

Equine Safety Management Strategy Framework: National Recommendations for Implementation

U.S. Forest Service

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Program Objectives

- Establish a **"culture of safety"** relative to equine use and horsemanship in the Intermountain region.
- Provide a management framework or **"strategy"** to **instill core values**, establish a **safety learning culture**, and **maintain a high level of safety behavior** relative to equine use and management.
- Strive to become a **"Zero Injury" Organization** relative to equine use.
- Be an **Employer of Choice** relative to Horsemanship Skills and Equine use.

Key Strategy Focus

- Develop a National Horsemanship Safety Plan based on the principles and practices of the National Safety Journey approach.....
 - Emphasize continued Stock Management reviews and horsemanship safety assessments of Forest programs to provide for a baseline **awareness** of current Forest safety cultures
 - Provide for an improved safety shift in behavior through a learning based a **culture of learning**
 - Utilize **strategic risk** in assessment of Stock Management Programs
 - Provide for program certification and policy requirements that provide for employee accountability and assessment of employee performance..
 - Provide for agency training for employees to **prepare** and provide employees uniform and consistent knowledge, skills, and equipment for safe horse use.

- Establish appropriate agency equipment standards to facilitate safe equestrian use.

Recommended Management Actions:

1. Establish/Re-Establish Regional Stock Management Program(s)

- **Narrative:** The Forest Service is currently not organized, staffed, or equipped to implement and administer a safe and professional equestrian use program. While select Forest programs within the agency in all regions of the agency implement and maintain a quality equestrian use program, these same programs are not provided across the agency.

As the agency endeavors to re-emphasize use of pack and saddle stock to facilitate attainment of the agency mission and management objectives, adherence to a quality equestrian use program has waned and current program capability is not in line with agency objectives for professional use and provision of an adequate safety use culture.

Development of a relevant pack and saddle use program must be a precursor to development of a culture of safety.

Recommended Regional Stock Management Framework:

- **Regional Program Management and Oversight**
 - Regional Program Funding
 - Regional Stock Management Cadre
 - Regional Training and Certification Standards
 - Stock Management Use Requirements and Guidelines
 - Program Review and Accountability
- **Forest Program Oversight**
 - Forest Stock Management Cadre
 - Implementation of Regional Training and Use Certification Standards
 - Forest Mentoring

- Forest Oversight for Stock Management:
 - Stock Management Plans
 - Stock Acquisition and Disposition
 - Personal Preference Oversight
 - Safety Use Program Oversight
 - Review and Accountability

2. Required Regional Horsemanship Training, Certification, and Mentoring Program

- **Narrative:** While a minority of Forests in the agency have an established Horsemanship and Pack Stock Training Program (examples include but are not limited to the Nine Mile (R-1); Shoshone (R-2); and Caribou-Targhee (R-4) Programs), over time, agency emphasis toward providing high quality training programs for equestrian use has waned over the years, and at best, has been provided on an inconsistent basis - both in terms of standard and quality.

In addition, with few exceptions, agency requirements for training and mentoring associated with equestrian use has not been implemented inconsistently. Development of a consistent agency equestrian training and mentoring program designed to develop and maintain equestrian use skills in the Forest Service workforce would significantly improve both the safety culture and the skill set of agency employees for equestrian use.

Moreover, implementation of required certifications for agency employees associated with the training and mentoring program would ensure that employees acquire the necessary skills, experience, and knowledge to provide for a relevant safety culture of learning and development through experience.

Recommended Management Actions;

- Development of an agency-wide Equestrian Training Modules designed for progressive levels of employee development.

- The Training Modules should be designed for agency applications and provide minimum standards for training at various levels while providing for regional differences based on management circumstances for equestrian use.
- The training program should require agency certification for pack and saddle use.
- The program should include an employee mentoring program designed to reinforce training through work experience and ensure progressive competence in horsemanship use through employee development

3. Identification and Implementation of Required Equestrian Safety Riding Equipment

- **Narrative:** Improved training should be complemented with emphasis on utilization of relevant equipment that could provide for improved safety and performance of agency employees and pack and saddle stock. Over time the equestrian use industry has provided substantial development in the design and availability of equestrian safety equipment. While individual Forests have taken advantage of these developments, the agency has not provided and emphasized use of relevant safety equipment on a consistent basis.

Based on safety reviews within the agency, a substantial number of equestrian related accidents have been mitigated and/or have occurred within the agency. The application of equestrian use in the Forest Service is not based on implementation of a high-risk, performance-based equestrian use - rather, our agency use of pack and saddle stock is predicated on a "working application" of pack and saddle stock where relevant safety - equipment should be required where value-added to facilitate mission and objectives. To this end, requirement of relevant safety equipment should strike a balance between value-added improvement toward the working safety of agency horse and rider, versus requirements for use of equipment that serve as "window dressing".

It is paramount that an agency safety culture be fostered where all employees are provided relevant safety equipment - whether optional or required, for the purpose of instilling confidence and enhancing safe equestrian use.

Recommended Management Actions:

- Required Use of Equestrian Riding Helmets and/or Vests for beginning agency riders during training and mentoring certification periods. This would be an agency-wide recommendation.
- Equestrian helmets should be provided for any/all agency riders upon request.
- Break-away stirrups are currently required equipment on the Shoshone Forest in R-2. It is recommended that this equipment become an agency requirement.
- Use of leather soles or low tread rubber soles should be an agency requirement.
- All tack used in pack and saddles stock program should be approved by Forest stock managers prior to use - this includes authorized employee personal preference use.

4. Establishment of Regional/Forest a Safety Management Culture, Oversight, and Review

- **Narrative:** The Forest Service is not currently organized to provide, foster, or assess a culture of safety relative to equestrian use and management.

The National Safety database program is not configured to effectively provide managers with detailed safety information relative to assessment of accident circumstances and trends.

Workforce accidents relative equestrian use are not being accurately reported or assessed when they are reported. In addition, employees are not reporting accidents due to fear of agency reprisal associated with our current safety emphasis.

The agency is not taking advantage of advances in electronic media to provide pro-active and timely program oversight, including: safety training and networking, information and education dissemination, and program accountability review.

Equestrian safety use oversight and accountability measures are applied inconsistently among Forests and Regions. The agency can clearly benefit from program emphasis and consistent accountability measures associated with fostering a safe equestrian use program.

Recommended Management Considerations:

- Re-design the agency corporate database program to meet the needs of field managers to assess and monitor safety programs in the field.
- Develop National and Regional electronic medium that easily provide for information sharing, networking, education dissemination for equestrian use and safety across the agency.
- Requirement for each Region to develop an Equestrian Safety Management Plan geared to regional management circumstances.
- Development of an agency Horsemanship Safety Use Guide
- Utilize Forest and Regional Horsemanship Cadres (see Management Recommendation #1) to assist Forest managers in fostering effective safety cultures, implementing program reviews, provide training, and share in stock management decisions on the Forest.
- Develop a National/Regional Equestrian Safety Use Guide and Provide for timely updates from lessons Learned.
- Provide for a safety culture of learning from accident reporting and field safety recommendations versus emphasis on punitive employee actions.

5. Establish Agency Personal Preference Requirements and Use Standards

- **Narrative:** In the Intermountain Region (One of the highest equestrian use regions in the agency), the majority of equine-related accidents have occurred from stock approved through the region's Personal Preference Stock Use Program. Un-official reports from other regions validate this trend in accident source at various levels.

Continued use of the agency Personal Preference authority is a valuable asset to the agency. This program, implemented correctly, works leverages agency resources to meet agency management objectives while providing for safe stock use through employees personal stock.

Unfortunately, some stock approved through the program is not safe for use in the agency.

The agency needs to develop updated criteria and standards for approval of personal preference stock and equipment, and provide for competent Forest staff (Forest Stock Cadre's) to assist managers with the approval process.

Recommended Management Actions:

- Develop standard criteria and approval process for personal preference stock and equipment use on Forests
- Develop and standard guidelines and requirements for implementation of the personal preference use program in the agency (may be already developed on progressive Forests).

6. Improve the Quality and Standard of Agency Pack and Saddle Stock and Equipment

- **Narrative:** Overtime, agency emphasis on maintenance of a quality Pack and Saddle Stock program has eroded. While skills and abilities of equine users have diminished, so has the quality of Forest Pack and

Saddle Stock and associated equipment used to facilitate the agency program. Both the effectiveness and safety culture of the agency is directly correlated to the quality of equine stock and associated equipment needed to facilitate agency use.

▪ **Recommended Management Actions**

- Emphasize and enforce agency equipment standards already in place for purchase and maintenance of truck and trailer equipment - establishment of Regional/Forest Equine Use Cadre could provide necessary emphasis and oversight.
- Acquisition of relevant agency pack and saddle stock is a paramount need toward improving both performance and equine safety use. Establishment of Regional/Forest Equine Management Cadres could improve the acquisition and management of relevant agency stock - matching relevant stock with Forest and District employee skills.
- Disposition of agency pack and Saddle Stock that are not relevant to meeting agency work needs, or have behavioral traits that create un-safe working conditions for agency employees.
- Improve the quality of tack and saddles that are available for agency use.....On many districts, employees are not using relevant tack that has been updated for design and use standards by the equine industry over the years.....emphasis on this equipment would greatly improve employee performance and safety.

7. Emphasize Horsemanship Skill and Experience as an Agency Outreach, Recruitment, and Selection Criteria for positions requiring Equine Use.

- **Narrative:** "Requiring people that don't want to be on horses - to be on horses is one of the un-safe things we do..." A substantial number of agency work and task duties require a "working knowledge" of

horsemanship skills. For the majority of position duties in the Rangeland Management and Recreational Trail Management series, a proficient knowledge of horsemanship skills and experience is needed to meet the work expectations of these programs. Over time, the agency has not emphasized the need for these skills in Out-reach, Recruitment, and agency position selection. In order to become more proficient and safe in our working culture where equine use is needed to meet our agency mission, the agency must re-emphasize efforts toward recruitment and selection of employees that will become not only proficient equine users and practitioners, but will be leaders in fostering an influential and adaptive safety culture for equine use.

▪ **Recommended Actions:**

- Incorporate Equine Use in Outreach and Recruitment Strategies where appropriate.
- Emphasize Horsemanship skills and performance criteria in agency Position Descriptions where appropriate
- Develop standard Horsemanship skills criteria for incorporation in agency KSA's for employee selection process.

Unintended Consequences associated with Agency Implementation:

Following, are a list of potential unintended consequences associated with implementation of field recommendations incorporated in the agency Equestrian Safety Framework.

- **Comprehensive implementation of the proposed equestrian safety framework is anticipated to increase agency costs** associated with development and maintenance of a quality and safe working culture in the short-term.....In some cases, Forest managers may choose to opt out of the program and meet agency mission objectives through alternative approaches. Predicted increases in program costs include the following:
 - Acquisition of relevant stock
 - Upgrade in agency stock management equipment
 - Increased training costs
 - Potential short-term reduction in program delivery associated with agency training and mentoring

- **Recommendation #1 - Requirement for Certified Training...**
 - The agency has historically chosen not impose training certification for pack and saddle stock use in the Forest Service. Some Forest managers have expressed desire to maintain field discretion for training requirements at the field level.

- **Recommendation #2 - Requirement for Equestrian Safety Equipment..**
 - Required use of proposed safety equipment for equestrian use is controversial with our workforce.....the committee of field advisors feel that recommendations for required equipment represents a balance between relevant equipment that could provide for "value added" safety benefit while facilitating agency equestrian use objectives. Toward this end, it is anticipated that Forest Service

equipment requirements for equestrian safety will be an asset in future agency recruitment. However, for some individuals this approach may be a deterrent in recruitment.

- **Recommendation #5 - Requirements for Personal Preference Stock Approval**
 - Implementation of this recommendation may have the effect of reducing employee use of personal preference stock and equipment authority, and may increase agency management costs associated with acquisition of agency stock.

- **Recommendation #7 - Incorporation of Horsemanship Skills and Experience in Agency Outreach, Recruitment, and Selection Process...**
 - This recommendation may not be congruent with agency diversity employment objectives
 - Some District Rangers may not want to emphasize Equestrian use on their units - want the flexibility to recruit and select employees regardless of equestrian skills and abilities.