

Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

November/December 2019



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

The holiday season is upon us again, and it's time to reflect on the past year. This group took on a big agenda in order to fulfill our mission. We wrote letters, we sat in endless meetings, we sought and were granted a limited exemption for chainsaw use and then we weren't. We debated publicly, we reached out to groups that did not agree with us, and we did it all honorably and in good faith.

We had a most successful fund-raising event with everyone's favorite Mustang Crow hosting. We broke some bones, we lost some great horses and, sadly, some of our family as well. We cleared trails, we supported Southwest Conservation Corps and Forest Service crews in the wilderness. We trained and rode and we even found time for some fun! In the end, we lived up to our mission. For that, I say ***Congratulations to you all on an outstanding year!***

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year's. Looking forward to seeing y'all out there on the trail!

—Larry Smith, SJ BCH president

A Christmas (Party) Story

*'Twas a few weeks before Christmas, and all through Pagosa
Back Country Horsemen did chores as they're 'spose ta;
The date of the party arrived at long last;
And it was on to St. Patrick's to have a real blast...*

Tonya Lambert organized a great San Juan BCH Christmas party Dec. 9 at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church Parish Hall.

With help from her elves (JoAnn and Randy Senzig, Ted Wortman, Nancy Seay, Annie and Sam Pack, Lisa Nelson and even Tonya's brother and sister-in-law), the decorations were put up and the festive event got underway, with Nancy and JoAnn checking in everyone at the door.

Some 50-plus members attended and enjoyed turkey and ham from Buck Stops Here and all manner of delicious side dishes and desserts brought by our members. Dick Ray brought his promised "baked cat," which had many wondering if he concocted something of mountain lion or bobcat. It was, in fact, a wonderful spice cake in the shape of a kitty cat (with toothpick

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- John Nelson
- Lisa Nelson
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Contact the Editor

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(A Christmas Party Story cont.'d)

whiskers) that was a recipe from his grandmother.

Lots of laughs were shared during the “awards” ceremony, and Kelli Day and Katie Betts did a terrific job “judging” contestants. The big winners were:

- Best Dressed—Alana Eagletree
- Best Hat—Erick Pantin
- Best Belt Buckle—Ken Beck
- Best Boots—Christian Pantin
- and, of course, Best Saddle Seat (err, buns)—Vern Jahnke

Great drawing prizes also were presented, including a smoker (thank you Tractor Supply), Durango/Silverton train tickets (thank you Vern and Kathy) and a Fanno saddle saw (thank you SJBCH).

...Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!

Photos by Lisa Nelson, except where noted.



Erick Pantin tips his Stetson (?) as judge Kelli Day awards him with the “Best Hat” prize.



Vern Jahnke is picked as having the “Best Saddle Seat” by judges Kelli Day and Katie Betts.



Lady in Red Alana Eagletree (left) wins “Best Dressed.”



Ken Beck shows off what earned him the “Best Buckle” at the party.



Christian Pantin kicks up her heels as the winner of the “Best Boots” award.



Great food, great fun and great friends.



Members brought all types of delectable side dishes and desserts to the feast.



Dick Ray’s “baked cat” was a hit at the party.



Mike Pluth presented the head of the “baked cat” to his wife Rena, who is recovering at home from back surgery.



Tonya Lambert and her crew gave the Parish Hall a festive flair with their decorations.

Volunteer Hours Add up to Successful Year

This is the season for reflection, giving and gratitude. In that spirit, our chapter recognizes the efforts of all our members in 2019 to advance the mission of keeping backcountry trails open and accessible to all users. You have shown your support through your physical labor, your financial commitment as members and your voice in advocating for our mission.

San Juan Back Country Horsemen volunteered 630 hours in 2019 and cleared about 120 trees from trails. The volunteer hours include not only trail work but also packing support for Southwest Conservations Corps trail crews as well as trainings and certifications by members. Several volunteer hours also went into organizing successful fundraising efforts, including the showing of the movie *Mustang Ride* and selling and taking tickets at the Thursday Night Rodeos this past summer. According to the SJ BCH volunteer report prepared for Back Country Horsemen of America by Tara McElhinney (Thank you Tara!), our chapter's volunteer efforts equated to a donation value of more than \$20,500. These are



SJBCH packers Donna Fait and Randy Senzig (at left) unload the supplies they hauled in for the Southwest Conservation Corps on Williams Creek Trail.

accomplishments to celebrate, especially in a year in which the chapter was challenged by a late start to the season with the heavy snowpack, more than its fair share of health issues (both human- and horse-related) and job demands that impacted the availability of several members.

SJBCH is proud of its part in helping the Pagosa Ranger District and partners clear about 85 percent of motorized and nonmotorized trails this year. That compares to about 50 percent of the trails being opened in

each of the last two years. Here's a breakdown of the 2019 trail-clearing effort from the Pagosa Ranger District:

- 6,253 trees were cleared in fiscal year 2019 (Oct. 1, 2018 – Sept. 30, 2019). This represented 405 miles of the 485 miles of motorized and nonmotorized trails on the district.

Breakdown by Groups:

1. Pagosa Ranger District - 2,614 trees - 2,619 hours - 231 miles
2. Southwest Conservation Corps - 1,857 trees - 2,080 hours - 70 miles
3. Volunteers - 1,471 trees - 1,029 hours - 88 miles *(Note: This does not include all the data from SJ BCH as the chapter submitted additional stats after the reporting deadline.)*
4. Outfitters - 309 trees - 322 hours - 16 miles

It is interesting to note that fewer trees than expected fell across trails this year. The Pagosa Ranger District had estimated that between 7,000 and 9,500 trees might fall in 2019, but the 6,253 trees cleared this year indicate the total of downed trees was closer to the lower estimate. It is also worth mentioning that about 2,000 more trees were cleared this year compared to 2018.

No one knows what the trails hold in store for us in 2020, but we hope to be ready with healthy riders and horses and plenty of enthusiasm to clear more trails and to do more packing in of supplies to SCC and Forest Service trail crews.

Back Country Horsemen of America Mission

- To perpetuate the common-sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's backcountry and wilderness.
- 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 in the wise use of the backcountry resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage.
- To foster and encourage the formation of new state Back Country Horsemen organizations.

2020 Trail Season Gets Head Start

You may not realize it, but the 2020 trail season already is off to a strong start.

The Pagosa Area Trails Council announced that about \$43,000 has been raised to be used for matching grants and/or to hire Southwest Conservation Corps trail crews for trail clearing and maintenance in 2020.

Bob Milford, president of PATC, provided the following breakdown of funds raised:

- ◇ San Juan Outdoor Club - \$10,000
- ◇ San Juan Back Country Horseman - \$3,000
- ◇ Jeff and Kelly Shaw - \$5,000
- ◇ Wilderness Trails Forever Campaign (carry forward from 2018 BigGame Forever banquet with local outfitters, San Juan BCH and PATC; San Juan BCH Tack Sale; and online donations) - \$9,500
- ◇ Archuleta County Conservation Trust Fund - \$3,000



The SJBCH Tack Sale in 2018 helped raise money to hire Southwest Conservation Corps crews to help clear trails. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)

- ◇ Pagosa Springs Area Tourism Board - \$8,992
- ◇ El Pomar Foundation - \$2,000
- ◇ Community Foundation 19th Hole Concerts - \$1,650

In September, the Pagosa Ranger District and PATC collaborated on a grant application for a \$106,000 Colorado Parks and Wildlife State Trails Grant. Recipients will be announced in March 2020 for the 2020 and 2021 trail seasons.

The Pagosa Ranger District plans on the following work in 2020:

- ◇ 10 weeks of Southwest Conservation Corps crews clearing trails (with maybe two or three weeks working on drainage and rock projects

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Trail Wandering

By John Nelson

SJBCH Board Member and
Trail Committee Chair

As a result of SJBCH's past involvement in trail issues, the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Region sought the chapter's input to a draft "Shared Stewardship Trails Strategy" for the region. The document is intended to guide the national forests and ranger districts in their trails management for coming years.

"We will leverage the energy, talent and resources of the trails community by sharing stewardship and making trails and trail management a collective priority," according to an email from Jason Robertson, the region's deputy director for recreation, lands minerals and volunteers.

In response to Robertson's invitation to participate, SJBCH President Larry Smith and area outfitter and SJBCH member Dick Ray submitted a letter that included the following points:

- Public use of trails was discussed but not administrative use such as Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, water administration, search and rescue, etc.
- The Forest Service needs to consider all legal tools for keeping trails opened and maintained, including chainsaws, and we want to be sure that before any trails are decommissioned (which is discussed repeatedly in the document—it seems like the Forest Service is positioning for decommissioning trails) that all legal tools are used and that public involvement is done before a decision is made to close a trail.
- If any study is undertaken in 2020 to compare chainsaws and crosscut saws for efficiencies, it needs to incorporate the use of stock to support chainsaw (both gas and electric) and crosscut saw crews (for gas and supplies) for the study to be fair and reasonable.
- The Forest Service should engage partners more for the challenges we face in trails management and

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(Trail Wandering cont.'d)

- should discuss all trails matters with partners before major decisions are made on trails.
- Forests and ranger districts need to support regional strategies for trails management rather than develop their own tactics for addressing trails issues, especially if it's something that's more philosophy-based like chainsaw use in wilderness and results in discussions about decommissioning trails. As you know, this is a bit of an issue for us.
 - The Forest Service should consider more boundary-crossing behavior in the agency, such as working with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to share stock for backcountry work. Given mission similarities between the Forest Service and CPW, this would be a good opportunity for more efficient stock use, and it would help ensure a viable Forest Service stock program for the future. Additionally, within SJBCH and outfitter circles, we have discussed the possibility of sharing stock and equipment with CPW to get their employees into the backcountry more.

- The Forest Service should engage partners more in Leave No Trace training.



Historic trails require attention and vigilance to ensure their future existence. (Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service)

Since sending the letter, we've received a message back from Deputy Director Robertson saying he appreciated the responses and will consider them in their planning.

(2020 Trail Season Gets Head Start cont.'d)

on the Continental Divide Trail). Their work will include clearing Quartz Ridge Trail, which has been clogged and closed, in large part, for years.

- ◇ 4-6 weeks of trail tread work by SCC (if the CPW grant is awarded)
- ◇ 2 Forest Service crews to do trail clearing and possibly some tread work

Your Voice Is Heard

As you know, this year San Juan BCH requested that the U.S. Forest Service regional forester in Denver allow an exemption for temporary and restricted use of chainsaws in the Weminuche and South San Juan Wilderness Areas to deal with the unprecedented downfall of trees killed by the spruce beetle epidemic.

Our position was, and remains, that while we prefer not to use chainsaws in the Wilderness, judicious use of the tool is warranted (and has been granted in other Wilderness areas) when faced with the potential of losing trails due to the inability to clear and maintain them.

Subsequently faced with a lawsuit filed by three conservation groups, the regional forester rescinded the chainsaw exemption he had approved. The action, however, should not be taken as defeat. The concerns we raised have been heard and resulted in additional funding to the Pagosa Ranger District this year for trail clearing. The regional forester's 2019 directive that trails be cleared and maintained in the next three to five years also remains, and the chapter will continue to advocate for our trails and trail access.

Upcoming Events & Other News

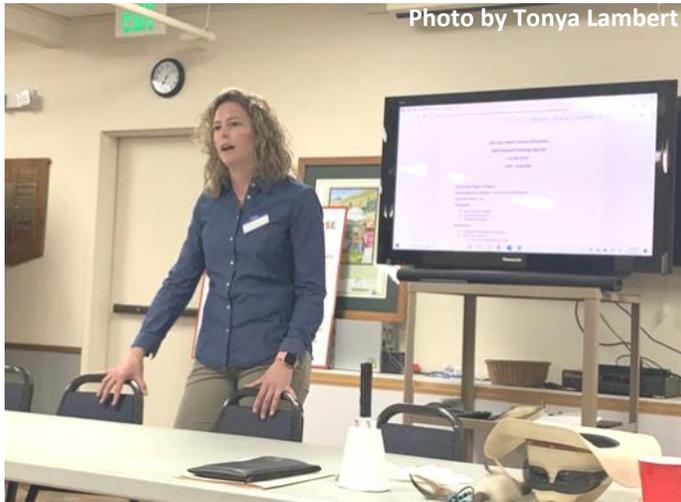
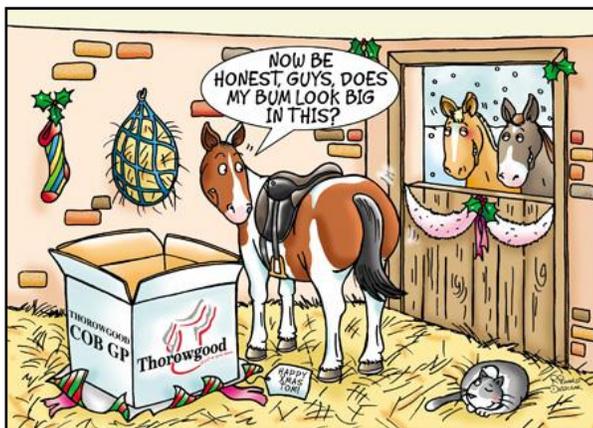


Photo by Tonya Lambert

Dr. Brittany Harris of Centennial Equine was the guest presenter at the November general meeting. She spoke about winter horse care and the importance of fresh water. She discussed winter feeding and blanketing and cautioned folks about sending horses to a “banana belt” pasture if their condition cannot be easily monitored. The game-themed potluck featured JoAnn Senzig’s elk chili and Donna Fait’s moose roast.



Special Bulletin

From the Executive Board of *Pony Tracks*

Now that we’re ending the first year of the resurrected San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter *Pony Tracks*, we here in the executive offices of this publication have been cogitating how we might increase our sales and profit margin.

One thing we’ve discussed is how—even though many of the high-paying jobs in the various newsletter departments are filled by busy, happy people—we still have a few desirable positions open and available, especially for writers and photographers.

We encourage our members to send in their cowboy and cowgirl poetry, trail and nature writings, cooking recipes (including Dutch oven!), photos of activities and good times, musings about horses and mules and dogs and other such nonpolitical, nonreligious, plain-old interesting stuff. We hear there are a few budding poets and writers out there. Why not use this newsletter to share your creativity with other similar-minded members?

If you’re interested in submitting articles and/or photos to *Pony Tracks*, either stop by the fourth floor office at Treasure Falls or email Lisa Nelson at lnwhorses@gmail.com. You will be glad you did!

Thank you Pagosa Brokers for your support!

We appreciate your generosity in providing a venue for our monthly board meetings.



Legendary Service

136 E. Pagosa St, Unit 16 (River Center) ■ 970-264-3800 ■ PagosaBrokers.com

Mark Your Calendars



January 20

**San Juan BCH
General Meeting**

Methodist Church
6 p.m. potluck;
7 p.m. program

