

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF AMERICA

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Superintendent Reed Detring
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
P.O. Box 490
Van Buren, Missouri 63965

Dear Superintendent Detring,

I had an opportunity to visit Missouri last week to facilitate a discussion with the Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen regarding the Missouri Wilderness Coalition Proposal for seven new wildernesses in Missouri. For a horseman from the western states, the differences were striking, especially the relatively few truly 'wild places' that remain. There were also some similarities in the number of small acreages that I observed with familiar barnyard pets. Of course, that isn't a surprise, I have heard about Missouri's quality mules and Missouri Foxtrotter horses for years. It is as much a part of Missouri's identity as the Appaloosa horse is to the Palouse region of Idaho and Washington. But, to the purpose of my letter, Missouri horsemen are concerned that wilderness classification will result in prohibition of horseback riding and pack and saddle stock use in the few remaining parcels of wild land available to them. They are also concerned that land managers will take these same opportunities away through their planning processes.

This came as quite a surprise to the representative from the Wilderness Coalition participating in our meeting who felt that horses were entirely appropriate in wilderness, and was surprised to hear that they were not specifically mentioned in the Act. The emerging belief that horses are not appropriate in wilderness is something that Back Country Horsemen are addressing at a national level, and what we're finding, is that it is also a concern with mainstream wilderness advocacy groups as well. I would like to share with you a comment from a high level Wilderness Society representative at our BCHA national board meeting last April: *"It is my hope that we here today can saddle up and work together to protect more wild places as wilderness. And together we can help the American people*

understand and truly recognize that horseback riding in the wilderness is a time-honored all-American tradition.”

I was alarmed to hear that none of the alternatives in your proposed GMP (except the no-action, which rarely emerges as a truly viable alternative) will allow equestrian use in the primitive/wilderness zone. This would appear to be a decision predetermined without benefit of analysis, and a decision intended to accommodate a small minority who simply prefer not to share our wild places – “The keep everybody out but me” sect, as described by ex-Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus.

Those of us who enjoy our recreation from the back of a horse are not too different than those who choose to hike or backpack. We want the same variety of experiences – sharing a pleasant environment with a group of like minded horsemen on a well developed trail, or, on another occasion, enjoying solitude in a primitive natural setting only available in a primitive or wilderness setting. The only place that we have to enjoy a pack and saddle stock experience is the large tracts of public land available in our parks and forests.

As observed by our Missouri Wilderness Coalition friend, it is difficult for many of us to comprehend wilderness without the pack train. Nearly 100 years ago, Aldo Leopold, a patriarch of the wilderness movement, shared the belief that the Nation should set aside large tracts of land that would serve as *“anchor points so society would always have a touchstone to the past.”* Leopold believed that *“Public wilderness areas are, first of all, a means of perpetuating, in sport form, the more virile and primitive skills in pioneering travel and subsistence.”* Two examples *“are as American as a hickory tree; they have been copied elsewhere, but they were developed to their full perfection only on this continent. One of these is canoe travel, and the other is travel by pack-train.”*

In a speech commemorating Leopold's contribution to the concept and establishment of wilderness areas in the United States, Harvey Broome, President of the Wilderness Society, observed that *“In 1921, Leopold wrote an article on the subject of wilderness in the Journal of Forestry. The plea in the article was for physical space -- a space so large that one had room to maneuver -- space which would absorb a two weeks' pack trip and be devoid of roads and artificial trails and other works of man. The man who wants wilderness, he said, wants not only scenery and hunting and fishing and isolation, but riding, daily movement, and the variety found only in a trip through a big stretch of back country.”* (Living Wilderness Winter 1954-55)

It is difficult for us to imagine that those responsible for introducing wilderness legislation did not intend that wilderness would perpetuate primitive travel with horses and mules. If the “pack train” is regulated out, it will not be the same ‘wilderness’ that Leopold envisioned -- it will not be a “touchstone” to our past and an expression of our cultural heritage. Wilderness will be little more than a ‘playground’ for the young and physically able. We hope that you will reconsider the structure of your alternatives and include traditional and historic equestrian use as appropriate in the primitive zone, and in any area recommended as wilderness.

The other concern that I heard from Missouri horsemen was the premise that equestrians were responsible for the water quality degradation problem. From the pictures that I have seen of the hundreds of canoeists and other users who flock to the Riverways, I am not surprised that there is

a problem. This would appear to me to be a 'total use' problem more so than a 'horse' problem. I would hope that your analysis would focus on the practices of all users that contribute to the problem and address those specific practices and users responsible rather than impose a 'carte blanc' restriction on equestrians.

The water quality argument sounds to me like just one more tool of the exclusionist extreme to advance their anti-stock agenda. Over the years BCHA has addressed the concern that equine manure introduces intestinal parasites such as giardia. Research from the University of California proves that this likelihood is minimal. Then there were claims that equines introduce weeds; current research from Dominican University of California, suggests that this claim is grossly exaggerated. And recently we are hearing reports that equines are *the singular cause* of impacts on the trail. A number of researchers, including Dr. David Cole from the Leopold Institute, have determined that hikers and horses cause the same type of impacts it just takes more hikers to have the same effect (there *are* many more hikers on our trails than horses). All of these are rationalizations that opponents of stock use employ to manipulate managers to favor their specific biases. Conflict between hikers and horse users is a conflict of values. Addressing a values or emotional issue with resource restrictions is not going to solve the problem! The problem needs to be addressed as a social issue and not a resource management issue, and alternatives to restrictions need to address it as such. Once a decision is made to accommodate 'all' legitimate users, and hikers are required to assume part of the 'cost' or responsibility of resolving the issue, both groups will begin to work together with your managers to find equitable and acceptable solutions.

I recognize that the comment period has closed for your planning effort, but hope that you'll take these concerns under consideration during your process.

Sincerely,

Dennis Dailey
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