



# Pony Tracks

The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter

Dedicated to Keeping Trails Open for All

October 2024

## President's Message



John Nelson

Fall is here. Temperatures are cooling, leaves are changing, and there's still some good riding yet this year.

This will be my last president's message to you as we are electing new officers, and they will take over in November. I want to take this opportunity to tell you how much I've appreciated serving for the last three years, and I feel so lucky to have worked with a great board of directors.

As I reflect, I think about the people who have made the chapter successful and why they're important. One of those people is Nancy Seay. Nancy is a nearby neighbor of ours; we've known her since we moved to Pagosa. She has been a

valuable member of SJ BCH since the chapter started—always there to welcome people at meetings, helping with rides and handling membership. Nancy's a "Lifetime" member now, recognizing her contributions to SJ BCH. Her house is on the market now, and she will be spending a second winter in Texas this year with her daughter and grandkids. She hopes to buy a smaller place in Pagosa to spend the summers here.

As Nancy has been getting ready to move, she has passed along some old SJ BCH items to Lisa and me. Old minutes, newsletters and emails have been interesting to read and show how much our membership and officers has turned over since about 2007 when we started.

Our chapter has always had good intentions when it comes to partnering with

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## SJ BCH Pledges Funds for Trails Grant

The Pagosa Area Trails Council recently announced a plan to bring its member groups together to apply for a \$200,000 three-year, non-motorized trail grant request to Colorado Parks and Wildlife aimed at fixing some trails we all care about that are in bad shape.

SJ BCH has pledged its support with \$18,000 in matching funds for the CPW grant that would focus on trail clearing and tread work on a number of trails in the Pagosa Ranger District.

The PATC/PRD grant application would provide funding for 2025, 2026 and 2027 if approved.

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Our next general meeting will be Nov. 18 at 6 p.m. at the United Methodist Church. Our guest speaker will be James White, author of the book, *Stories of the Blanco Basin Road*.

(See details on page 4)

**(President's Message cont.'d)**

the Forest Service on our public lands and for fun get-togethers. We've focused on the mission of Back Country Horsemen of America to advocate for the commonsense use of stock in the backcountry. And importantly, we've served as a support group for each other through the years.

A small but dedicated group has made a big difference with our fundraising and trail work, opening trails that have been closed for decades and making it possible for us to provide matching funds for large trail

grants.

To all our members, I want to say "thank you." Thank you for joining SJBCH. Your membership is critical to supporting our efforts to keep trails open for all—and to having a little fun along the way.

This is all so rewarding for me and is why I have appreciated serving as president for three years. The sky is the limit for this chapter. Focus on the BCHA mission and taking care of each other and the land, and—well—this chapter will do great for a long time.

**(Trails Grant cont.'d)**

"The devastating, large-scale beetle-kill effects we've experienced in this area over the last decade have effectively blocked our backcountry and front country trails," noted SJBCH President John Nelson. "With our efforts focused so strongly on simply getting trails cleared and opened over the last 10 years, very little important tread maintenance or reconstruction work has been done—to the point that some trails are in danger of being lost due to lack of maintenance" he added.

In a message to its member groups, PATC President Bob Milford noted that some of the trails and sections in the Pagosa Ranger District that are a priority for tread work and repair are: Indian Creek, Fish Lake, Palisades Meadows (Section), Knife Edge - Continental Divide Trail, West Fork (Sections), Pine-Piedra towards Graham Peak, Turkey Creek (Section), Anderson (Section), Williams Creek (Section), Lower Weminuche (Section) and Fish Creek (Section).

"Our goal is to hire an American Conservation Experience (ACE) eight-person crew for eight weeks in each year 2025, 2026 and 2027," Milford explained in his message. "The crew costs \$10,500 per hitch (40 hours).



**Bill McElhinney (left) and Randy Senzig cut out one of thousands of trees that fall and block trails each year. Compounding the problem is deteriorating trail tread.**

Plus, we'd like to hire a four-person crew to supplement and work with the Pagosa Ranger District trail crew for four to eight weeks per year. (eight weeks preferred). We are planning this as we are expecting the PRD seasonal trail crew to be smaller in numbers than in the past due to projected Forest Service budget cuts. We estimate \$5,000 a week for a four-person crew. The ACE crew is a little more expensive than some other crews, but the Forest Service has been very

happy with their work over the last two years, and they have been very reliable," Milford wrote.

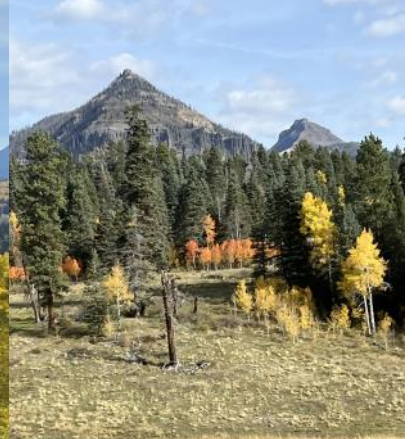
"While other trails need work, this is a great start," Nelson said. "We are sure glad about this and will work to help as much as we can. Thank you PATC and thank you to our donors whose contributions help us make a big difference in maintaining our valued trails."

**Factoid**

**In 2024, the Pagosa Ranger District and volunteers cleared 5,501 trees on 452 miles of trails in the district with 3,865 hours worked.**



# The SJBCH Fall Colors Ride



Special thanks to Annie Pack for organizing the Fall Colors Ride earlier this month at Burro Park and to Annie and Tara McElhinney for the photos.



### Preserving History

This old, routed, wooden forest entry sign is thought to be from the late 1940s or early 1950s and is likely the oldest sign still on the job on the Pagosa Ranger District—perhaps on the San Juan National Forest. It has weathered many tough winters, harsh summers and bullets, so the Pagosa Area Trails Council sign crew decided to take on the task of refurbishing the old warrior, and the results are remarkable.

The crew produced a new inlaid Forest Service shield, and they cleaned rust off the hand- forged iron hinges and had them powder coated. Some serious sanding of the sign and the four joined juniper posts that are holding it up, a few coats of “Forest Service brown” paint, and it’s back in service. Longtime Pagosa Ranger District employee and retiree Ron Decker was there for the re-hanging of the sign and recalled he and his crew painting it some 30 or 40 years ago. History lives on.



The sign crew (from left) Adrian Brooks, San Juan Back Country Horsemen; Bill Milner, San Juan Outdoor Club; Ron Decker, U.S. Forest Service, retired; Mike Cianciolo, SJOC; and John Nelson, SJCH. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)

### Pic(k)s Of the Month



Dan Wand captured these three wildlife photos of (from left) bear, elk and moose while riding Williams Creek Trail.



This horse seems to be reading the “No E-Bikes” sign. (Photo by Tara McElhinney)

## Happy Halloween

From Ivan, the Trinity Alps Pack String mule  
(By Gay Berrien)



THE HALLOWEEN THE WITCHES DIDN'T FLY

# Thank You to Our Generous 2024 Donors



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