



2023 Annual Report



Accomplishments

Trail Maintenance

2023 was a fantastic year for us in many ways. With trail maintenance at the heart of our mission we were still active in completing a lot of construction projects. We gained several new members this year who eagerly pitched in beside all our longtime folks and together we donated many hours of time. Unfortunately, the summer turned out quite stormy and a couple of projects had to be postponed. Luckily the fall stayed warm, and much drier and we were able to get those projects done later in the year. The totals below include our organized workdays along with efforts by members working individually on their own time. Many thanks to all who helped us achieve this awesome effort!!

Miles of trails maintained: Wilderness – 210 miles
 Non-wilderness – 302 miles
 Total – 511 miles

Structures installed/maintained: Two new horse-friendly gates installed

Total volunteer hours donated: 1,891 hours

Total miles driven: 17,281 miles

Total stock days donated: 125 days

Total heavy equipment hours: 49.5 hours

Total value donated: \$92,319.51

4-H Youth Trail Challenge

As we sit around our meetings and look at all the grey-haired folks in our outfit....we realize that we need to get some younger folks interested in trail riding! Luckily one of our members Larry, had been involved with youth through the 4-H organization. Larry helped us sponsor a Trail Challenge clinic and competition for local 4-H kids and their horses.

We had perfect weather for our second annual 4-H Youth event on Saturday May 6th! We started out in the morning with our local clinician and BH BCH member, Larry, teaching horsemanship skills and working with the youth to learn to negotiate various trail obstacles. After a break for a hot lunch which was provided by Black Hills Energy the kids had a chance to test the skills they had learned by completing a trail challenge competition. This competition offered the chance to earn prizes.

While the one age group of kids was competing on the trail course, the other age groups competed in a variety of equestrian games or participated in an equitation clinic hosted by local trainer Randy Guggisberg of Sliding G Performance Horses.

Thanks to all our BH BCH members, Randy G., Black Hills Energy, and Pennington County 4-H Youth Advisor who helped make this awesome event such a success! And many thanks to all the 26 kids who attended and their parents who made it all possible!



Figure 1. Twenty-six 4-H kids participated in our first Trail Challenge clinic and competition.



Figure 2. Youth were coached through several types of trail obstacles.

Memorial Day –Black Elk Wilderness Trails

It was the third weekend in May and the weather was much more pleasant than the past few years. We spent 5 days clearing trails out of Iron Creek Horse Camp just in time for Memorial Day weekend. Over the course of the weekend, 25 Black Hills Backcountry Horsemen of South Dakota gathered at Iron Creek Horse Camp to assist with a packing project and to clear/maintain the trails in the Black Elk Wilderness area and Norbeck Wildlife Preserve.

Two groups spent Friday – May 19, 2023, with 10 individuals and 17 stock – (including 7 pack stock) cleared 10X10 timbers from Trail #15 (Iron Creek Horse Camp to Lakota Lake). Over 30.5 loads (4 timbers per load with 2 timbers per pannier) were packed out at trail heads for USFS – Black Hills National Forest personnel to remove. Timbers had historically been placed at creek crossings along Trail #15 – Iron Creek Trail for bank protection, stability, etc. However, the timbers at each crossing eventually became dislodged, exposing rebar and creating deep steps because of flooding and scouring. The creek crossings had become extremely hazardous for equestrians and other trail users.

The 10X10 timbers removed weighed over 4270 lbs or over 2 tons. The trail timbers had been cut to length by USFS and BH BCH SD personnel. A grinder was utilized to remove the remaining rebar on numerous timbers for safe packing in panniers on stock. 2.4 miles of trail cleaned up by BH BCH SD members.



Figure 3 & 4. Doug cutting rebar off of timbers to fit in panniers and loading panniers.



Figures 5 & 6. Festus hauling out timbers and making a pile at the end of the trail.



Figure 7. The second crew of packers at the other end of the trail.

Another 2 groups of 9 BH BCH SD members (with 1 pack stock) cleared/cut logs/saplings on Trail #89 to Mt Rushmore and Trail #89B to 16 to Remington RD. 8 Large logs, 25 small trees and saplings.

#89 Trail to Mt Rushmore – 8.9 miles of trail, #89B to 16 – 3.1 miles of trail

Saturday – May 20, 2023 – BH BCH SD Members divided into 2 groups for trail clearing. One group with 8 members – no pack stock cleared 5 large logs by crosscut on #89B trail. One additional large log was crosscut on #7 Spur. #89B trail – 1.7 miles, #7 Spur - 0.5 mile

Another group of 8 BH BCH SD members with 2 pack stock provided trail maintenance on #7 with 1 large tree crosscut and 21 saplings or small trees. #7 – 5 miles



Figures 8 & 9. Ralph and Alan working on a trail blocker log. Getting some good saw training in as well.

Sunday – May 21, 2023 – BH BCH SD Members divided into 2 groups for trail clearing. One group with 6 members and 1 pack stock completed trail clearing on #89 to Mt Rushmore with one large tree cut with crosscut.

Another group of 6 members with 1 pack stock trailered from Iron Creek HC to Big Pine Trail head. Members cleared 10 trees from Big Pine TH along the #89 Trail – 4 miles. Trail #89 is cleared from Iron Creek HC to Big Pine TH.



Figures 10 & 11. Getting a big one out of the way on Trail 89. Before and after.

Monday – May 22, 2023 – Three members (J&A Allen, R. Carlson) replaced a broken fence post at the entrance to the horse camp. They also removed and rearranged the parking barriers at the Trail #3 trailhead. 4 hrs.



Figures 12 & 13. Ralph and Jim replacing broken post in Iron Creek Horse Camp.

Weekend totals: 25 members and 31 head of stock

Total volunteer hours: 394 hours

Total Miles of Trail Maintained: 22.5 miles

Total trees removed: 16 large >12" DBH, 47 smaller trees

Weight of waste timber removed: Over 4200#

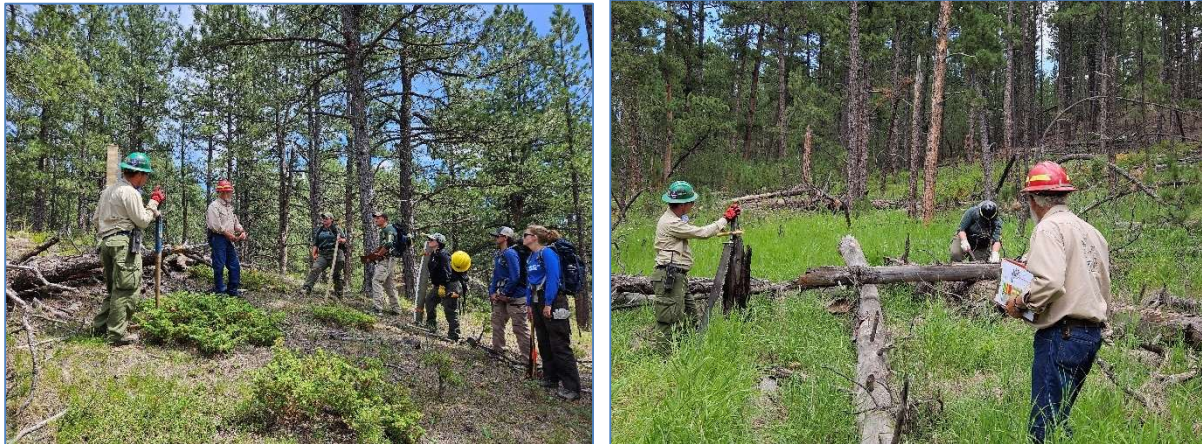
Crosscut Saw Training

We were thrilled to be able to offer crosscut saw certification to our members in May of 2023. One of our members, Jim Allen, had received his certification as a saw evaluator for crosscuts in 2022. With nearly 60 miles of trail in the Black Elk Wilderness (BEW), use of crosscut saws is a critical skill for our members. As a portion of our trail work during our Iron Creek work weekend in the Black Elk wilderness, five of our members were re-certified on crosscut saws.



Figure 14 & 15. Jim giving some BH BCH members tips on using a crosscut saw.

Additionally, the Black Hills National Forest had hired several young people as summer trail crew workers. None of these folks had experience working with crosscut saws. Much of their trail duties involved clearing trail in the BEW. The BHNF requested that our saw evaluator teach their interns about crosscut saw use. So, on August 2, Jim and Alice provided classroom and field training sessions for twelve USFS personnel on the care and use of crosscut saws.



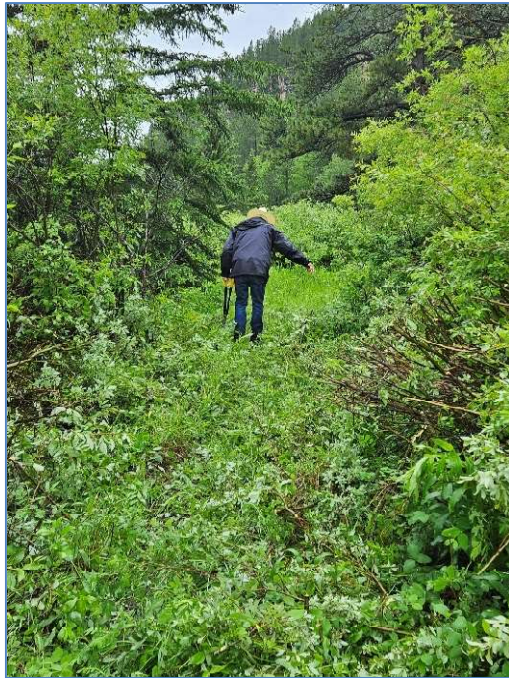
Figures 16 & 17. Jim providing instruction on the use of crosscut saws to Forest Service trail crew.

Old Baldy Trails

This is one of our annual trail clearing projects held in June. Unfortunately, this year it was a very rainy chilly weekend. We had 7 hearty members show up but we were only able to use our horses and mules on one day. But despite the wet weather, our crew walked and used an electric hedge trimmer to “uncover” about 1 mile of the Little Spearfish Trail. It had been completely overgrown by willows and other shrubs adjacent to the creek. Luckily on Sunday the clouds parted for long enough to clear the Old Baldy Trail. We had hoped to repair and widen one livestock gate on the Rimrock trail but that got rained out again on Monday. About 9 miles of trail were maintained.

Total volunteer hours: 70 hours

Total miles of trail maintained: 9 miles



Figures 18 & 19. Cutting willows on a rainy afternoon along the Little Spearfish Trail.

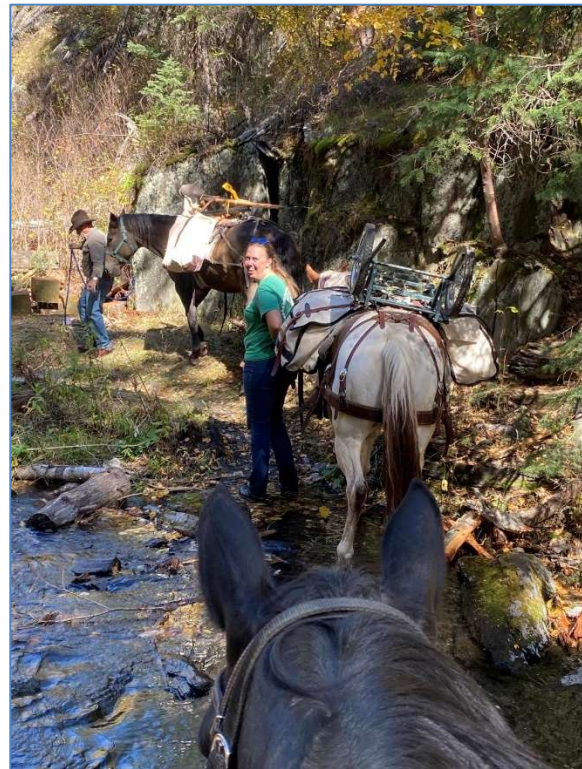


Figure 20. Warming up by the fire after the clouds cleared.

Deerfield Lake Loop/Deerfield Trail

We spent a couple days in late September working on various portions of the 25-mile-long Deerfield Trail and the 11-mile-long Deerfield Loop Trail. We maintain portions of these trails yearly as part of our annual trail maintenance and clearing program. This year we were also asked to provide pack animal support for reconstruction of several foot bridges that had been washed out by flooding.

BHNF recreation crews had arranged to have the long, heavy bridge timbers moved using National Guard helicopters. Most of the needed power and hand tools were also dropped on location by the helicopters. But the rec crew needed assistance moving their tools between bridge locations because the trail is inaccessible by OHVs. We were happy to assist!



Figures 21 & 22. Rob and Marsha provided the pack stock to haul tools along Slate Creek Trail.

On a couple of other days, a group of BHH BCH members rode the entire Deerfield Trail Loop and another 3-mile section of the Deerfield Trail. We used hand saws and a hedge trimmer to clear 14 miles of these trails.



Figures 22 & 23. Jim and “Petey” both doing their part to prune the willows on the Deerfield Trail.

National Public Lands Day & Fall Color Ride

Fall is a beautiful time most anywhere but especially in the Black Hills. We decided we had earned a freebie trail ride just to enjoy the beauty around us. We met at Alan and Elizabeth’s home to ride through the Flynn Creek Wildlife Management area southeast of Custer and enjoy the beautiful fall foliage. We followed up the ride with a BBQ on the deck and adult beverages. We chose National Public Lands Day for this event because we are grateful for our public lands and our ability to get out and ride in them!

Equestrian gates

Compared to spring and summer, fall of 2023 stayed warm and dry. We finally got a chance to work on a couple of gate projects that had been postponed due to wet weather during the summer. Both of these existing gates were not wide enough for safe passage of riders and did not allow pack stock to pass. In

2020 we had applied for a grant from the Black Hills NF Resource Advisory committee (RAC) to cover the costs of the materials for several new gates. We still had a couple of the gates remaining to be installed.

The first gate was installed an access point to the Wildcat Canyon Wildlife Management area in the southern Black Hills. This area was added to the Black Hills National Forest in 2011. The area doesn't contain any official trails but is open to equestrian exploring. However, to discourage OHV use, the access gate had been narrowed to the point of not being able to get horses through it. We requested permission from the Forest to replace this gate with wider one still designed to prevent access by motorized vehicles.

On October 10, Ralph showed up with his tractor to dig post holes and lift the new gates into place while the other 3 members were stuck with the grunt end of things. But, by the end of the day the new gate was completed! We are looking forward to riding and exploring this new area.



Figures 23 & 24. Before and after photos of the new gate at the Wildcat Canyon Wildlife area.

The second gate was located on the Rimrock Trail in the northern Black Hills. We maintain about 25 miles of trail in this area annually. But several of the gates were so narrow, that we had to unload our pack animals to get through the gate, and then reload them again on the other side. Over the last couple years, we had managed to get all but one of the gates replaced with wider ones. This gate was the last narrow one. So, on a really nice November day, four BH BCH members and one pack mule hauled in a gate that we had removed from another location. We installed it next to the old one to make a double-wide gate. Finally, we can do our annual maintenance without unloading a pack animal!!



Figure 25. The original gate on the Rimrock Trail



Figure 26. Brad and Frannie using the new wider gate.



Figure 27. The new wider gate.

Other Projects

BCHA National Board Meeting

We had a fantastic time at the BCHA 50th Anniversary celebration and National Board meeting!

As a chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA), we are entitled to elect two members to represent our state on the National Board of Directors for BCHA. The BOD convenes once each spring to conduct the business of the national organization, to discuss common problems and opportunities, and to share ideas with fellow back country horsemen. We have been attending this meeting every year since 2010.

This year was the 50th anniversary of the BCHA organization and we had nine members make the trip to Kalispell, MT. The history of BCHA is inspiring and one we carry on proudly here in the Black Hills. We love keeping trails open and promoting equestrian use on our public lands!



Figures 28 & 29. A couple photos from the BCHA National Board Meeting and a big “Thank You” from the USDA Forest Service.

Facebook

Our chapter continues to maintain a presence on Facebook primarily to inform equestrians about horseback opportunities in the Black Hills and surrounding areas. We use it to provide current information on trail conditions and hazards during the riding season. We also encourage interaction with users on local and national issues that may affect equestrians who travel to the Black Hills. We respond to numerous messages and questions from horsemen and women regarding specific trails, campgrounds, and equestrian facilities.

Find us at: <https://www.facebook.com/bchofsouthdakota>

Safety

We are proud to say that we again have had a clean safety record for 2023 with no reportable accidents!!

Challenges in 2023/2024

Forest Service Staffing Levels for Recreation

We realize that this issue affects all BCHA units. However, recent retirements and transfers have left several key recreation positions vacant in the Black Hills. This has hampered our ability to communicate and to plan or discuss projects and equestrian priorities. It is directly related to all the other challenges we face that are discussed below. We feel that BCHA needs to be as proactive as possible in promoting legislation that increases funding for recreation on our public lands, especially the Forest Service.

We will continue to discuss options to increase funding and to increase the effectiveness of the Forest Service with our Congressional delegation.

Willow Creek Horse Camp Reconstruction - Phase 2

We began discussion with Black Hills NF regarding the reconstruction of Willow Creek Horse Camp in Spring of 2016. A design was developed and implementation began in Fall of 2016. We spent hundreds of volunteer hours in October and November 2016. We were unable to complete reconstruction of all the campsites due to winter weather. Six sites were redesigned and three more remained to be completed in Spring of 2017. We continued to help install fire rings, picnic tables, and corrals on the first six sites in the Spring of 2017. We fully expected to complete the remaining 3 sites in Fall of 2017 since the dirt work for new corrals had already been completed. However, at that point the FS decided not to start on the other three sites and additionally to convert those sites to non-horse sites. The Forest Supervisor did not return phone calls to discuss the issue. Our President decided to request a Congressional inquiry into the matter. The result was a meeting with the Forest Service where we explained our issues and grievances. We agreed that if occupancy at the campground exceeded 40% in 2018, then we would be allowed to construct the corrals for the additional three campsites. In fall of 2018 we were informed that occupancy did not meet the 40%. But it was close. We feel that once the problems with the reservation system are corrected, we will easily achieve 40%. Due to the extremely wet weather in spring 2019, this campground did not open as early as usual. However, we did convince the Forest Service to keep both horse camps open until the end of September. COVID has vastly increased occupancy in all Forest Service campgrounds including Willow Creek. The Forest Service has again been reluctant to share the occupancy information with us. But from researching other data sources we have learned that occupancy has exceeded 40% in both 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

We will continue to pursue adding the three new corrals to the existing campsites. As of the time of this report we have received a letter of authorization from the Hell Canyon District Ranger to install the three new corrals. We plan to install the corrals in 2024!!!

National Saw Policy Implementation

We continue to work with the Forest leadership as well as the Regional Forester to begin local implementation of the saw policy. We are beginning to see some progress. We now have one of our members who is certified as a crosscut saw trainer and evaluator. We also have another member who is authorized to re-certify previously trained chainsaw operators. In the meantime, we have also been working with BCH trainers from Region 1 who are willing to come to the Hills to provide chainsaw training for our members.

We currently have 8 members who are certified crosscut sawyers. However, we do have 7 previously certified sawyers who need re-certification on chainsaws. We also have a long list of members who would like to be initially certified to operate either crosscut saws and/or chainsaws. Our chapter will provide crosscut saw training this spring. We hope to continue to pursue getting one or more of our members certified to train our own chainsaw sawyers in 2024.

Increasing OHV use in the BHNF

Motorized travel in the Black Hills NF has always been popular and widely allowed. For the last decade motorized travel has been restricted to open road (3,000 mi) and motorized trails (700 mi). However, in the last couple of years, use of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use has mushroomed on the Forest. Numerous private enterprises have started renting OHVs to visiting vacationers. These folks are not aware of travel restrictions, and many are inexperienced with handling the machines. Trail rutting, excess noise, and travel off approved routes is occurring. This use has overwhelmed law enforcement capabilities and has resulted in conflicts with equestrians and other non-motorized users such as bicyclists and hikers. Our members are working with the Black Hills National Forest, local authorities, and other user groups to develop solutions so that all users can continue to enjoy the Black Hills NF.

E-Bike use on Non-motorized Trails

During the recent 2024 session of the South Dakota state legislature, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks proposed legislation to allow use of all classes of e-bikes on the Mickelson Trail, a 111-mile-long Rails-to-Trails project that was authorized and developed in 1991 as a non-motorized trail. The legislation was tabled in committee due to the high level of controversy that the proposal elicited. However, we anticipate that the issue will again be proposed next year. Following a nationwide trend, we also anticipate that there will be other demands for use of e-bikes on previously designated non-motorized trails. This is especially true in light of the upcoming Forest Plan revision. We are in the process of developing a position statement on this issue.

Opportunities in 2024

Partnerships with other Recreation Organizations

Our past president is a member of the Northern Hills Recreation Trails Committee composed of recreation personnel and Chamber of Commerce members from cities of Lead and Deadwood along with folks from BLM, USFS, State Parks, bike organizations, equestrian organizations, and hiking organizations. The committee collaborates to build trails in and around urban areas of Whitewood, Spearfish, Sturgis, Deadwood, Lead and Central City. The goal is to create a network of trails connecting these towns in the northern Black Hills. The group has already built an estimated 35 miles of trails in the Deadwood and Lead areas. The funding comes from various sources including city and federal funds, grants, and donations. We hope to continue our involvement to ensure that equestrian use is given equal consideration.

BHNF Forest Plan Revision

The Black Hills National Forest is in the initial stages of the forest plan revision process. We have asked to be involved in all phases of the process to ensure that equestrian interests are considered, as recreation is a major topic for the Black Hills National Forest plan revision. This is a huge opportunity to preserve and enhance equestrian access and facilities in the Black Hills for future generations. We plan to stay actively involved and hope to work together with other recreation interests to provide a high quality non-motorized recreational experience for all users of the Black Hills NF.

Alice Allen

Alice Allen, President
Black Hills Back Country Horsemen of South Dakota
February 29, 2024

Backcountry Horsemen of America Volunteer Hours Report

January 2023-December 2023

Black Hills Backcountry Horsemen of South Dakota

| | P1 Totals | Rate per hour/mile/day | Total Value | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Total Basic Hours | 467 | \$31.80 | \$14,858.55 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Skilled Hours | 204 | \$47.70 | \$9,706.95 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Trail Recon Hours | 67 | \$31.80 | \$2,114.70 | Calculated per hour |
| Total LNT - Education | 149 | \$31.80 | \$4,738.20 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Public Meetings | 191 | \$31.80 | \$6,073.80 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Administrative Service | 536 | \$31.80 | \$17,028.90 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Travel Time | 278 | \$31.80 | \$8,853.12 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Hours | 1891.15 | | | |
| | | | | |
| Wilderness Trail Miles | 210 | | | |
| Other Trail Miles | 302 | | | |
| Total Trail Miles | 511 | | | |
| | | | | |
| Personal Vehicle | 12450 | \$0.62 | \$7,719.25 | Calculated per mile |
| Stock Hauling | 4830 | \$1.35 | \$6,521.04 | Calculated per mile |
| Total Travel Miles | 17280.8 | | | |
| | | | | |
| Power Equipment | 41 | \$30.00 | \$1,215.00 | Calculated per hour |
| Heavy Equipment | 9 | \$110.00 | \$990.00 | Calculated per hour |
| Total Equipment Hours | 49.5 | | | |
| | | | | |
| Total Stock (Pack and Saddle) | 0 | | | |
| Total Stock Days | 125 | \$100.00 | \$12,500.00 | Calculated per day |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Total Donations | \$0.00 | | \$0.00 | |
| | | | | |
| | | Total | \$92,319.51 | |

