

# Decker Dispatch

Photo © Dawn Brennan, BCH Flathead

www.bchmt.org

The Newsletter of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana - 1,059 Members

February 2019



## OUR PURPOSES

- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country, roadless backcountry and wilderness areas.
- To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
- To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.
- To educate, encourage and solicit active participation by the general public in the wise and sustaining use of the back country resource by horses and people commensurate with our heritage.
- To foster and encourage formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.
- To seek out opportunities to enhance existing areas of recreation for stock users.

## Bitter Root BCH sets record on summer project

by Karen Philips, past-president, Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen

Bitter Root BCH members tackled a challenging project last summer when they headed up Boulder Creek Trail for a three-day adventure with a record number of horses and mules and a large crew of humans.

To prepare for this endeavor, three members hauled certified forage seven miles up Boulder Creek Trail ahead of time for the upcoming project. They also cut out trees so the crew to follow could get to the base camp area without having to clear trail.

On July 6, eleven members, along with 19 stock animals (yes, 19!), gathered early and spent a couple of hours getting their tools and gear packed up. They headed up the trail aiming to set up camp before getting started on trail work.

Once that was accomplished, they worked from Friday afternoon through Sunday clearing two different trails, from the base camp up to the pass on the Idaho border and to Boulder Lake. While there is still a good deal of brush encroaching on the trails, significant alder overgrowth was removed, as well as all downed timber that blocked the trails.



Here is an example of just one of the challenges participants faced: half a mile from Boulder Lake, one of the crews had to chop out a three-foot-deep snow and ice drift that completely blocked the trail. Members used an ax to cut the drift into blocks, then lifted the blocks and rolled them clear of the trail and the trail switchbacks below. Wow! Total trail mileage cleared on this project was 11.5 very tough miles.

Meanwhile, back down at the trailhead and the adjacent horse camp, another crew cleared debris from around hitch rails, removed manure from the parking area and cleared and marked the stock watering trail located near the horse camp.

On Sunday afternoon, they welcomed back the tired and thirsty trail crew with much-appreciated beverages and watermelon.

What a great job accomplished by an outstanding group, led by project leader Dan Brandborg!

Left: Kathy Stroppel-Holl and Julie Schram lead the crew from the trailhead. Right: Eva-Maria Maggi secures a load.



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By Mark Himmel  
National Director, BCH Montana

National Convention this year is in Asheville, North Carolina from April 7th – 10th.

I can give a brief update on a few of the eleven active committees of BCHA.

Education Committee will soon be posting the work they have been doing on the Education Matrix. This is a collection of information for chapter and state development. This information has been requested by the many states who have questions or issues at one point or another. Next week I'll be narrating a webinar along with the other officers. I'll be talking about state development. More on that at convention.

Media & Marketing is the committee I currently chair. I mentioned at the state board meeting in December that BCHA Facebook creates many posts on all sorts of topics. These posts can be shared by the state or chapter locally and then they can

## National Director's Column

edit the last line for their own contact info instead of the BCHA link. Our posts that deal with membership are popular (yes, the humor posts are the best). BCHA can create a good post but horsemen still join a chapter at the local level, so I encourage you to give it a try. Any questions let me know.

BCHA currently is an exclusive sponsor of Trailmeister with the goal of increasing membership nationally. Chapters have the opportunity to sponsor Trailmeister locally with the goal of increasing membership. Robert has many topics he can speak about and BCHA will be there to assist with the marketing on social media.

Public Land committee has been busy in a number of locations. They have an article in the BCHA Winter newsletter.

I will be doing a more in-depth update at the pre-convention meeting on March 1st in Great Falls.

Mark

## BCHMT receives many thank yous from summer camp participants

• Thank you for making it possible for me and other kids to go to the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch for a fun and adventurous five days! It is people like you that make outdoor and wildlife education available to the youth of this country. I hope you continue to do this to keep generations knowing what's out there and how to protect and preserve it. At that camp, I found out a new hobby, fly fishing and fly tying. Now that I'm back in the Bitterroot Valley, I am excited to pursue this hobby and hone my skills with the bountiful source of fish and bodies of water that I now know the importance of protecting.

• Thank you for putting on Magruder Camp. I greatly enjoyed it.

• Thank you for helping put on the awesome camp in the Selway. It was really fun learning how to tie manties and saddle up the horses and mules. Thank you so much. I'm looking forward to next year's camp.

• Thank you for helping to sponsor my camp at the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch. I had lots of fun and wouldn't have been able to go without you. Thank you for teaching about horse packing. That was very fun.



Photo by Linda Huso.

## Letter from the Chair

Friday, January 11, 2019 was another important day for the Back Country Horsemen of Montana. Many BCHMT members attended the State Capitol in support of the Public Lands Rally that was held in the Capitol rotunda. It was estimated that 2,000 people attended. I do not really need to tell all of you how important public lands in Montana are to our mission. But it goes beyond that. Most of us use our public lands for many different opportunities. User groups and individuals from all over Montana came together for the same purpose. This issue is not going to go away, but with the support

shown at the Capitol it should make it easier.

We need to stay tuned on the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This fund has provided millions of dollars to the state of Montana. Both Montana senators support this bill.

The BCHMT hours came out and we are just short of \$1,000,000 contribution for the past year - see page 6 of this newsletter. Everyone should be proud of their accomplishments. Thank you all.

Stay safe on the trail,

Rich



*Rich Carl  
Chairman  
BCH Montana*



## National Director's Column

*By Mack Long  
National Director, BCH Montana*

### **BCH Montana was represented well at Public Lands Rally**

On Friday, January 11, 2019, Public Lands supporters from across Montana showed up in Helena at the State Capitol to show our new legislators that Montanans support keeping our Public Lands in Public Hands.

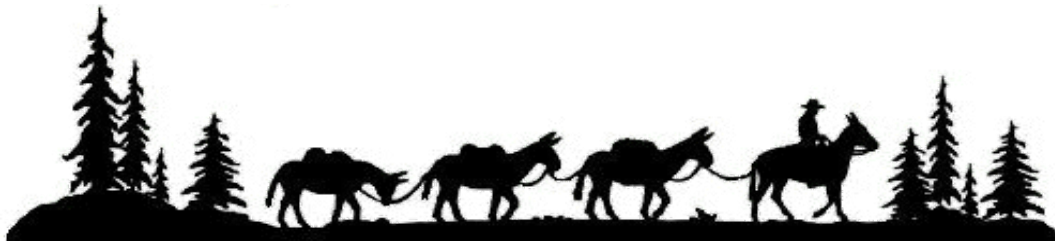
Several excellent speakers including our senior U.S. Senator Jon Tester and our Governor Steve Bullock addressed the crowd announcing their support to maintain these lands for all Montanans and citizens from around the country for current and future generations. Both Senator Tester's and Governor Bullock's dedication to keeping these lands public is critical. We thank them both for standing with us.

Looking around the rotunda of the Capitol at a crowd of somewhere around 2,000 people was impressive. The diversity was also great to see. Supporters from bird watchers to bird hunters, from hunters to wildlife viewers, and hikers to horse and mule enthusiasts, and every group inbetween were all there for one reason, to see our Public Lands stay in Public Hands! Many of the organizations that we work with on a regular basis were there, including the Montana Wilderness Association, The Wilderness Society, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and several sportsmen/women groups.

It is more important than ever to pay attention to any legislation that may come up in the next few months that might threaten or take away our public lands.

*Photo by Dan Marsh.*





**2019 Registration**

Back Country Horsemen of Montana State Convention  
Hosted by the Charlie Russell Chapter

**March 1-3, 2019**

Best Western Heritage Inn  
1700 Fox Farm Rd, Great Falls, MT 59404

**Convention Participant(s)**

BCH Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Voting Delegate: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Voting Delegate: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
 Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee: **Until February 1 - \$90 After February 1 - \$100**

Registration Fee includes registration, seminars, lunch on Saturday, banquet on Saturday, and refreshments at breaks.

	<u>Fee</u>	x	Number of Registrations above	=	Total
Registration Fee	_____	x	_____	=	_____
Dinner Choice:	_____		Chicken Marsala _____		Angus Beef Sirloin _____

**Guest(s)/Spouse of Participant**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Guest Tickets</u>	<u>Fee</u>	x	<u>Number of Tickets</u>	=	<u>Total</u>
Saturday Lunch	\$16.00	x	_____	=	_____
Saturday Banquet	\$30.00	x	_____	=	_____
			Guest Total	=	_____
Guest Dinner Choice:	_____		Chicken Marsala _____		Angus Beef Sirloin _____

Registration Fee total + Guest(s)/Spouse total = Total registration fee \_\_\_\_\_

Make check for the total registration fee payable to Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen.  
Mail to: Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen / P.O. Box 3563 / Great Falls, MT 59403

All registrations must be received by February 14, 2019.  
For further information contact Sandy Himmel (406) 788-2618 or Lisa Wiley (406) 964-1154.

# Charlie Russell Hosts 2019 Backcountry Horsemen State Convention

By Sandy Himmel, Charlie Russell Back Country Horsemen

The 2019 Montana State Convention will be hosted by the Charlie Russell Chapter in Great Falls, March 1-3. Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup> is the State Board meeting. Convention starts Saturday morning at 8:00 am.

Registration will be available Friday starting at noon and Saturday morning starting at 7:30 am. A tentative agenda and registration form can be found on the state website. A registration form is also included in this newsletter.

Photo contest categories include:

- **BCH at Work**
- **Kids of All Ages**
- **Montana the Beautiful**
- **Horses & Mules.**

Photos must be printed 5x7 or 8x10 size and unframed. Members are permitted two entries per category. BCH amateur photographers only and no previous prize winners can be re-entered. All photos must be marked on the back with your name, chapter and category.

Your chapter's photos for the slideshow can be uploaded to Google Drive ([click here](#)).

Each chapter has been given raffle tickets to sell. The prizes are: Browning A-Bolt 300 Win Mag with scope, Custom made metal art coffee table, and a 50" 4K smart TV. The items are shown on the state website. If you need more tickets contact Lisa Wiley (406)964-1154 or Sandy Himmel (406)788-2618.

We look forward to seeing you!

## BCHMT members attend the Public Lands Rally in Helena on January 11, 2019

By Deborah Schatz, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead



The fifth day of Montana's 2019 legislative session wrapped up Friday with a huge rally.

NBC News reported this was the state legislature's noisiest session yet, as thousands of people crowded the state capitol's rotunda.

This marked the third Public Lands Rally held at the capitol in Helena - they are held at the beginning of each legislative cycle. Of the 3,000 bills submitted to the legislature so far this session, none of them take our public lands away.

Organizers say this year's crowd surpassed last year's attendance with over 2,000 people.

Their message was clear -- Montanans love their public lands.

Sen. Jon Tester and Gov. Steve Bullock rallied with the crowd, re-

*Clockwise: The rotunda overflowed with people during the rally. Frank Vitale holds up his "Cliven Bundy" sign. Dan Porter left, and Vern Campbell right, from the Gallatin Valley BCH chapter, hold up their sign. BCHMT Chairman Rich Carl shakes hands with Governor Steve Bullock. Photos by Dan Marsh.*

mind them that public lands are for everyone.

Professor of Native American studies and Crow tribe member Shane Doyle also spoke at the rally and sang a Northern Cheyenne honor song for the crowd.

"Public lands define what it means

to be a Montanan. They are the reason we live here and love our lives here in Montana," said Kayje Booker with the Montana Wilderness Association.

BCH Montana was a co-host for this event with the MT Wilderness Association and other conservation organizations.

# Backcountry Horsemen of America

## Volunteer Hours Report

BCH MT

2018

*Submitted by John Chepulis, Beartooth Back Country Horsemen*

	Totals	Rate per hour/mile/day	Total Value	
Total Basic Hours	5337	\$24.69	<b>\$131,765.59</b>	Calculated per hour
Total Skilled Hours	5246	\$37.04	<b>\$194,296.72</b>	Calculated per hour
Total Trail Recon Hours	545	\$24.69	<b>\$13,456.05</b>	Calculated per hour
Total LNT - Education	2296	\$24.69	<b>\$56,688.24</b>	Calculated per hour
Total Public Meetings	854	\$24.69	<b>\$21,085.26</b>	Calculated per hour
Total Administrative Service	3881	\$24.69	<b>\$95,821.89</b>	Calculated per hour
Total Travel Time	3486	\$24.69	<b>\$86,069.34</b>	Calculated per hour
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>21645.1</b>			
Wilderness Trail Miles	431			
Other Trail Miles	1250			
<b>Total Trail Miles</b>	<b>1681</b>			
Personal Vehicle	49651	\$0.90	<b>\$44,685.90</b>	Calculated per mile
Stock Hauling	66409	\$1.10	<b>\$73,049.90</b>	Calculated per mile
<b>Total Travel Miles</b>	<b>116060</b>			
Power Equipment	789	\$26.00	<b>\$20,514.00</b>	Calculated per hour
Heavy Equipment	43	\$81.00	<b>\$3,483.00</b>	Calculated per hour
<b>Total Equipment Hours</b>	<b>832</b>			
Total Stock (Pack and Saddle)	1257			
<b>Total Stock Days</b>	<b>1894</b>	\$100.00	<b>\$189,400.00</b>	Calculated per day
Total Donations	\$3,443.20		<b>\$3,443.20</b>	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$933,759.09</b>	



in conjunction with Back Country Horsemen of Montana  
FULL SCHOLARSHIP AVAILABLE

# Packing Skills Class

5 days/4 nights: June 8-12, 2019



Winning applicant will learn the hands on skills of packing horses and mules on this 5 day/4 night wilderness (LNT) educational trip. Scholarship will cover \$1,725 for tuition plus transportation within Montana for the winning applicant.

Students learn by doing the hands on work which is the best way to retain packing skills. We have a classroom setting the first day. We start with teaching you the benefits of the Decker Pack Saddle and the traditional packing methods that have been developed over the years. Next is proper saddling and adjusting of the Decker. We then teach you how to mantle, load, balance and watch the loads on the trail. Other skills that we cover are stock care, saddling, riding your trail horse or mule, stock management in a wilderness setting, Leave-No-Trace (LNT) techniques for stock use and much more. We also cover backcountry meal planning and preparation. We plan to move camps every day so there is plenty of practice. This is a working, learning trip and is not intended to be a relaxing vacation. There will be down time to relax, but we want you to learn as much as possible in this short time in the Wilderness.

This class will benefit anyone who wants to learn horse and mule packing skills and learn how to practice Leave-No-Trace techniques to protect our wilderness resource. Stock users have a responsibility to be good stewards of the land, and this is the philosophy that we want to share with you. We teach you how to select a camp site, how to set it up and what equipment is light, comfortable and packs well. Both Connie and Mack are LNT Master Educators for Stock Use and students will receive a LNT certificate of completion. Students will also receive a certificate for completing the Packing Skills Class.

## APPLICATION FOR BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN MONTANA SCHOLARSHIP

Target age range of participants is 18 to 25 years of age. The chosen participant needs to provide their own transportation [reimbursed by BCHMT] and be at the North Fork of the Blackfoot trailhead at 10 am on Saturday, June 8th to begin the class. Scholarship applicants can go on-line and download the application form OR write an essay OR provide a short video with the answers to the questions. Applications should include a letter of reference. Applications are due by March 1, 2019. The scholarship will be awarded April 1, 2019.

Download the application at: <http://www.bchmt.org>

E-mail or USPS mail essays and video DVDs to:

Greg Schatz | 4720 Trumble Creek Road, Columbia Falls, MT 59912 | [gregschatzbuilder@gmail.com](mailto:gregschatzbuilder@gmail.com)  
or Kathy Hundley | 3448 Wright Way, Darby, MT 59829 | [montanakath@yahoo.com](mailto:montanakath@yahoo.com)

Questions? Call or text Greg 406.261.5450 or Kathy 406.363.8230.

# R.L. Curtin, President Bush's Secretary, and THE BODY GUARD!

By John Simmons, Beartooth Back Country Horsemen

My first trip to the Montana backcountry was in the mid 1960s. I have been blessed with numerous opportunities to visit the Wilderness and front country wilds, just riding a horse and/or hunting or fishing. It seems to me that I can remember them all. A majority of the time has been in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Many of the trips in the last 25 years have involved the Back Country Horsemen projects to help maintain the access trails. Our main Stillwater Trail was closed for several years after the 1988 fires; that is the main reason our BBCH chapter was formed.

Most visits and stays are pleasant, but when accompanied with horses there were those times of trial. But the pleasant and even funny times far outnumber the testing.

One unforgettable trip was in the early 1980s, when four of us had spent four days on the dusty back country trails. The last day we were packing out to the trailhead from Lake of the Woods. We just wanted a meal of wild fish to round out our diet. That was our excuse for traveling the 23 miles to get there. A few miles below our lake camp there was an outfitter's camp. On the way out, near the outfitter's camp, in a large meadow area, I, my wife Marilyn, and two friends met R.L., a backcountry guide and friend of mine. He was leading two of the camp's guests up to view the panorama of the valley; all seven of us were riding horses.

R.L. had just bought a new Sharps reproduction saddle gun that he was so proud of. "John, John, look at my new rifle." He jumped off and pulled the rifle out of the scabbard to show it off. I stepped off my horse as a courtesy to look at his prize. It was a beauty.



As we were viewing the rifle we were on the far side of his horse. R.L.'s back was to his guests and my three party members. I was cautiously watching his two guests, as it was obvious they were uncomfortable with him stopping to visit with us. After four days in the backcountry all four of my party were disheveled and looked and smelled dirty.

The thin, petite woman guest rider appeared very concerned and stressed including her discomfort with her seat on her horse, even though it was a docile old pony. Her riding partner, 125 pounds heavier than her and 50 pounds bigger than R.L. with the likeness of a professional football lineman, had a strange appearance. Here, miles and days away from civilization and a shower, he was wearing clean expensive clothes, including a Derby hat and a white shirt under a Continental suit — a New York City look. His high-top, lace-up shoes really didn't look too far out of place.

As we met, he had ridden over a few yards to the side to survey the situation and was facing us all, while sit-

ting quite fit on a dependable looking horse. There was no nonsense with his horse trying to take a bite of grass; he stood alert at attention.

My opinion was that this guest was a horseman and also used to being in control of his surroundings; his steely eyes saw everything. I whispered to R.L. that we needed to move on our separate ways, that his dudes didn't like us. I am thinking of the bad boys of Elliot Ness days.

R.L. quietly answered, "Yes, I better move on. I am in charge of taking care of them. They don't know anyone here and they don't visit much in camp either. They are a strange couple; the lady is President Bush's secretary. Her boyfriend never lets her out of his sight. He quietly follows her everywhere, except when she goes into her tent to bed. He has his own tent that is set up about a foot from the back of hers."

I asked R.L., "Did anyone say anything about Secret Service or a body guard?" R.L. replied, "Yea, the boss talked about one, I guess that's me."

We moved on.

## Back Country Horsemen of Montana State Chapters

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Bitter Root BCH  
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Cabinet BCH  
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Charlie Russell BCH  
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East Slope BCH  
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BCH of the Flathead  
PO Box 1192, Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Gallatin Valley BCH  
PO Box 3232, Bozeman, MT 59772

Judith Basin BCH  
PO Box 93, Lewistown, MT 59457

Last Chance BCH  
PO Box 4008, Helena, MT 59604

Mile High BCH  
PO Box 4434, Butte, MT 59702

Mission Valley BCH  
PO Box 604, Ronan, MT 59864

BCH of Missoula  
PO Box 2121, Missoula, MT 59806

NorthWest Montana BCH  
PO Box 23, Kalispell, MT 59903

Selway-Pintler Wilderness BCH  
PO Box 88, Hamilton, MT 59840

Three Rivers BCH  
PO Box 251, Dillon, MT 59725

Trout Creek BCH  
PO Box 1435, Trout Creek, MT 59874

Upper Clark Fork BCH  
PO Box 725, Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Wild Horse Plains BCH  
PO Box 640, Plains, MT 59859

If you would like to join us, please contact a chapter in your area. Find more information on our website:  
[www.bchmt.org](http://www.bchmt.org)



# Bannack Days Packing Demonstration 2018

By Kari Thomas and Linda Hamrock, Three Rivers Back Country Horsemen

## History of Bannack

The town of Bannack, Montana was founded in 1862 as the site of the first major gold discovery along Grass-hopper Creek. It served, briefly, as the capital of Montana Territory. Bannack was also the location of the infamous Sheriff Henry Plummer's execution by a group of vigilantes for suspected involvement with road agents. At its peak, Bannack was home to some 10,000 people. The population eventually dwindled, and in 1954 the town was made into Bannack State Park.

## Bannack Days

Today, Bannack State Park hosts Bannack Days. Held on the third weekend of July every year, it celebrates the history of pioneer life. Bannack Days takes visitors back in time with wagon and horseback rides, candle making, gold panning, and even a wild west gunfight.

This past year, Three Rivers Back Country Horsemen were excited to re-live history in Bannack with several of our members attending to put on packing demonstrations. Packing has been used for thousands of years, in many places around the world it was the only means for transporting loads. This was the case in Bannack, whose population depended on goods transported by wagon and pack animals long before railroads crossed this territory. The gear and techniques used to pack have changed little since Bannack's boom days. Our members hosted a morning and afternoon demonstration. Visitors were excited to get an up close look at the animals and pack equipment. TR-



Editor's Note: TRBCH puts their chapter logo over their mantied loads. What a great idea for promoting your chapter!



BCH brought one horse and one mule, and demonstrated how to prepare loads on the ground, the differences between sawbuck and Decker pack saddles, how to tack the animals, and how to balance different loads on each animal. Each demonstration brought a good crowd of 20+, and TRBCH members fielded wonderful questions from the audience.

It is wonderful to see the community involvement in events like Bannack days. Three Rivers BCH members are looking forward to another year of opportunities to share our knowledge and love of our animals and the back country.



**Schedule for chapters' news article submissions**  
E-mail to: [deborah.bcha@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.bcha@gmail.com)

**Spring Issue:** articles due May 5th, 2019  
Charlie Russell, East Slope, Flathead, Gallatin, and Judith Basin.

**Fall Issue:** articles due September 5th, 2019  
Last Chance, Mile High, Missoula, Northwest Montana, Selway-Pintler Wilderness, and Trout Creek.

**Winter Issue:** articles due January 5th, 2019  
Beartooth, Bitter Root, Cabinet, Mission Valley, Three Rivers, Upper Clark Fork, Wild Horse Plains, and convention hosting chapter.

# Cabinet Back Country Horsemen and Montana Conservation Corps team up to improve a section of the Pacific Northwest Scenic Trail

By Deena Shotzberger - President, Cabinet Back Country Horsemen

Cabinet Back Country Horsemen received a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant to work on a remote section of the Purcell Trail #91. This trail is located at the head end of the Yaak drainage in Northwest Montana, and is part of the Pacific Northwest Scenic Trail that connects the Continental Divide Trail to the Pacific Coast Trail. The grant allowed us to pick up a Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) crew for a week to assist with this project.

The area we worked on is fondly or un-fondly referred to as “Dark Purcell”, because it’s a “water logged” three-mile section of the trail located about five miles in from the trail-head. Because of the distance to this section, it gets a quick clearing by the Three Rivers Ranger District on the Kootenai National Forest; but without backpacking a crew into the site, there is never enough time to fully address the maintenance needs. This section of the trail has numerous springs, seeps and bogs, and was in dire need of major drainage features to make the trail more user friendly and sustainable.

Our project was scheduled for August 6-10, 2018. As fate would have it, a lightning storm went through the area on August 1st and ignited several fires to the north and west of our project area. Just a few days before our scheduled project, the access road was closed to fire traffic only.

Our chapter president immediately started coordination with the RTP coordinator and the District’s recreation specialist on possible project changes if the Purcell area was not accessible when the scheduled MCC crew showed up. While the Three Rivers Ranger District does a great job with the resources they have, there are always areas that need significant maintenance. We quickly came up with a backup project.

Thankfully, the fire team opened



MCC crew and CBCH crew leader Cindy Betlach.



Cabinet Back Country Horsemen packing support.



Drainage work.

our access road two days before the scheduled project, and we were able to proceed with the planned Purcell drainage improvements.

Because the work section is a wet, brushy and buggy area, our on-site project coordinator Cindy Betlach planned to camp the crew on the ridge just off Boulder Mountain located about one mile west of the work area. This was a great non-buggy, flat campsite, with evening breezes and a swimming lake just “a steep” three-quarters of a mile to the north. While it was a great location to camp, it was a dry site. The temperatures were forecast to be in the high 90s to low 100s, so it required that we pack a substantial amount of water in addition to the crews gear.

Five Cabinet Back Country Horsemen and nine head of stock met the MCC crew at the trailhead at 0800 on the morning of August 6th to pack the crew’s gear and water to the campsite. Our packing crew included John and Deena Shotzberger, Ross and Elmer Boring and Allen Dye. After a quick stock safety briefing, we worked with the MCC crew to consolidate and pack all of their gear and 30 gallons (240 pounds) of water. Because temperatures were in the low 100 degrees, Allen Dye went back up two days later to pack in additional water and bring out

the empty cubies and garbage.

Cindy worked and camped with the crew through the week to maximize the project accomplishments. We have found that while the MCC crews have the training and lots of enthusiasm, they don’t necessarily have the background to complete projects in the most efficient way. Our experience has shown that we get two to three times more accomplished when we provide an experienced on-site project leader. With Cindy’s direction, the crew cleared six miles of trail, cleaned all the existing drainage features, installed seven new log water bars, installed 15 new drainage dips, and dug an estimated 180 to 200 feet of ditches to drain nine boggy areas. In addition to the drainage features; they brushed the three mile section, removed the monster trail clogging root wad, and constructed one-half mile of new tread. Because of their extra efforts and the 102 degree temperature, Cindy brought the crew back to camp a little early on Thursday afternoon so they could take a much needed swim in Boulder Lake.

After completing our project, the MCC crew was scheduled to work for the Forest Service the second half of their hitch. On Friday, August 11th, Allen packed the crew’s gear out of the Purcell camp, and the crew head-

ed down to resupply. That afternoon, Allen and Cindy took six head of stock and packed the crew to their next spike camp in Feeder Creek. We can’t thank Allen and Cindy enough for their amazing support of the Purcell drainage project and the assistance they provided for the Forest Service project in Feeder Creek.

In addition to funding the MCC crew, the Purcell RTP Grant provided funds to reimburse Cabinet Back Country Horsemen for meals, mileage and stock use - a much appreciated benefit as the haul for four of our packers was over 180 miles for the round trip. Cindy made several trips to the work site and camped with the crew, and Allen made four trips with stock to assist on this project!

Cabinet Back Country Horsemen are thankful for the continued support of the RTP grant program. As our members’ average age continues to creep up, it is more difficult to accomplish the back breaking labor required for projects like Purcell. If we can pair our knowledge with young, enthusiastic MCC crew members and provide them with packing support, we can continue to chew away at these problem areas and make trails on the Kootenai more sustainable.

## ***Bitter Root BCH youth member awarded gift***

After the Boulder Creek trail project last summer, member Bonnie Morgan donated a gift to one of our youth members to honor him for his great work on that challenging project. Bonnie wrote the following letter to explain why she chose to recognize him:



To John Renner,

On the Boulder Creek project, I watched you help your parents, Ed and Christy, in every way you could: you stood by an anxious lead horse as they were saddling and loading the mules; you helped lead a pack mule up a very rough trail, you loosened the girths when you got back to camp, you led mules and horses to water, and you helped tend the camp fires. I wondered if there was a way you could help even more, and the very hot ride out gave me an idea. I had the water purifier with me and your group had to stop to adjust loads several times, so you were too far behind me to refill your water bottles. I would be pleased to have you accept this water pump and give you a new job: the hydration technician! Learn all you can about dehydration and the signs of overheating in people so if you stop near a stream, you can quickly refill water bottles while the adults are adjusting the loads. These pumps are also great to quickly give everyone a drink while the large camp filter gets unpacked and set up. The filter is small enough to fit in a canteen bag - just like a first aid kit you will always have it with you! Once you know what to look for, you can recognize the signs of overheating and remind all of us to sit in the shade and drink water!

Thank you for all of your help on projects. I look forward to working on another project with you.

Bonnie Morgan  
Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen

## **Restoration and Beyond**

*By John Errecart, Wild Horse Plains Back Country Horsemen*

After five years the project to restore the Big Hole Peak Lookout on the Lolo National Forest (NF) near Plains, MT was wrapped up in late June 2017 (Pics 1 and 2). The project has been a collective effort between the Lolo NF, Passport-in-Time (PIT) volunteers and the local Wild Horse Plains Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen (WHPBCH).

The Big Hole Lookout PIT project has a long history. In the 1990s the lookout, one of only three Grange Hall style lookouts remaining in the region, was recognized by the Lolo Forest as a site that was in need of historic restoration so that it could be preserved for future generations. Other Forest Heritage priority projects put the restoration work on hold for several decades. In 2005, attention shifted back to Big Hole Lookout when local volunteers expressed an interest in seeing the lookout restored. The Forest Service Region 1 Historic Preservation Team, led by Kirby Matthew, assessed the building once again, and a document was produced detailing the needed work.

In 2012 the Big Hole Lookout project became a Lolo NF restoration priority. That year the Lolo NF submitted a Heritage Stewardship Enhancement (HSE) grant request with endorsement from the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team. Additionally, WHPBCH also submitted a grant to the Sanders County Resource Advisory Council (RAC) for the lookout restoration, road improvements leading to the lookout trailhead and roadside weed spraying. Combined, the grants totaled over \$60,000.

In 2013 the project was off and running utilizing the grant funds for the purchase of supplies and services: replacement cedar shingles, new lightning protection system, new wood stove, stove pipe, food, helicopter use, pack string use and a multitude of miscellaneous supplies. The funding purchased food and camp supplies to support six Passport-in-Time volunteers, two Historic Preservation Team members and a cook located at the spike camp near the lookout. In advance of the arrival of volunteers the Lolo For-

est helicopter was used to sling in over 2 tons of tools, materials (scaffolding, generators, shingles, stove, etc.) and replacement logs for the project. With project initiation the Ninemile District pack string along with WHPBCH brought in another ton of camp supplies, food and personal items for the two week stay at the spike camp. All told in 2013 the volunteers committed over 400 hours and WHPBCH over 500 hours.

In 2014, WHPBCH got an early start in May, well ahead of the July project date, by felling, skidding and peeling 15 logs to be used to replace the rotted logs on lower walls of the lookout (pic 3). In July a helicopter was once again used to sling the logs to the lookout using WHPBCH secured RAC funds. Over the winter the nineteen windows that had been removed from the lookout and packed down by WHPBCH were repaired and re-glazed by the Region 1 Historic Team wood shop. Even though it rained the entire first week of the project in July, all nineteen windows were painted, three coats of dark green (inside) and four coats of white (outside). The north wall, which sits precariously close to the steep cliff, had two logs replaced and two logs repaired. Measurements were taken of the furniture to start building replica furniture in the Region 1 Historic Team wood shop over the following winter. In 2014, seven PIT volunteers dedicated a total of 384 hours, while WHPBCH committed an additional 412 hours.

In 2015, the Lolo NF made great strides in the restoration work at Big Hole Lookout with support from the WHPBCH, Region 1 Historic Preservation Team, the Sanders County Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), and pack strings from Region One, Stevensville Ranger District, West Fork Bitterroot District, and Bonners Ferry District. Fair weather helped keep the project moving. With only four PIT volunteers, 314 donated hours of work were accomplished at the site. WHPBCH contributed over 500 hours with daily support of water, ice, paint and other supplies packed in from the base camp three miles below the lookout. The

volunteers completed the final south wall repair, the YCC painted lumber for gables and shutters, and the old gables and shutters were removed and replaced.

In 2016 work was completed in the Historic Preservation Team wood shop on the replica furniture. This was going to be the year to “get it done” with a two-week PIT project. In the first week the building walls were straightened so they no longer listed. The old ceiling was replaced with an in-kind ceiling. The floor was removed and a new sub-floor was installed with fine galvanized wire (hardware cloth) on both top and bottom so rodents will not be able to enter the lookout from below. The furniture was assembled and mostly painted. Then on Day 7 of the project, smoke from the Copper King fire appeared; within a half an hour the group was advised to evacuate the lookout by the aircraft observer over the fire. Given the winds and fast moving fire it was best to err on the side of safety even though it was disappointing to be so close to finishing. Two or three days of work to finish the floor, complete the painting and daubing, install the door and level the lookout was all that remained.

In 2017, plans were made to get in early to finish up, before fire season. The final PIT project at Big Hole started on June 20th again with packing and trail clearing support from WHPBCH, the West Fork of the Bitterroot District pack string and Seeley Lake Ranger District pack string. Once again WHPBCH contributed over 170 hours by making daily pack string runs between the base camp and spike camp delivering ice, water, supplies and backhauling garbage. The final phase scheduled for two weeks was completed in half the scheduled time and an impromptu ribbon cutting ceremony capped off the project.

One of the highlights of the restoration project included the participation of two former Big Hole Lookouts, Chad Kinzel and Molly Morrison. Chad staffed Big Hole in 1966 and was a PIT volunteer for the last two sessions. Molly was the last to staff the lookout, 1970-71, and became a frequent visitor



**Pic 1: Big Hole Lookout before restoration (2005).**

**Pic 2: Big Hole Lookout completed restoration (2017).**

**Pic 3: WHPBCH and Lolo West Zone Archeologist (Erika Karuzas) peeling replacement logs.**

during the project. Molly also played the piano music accompaniment to the five videos documenting the restoration project:

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-1GeSi8KPaY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-1GeSi8KPaY)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqG3BF4iqzY>
- <http://youtu.be/dHbRE47ZaSo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM5SSSP8hao>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_NdG1amsA4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_NdG1amsA4&feature=youtu.be)

Though the completion of the lookout restoration is a major milestone, there are still plenty of improvements to come for the surrounding area. Working with the Forest Service WHPBCH still has a number of improvement projects at the lookout, the surrounding trails and the site near the trailhead that served as the basecamp location during the lookout restoration project. During the last session of the lookout restoration phase in 2017 the Forest Service trail crew and a Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) crew began removing the lodgepole pine trees that have encroached on the lookout site for decades. WHPBCH will be continuing to remove and pile the lodgepole pine to reduce the chance of wildfire destroying the restored lookout and once again enabling visitors to enjoy the same vistas the lookouts had near-

ly 50 years ago when it was last staffed. The Forest Service will burn the piled material in the fall once a bit of snow has fallen eliminating the danger of escape. WHPBCH plans to retain some of the larger trees for the installation of several highlines that will be available for stock users making day or overnight visits to the lookout.

On one of the many trips between the lookout restoration basecamp and spike camp a WHPBCH member noticed a faint trail heading down the hill from the lookout. Curiosity got the best of him and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile later the lookout water source was rediscovered. The following year the original dilapidated wooden water trough was replaced with a plastic tank by a YCC crew. Further improvements will include addition of a stock watering site, a hose for filling larger water containers and surfacing armoring. Trail signage to the water source was made and hung in the fall of 2018 with some trail tread improvement and blazing to follow in upcoming years.

As always is the case there are plans for a bunch of trail work. Like many lookouts, trails around Big Hole Lookout converge like spokes onto the hub of a wheel. Several short, 3-6 mile loops around the lookout are currently maintained by WHPBCH with the addition of another 6 mile loop to be ready in 2019. Last summer (2018)

WHPBCH, YCC and MCC crews spent a week reconditioning a mile of tread on trail 366W. Similar to the faint trail to the lookout's water source WHPBCH trail clearing crews had noticed what looked to be a trail corridor intersecting a trail near the lookout annually cleared by the chapter. Once again curiosity got the best of us and led to the discovery of the missing section of trail 366W which had been lost following the 2003 Tepee fire and subsequent downfall of the fire-killed trees. Though the trail is now easily rideable we'll hit it again with YCC and MCC crews to put the finishing touches on it in 2019. Trail 370 is also on the radar for some improved water crossings. During 2019 we'll recon the crossings with the Forest Service, most likely resulting in the installation of several short stock bridges in the near future. Though navigable during low water the bridges will increase the timeframe users will be able to start at the valley floor (3600') and daytrip or overnight at the lookout at 6800' then back down Trail 366W to the valley floor, a 16-mile loop.

Meanwhile, three miles below the lookout, back at the base camp site near the lookout trailhead, plans include installation of a corral in 2019 and hopefully a SST (sweet smelling toilet) in upcoming years. The base camp site, an old gravel pit several acres in size, offers a little graze for hobbled stock and camping for a dozen or more tents, campers and trailers.

When all is said and done users will have an option to ride longer loops to the lookout from the valley floor or trailer up to the lookout trailhead, just three miles below the lookout, and enjoy the several shorter loops around the lookout. Visitors to Big Hole Lookout will be able to tie-up at the hitching post or the highlines and get to water relatively close to the lookout for themselves and their stock. It's a work in progress but you're welcome to come take a look.

<sup>1</sup> *Several portions of this article are reprinted verbatim with permission from The Forest Fire Lookouts Association, Inc. Vol. 28, No. 2, "Lookout Restorations Completed."*

# What you need to know about Spot®, inReach® and rescue!

By Rick Mathies, President, NorthWest Montana Back Country Horsemen

I have carried a Spot® Satellite Messenger for almost seven years now and until this summer it was just a precautionary device. It was mainly to reassure my wife that I was safe in the backcountry while I was hunting or on projects with my local Back Country Horsemen chapter.

When I purchased and activated my Spot® for the first time, I opted for the GEOS Search and Rescue feature. GEOS provides S.O.S. monitoring and emergency dispatch through the dedicated International Emergency Rescue Coordination Centre (IERCC) based in Houston, TX. This added service provides a GEOS Member Benefit for reimbursement of up to \$100K in search and rescue (SAR) expenses – even coordinating a private SAR contractor if needed to get you to safety. The GEOS Member Benefit was only \$17.95 per year, a bargain at any price.

What I didn't fully realize was that my subscription/membership only covers me - not any of my family, my grandson (who accompanied me in the backcountry every summer since 2014) nor my wife. **What I recently found out is you can add any and all family members or friends that might be coming along for an additional \$17.95 per year.** If I had known this I would have signed them up for that nominal charge.

The GEOS membership is not an insurance policy; it is a “pre-paid” service that allows you to draw from the pot, up to \$100K for your search and/or rescue. But there is a catch; GEOS

services **must dispatch your rescue.** This means that if someone else dispatches A.L.E.R.T or any other helicopter extraction or dispatches a local search and rescue team, **you will not be covered.**

I know all of this because on July 5, 2018, I had an unexpected dismount on the way out of the Great Bear Wilderness while packing out supplies for the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. When I came to my senses, my left arm wouldn't work and my right leg wouldn't work. I was able to get back to the trail and was helped to the top of the ridge by my fellow packer John Peine.

Long story short, after some deliberation I decided that the only way for me to get home safely was to call the local A.L.E.R.T helicopter to rescue me. While deliberating on what to do, I had pressed the “I'm OK but need help at this location” button on my SPOT® device so that we could get some help coming in that direction.

Luckily, we also had a Forest Service radio and were able to contact our local Forest Service Ranger District and let them know we had an injured packer. We tried to get in touch with the work crew who was between the ridge and the trailhead, six miles away, so that they could assist in getting my stock out. We couldn't reach the work crew as they were in a deep ravine with not enough clear access to the repeaters.

At this time, I pressed the S.O.S. button on my SPOT® device and at

the same time told the Kalispell Interagency Dispatch Center that we had pressed the S.O.S. button asking for A.L.E.R.T to come and get me. Looking at the SPOT®, I was receiving a “sent message” indicator. Everything copasetic, right?

OK, here comes the kicker. Evidently, I needed to **turn off my SPOT® prior to sending the S.O.S. to reset the device.** Because I had sent the “I'm OK but need help at this location” message earlier, my S.O.S was not sent or received by GEOS.

So now A.L.E.R.T. was dispatched by our local Kalispell Interagency Dispatch Center and was on their way to get me to the hospital safely. **But, GEOS will not pay for an extraction, rescue or search that they do not dispatch.**

So to ensure that your special GEOS membership covers the cost of getting you out of the backcountry, **you must let them dispatch the services to help you, no exceptions.**

As a side note, when checking with Garmin and the inReach® product and GEOS, the cost for the membership with a Garmin inReach® is \$29.00 per person covered and the same applies, they will only pay if they dispatch.

So make sure you follow the rules and if you are ever injured or need search and rescue, let your device dispatch the service you need and make sure all of your family and friends with you are covered.



## The Hills ARE Alive...

Submitted by the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation

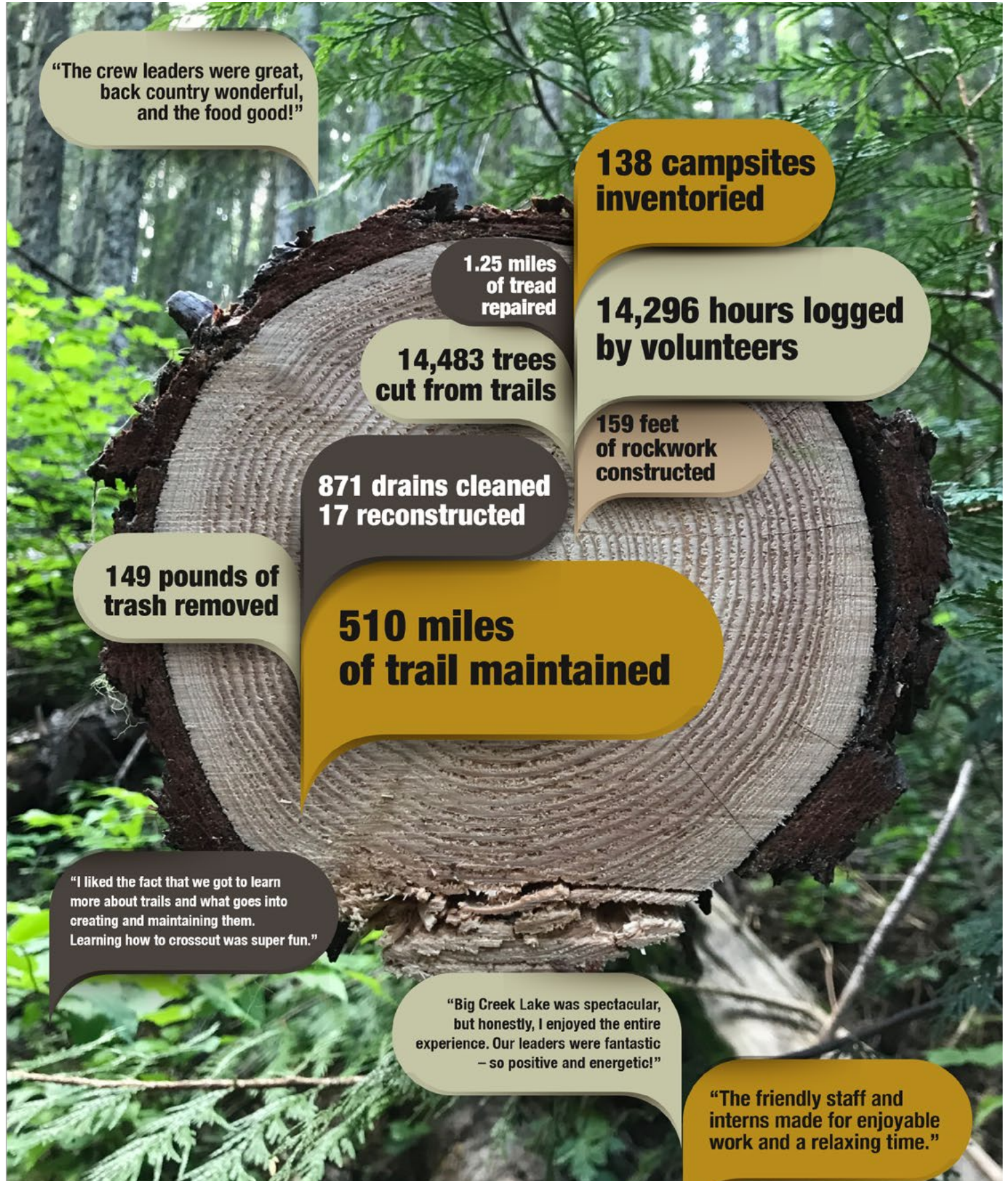
Under the category of “yes this really happened this summer”, St. Mary Lookout volunteer Sheryl Olson (in photo bottom left) was beyond surprised when she spotted seven nuns in full habits (which BTW, they wear all the time) about to summit the St. Mary Peak Trail. While on a ministry tour through Montana, the nuns took a vacation day to hike to the lookout. We're talking 2,500 feet of elevation gain in 3.5 miles - with wind - think about it.

But, do they sing you ask? Ah yes! They go by the group name, “The Singing Nuns” and perform for various community events throughout the year, but their favorite time to sing, according to Sister Mary Angela, is “for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass because we know that it is all for God's glory”.

The Singing Nuns are from St. Michael's Convent, located on Mount St. Michael, just north of Spokane, WA. For more information on this rugged and talented group of women you can visit their website which is appropriately named [www.singingnuns.com](http://www.singingnuns.com).

## Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation 2018 season accomplishments

We couldn't do it without the support of our partners like the Back Country Horsemen! Thank you for another great season. We look forward to working with you again in 2019!





**Back Country Horsemen of Montana**  
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## Two ways to promote Back Country Horsemen in your area

1. Local newspapers are a great way to promote BCH and the projects we do. Not sure how to get your story published? Write it up and send it to the editor! Editors love it when you do most of the work, and it's likely your story or news release will be published. Then take a picture with your phone and post in on FB.

2. Everyone loves a parade! Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead ride in the annual Heritage Days Parade in Columbia Falls each July.

This year BCH of the Flathead had the honor of receiving the First Place Award for their colorful riders and vehicle.

Photos by Annette Leverington.

