



Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

May 2019

Message from the President



Larry Smith

I grew up in Texas where people are fond of saying, “If you don’t like the weather, wait five minutes, it’ll change.” Well, it’s May already, and as I write, I am looking over a thin layer of wet snow spread across my pastures and am totally confused. It is May, right? Oh well, it’ll take more than five minutes for me to write this note, so maybe the sun will come out by the time I’m done.

If you’ve been following us on Facebook, you know that we have been busy this past few months getting organized, trained up, raising money and working with the Forest Service to do what we can to get our trails opened in the next three years. The forest access roads are getting

opened one-by-one as conditions permit, and there seems to be a positive buzz building to get out there and ride (more like clearing trails, actually)! Hopefully, we’ll be able to start scouting and get an accurate picture of what last winter wrought for us soon.

With riding season nearly here, we decided to change the format of this month’s general meeting from a business and presentation format to a more interactive format involving all present. To borrow a popular credit card marketing phrase, the focus will be “*What’s in Your Saddlebags?*” The idea is to use this time to share what each of us carries with us when we saddle up and head out, with emphasis on first aid for humans and horses, but also for things like navigation

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Why Are These People Smiling?... (See page 2)



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(President's Message cont.'d)

and survival. Many (including me) put together a first-aid kit and forget about it or use items in the kit and forget to replace them—only to discover that when needed, the item is not available. So, this meeting serves as an opportunity to talk with other members and share your thoughts and get ideas and a reminder to take stock and get these items squared away. Look

for the meeting notice early next week for more details.

Well true to form, the sun did come out while I was writing this, but it went away and now it's raining!

See ya out there!

Larry

...Because They Earned Crosscut Certifications!

An impressive 24 people participated in the crosscut saw certification course May 1-2 organized by the Pagosa Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest.

San Juan Back Country Horsemen was the largest group, with 10 members getting certified. They were Donna Fait, Ron Toland, Rocky and Kelli Day, Tonya and Rob Lambert, Kristie Hefling, Annie Pack, Vern Jahnke and Dan Wand. Members of the San Juan Outdoor Club, Pagosa Area Trails Council, San Juan Mountains Association and others also participated in the certification.

John Nelson, SJBCH Trail Committee chair, served as an instructor/evaluator for the course along with Pagosa Ranger District staff Tyler Albers and Ros Wu and trail crew leader Zach Staley with members of his trail crew.

The first day of the course was devoted to classroom instruction, and on the second day, the “students” gathered at Ute Campground to be evaluated on their proficiency in using a crosscut saw and understanding crosscut saw principles and techniques.

Congrats to all our members who received crosscut saw certifications!



SJBCH member Ron Toland (right) bucks a log with his saw partner Lauren Crawford. Photo by John Nelson



Trail Wandering

By John Nelson

SJBCH Board Member and Trail Committee Chair

After a strong winter, it's finally spring. The deep snow is starting to melt in the high country, and before long, we'll be out on the trails riding—well actually we may be cutting dead trees off the trail before we do much riding in the high country.

The job of clearing our trails is way bigger now than ten years ago when something like 400 to 500 trees total were removed in each year to open the entire trail system in the Pagosa area. But since the start of the beetle epidemic a decade ago, we are now seeing nearly 10,000 trees falling across our system trails each year.

This is a significant problem, and, as you know, San Juan BCH volunteers have been working hard cutting trees out with our saws, raising money to hire conservation corps crews, advocating for additional Forest Service funding for the work, and working with the Forest Service to seek a special program whereby the Forest Service and partners might use chainsaws for the duration of the beetle-kill issue to get our trail system open. *(See article on next page)*

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(Trail Wandering cont.'d.)

The downed tree issue has affected the Weminuche and South San Juan wilderness areas significantly, and the general thinking is that we'll need to concentrate on this problem for another five to ten years before it's resolved, i.e. before all the dead trees have fallen and been removed.

In the meantime, we need to keep our skills up and our saws sharp and get all hands on deck to help with this problem. Otherwise, the blocked trails situation—or possible closure of trails—may get worse, and we don't want that.

As written elsewhere in the newsletter, we've had some nice training sessions for our members and others to get certified for both crosscut and chainsaw use, and we'll put those skills to work soon this spring, likely starting in the Piedra Primitive Area in late May and June where we can use chainsaws and where the snow melts first. Then sometime in July after snowmelt we'll move up to the higher trails in the two wilderness areas. I know we're all excited about shedding this cabin fever and getting out on horseback again soon!

If you're inclined to help, please get involved. If you've wanted to get involved but have held back for some reason, there's no better time than now to get started. Training for efficiency and safety reasons is available. Sharp saws are a must to make work easier and safer. If you're going out on your own, please keep tabs on the number of trees you remove from which trail and from what mileage points on the trail. Stay tuned, too, for a new "app" for your smart phone that will let you easily list trails and trees cut by GPS coordinates and then you simply

download that info and send it to the Forest Service for inclusion in their data gathering. Training on this new app ('application', I guess is what that means) is forthcoming, so let someone on your board know if you're interested. And there's no better time than now to start planning to



Photo by Kelli Day

join us on semi-scheduled work days out on the trails where you can learn the ropes and maybe take advantage of some of our overnights, too, like on Lower Weminuche Creek above the Piedra River probably in June. Yet another opportunity to get some training will be at our SJBCH National Trails Day event at Anderson Trailhead on June 29 when we'll talk tools, do a little work on the first section of our adopt-

ed trail, and have lunch together. If you're interested in helping with the cookout, please let us know.

Last, a word about the potential use of chainsaws in wilderness. Our position on the issue is that we love wilderness for the many values we find there, including quality habitat for wildlife and opportunities for solitude in a primitive environment without the sights and sounds of people, and we don't want to hear chainsaws. But this beetle-kill situation and the potential loss of trails due to downed trees has gotten so bad that we feel we need to consider chainsaw use temporarily and under strictly controlled provisions to get the trail system open. Once the trees stop falling, we can go back to no use of chainsaws. This is a tough conversation, but the chapter feels we need to advocate strongly for the opening of our complete trail system as soon as possible.

Thanks, we hope to see you out there on the trail!

Chainsaws Approved to Clear Trails in Two Wilderness Areas

By the USDA Forest Service

DENVER—Regional Office officials announced on May 9 the approval for a time-limited exception for chainsaw use within the Weminuche and South San Juan Wilderness areas. The exception will allow Rio Grande and San Juan National Forest employees, partners and volunteers under Forest Service supervision to clear bark beetle-killed trees that are obstructing access to the wilderness. The approval does not provide free rein to use motorized equipment in wilderness areas.

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(Chainsaws Approved to Clear Trails cont.'d)

The supervised use of crosscut saws and chainsaws will be allowed for up to six weeks between June 1 and August 17. Trail work will be dependent on resource availability and weather conditions. Removing obstructions will enhance visitor safety, improve access and reduce resource damage that occurs when visitors bypass dead and downed or leaning trees, which can create social trails, trample vegetation and cause soil erosion.

The Weminuche Wilderness encompasses approximately 500,000 acres in southwest Colorado, the largest wilderness in the state, and is administered by both the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests. The South San Juan Wilderness encompasses approximately 159,000 acres of the southeastern extent of the San Juan Mountain Range, including a segment of the Continental Divide, which is also administered by the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests.



**Cimarrona Trail 2015
USDA Forest Service Photo**

(Editor's Note: SJ BCH representatives will meet with the Pagosa Ranger District later this month, along with other trail-user groups to discuss the chainsaw decision in greater detail.)

Upcoming Events & Other News

Saddle Up for First Social Ride of 2019

By Tonya Lambert

The first social ride of the season is scheduled for May 18 at 10 am. We will again have this ride at Kenny Flats.

Kenny Flats seems to be good place for early season rides because of the large parking area for our rigs and its relative flat terrain. Although the gates to Kenny Flats are currently closed, I have been assured by the Forest Service the gates should be opened by the 18th.

The ride is a loop that is approximately eight miles long. It is a relatively flat, dirt road. We will have an informal potluck after the ride. Please bring a snack, drinks and lawn chairs, and stay for a couple of hours to eat and socialize!

Directions: Head south on Hwy 84 past the 14-mile marker. The turnoff will be on the left before mile marker 13. Look for signs on left pointing the way. Turn left and go up the hill to parking lot on the right.

The ride is okay for barefoot horses, but there are a few rocky places.

Please remember that due to insurance requirements, you must be a current member of SJ BCH to ride with our group. Membership applications will be available on site.

Join us for this fun first social ride. It'll be a great place to ride, socialize and get our horses "legged up" a bit!
Let's Ride!



**Photo by Kristie Hefling
Social ride in May 2016**

New SJMA Conservation Director Reaches Out to Chapter



David Taft

David Taft, the newly named conservation director at [San Juan Mountains Association](#), has reached out to San Juan Backcountry Horsemen to explore collaborative opportunities with our chapter. David met some of our folks at the crosscut certification earlier this month.

SJMA assists the Forest Service in providing education and interpretation of public lands in Southwest Colorado. The organization also sponsors the Ghost Riders pro-

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Upcoming Events & Other News (cont.'d)

(SJMA Conservation Director cont.'d)

gram in which many of our members have participated—making public contact on the trails.

David has many years of experience leading stewardship, volunteer and outdoor education programs in the Four Corners region. In addition to several years leading youth corps crews throughout Colorado, David worked for Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado managing projects

across the state. He was most recently the adventure director at the Canyon Country Discovery Center in Monticello, Utah, where he coordinated outdoor education and stewardship programs. David will oversee SJMA's efforts to engage volunteers on public lands stewardship projects.

We look forward to meeting David and working on some projects together.

Auction/Consignment Sale to Benefit Hughes Pavilion

Whether you're looking to buy or sell, you need to check out the Public Auction, Consignment Sale and Silent Auction on May 18 at the Western Heritage Event Center at the Archuleta County Fairgrounds.

The event begins at 10:05 a.m., and proceeds will benefit the Hughes Pavilion covered arena.

Items for auction include:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| tractors | dump truck |
| trailers | rifles and pistols |
| farm equipment | broke horses and mules* |
| small boats with motors | horse hay |
| ATVs | horse trailers |
| snowblowers | saddles |
| auto parts | roping steer |
| vehicles | tack |

**Brand inspection fees will be deducted from livestock seller's proceeds.*

Donations are being accepted and are 100 percent tax deductible. Consignment items also are being accepted.

Consignment commission is 10 percent on items over \$100 and 20 percent on items under \$100. A "no sale" fee of half the normal commission on the last bid taken and \$50 on vehicles, tractors, trailer and heavy equipment will be assessed. Sale items will be accepted until the day be-



Photo by Lisa Nelson

fore the event. Significant items may be picked up and hauled on a case-by-case basis. The event flier requests "no junk," such as clothes, refrigerators, washers, dryers, mattresses, dishes and VCRs.

Transactions will be cash or check due the day of the auction. A valid driver's license or state photo ID is required for purchases.

Mike Ray, one of the event organizers, said the funds raised from the auction and sale will be used to install surface material for the Hughes Pavilion and to establish a paneled riding arena. The pavilion will host various events and be available during the county fair. Horse riders also will be able to use the facility for a fee.

For information, contact Ray at 970-759-8424.

Mark Your Calendars



June 17
SJBCH BBQ
 Fireside Inn
 5 p.m.
(No June SJBCH general meeting)

June 29
National Trails Day
 Anderson Trail Trailhead
 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 Learn about trail tools and trail clearing & enjoy cookout lunch

July 15
SJBCH General Meeting
 Methodist Church
 6 p.m. potluck;
 7 p.m. program

A Look Back

Sharing memories from years past



1912 Bridge Ranger Station, Piedra Ranger District, on the bench above the current Piedra River Trailhead.



(Above) Bob and Laura Volger spread gravel for a water crossing at 30-Mile Campground. Helping with their skid steer were Bill Getz and Sandra Wagner of Creede.



(Above) George Mee of Vallecito packs bridge materials for the U.S. Forest Service in about 1910.



(At right) Members of San Juan BCH and Four Corners BCH earn their crosscut saw certifications in 2015. From left are Cathy Roberts, Donna Fait, Lisa Nelson and Kristie Hefling.