies, to insure equestrian access; promotes education of equestrians and other user groups in the use of Leave No Trace ethics, outdoor ethics,

campground etiquette, and trail etiquette; and links equestrians together by relating news that impacts all Oregon equestrian trail users.

Back Country Horsemen of America

www.backcountryhorse.com

BCH is a national non-profit group that seeks to perpetuate common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness, assists various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of wilderness resources volunteering thousands of hours annually, works to insure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use and seeks to educate and encourage wise use of the back country resource by horsemen.

American Horse Council www.horsecouncil.org

AHC is a national trade association representing the horse industry in Washington D.C. It seeks to promote and protect the equine industry by representing its interests in Congress.

The Equestrian Land Conservation Resource www.elcr.org

ELCR is the only national organization dedicated to promoting access to and conservation of land for all types of equestrian activities. ELCR provides direct assistance to individuals and groups working to preserve land for equestrian use, whether publicly or privately held. It assists horse people across the country to identify all of the resources available to them and to maximize their potential to be environmentally responsible and financially sustainable over the long run, and to take action to provide permanent access for equestrians.

Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics www.lnt.org

Is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and inspiring responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships. The Leave No Trace principles are used by various organizations to build awareness, appreciation and respect for our wild lands. BCHA and OET support and educate their members on LNT and how to apply it to horses, trail riding, and camping and pack trips.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erica Curtis is a member of North Coast Chapter of Oregon Equestrian Trails and Willapa Hills Chapter of BCHW. She has been active in both groups, volunteering in the areas of communications and marketing. Her hope is that she can make the mission statement come to life through her work.

