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Peg Greiwe  
1-888-893-5161

## Back Country Horsemen of America Expands Their Reach to Benefit Equestrians Across the US

By Sarah Wynne Jackson

Back Country Horsemen of America, the organization that works hard to protect our right to ride horses on public lands, is bigger than ever. Membership now totals over 13,300 members nationwide, with chapters in 27 states. In 2013 alone, those members contributed 368,000 volunteer hours valued at \$14 million aimed directly at keeping trails open for horses and other users. Over 30,247 miles of trails were maintained. They've welcomed several new State Organizations that carry their benefits to equestrians across the country, and even re-designed their popular website.

### BCH in "The Natural State"

Arkansas Back Country Horsemen, previously an Affiliate Organization, has met the requirements and was recently accepted as a BCH State Organization. Equestrians in Arkansas enjoy many miles of trails that meander through the state's wild landscapes.

The 6,911 acre Village Creek State Park is its second largest state park and includes Crowley's Ridge, a landform of rolling hills in eastern Arkansas' Mississippi Alluvial Plain with unique geology, topography, and unusual plant communities. Riders also return frequently to the 75 photogenic miles of trails along the running rapids and quiet pools of the Buffalo National River, which passes decades-old farmsteads and other historic structures.

### BCH from Coast to Coast

For the first time in history, Back Country Horsemen of America now has a state presence from the Pacific to the Atlantic since Back Country Horsemen of Kansas

became a State Organization. Equestrians in the Sunflower State ride across the plains, prairies, hills, and forests in a variety of public lands.

In the southwest corner of Kansas, the Cimarron National Grasslands encompass 108,175 acres, the largest area of public land in the state. These wide open plains showcase rock cliffs, cottonwood groves, yucca, and sage, along with native grasses and riparian vegetation along the Cimarron River. Eisenhower State Park, located 30 miles south of Topeka, includes 1,785 acres of tall grass prairie and woodland in addition to the 6,930-acre Melvern Lake. Horse trails offer a variety of terrain and scenic lake views.

### BCH in the East

Although Back Country Horsemen of America was founded in the west, their vision has caught fire and is steadily spreading across the country. BCHA is pleased to welcome Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen, previously an Affiliate Organization, as a new State Organization. FF BCH has always had the characteristic "get it done" attitude of all Back Country Horsemen.

Over 30 members logged a total of more than 300 volunteer hours clearing 10 miles of the Withlacoochee State Trail for equestrian use near the town of Nobleton. Previously, this stretch of trail was badly overgrown and nearly impassable. They also worked with a number of other equestrian groups to perform trail maintenance on the Bear Head Hammock Horse Trail in the Two Mile Prairie Tract, part of Withlacoochee State Forest.

### Stay Informed

Back Country Horsemen of America recently unveiled a new website at [www.backcountryhorse.com](http://www.backcountryhorse.com). This is your one stop spot to keep up with BCHA's many projects, learn more about responsible equestrian recreation, and find out how you can get involved with protecting our right to ride horses on public lands. You'll find their updated brand, front and center on the home page. Their virtual storefront makes it easy to purchase books, bumper stickers, CDs, patches, and more while supporting a cause you stand behind.

### Get Involved!

The folks at Back Country Horsemen of America are humbled and thrilled to have experienced such growth in recent years. This is an exciting time to be a part of BCHA! Don't miss out – join now! Go to [www.backcountryhorse.com](http://www.backcountryhorse.com) to find a chapter near you, or contact BCHA directly and they'll tell you how to start one. Every new member makes a difference in their efforts to preserve this historical use of public lands.

### About Back Country Horsemen of America

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at-large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes regarding the use of horses and stock in wilderness and public lands.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: [www.backcountryhorse.com](http://www.backcountryhorse.com); call 888-893-5161; or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367. The future of horse use on public lands is in our hands!