

BCH Membership Meeting
January 19, 2022

"The semi-trucks of the backcountry: The US Forest Service Northern Region Pack Train" by Robin Connell, Manager of the US Forest Service Northern Region Pack train.

- Eva introduced both Katy Bartzokis and Robin Connell as tonight's speakers
- Robin Connell is the acting regional manager for Ninemile Remount Depot & Historic Ranger Station and [Wildlands Training Center](#)
 - Started as an outfitter in Hungry Horse
 - Evolved to being a packer/stockman
 - He has spent a lot of time in the Bob Marshall Wilderness
 - Then moved to a job with the Forest Service in the No Return Wilderness in ID
 - He has farrier, shoeing experience as well
 - Worked on both east and west side of Glacier NP, packing
- Casey Burns got him connected in Ninemile
- History of stock & the FS, Ninemile:
 - 1905: FS was created, mostly focused on mapping the Rockies
 - 1910: bad fire season, so focus changed to landscape mgmt.
 - horses and mules were the answer for quick access
 - building trails, fire lookouts
 - stock was used in all aspects
 - the need for a place to develop stock skills arose – this is how Ninemile came to be the center for the region
 - 1930s: CCC built the Ninemile Campus
 - As planes became the tool for fire mgmt., stock were pushed to the wayside
 - 1970s-80s: Many folks still saw the interest in the stock culture, maintaining mules and horses. The education evolved around teaching people about using stock in the backcountry
 - Work projects, plus general public awareness, created more interest in backcountry packing
- Today: the core values of Ninemile is education
 - Traditional skills like working teamsters, ax, LNT principals, etc
 - Packing is a huge part of this
 - They are focused on promoting more public access to these courses
 - Winter boarding program: they take in stock from all over the region, even into WY, to feed through the winter.

- 194 head this winter
 - Regional Pack Train is busy!
 - They travel all over [Region 1](#)
 - They train inter-agency people on these trips
 - They work will UM-Western in Dillon, plus UM in Missoula
- Katie (Region 5 in CA)
 - One 120 day detail in MT
 - She went to the Thatcher School
 - Started working for the FS in Inyo Forest as a seasonal packer, then BLM in OR
 - The [Region 5 Packstock Center for Excellence](#) grew out of a need for more training and to stop attrition
 - 2013 was its first year as a regional program
 - There are 6 packstrings remaining in CA in the nat'l forests
 - More than 20 head each
 - The program is a hay fund (to relieve stress on districts to pay for hay) plus 4 permanent positions
 - They pack on fire crews often, as a team with crews from all over the state
 - They do more internal education, not as much for the public
 - A major focus is the apprenticeship program
 - 4 positions
 - Almost all of the alums work with land mgmt. programs
 - BCH-CA funds an annual summer apprenticeship
 - If you know anyone interested in this for the 2023 season, contact Katy: katherine.bartzokis@usda.gov.