

Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

# Decker Dispatch



## Judith Basin BCH Engages Youth at Farm Safety Day

By Linda Westby - Judith Basin Chapter

For the third year, Judith Basin Back Country Horsemen was asked to participate in the Farm Safety Day hosted by the 4H Ambassador team. This year eight rural schools, home schooled students and second grade students from Lewistown attended. Held on April 9, a total of 322 students attended from Roy, Denton, Stanford, Lewistown, Moore, Winnett, Hobson and Grass Range. The event is designed to inform kids of all ages about the different aspects of safety in farming, ranching, and general life.

Ten stations helped meet the challenge of keeping the attention of these bundles of energy for 15 minutes. The students got a hands-on experience with grains, grasses, and miscellaneous food supply plants. They took home a potato style sock filled with seeds to grow at home.

Fergus Electric gave an exciting electrical presentation demonstrating electrical conductivity with a hot dog! We had safety demonstrations with grain elevators as Lego figures were buried because of unsafe practices.

Some of our city kiddos were amazed as they examined large tractors with balers and miscellaneous implements.

The ATV station was another favorite, learning safety and fun facts. Students learned CPR and emergency protocols from firefighters with firetrucks and EMTs



complete with ambulances. Students also enjoyed petting and learning about cattle.

According to the kids, their favorite activity was the horse station. JBBCH was blessed to have Judy Fossum, a retired teacher, and her buttermilk buckskin gelding named Taffy as the main attraction. Linda Westby helped with crowd control and wherever needed.

With so many horse-owner kids, it was a great interaction with Judy's teaching abilities and personal familiarity with many students. The kids helped with demonstrations of the safe handling and care of horses. Taffy was in seventh heaven as each child approached saying his name; he would look at them bringing huge smiles and sometimes laughter. Taffy's favorite part was the treat feeding demonstrations!

While stressing the importance of safety and care of such a special animal,  
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## OUR PURPOSES

- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country, roadless back country 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.

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## Judith Basin Engages Youth at Farm Safety Day [continued from front page]

we noted the fun and advantages of riding and exploring the back country. It is our wish that this encounter will spark an excitement and interest in seeing this great country we live in from the back of a horse. It's always a fun time to see the youngsters with the excitement, knowledge, and enthusiasm they bring.



## Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead Receive RAC Grant

By Deborah Schatz, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead

The Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead received an RAC Grant to improve eight trailheads in the Flathead National Forest. Stanton Lake trailhead was enlarged to accommodate trailer parking, along with signage indicating where hikers should park and where trailers should park.

BCHF built a new stock trailhead near the Big River Trail. Two new hitch rails and a feeder were installed, along with signage indicating that the parking area is for stock trailers.



### Devil Creek Trailhead

The Devil Creek Trailhead was enlarged to accommodate trailers, with a circular pull-through and two feeders and several hitch rails. Signage was installed to indicate where hikers should park and where trailers should park.

Geifer Creek Trailhead received heavy brushing and signage for parking. Morrison Creek Trailhead has two new feeders, two new hitch rails, signage for parking and a mounting block.



### Granite Creek Trailhead

Granite Creek Trailhead received heavy brushing, two new hitch rails, a feed bunk and signage for parking. Logan Baptiste trailhead has a new stock trailer parking area with signage.



### Tuchuck Trailhead

BCHF built a stock trailhead at Tuchuck several years ago. This year, we cleaned up the trailhead, repaired the handicap mounting ramp, and opened trails in the area.

These trailhead improvements were a multi-year project. Our chapter spent five years on the planning, and another four years doing the work. At all the improved trailheads, the hiker parking area is closest to the trail, while trailer parking is further away. This helps with hiker parking compliance, as they seem to prefer to park right by the trail. All trailheads received mounting blocks, which turned out to be very popular.

# Letter from the Chair

By Mack Long, Chair, BCH Montana

## Change and the Future:

A week ago, I was at home planting vegetables in the High Tunnel and getting the outside garden ready to plant. Today, I'm in Sula, MT, looking at 10 inches of wet snow, broken tree limbs, no electricity, firing up the wood stove and a 2-hour delay to start school for my youngest grandson. Oh well, it's spring in Montana, change is expected. It's the seasonal changes that make this state so special.

Change is imminent and, in many cases, makes us stronger and more resilient. So that raises the question of what is good change and what is not?

Taking a young horse or mule and working with them to get them desensitized and ultimately make them a safe riding partner is a great change. Cleaning and repairing tack are not a very exciting change, but one that is necessary.

What about the lands that we ride on, recreate and work on? There are many pending changes here. We are currently waiting for a final decision on the future land use decisions on the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest Plan that adjoins Montana at the Idaho State line. There are many decisions here that may significantly negatively affect Stock Users and other user groups.

The Lolo Forest has begun its process for Forest Plan Revision. The Lolo Plan seems to be offering some positive changes. It's critical to stay involved and comment to keep

this positive direction. The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, which has been introduced in Congress, would add some additional Wilderness to the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, create a Recreation Area for snowmobiles, set aside some lands for mountain biking, and has benefits for logging. All this is included in the Lolo Plan but needs public support to stay in the plan. These are changes that would help local communities and provide a wide range of recreational opportunities.

Montana's landscape has proven to be resilient, but as more and more pressure is put on her, we need to make sure that future decisions and changes support that resiliency. All of us need to be involved and do our part to ensure positive changes happen in the future. Volunteering on work projects, being involved by commenting on proposed actions and setting a good example when using stock in the backcountry all help to ensure we keep our public lands open and remain intact.

Mack

Contact Mack at [alpenglowlranch.mack@gmail.com](mailto:alpenglowlranch.mack@gmail.com)



## Reasons NOT to Move to Montana

**If the bears don't kill you, the people will.**

We're armed to the teeth and angry that there are now speed limits.

**Too much open space and nothing to do with it.**

According to the U.S. Census, 46 of 56 counties in Montana qualify as "frontier counties" with an average population of 6 or fewer people per square mile. Just try finding a Starbucks.

**Might get eaten by wildlife.**

We host the largest grizzly bear population in the lower 48, and while it is a well-known fact that they eat fish and berries, a lesser-known fact is that the fish and berries come from inside humans who ate fish and berries earlier.

**Too cold.**

We've seen pictures of people enjoying warm, sunny weather in Montana, but these were all Photoshopped. The average July temperature in Montana hovers around negative 12 degrees Fahrenheit, and in January it dips to 0 Kelvin, stopping all cellular activity at the molecular level.

Source: Backcountry.com

## You Can't Do That in Montana

It's illegal to keep a sheep with you in a car, UNLESS you have someone else with you to act as a chaperone.

In Helena, it's illegal to throw any item from one side of the street to the other.

In Whitehall, it's illegal to drive a car with ice picks strapped to the tires.

Married women are prohibited from fishing by themselves on Sundays.

Unmarried women are prohibited from fishing alone on any day of the week.



# Back Country Horsemen of Montana Annual Rendezvous

## Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range - June 21-23, 2024

*"Rendezvous" To Gather, to Meet Up, to Reconnect with Old Friends and to Meet New Ones.*

Free Camping with Two Flagged Trails to ride at your leisure.  
Horseback clinic "Training for the Trail" by Wade Murphy.



**Catered Saturday Evening BBQ \$10**

*By BCH Members Mike and Trish Foster.*

**Please RSVP for BBQ by June 20, 6pm**

**Text 406-546-8943**



Located on MT Highway 200 east approximately 6 miles from junction with MT Highway 83. West of Ovando, before Russell Gates boat take out. Turn north towards Lake Upsata on the dirt road, take the first left. We will be in the area around the large metal barn. Look for horse trailers & signs from the highway.

Plenty of room to set up your high line or portable corrals. Lots of room to park your trailers and campers too. There are no trees, you will have to high line between horse trailers.



- Hay shelter to be out of possible rain.
- Cottonwood creek is close by for water.
- Large meadows for grazing stock.
- Weed Seed Free Feed is mandatory.
- 4 small corrals
- 6 outhouses & two wash stations provided.

*Montana now requires all recreational users of public lands to have a current FQP Conservation license. If you have not purchased yours for 2024, MT BCH has made arrangements to cover us all at this event.*

### Thursday Afternoon - Friday Afternoon

Arrive and enjoy a ride on the flagged trails.

### Friday Evening:

No-Host Campfire Gathering

### Saturday Morning:

Ride the trails on your own

### Saturday Afternoon:

1:00-4:00 pm - Horseback Clinic

Limited to 8 riders & *Observers welcome!*

Contact Wade to sign up.

[murphywade923@gmail.com](mailto:murphywade923@gmail.com)

### Saturday Evening:

6:00 pm - Catered Group BBQ

**Please reserve your meal**

**Text Trish - 406-546-8943**

After BBQ join us for Stories at The Campfire Jack Rich, outfitter, will share the history of the game range and if we're lucky, some cowboy poetry too.

**Sunday:** Enjoy a ride then head home.



# YOUTH PACKING CAMP FOR BEGINNERS

AUGUST 8-11

Open to ages 14-17

JOIN THE BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF MONTANA IN THE **SCAPEGOAT WILDERNESS** FOR 3 NIGHTS AND 4 DAYS TO LEARN THE ART OF HORSE AND MULE PACKING



Meet at Indian Meadows Guard Station

Hands-on professional stock management and packing education

Hike to a backcountry campsite

Learn about trail restoration in conjunction with The USFS

- Swimming
- Fishing
- Camping



Contact us at [bchmt.youth@gmail.com](mailto:bchmt.youth@gmail.com) for more information

Or visit our website at [bchmt.org/wp/flathead/bchmt-youth-program/](http://bchmt.org/wp/flathead/bchmt-youth-program/)

If you're not riding, you're not living!



# YOUTH PACKING CAMP LEVEL 2

AUGUST 15-18

OPEN TO AGES 14-17

JOIN THE BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF MONTANA IN THE **BADGER TWO-MEDICINE** FOR 3 DAYS AND 4 NIGHTS. GO MORE IN-DEPTH WITH PACKING AND TRAVELING. BUILD AND PRACTICE YOUR SKILLS.



Travel to a new campsite each night across the wilderness

Hands-on packing practice and stock care

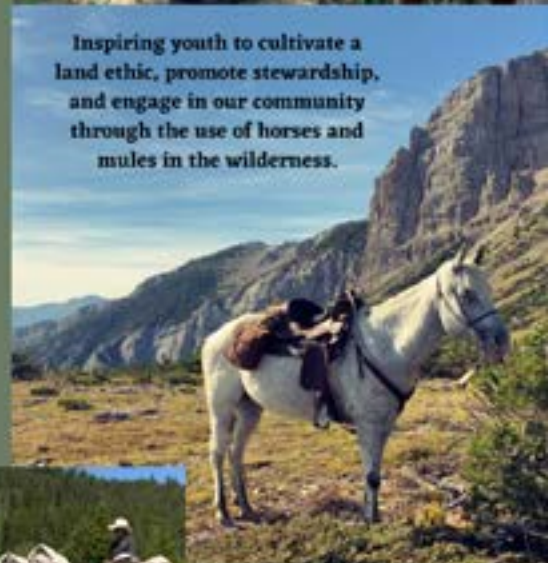
Take on more camp and leadership responsibilities

SWIMMING IN THE MOUNTAINS  
CAMPFIRE CHATS  
TRAIL RESTORATION

Prerequisite: Attendance of Indian Meadows Packing Camp



Inspiring youth to cultivate a land ethic, promote stewardship, and engage in our community through the use of horses and mules in the wilderness.



Contact us at [bchmt.youth@gmail.com](mailto:bchmt.youth@gmail.com) for more information

Or visit our website at

# Safety Moment

By Wade Murphy, Circle Cross Equine

## Importance of Groundwork

Lonnie and I just got back from putting on a very rewarding clinic in Columbia Falls. We had members of both the Flathead and Mission Valley chapters come together for a three day clinic. As we progressed through the weekend most of the problems that people were experiencing with their animals were things that could be fixed with more thorough groundwork. As we made progress with the groundwork, the troubles that people were having under saddle got smaller and smaller.

If your horse is having trouble with certain maneuvers on the ground, it will only get worse when you are under saddle. I use a simple check list in training and before each ride to make sure my horse/mule is in the right frame of mind and ready to ride. For all of the exercises below I am looking for a quiet and relaxed animal. If they are fearful or full of energy I will stick with the exercise until they relax.

I like to ask my horse to walk around me on a loose lead. With the horse facing me I will start by asking the horse to move their shoulders to the side to start their circle. Yielding the shoulders is very humbling to them. If the shoulders are sticky, it is an indication that they are challenging your leadership.

After they move their shoulders, I ask them to walk quietly in a centered circle around me. "Centered" means they are going the speed and direction I ask for on a loose lead. They should walk calmly around me without any pressure from me.

If they speed up or slow down, they will "run into pressure". If they pull away or crowd into me, they will "run into pressure". If they walk a centered circle there is zero pressure on them.

Again, they should be on a loose lead.

After a lap or two of quality circling I will ask them to turn their hind end away from me and stop. Next, I will move their shoulder the opposite way an repeat the exercise in the other direction. After this second stop I will ask for a couple quiet steps backwards.



If all of this can be done quietly and calmly then I am ready to mount. If he has trouble with any of this, I will fix that trouble before I mount. When I am ready to ride, the first thing I check is if they will stand still to mount. I have zero tolerance for an animal that walks off as I try to mount. When I am in the saddle, I repeat these basic maneuvers that I did on the ground. I check for control of the hind and front end. I walk in a centered circle. They should

be soft on the bit and flex the head left and right quietly. They should be going the speed I am asking for and not trying to dictate the speed. They should be willing to back up a few steps softly.

I run through this simple pre-ride check out before every ride. It only takes about five minutes to complete.

By observing my animal through these warm ups I can easily assess their state of mind. If we run into trouble at any point during a ride, I can easily run through these familiar exercises, either from the saddle or on the ground to get my animal back into the proper mindset.

Spring is a great time to get your four-legged friend tuned up and ready for the trail.

Don't skip the groundwork.

Safe and happy trails,

Wade

Circle Cross Equine  
406-431-1717

[murphywade923@gmail.com](mailto:murphywade923@gmail.com)

There's no education in the second kick of a mule.  
- Mark Twain

# 2024 BCHMT Annual Convention

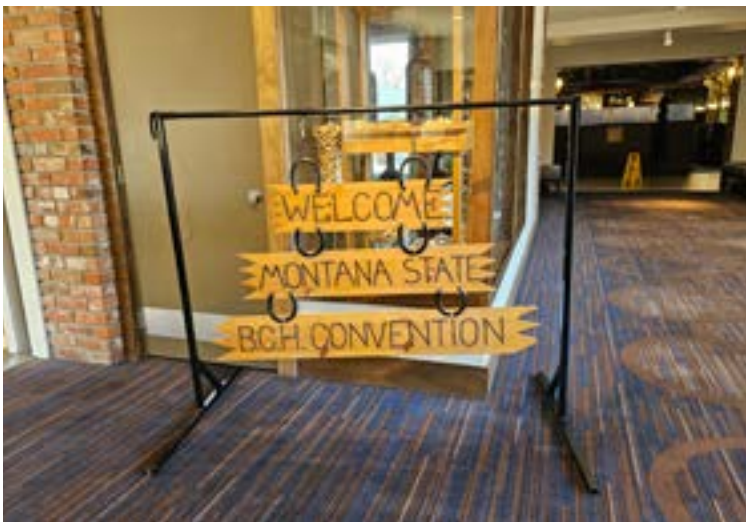
By Casey Waldrop, Upper Clark Fork Back Country Horsemen

The Mile High Back Country Horsemen and the Upper Clark Back Country Horsemen chapters teamed up to host the 2024 BCHMT Convention at the Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, March 8, 9, and 10.

We were pleased to offer over 20 vendors, guest speakers, live music, live and silent auctions, photo contest, and the cross-cut saw competition. It was the first convention for many of the MHBCH and UCFBCH volunteers and the learning curve was steep for a few of us! We're truly grateful for all of the positive feedback we've received from those who attended.

David Armstrong, a retired PE from Montana Tech, gave his presentation, "Mules in the Mines," that detailed the use and care of mules in the early days of underground mining.

The highlight of the event, however, was our own Smoke Elser telling stories from his new book, "Hush of the Land."



Always entertaining, Smoke shared stories from his years of guiding in the wilderness with humor and authenticity.

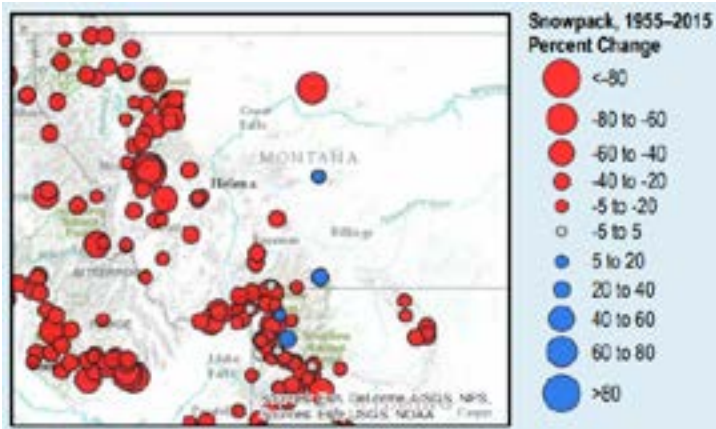
The Last Chance BCH in Helena is preparing to host the 2025 convention. Details will follow in the next Decker Dispatch.

## What Climate Change Means for Montana

Montana's climate is changing. Record heat and cold, snow melting earlier, more frequent and more serious fires, and droughts are results of a warming globe. In the coming decades, the changing climate is likely to decrease the availability of water in Montana, affecting agriculture. A warming atmosphere will increase the frequency of heavy rainstorms in many places — but contribute to drought in others.

### Snowback and Glaciers

Since the 1950s, the snowpack in Montana has been decreasing. Diminishing snowpack shortens the season for winter tourism. The tree line may shift, as higher temperatures and a longer season without snow allow trees to grow at higher elevations. A higher tree line would decrease the alpine tundra ecosystems, which could threaten some species.



### Precipitation and Water Sources

Mountain snowpacks are natural reservoirs that collect winter snow and release water when the snow melts during spring and summer. Dams capture meltwater and retain it for later use. But upstream of these dams, as the snowpack declines, less water is available during droughts for ecosystems, wildlife, livestock, water-based recreation, and landowners who draw water directly from a lake or river.

### Agriculture

Rising temperatures and changes in rainfall are likely to have both positive and negative effects

on Montana's farms and ranches. For example, higher temperatures reduce yields of wheat, but higher concentrations of carbon dioxide are likely to increase yields by a similar amount. Warmer and shorter winters may allow for a longer growing season, which could allow two crops per year instead of one, but may also promote the growth of weeds and pests.



Rising carbon dioxide concentrations are likely to increase the productivity of rangelands, and if the quality of forage does not deteriorate, the higher range productivity would increase cattle production.

Warmer winters could also benefit ranches by reducing losses to winter storms. During the winter of 1996–1997, for example, high winds and heavy snow killed half of the newborn calves and 100,000 adult cows in the Northern Great Plains. But warmer summers would at least partly offset many benefits because hot weather causes cows to eat less and grow more slowly, and it can threaten their health. Over the next 70 years, the number of days above 100°F in Montana is likely to double.

### Wildfires

Higher temperatures and drought are likely to increase the severity, frequency, and extent of wildfires in Montana, which could harm property, livestock, wildlife, people, and livelihoods. On average, about 2% of the land in the state has burned per decade since 1984. Wildfire smoke



pollutes the air and can increase medical visits for respiratory and heart problems.



1997 was one of the worst fire seasons on record, with over 1.6 million acres burned.

**Forests**

Longer growing seasons and increased carbon dioxide concentrations could increase the productivity of forests, but warmer conditions also make forests more susceptible to pests. Temperature controls the life cycle and winter mortality rates of pests such as bark beetles, which have infested millions of acres and killed millions of trees across the West in recent decades. With higher temperatures, some pests can persist year-round, and new pests and diseases may become established. Drought also reduces the ability of trees to mount a defense against attacks from beetles and other pests,

**Human Health**

Extremely hot and cold days can be unhealthy—even dangerous. Certain people are especially vulnerable, including children, the elderly, the sick, and the poor. The elderly may be particularly prone to heat stress and other heat-related health problems, including dehydration, cardiovascular strain, and respiratory problems. Those with low incomes may be particularly vulnerable if they lack air conditioning. Power failures due to severe weather can also present risks, especially in lightly populated areas where access to the necessary support services

may be limited. While these risks will increase as the climate becomes warmer, illnesses and deaths due to cold weather and snow are likely to decline.

Organizations like the Back Country Horsemen play a crucial role in the preservation of public lands, especially in the face of climate change effects. Here are several reasons our organization is vital:

**Stewardship and Conservation:** We engage in trail maintenance and other conservation activities. Our stewardship helps ensure the health and resilience of ecosystems, which is essential in the face of changing climatic conditions.

**Educating the Public:** Back Country Horsemen often engage in public education and outreach. They can play a vital role in raising awareness about climate change impacts on public lands, promoting responsible recreational practices, and fostering a sense of environmental stewardship among the public.

*If preserving our public lands for conservation and responsible use interests you, please join BCH today!*



**Advocacy for Sustainable Policies:** Organizations like the Back Country Horsemen can advocate for policies that support the long-term sustainability and health of public lands. This may include advocating for climate-resilient land management practices and policies that prioritize conservation and adaptation.

Source: EPA 430-F-16-028

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If you would like to join us, please contact a chapter in your area.



Find more information on our website:  
[bchmt.org](http://bchmt.org)

### Schedule for chapter news article submissions.

Submit 400-500 words, photos in separate .jpg files (not in Word)

E-mail to: [1caseywaldrop@gmail.com](mailto:1caseywaldrop@gmail.com)

Editor reserves the right to edit articles.

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

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

*Fall issue: articles due September 5th: Last Chance, Mile High, Missoula, North West Montana, Selway-Pintler Wilderness.*