



Decker Dispatch



Mark Your Calendar!

2026 BCHMT RENDEZVOUS

June 18-21, 2026

Monture Guard Station -Ovando, MT

Hosted by Bitter Root and Missoula BCH

Photo by Kari Schiffman, Bitter Root BCH

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.

2026 Monture Guard Station Rendezvous, Fun Ride, & Pasture Fencing Project: June 18-21, 2026

By Mark Wright, Bitter Root BCH

Note: The fencing project is completely voluntary and is not a requirement for participation in the Rendezvous.

The Monture campground will open Wednesday the 17th. Work is to begin Thursday morning. Folks may choose to arrive on Wednesday to get set up, relax or saddle up and ride. High line trees are available throughout the site as are a few stock pens. A water supply and stock troughs are available but it is recommended that you use bio security for your stock. Weed free hay is required 2 days before and during your stay.

Wade Murphy's horsemanship clinic is scheduled for Friday June 19th 1-4pm. There is no charge for this clinic and is limited to 10 participants. Please refer to the flyer and QR code on the next page of this newsletter

A Saturday evening dinner will be provided at 6:00 pm for \$15 per person. You may send cash or check to: BCH Missoula, PO Box 2121, Missoula, MT 59806. Meal fee must be in before June 5th. The Bitter Root BCH will provide a cook trailer on Wednesday.

(Continued on page 2)

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2026 Monture Guard Station Rendezvous, Fun Ride, & Pasture Fencing Project: June 18-21, 2026

(Continued from page 1)

Fencing Project Objective: Opportunity to support the Forest Service Packing Program by assisting Seeley Lake Ranger District in fencing a new proposed pasture. Please see project site map in this newsletter and on the BCHMT website.

History: The area was evaluated and a report done in 2020 by Rachel Fiegley, former Seeley Lake Ranger.

The project of clearing the acreage was started in 2024 by Keith Guschausky, a Forest Service Packer and former BCH member. Keith used a Skid steer with a timber grabber to start the process of making burn piles. At that time materials for the fencing project were purchased by Seeley Lake Ranger district and stockpiled until the project could be started. Since then the Forest Service has had major layoffs with seasonal employees. The project was projected as a three year project to fence, remove slash, treat weeds and non-native grasses. Keith Guswchausky passed away April 28, 2025 of cancer.

Scope: The Back Country Horsemen proposed Volunteer work project would involve putting up barbless fence wire and "T" posts. The Forest Service is going to put in "H" braces at corners and specified distances along the fence line.

Tools: Tools that volunteers could bring if they have them (but not required) are: fencing pliers, "T" post pounders, tape measure, wire puller and any other tools you may have that would be helpful.

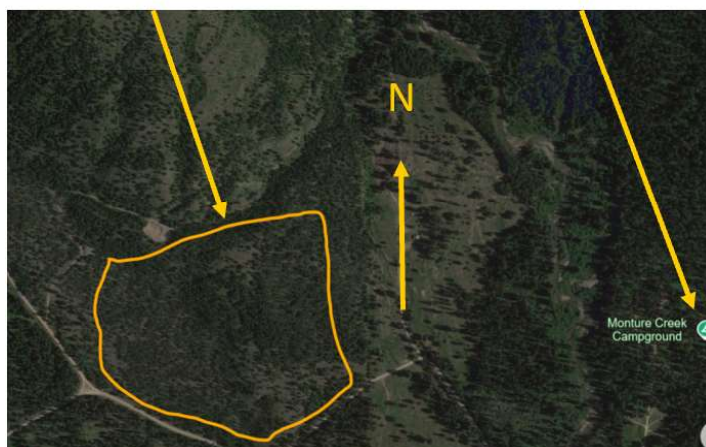
Personal protection equipment and clothing recommended: Boots, long sleeve shirts, and work gloves along with eye and ear protection, electrolyte, insect repellent and first aid kit.

If you need more information please contact Mark Wright (Bitter Root BCH): (406) 531-2455 (cell/text). Email: saberhorse76@gmail.com. Also, check out the QR Codes on the Rendezvous announcement flyer in this newsletter.

Rendezvous flyers are on pages 12 and 13 of the newsletter.

Fencing project site

Monture Campground



2026 BCHMT State Convention Recap

Submitted by Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen

The Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen hosted the 2026 BCHMT State Convention in Bozeman March 27 through 29. Turnout was strong, the weather cooperated, and the weekend ran on schedule. The food was good throughout.

The crosscut saw competition drew good participation from across chapters and was one of the more popular events of the convention. Watching sawyers from different parts of the state put their skills on display made for a fun Saturday afternoon and a fair amount of friendly trash talk on the sidelines.

The speaker lineup held up in both variety and quality. Matt Jedra, Custer Gallatin Forest Supervisor, opened Saturday morning with an update on summer programs, seasonal staffing, and forest conditions heading into the season. We appreciated having a Forest Service voice on the agenda. Ryan "Cal" Callahan, President of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, gave the banquet keynote. He was engaging, entertaining, and made for a fun evening.

The Saturday silent auction stood out for the number and quality of items on offer. There was a lot to bid on, and the bidding stayed active throughout the day. The live auction was a high point as well. Rusty Trzpuć and his family worked the live portion and kept the pace moving with humor and energy.

The Presidents' Breakfast brought a lively cross-chapter discussion. The State Board of Directors election was held immediately following the closing of the convention.

Thanks to every chapter that came out and made the weekend work.



Photos by Gary Bailey, MH BCH

Mark your Calendars!!

**2027 MT BCH Convention,
"On the Trail of Tradition"**

April 2-4, 2027

**Billings Hotel & Convention Center.
Hosted by Beartooth BCH.**

Letter from the Chair

By Sandy Himmel- Chair, BCHMT



Sandy Himmel and Bo

Recently Mark & I attended the National Board Meeting in Missouri. Unlike the state convention there is lots of business that is addressed. The first day the committee chairs reported. Montana was well represented; each Montana representative was a committee chair. Connie reported on Chapter Support Grants; John reported on Volunteer Hours, Mark reported on Partnerships, Public Lands and Saw. In the afternoon there was a contract review on Michelle and Randy, the proposed budget, the Governance Policy Compliance Review and also the resolutions review.

Tuesday the BLM management and update report was given. Randy spoke on National Trails Day. Mark spoke on the new Public Lands structure which now consists of 3 areas (East, Central & West). The states broke into those areas and went through the process of how it will function. Mack Long reported on the roadless rule. He did a spectacular presentation showing how all states are affected. On Tuesday afternoon the new saw structure was presented. There was general discussion on PPE. Mark had examples to share. There was a crosscut saw demo outside. Several people jumped in to try their hand with the saw.

On Wednesday there was a vote on the resolutions, both passed. With the proposed budget showing a big deficit it took well over an hour to make suggestions on how to balance the budget. It started at a \$16,000 deficit and ended at \$3,000 in the hole. There was an approval of the Strategic Business Plan. There were elections with Craig Ferdig (AZ) as Chair, Tiff Rodriguez (CO) as Vice Chair, Heather Schultz (WY) as Treasurer. The Executive Committee of Heather Cox (NC) and Keith Holley (TN) Darrell Wallace (WA) as non-director. The banquet was Wednesday evening. Montana's donation of the electric confinement fence brought \$325. The traditional hard hat was auctioned off bringing \$3000 to support BCHA administration. The overall auction brought BCHA \$6000 to the positive for the year's budget.

Remember to get your 301B forms signed.

Stay safe out on the trail.

Sandy

Safety Moment

By Wade Murphy, Mile High BCH - Circle Cross Equine



Who is driving????

We have a unique challenge as trail riders.....We ride into amazingly beautiful country. We get to enjoy long days in the saddle. We are literally living the dream of many people as we do what we do. But trail riding can present an interesting challenge. I can leave a trailhead and point my trusty saddle friend up the trail and it might be miles before there are any decisions to make. All the mule has to do is walk up the trail. For a lot of animals this can create trouble. Horses and mules need leadership. They need steady communication from us. It is very easy for us to day dream as we ride and forget that the animal below us is craving leadership and direction. After a few miles, the horse starts to ask "who is driving?" When you are not constantly communicating, the horse can start to wonder if you are even paying attention. "Since Wade is not paying attention, I guess I better make some decisions" says the horse. And they start to take matters into their own hands. They start to get more spooky. They start to feel like they need to decide which direction to go. They start to look to their herd mates for leadership and comfort. Often too late in the game, the rider realizes that their horse is having trouble.

This is all easily avoided, but it takes discipline on the part of the rider. I strive for continual connection while I ride. I try to reassure my animals all along the way with very light cues that assure them that I am engaged and looking out for them. I try to leave no doubt in their mind that I am awake and driving. Here are some suggestions of things you can do while on the trail to keep your horse engaged:

- Steer them around corners. Even if there is absolutely no where else for them to go, a step or two before the corner, lightly use your calf to push them the way they will be going. This has a calming effect and also helps train them to move off of your legs.
- Speed up and slow down their walk every 10 minutes or so. It is great practice and keeps them engaged.
- Circle rocks, cross logs, flex their poll to light reins, walk diagonals across the trail... There are so many things that you can work on while on the trail. You can improve their training and also keep them engaged while you ride. The more engaged they are, and the more they know that you are actively leading, the safer you will be.

I hope you all have a great summer in the saddle.

Wade

Charlie Russell BCH Investing in Youth Education

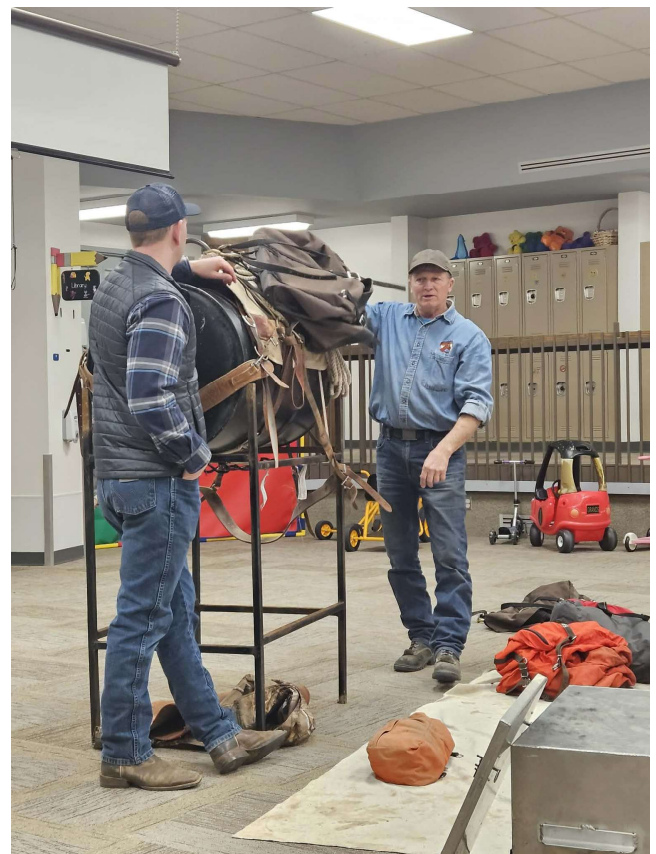
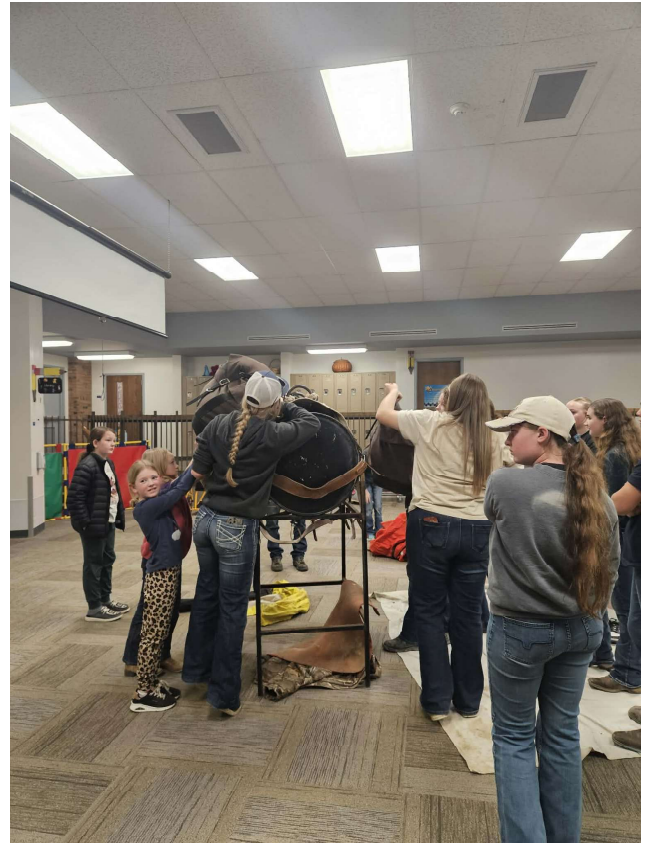
Article and Photos presented by Christian Rohloff, Charlie Russell BCH

On Saturday, February 14th, CRBCH members worked with 15 enthusiastic 4-Hers to introduce them to the fundamentals of backcountry packing. Using a barrel dummy and a Decker saddle, the youth received hands-on instruction in proper saddle placement, gear selection, and load building. Students worked first-hand to build and balance loads themselves, gaining practical experience while learning why preparation, weight distribution, and the right equipment are critical for stock and rider safety. Pack bags, bear boxes, and other essential gear were available so participants could better understand how to properly outfit an animal for backcountry travel.

This clinic marked the beginning of a new packing component within Cascade County 4-H's 2026 activities. As part of their Horse Camp, youth will have additional opportunities to build these skills. Additionally, the county horse show—held each summer—will feature packing competitions designed for multiple skill levels. These additions represent an exciting step toward preserving and promoting traditional packing knowledge among young horsemen and horsewomen.

CRBCH will continue building on this momentum throughout the summer. Our upcoming meetings will feature a “Learn to Pack With Us” series, with each month highlighting a different skill essential to backcountry stock use, including highlining, mantly load building, Dutch-oven cooking, and knot-tying. These hands-on sessions are designed to strengthen practical skills, build confidence, and encourage safe, ethical use of Montana’s backcountry.

By investing in youth education and offering opportunities for members to sharpen their own skills, CRBCH is helping ensure that the traditions of safe, responsible backcountry stock use remain strong for generations to come.



Water at Meadow Creek (Or How to Wait Patiently)

By Greg Schatz, BCH Flathead

Until the 1970s pack strings used the Cedar Creek trailhead to access the upper South Fork of the Flathead. The USFS built the first Meadow Creek trailhead in the early '70s and the Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead significantly upgraded the trailhead in 1990. When the upgrade was being planned, water was going to be brought to the trailhead. Otherwise the closest water is a quarter mile away.

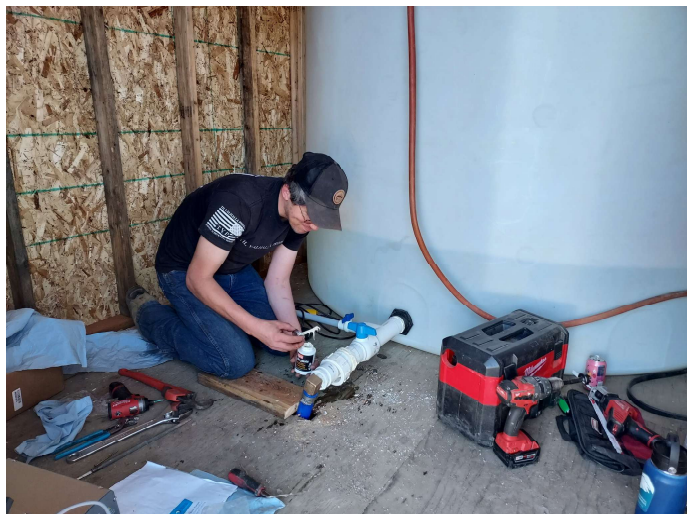
We didn't get water in 1990, so we waited, and waited. We went through several district rangers and still no water. FINALLY, in 2020 the USFS received GAOA money to dig a well and supply water. A well was drilled successfully, but there was no pump or way to access the water. So we waited some more, and waited, and waited. Finally in the fall of 2024 the USFS called to see if BCHF was interested in getting the water flowing. Of course, being we're horsemen, and we don't have any plumbers in our chapter, we said yes. Oh, and they need a budget in two days, and there are no plans.

We put our heads together, came up with the most accurate budget we could and came up with a plan over the winter. In May of 2025 we were ready to go, and in 10 days we had a half-mile of waterline installed along with a well pump, nine hydrants, a pump house for the holding tank, and all of the solar equipment.

One of the tricky things about the Meadow Creek trailhead is that it's 68 miles of gravel from the last pavement. In total we drove 4,171 miles and invested 904 hours of our time. A bonus to the water is that we were able to install two corrals for the public to use with some leftover money.

Finally, after waiting 35 years, stock water is flowing at the Meadow Creek trailhead.

The moral of the story is - be patient.



BCHF members hard at work

Hail of a Time

By Linda Westby, Judith Basin BCHMT

In the spring our chapter was contacted by Laura Anderson of Make it Happen, wanting us to pack in supplies for the first Trail Running Event hosted in Lewistown. The trail chosen was LimeKiln in the Judith Mountains on the northeast outskirts of Lewistown. The race consisted of a 10K of 6.2 miles, and a 6K hike of 4 plus miles. In addition, walkers were welcome.

Of course, our members jumped at the chance to help. A little light on pack horses, but we were up for the challenge. It was decided to deliver the supplies the day before the race. There would be a flurry of action, people and general craziness early in the morning with the race starting. Not a great atmosphere for horses with packs. Bureau of Land Management Recreation Specialist, Travis Rixford, gave the ok to set up the water stations with the caveat that bear proofing was required. Putting on the thinking caps from experienced members, hanging supplies in trees was a poor option as the location didn't have any trees tall enough close, so plan B- electric fence with a solar battery. The plan was set for August 1. Perfect, the weather will be great for a fun time to have an adventure and enjoy our friends and horses.



A nice trailer ride to the trailhead with adventure on the minds of the 6 hardy horsemen. Now to figure out how to pack some unusual items including tables, water jugs, electric fencing supplies, chairs and miscellaneous items. Was some ingenious loading with fingers crossed and high hopes along with one very green pack horse named Pedro. Gregg Morse is experienced and a good hand with horses, so confidence was high as Pedro started his packhorse training. A beautiful sight as the colorful pack string started out with Sonja Gangstead, experienced as well, on Rustee, her well trained Appaloosa, along with her pack appaloosa. Judy Fossum, Brad Fogle, Laura Fogle, and Lisa Lucas following in anticipation of the work to come.



(Continued on Page 9)

Hail of a Time

(Continued from Page 8)

All eyes were on the western horizon as clouds developed and a cool breeze started. Felt pretty nice and cool for an August day. Up the mountain to the designated set up point. Huh, where were the markings for the setup? After searching for an indication of the exact location, with no cell service, an educated guess marked the spot. By this time a cold breeze was blowing stronger and clouds hung lower. The pace picked up as the set-up station was set-up and protected by the solar electric fence. A quick snack and down the mountain they came. Not a step wasted as they descended through the trees, a welcome break from the wind. Smiling big grins and high hopes as the fearless crew viewed the safety of the trailers a short distance away. OH NO! Just a mere yards to go-The sky opened up with hail. Blinding whiteout with biting stings a wild race of their own was at hand. Man, Woman and Horses flew to safety. The riders were airborne as they flew off their trusted steeds, threw trailer doors open, horses grateful for the anticipated protection from the biting hail, jumped into the comfortable trailers. Soaked, cold and grateful for a safe return the humans loaded into pickups with heaters on high. A flat tire was discovered so to wait out the storm and make sure all were safe. Thanks to Gregg Morse for fighting mud filled with small white balls to get Sonja Gangstead on her way home. It's Montana, you never can out guess the weather.

These 6 troopers and the chapter organizer, Leonard Francis, were awarded T-shirts by the hosting organization-Make it Happen. Sounds like our motto at times!

Laura Anderson attended our March 2026 meeting with updates and an invitation to pack in supplies this year. The race was a grand success with 150 runners, 2 aid stations and 8 personnel with radios for security. The weather was gorgeous. Only a few minor injuries. The run lasted 2 hours and 30 minutes. The fastest times were 45 minutes for males and 50 minutes for females. A wholehearted yes was echoed by all chapter members to the invitation for another packing in of supplies. Hopefully without hail!

Turns out there will be 200 participants approved for 2026. A well-organized run with established parking and shuttle, handicap parking at the trailhead, a map with directions and aid station locations, no dogs allowed on the run or shuttle. Information and for sign up is available at runsignup.com - Judith MTN 10 K.



"Caretaker and Mayor of Swift Dam"

By Le Ann Hermance, East Slope BCH

Located on the Rocky Mountain Front in Pondera County is the Swift Dam Campground and Trailhead. This has been a starting point for many horse packing trips into the Bob Marshall Wilderness and points beyond. For the East Slope Back Country Horsemen, this trailhead has been our focus. We built corrals, highlines and hitching rails, outhouses, horse watering area and of course did trail work. Our latest project is getting the spotted knapweed under control.



Cliff Gustafson

We would like to recognize a very special past member of the club, Cliff Gustafson. Hopefully if you used the trailhead, you met him during your travels. Cliff loved to visit and share the history of the area. For well over 40+ years, Cliff volunteered at Swift, mowing, trimming trees, cleaning up the camp and corral areas and making sure the facility was well stocked with firewood for those who got caught in the weather. Whatever needed to be done, he was our man. We have received many compliments on how well kept the campground is.



Cliff's one-man table moving program

Unfortunately, we lost Cliff in December. The ESBCH club will be placing a memorial marker at Swift honoring Cliff. For those who have the opportunity to use the campground and trailhead, please take a moment to remember those who have gone before us and make our trips more enjoyable.

Comment from President Ron Ries – Cliff Gustafson, AKA "Caretaker - Mayor of Swift Dam"
Swift Dam was Cliff's happy place. For nearly 40+ years he spent 1,000's of hours improving and maintaining the public campground and popular trailhead into the Bob Marshall Wilderness. From picking tons of rocks, building corrals and fence, he also secured all materials to reside and reroof the public foul weather building. Also kept it clean and fully stocked with firewood. Picnic tables, fire pits and campsites were always clean and in good repair. The old hand water pump was well maintained to supply water for stock. He arranged to have gravel hauled for the road. Singlehandedly he moved the concrete picnic tables, dug out the base, laid weed barrier, put in new gravel and reinstalled the tables. (Please note the chain and come along attached to his bumper in the above picture). Thank you Cliff, you will be missed.

Comment from Pondera County Commissioners
We as the Pondera County Commissioners were saddened to hear of Cliff's passing. Cliff has been a loyal, hardworking volunteer at the Swift Dam campground and trailhead for decades, his absence will not go unnoticed. Cliff was the gold standard for what a volunteer should be, he never to my knowledge ever asked for any compensation on his time, equipment or fuel. Cliff always enjoyed talking with whomever was visiting the campgrounds because Cliff spent a good portion of his summers camped in his spot just inside the campground. There are numerous thank you letters that he received from visitors that he proudly has displayed on a wall in the Houge Hotel as the locals refer to the building that Cliff always kept clean and tidy with a large pile of firewood for anyone to use. We will truly miss Cliff but we thank him for all his hard work and fond memories of the man we officially unofficially named the Mayor of Swift Dam.

Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue TLAER

By Stacie G. Boswell, DVM, DACVS-LA, Gallatin Valley BCH

This spring, the Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen chapter is participating in an excellent education opportunity at a Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue (TLAER™) course. TLAER is a specialized field of heavy rescue dedicated to the safe extrication of live large animals—such as horses, livestock, and exotic animals—from entrapment scenarios like trailer wrecks, mud, ditches, and barn fires. We are very fortunate to have Rebecca Gimenez Husted, PhD, the founder of TLAER, teaching the course on Saturday and Sunday May 2-3 at the Montana State University Miller Livestock Pavilion. TLAER training is attended by professionals and individuals, including: fire departments and rescue squads; veterinarians and veterinary technicians; animal control officers and law enforcement; and large animal owners and transporters. All must work together for the success of any TLAER rescue mission.

TLAER is not field medicine, disaster medicine, nor the rescue of abused/neglected animals. Instead, it is a systematic process involving these key points. 1. Response - it is first necessary to understand the situation from the moment it is reported. 2. Safe scene setup so that there is no harm and injury to human responders, and the animal is rescued safely. 3. Extrication - TLAER uses specific, known techniques and principles with available equipment to move the animal safely. 4. Follow-up care should coordinate with veterinarians and animal caretakers for the best outcome in the case of injuries and illnesses.

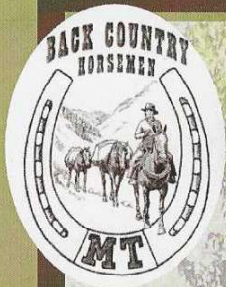
Three training core principles will be introduced and exemplified in the hands-on TLAER course. The first principal is safety! A huge theme of the training is prevention, safety, and education. Rescuers are taught to avoid placing themselves in danger. The second principle is behavioral understanding of horses or livestock. Because large animals often react with "fight or flight" instincts under stress, rescuers must understand these behaviors to avoid compromising or dangerous positions. Finally, innovation is an important part of every rescue. Each situation, accident, or incident is different, so TLAER requires creative, practical applications of equipment like slings, webbing, and ropes.

Our chapter is excited about attending this enjoyable, fun, and useful training. Hopefully it will become an annual event!

More about TLAER can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/TLAER>, <https://tlaer.org/>.



TLAER disaster rescue horse water practice



State Back Country Horsemen Rendezvous

Monture Ranger Station from June 18-21

Volunteer Opportunity:
U.S.F.S Fence-Building
Project

**Horsemanship
Clinic with Wade
Murphy on Friday!**

Saturday Community Supper 6:00 p.m.
(\$15 per meal)

Pulled pork, baked beans, and coleslaw provided.

**Horses
welcome,
but not
required.**

Mail meal payment (Checks only) to:
BCH of Missoula
P.O. 2121, Missoula, MT, 59806

**Wade Murphy
Clinic**



**More info on
rendevous**



**Questions? Contact Mark
Wright at
saberhorse76@gmail.com**

Volunteer Opportunity! Support the Forest Service Packing Program!



Scan here for
more info!



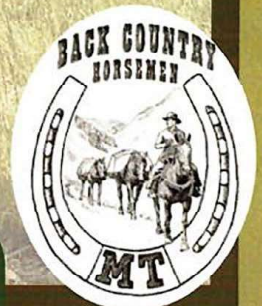
**Build fence at
the Monture
Ranger Station**

**When: June
18-21**

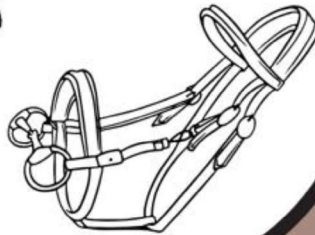
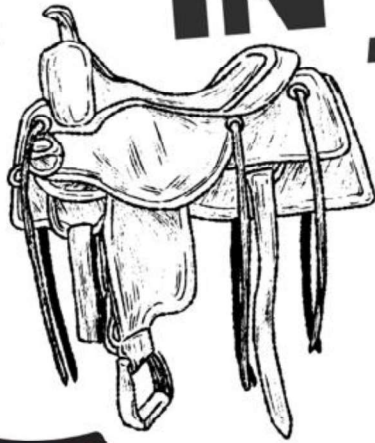
Horses welcome, but not required.

For any questions, please contact Mark Wright at
saberhorse76@gmail.com.

**State Back
Country Horsemen
Rendezvous!**



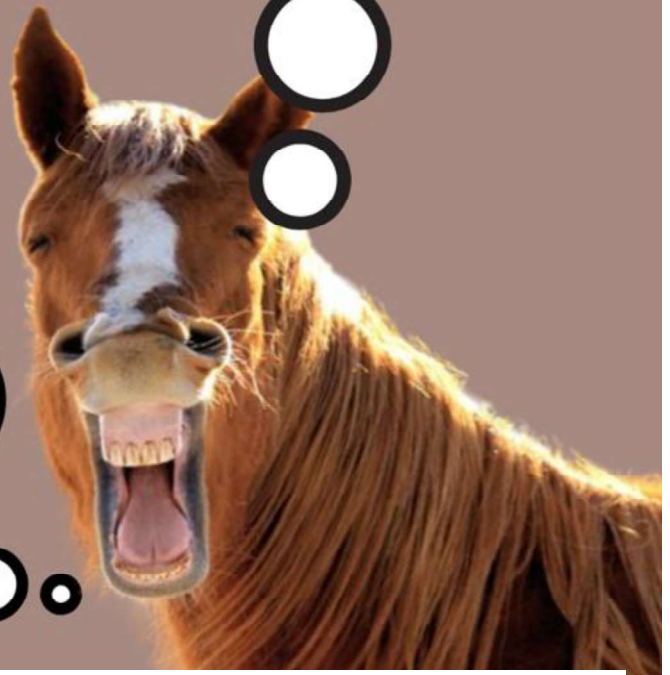
**ARE YOU
YOUNG AND
IN NEED OF
TACK?**



**CHECK OUT
OUR GEAR UP
PROGRAM!**



QR.CO.DE/BEEUDM



**FOLLOW US
@BCHMT4**

Gear Up is a program to share saddles and other horse tack with people who need it. It is gear which is donated to BCHMT by its members. For more information go to <https://bchmt.org/wp/flathead/gear-up-program/>

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
PO Box 967, Conrad, MT 59425

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

Find more information on our website:
bchmt.org

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Mile High BCH
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Mission Valley BCH
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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

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

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



Schedule for chapter news article submissions.

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

E-mail to: garybailey406@gmail.com

Editor reserves the right to edit articles.

Winter Issue: articles due January 5th: Beartooth, Bitter Root, Cabinet, Mission Valley, Three Rivers, 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.