



# Pony Tracks

*The San Juan Back Country Horsemen newsletter*

Dedicated to Keeping Trails Open for All

January 2025

## President's Message



Ron Toland

Our sister organization in Del Norte, Trail Wise Back Country Horsemen, has disbanded. It's unfortunate because we need more BCH chapters, not less. Although TWBCH is no longer an official chapter, our hope is for former members to work with the local community and government agencies as members of SJBCH. Our chapter already operates in several parts of the San Luis Valley, and we have good relations with land management agencies there. We're also discussing work in the La Garita Mountains in the Saguache Ranger District north of Del Norte. There's strength in numbers, and former TWBCH members can help represent our interests in their district. We invited them to join us, and I hope to see them on our roster, on the trail and at our events this year.

Like many BCH chapters around the country, TWBCH issues were primarily about membership and participation; both are important, but let's think about the difference. Joining a Back Country Horsemen chapter helps to support the organization in several ways. First, simply paying your dues supports the national organization where BCH officers advocate at the federal level for things like trail maintenance budgets and to protect/promote recreational stock use on public lands. Second, BCH membership is a way to integrate with the community and meet other stock users at

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## Deadline is Jan. 31 for Membership Renewals

TIME IS  
**RUNNING OUT!**

This is a friendly (but not so subtle) reminder to pay your dues by the Jan. 31 deadline. Annual memberships are Feb. 1 through Jan. 1. Dues are \$45 for individuals and \$50 for families.



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The next general meeting of SJBCH will be March 17.

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

meetings and events. Third, members can help maintain and improve trails by physically clearing trails, working on tread or volunteering to help with administrative duties like serving on the board of directors, fundraising, social media, website management, newsletters, etc. Doing something beyond paying dues is the difference between membership and participation; membership is important, and participation gets the job done. **Please renew your membership** for 2025, help support Back Country Horsemen and have some fun along the way!

Speaking of fun, last month, I reached out to several SJBCH members to ask what they want from our chapter. I got some good feedback, and the board of directors is discussing those ideas. It's interesting to note that only a few of us said we want to cut more trees—*go figure!* A lot

of folks want more organized rides. I understand...I love to ride! I also like to help folks with their horses and horsemanship; it's not only part of the BCH mission, it's just neighborly. But here's the rub: We're not a saddle club. So how can we accommodate a popular request and not lose sight of our mission? SJBCH can and should facilitate getting more people on the trail. It's a dilemma I think we can solve, and I invite members to share their ideas and take a leadership role to implement them.

*Update: Since I've written this column, we've had four members step up and volunteer to organize trail rides (see "Let's Ride" below). Now that's the spirit! I look forward to working and riding with you in the new year.*

Happy Trails!

## Let's Ride!

Various SJBCH members have requested more group riding opportunities, so Donna Fait, Annie Pack, Tonya Lambert and Janie Gray are stepping up and into the saddle to lead the outings for chapter members. They plan

to schedule weekly rides and alternate leading the trips among the four of them. Stay tuned for more details as riding weather approaches.



Photo by Tara McElhinney



Photo by Annie Pack

**Membership Renewal (cont.'d)**

Please note that current members also need to submit a 2025 membership application, because we need to have an updated disclaimer each year for *all* members. Just click [here](#) and you can either join online by filling out the

information and paying via PayPal or credit card, or you can download a membership form, fill it out and mail it in with a check to San Juan Back Country Horsemen, PO Box 682, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147.



## Outfitter Ash Tully Shares Thoughts on Trail Work and Other Topics of Interest to SJBCH

By Lisa Nelson

Longtime outfitter Ash Tully shared his perspective on potential collaboration with San Juan Back Country Horsemen to help clear and maintain trails when he spoke at the Jan. 20 SJBCH general meeting. His talk also sparked a good discussion on the future of wilderness and horse riders in the backcountry.

An outfitter since 1995, Tully bought Sundown Outfitters in 2003 and operates on the Pagosa Ranger District and on the Divide Ranger District in Creede. He's also the director of the Southwest Region of the Colorado Outfitters Association.

"The history of outfitting is something we cherish," Tully said. He told the group that SJBCH and outfitters have shared interests in recreation and horses in the backcountry. At the same time, he noted, "I don't think our paths are

directly aligned, but they're headed in the same direction."

He provided a brief history about the Pilot Program, a Forest Service initiative, whereby outfitters worked on trail clearing and maintenance through a bid process with the Forest Service from 2000-2010. However, he

among outfitters also proved challenging.

In addressing the idea of SJBCH possibly funding trail-clearing efforts by outfitters, Tully said, "Outfitters in 'good standing' (with the Forest Service) working with BCH is maybe the way to go."

In the end, Tully said he'd like to "keep wilderness wild," explaining that he doesn't want to see trails on top of trails. The group also shared thoughts about the increasing pressure on wilderness with the influx of people to the area, the potential impact of artificial intelligence in the backcountry and the apparent decline of horse people.

"People love horses," Tully said, so he's confident there will always be horses in the backcountry. As an outfitter, Tully said, positive interactions with the public are important. "Every person you come across, you want them to think, 'That's a good human being.'"

That's a worthy aspiration for all of us as we ride the trails.



Ash Tully (left) of Sundown Outfitters discusses the idea of outfitters possibly collaborating with SJBCH on trail clearing. To his left are Ron Toland, Mike Garding and Evley Candelaria. (Photo by Lisa Nelson)

said federal laws, regulations, work specifications and the paperwork required for reimbursement kept driving up the cost of doing business with the Forest Service. Additionally, turnover at the Forest Service and

## Volunteer Hours Really Add Up

By Donna Fait

A huge "Thank-You" goes out to SJBCH members who volunteered 1,189 hours of their time in 2024.

Back Country Horsemen of America values this time at \$33.49 per hour for unskilled labor and \$50.24 per hour for skilled labor for a total contribution value of \$69,979.61 from San Juan Back Country Horsemen.

Volunteering is one of the most important activities SJBCH can use in our effort to keep backcountry trails



Treasure Falls cleanup 2024, celebrating National Trails Day. What a team! (Photo by Lisa Nelson)

**Volunteer Hours (cont.'d)**

open to pack and saddle stock users. Our mission statement is to assist government agencies in maintenance and management of public lands. Reporting our volunteer hours each year gives us the ability to speak with public land managers locally and nationally.

Our projects are satisfying and fun, and we are proud of the cleared trails, re-cut tread and repaired drainage on our adopted trails. Keeping track of volunteer hours is critical. Please submit volunteer hours and mileage as soon as every project is finished by filling out the [online form](#) or emailing to [djf8djf8@gmail.com](mailto:djf8djf8@gmail.com).

## A Bit of SJBCH History

*and some of the people who brought us here*

**By John Nelson**

The mountains draw us here, time passes and people come and go. And that's how it's been for San Juan Back Country Horsemen since its beginnings in the 1990s.

We started as a small group of people who saw stock use being impacted on our national forests—use and access being deprived and cut off—so our founders started building a

membership, formed the chapter, met with the Forest Service and began clearing trails.

One of those early founders and board directors is Nancy Seay. Nancy left Pagosa for the winter a month ago with her daughter Laura, who took her back to Texas. Nancy's house is on the market; she hopes to sell it this winter and maybe buy a condo here in Pagosa for summer stays. Her last two horses are gone now—sad indeed—but she hopes to stay involved with SJBCH next year. Her commitment to SJBCH over the last 25 years has been nonstop and includes assisting with meetings and events, helping with trail work, conducting ticket sales at the summer rodeo to benefit the chapter and participating in the social rides. And during her many years in Pagosa, she trained young riders in her front-yard round pen—another important aspect of our BCHA mission. When she left town last month, she passed on to



**Nancy Seay and her horses**

Lisa and me one of the first SJBCH newsletters, which triggered a desire to share some SJBCH history as I know it.

Nancy exemplifies the many people who have come and gone in this organization. Some are still here, and now there are new leaders taking us forward. Gil Johnson, John Webb, Bev Warburton, Donna Fait, Bev Compton, Gary Staplekamp, Tara McElhinney, Hank Roberge, Bob

Volger, Vern Jahnke, Mike Pluth, Nancy Seay, Larry Smith and others got us here.

My family has always had strong ties to Colorado, having come from Missouri to Pueblo and southwestern Colorado in the late 1800s, so Lisa and I have always spent time here in the mountains and visiting with relatives.

Before we moved here permanently from Flagstaff in 2011, we

came to Pagosa every summer with our horses, spending time in the San Juans, especially in September for Lisa's annual birthday trips. We'd stay at the Fireside Inn because we could keep the horses there, and the cabins are so neat. We'd ride the mountains with a pack horse and saws, clearing trails, fishing and having a good time.

Guy and Diane Ludwig owned Fireside Inn at the time, and over the years Guy rode his horse Gus with us on many day rides in the hills. One early fall morning in



## SJBCH History (cont.'d)

about 1996 as we were feeding the horses and getting ready to head out, Guy came down to the corrals in his “Gus” cowboy hat (Guy looks and acts like Robert Duval, aka Gus, in the movie *Lonesome Dove*—even named his horse after him). He talked about his friends Gil Johnson and John Webb, who he rode with a lot. He said they were concerned about local national forest management, because stock users in the backcountry were beginning to get a raw deal with a loss of trails and seeming disregard for stock use.

“You’re with the Forest Service,” Guy said to me, “What should they do to turn this deal around—to get the Forest Service to listen to us?”

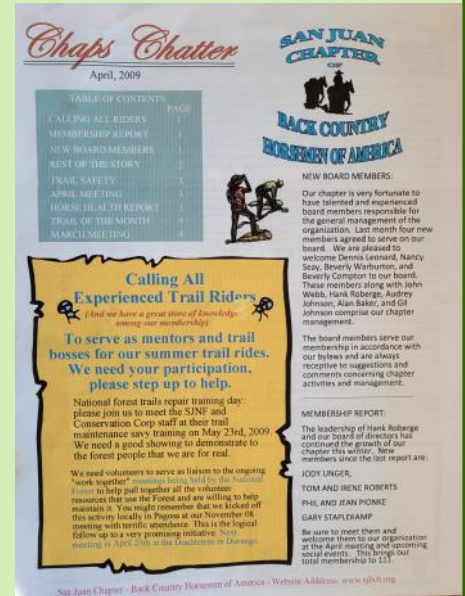
I told Guy that one very effective tool I’d seen in Arizona and around the country are chapters of Back Country Horsemen of America, and that there is a chapter in Durango—Four Corners Back Country Horsemen—that had formed a few years earlier. He said he didn’t know what BCH was, so when Lisa and I got back to Flagstaff, I sent him an email with BCHA information, which he passed on to Gil and John. Within a few months, those guys had put up fliers at Boot Hill Feed Store and Ace Hardware, and they pulled together the early SJBCH board and membership around 1997. As it turned out, several of the first members in our chapter already were members of 4CBCH. Bev Warburton, Nancy Seay and would go to monthly Wednesday night meetings in Durango—dodging deer and elk and telling stories about it.

Gil Johnson built radio and TV towers in Texas, was our first chapter president, and contributed all kinds of pack equipment and trail tools to the chapter to get us

started. What a neat deal. I’m not sure what John Webb did in Texas before coming to Pagosa, but he is a very nice man who served as our first vice president, and I remember us riding to Opal Lake with John and Guy and how well John sat his horse. Bev Warburton was five feet of walking dynamite and our second chapter president. I remember local FS people telling me how she would come to their office several days a week to push BCH interests. I also remember her standing in front of me at an SJBCH meeting and saying, “You’re

with the Forest Service; why is this happening like this around here,”—like I had something to do with it. Then Tara was president, and Vern, Bob, Mike and others. And after multiple SJBCH leaders over the years, we’re strong, growing, learning and active.

And Nancy Seay was involved from the beginning. Thank you, Nancy. And thanks to everyone else for what you’ve done and what you will do in the future for San Juan Back Country Horsemen. It matters and makes a difference.



An early SJBCH newsletter titled *Chaps Chatter*

## Mark Your Calendars

### March 17

SJBCH general meeting to discuss plans for 2025. Stay tuned for details.

### May 31-June 1

Crosscut saw recertifications for B- and C-level sawyers. More information will be forthcoming as arrangements are confirmed. *Remember: You need current First Aid and CPR certifications to participate in the crosscut saw recertifications.*

### June 16

In lieu of a regular general meeting on June 16, SJBCH will meet at the ranch of Gabe Candelaria and family for a barbecue. Stay tuned for details.

# Thank You to Our Generous 2024 Donors



**San Juan  
Veterinary Hospital**

**Justin Frie  
Backcountry Outfitters**

## Your Board of Directors

- Ron Toland, President
- Larry Smith, Vice President
- Katie Betts, Secretary
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- Autum Anderson, U.S. Forest Service Liaison, Pagosa Ranger District
- Lisa McClure, U.S. Forest Service, retired, Divide Ranger District

