

Press Release

Florida's first chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of America has been organized. We call ourselves Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen, FF BCH for short, and our birth day is March 13, 2007. Back Country Horsemen of America officially recognized FF BCH on 29 April 2007. Florida is the 22nd state to join BCH and the 11th state in the eastern part of the United States. For more Back Country Horsemen of America information see <http://www.backcountryhorse.com>. Our FF BCH information can be found on our web site (currently under construction) at <http://www.ffbch.org>.

The Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen is incorporated as a 501 (C4) corporation and is headquartered in Hernando County, Florida. Our mission is:

- To assist the various government and private agencies in the establishment, maintenance and management of trails and other back country resources.
- To work to insure that public lands remain open to recreational equestrian use.
- To educate and encourage the wise use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public.
- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of equines in Americas' forests and wilderness areas.
- To foster and encourage the formation of new state organizations and BCHA.
- To actively involve the community in activities related to Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen's purpose.
- To maintain a family oriented organization.

For additional information contact us at ffbch@earthlink.net.

Please join us for Workday

Saturday, June 2, 2007
8:00am to 12:00 PM

Cleanup Day in Croom forest

FFBCH members are supporting the Croom Trail Club in their annual litter cleanup day in the Croom forest. Please come, bring your friends and neighbors, all the empty feed bags that you have sitting around, and any 4wd vehicle that you have available. Please wear your Croom T-shirt or some other apparel with horses on it so that we can be identified as equine enthusiasts!

Hats: FF BCH has a limited number of FF BCH hats available for the first FF BCH members to arrive.

Directions: We will meet in the parking lot at the Tucker Hill trail head on Croom Road. This is the trail head on the west side of the Croom forest. If you need more specific directions please contact Kathy at kathomps@gate.net.

Note: Due to severe fire danger, DOF may postpone this event. Please check our website for updated status.
<http://www.ffbch.org>

FFBCH News and Events

Welcome to all members of the FFBCH. We greatly appreciate your support and hope that together we can make a difference in protecting and preserving our public lands for recreational equine use. Life has been a whirlwind of activity since we first organized. With so many things happening all at one time it is difficult to keep up with everything. This is the first edition of the FFBCH newsletter. We are putting it together by committee and hoping that someone among you might volunteer to take on the task of putting the newsletter together in the future.

The FFBCH formed as a result of encouragement from the Withlacoochee DOF to get local recreational equine users organized. We are initially focused on equine trail use in the Croom tract of Withlacoochee State Forest. However, it is apparent from your state-wide response to our membership drive that it is important to get recreational equine users throughout the state of Florida organized. One of the FFBCH missions is to foster and encourage other equine groups to become pro-active in working with public land managers to preserve our right-to-ride our equines on public land. We will work with you to help you form other chapters of the BCH.

FFBCH applied and has been approved as a Volunteer Organization by the Withlacoochee State Forest. Volunteer hours count not only with our local DOF and the state level, but they are also very important at the national BCH level. Nationally the Backcountry Horsemen of America has supplied public land managers over 131,000 volunteer hours equating to over 3.2 million dollars in 2006. If you perform volunteer hours for the public land managers in any part of the state, please send Becky Fulcher Rafulche@aol.com these volunteers hours each month and they will be forwarded to BCH of America. We will have more information on how volunteer hours count in upcoming newsletters.

A **Trails Council** with representatives of the various recreational user groups within the Croom tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest has been set up by Department of Forestry management. The goal of the trail council is to address existing trails issues and resolve conflicts among the users. The equine Trail council representatives are Thurman Tolbert (796-4194), Kathy Thompson kathomps@gate.net and Debbie Shaughnessy whfsouth@yahoo.com. If you have specific concerns or requests about the trails in Croom, please contact one of these people and let them know.

Volunteers needed: The Withlacoochee State Forest is starting a trail ranger program called **WSF Trail Rangers**. The goal is to make the user experience in the forest more pleasurable while minimizing user conflict. It calls for volunteer "rangers" to work to help the various users. The program will primarily be implemented on the weekends and holidays where there is the biggest potential of user conflict. The details are still being worked out, but we highly recommend that equestrians become involved in this program. See future newsletters for more details.

SEVERE DROUGHT CONDITIONS/FIRE DANGER LIKELY TO PERSIST THROUGHOUT CENTRAL FLORIDA

Florida is suffering through one of the worst droughts in the state's history and the seasonal outlook, provided by the [National Weather Service](#), an agency of the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), holds little hope of immediate relief. Severe drought conditions are likely to persist well into the south central portion of the state – increasing the danger of wildfires across most of central [Florida](#).

Please use extreme caution when riding in and near our forests!

Remember When?

Do you remember the time you lived in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by fields and forest? You could ride your horse anywhere you wanted to go. You could get on your horse in your backyard, ride dirt roads, follow a narrow path, meet your friends, and ride your horses for many, many miles in any direction. No one cared if your horse left a few droppings along the way. No one cared if there were hoof prints in the dirt. Doesn't that seem like just yesterday?

One day, in a place which you have always ridden you see heavy equipment clearing land. A housing development with streets named Country Lane, Paddock Drive, and Bridle Path Circle is being built. Funny, there are no country lanes, no paddocks, no bridle paths in that development. Horses and ponies are not welcome. Oh well, the first development isn't too much of an impact. There are still lots of other places to ride. A year later...you notice they are clearing land for a second development. This development is called The Meadows with streets named Evergreen Trail, Oak Lane, and Pony Path. Still no bridle paths and just a few oaks remain. Horses and

ponies are not welcome. Oh no...a third development. Does time really slip by that quickly?

You wake up one morning and realize you can no longer safely ride your horse out of your backyard to meet your friends. You can no longer ride many or any miles in even one direction let alone any direction. In fact, you can no longer keep your horses on your property because the neighbors complain about the smell of the manure and the flies. Is it time to take action?

You move. Further into the country. You do your research. You find a place where nearby there is public land on which to ride your horses. Once again you can ride your horse from your backyard, ride dirt roads, and ride many, many miles on the public land. Life is good. Does time really slip by that quickly?

One day, as you are riding your horse on your favorite trail on the public land you see a new sign. Trail Closed to Horses. Is it time to take action?

By Kathy Thompson

President's Message

Development is encroaching and squeezing our horses and horse events out everywhere. Land is more valuable for a housing development than for an eventing venue, a fox hunting venue, a show arena or a boarding stable. As private lands go the way of bull dozers and houses – our ability to enjoy our horses the way we choose is being impacted.

Studies show that recreational equine activity has exploded since the mid 1990's.

Because of the loss of available private land, more and more we rely on access to public land to enjoy our recreational equine activities.

Studies show that other recreational user activities on public lands have also exploded since the 1990's. As pressure from the various other recreational users increase on public lands equestrians are getting squeezed out.

The reason for our plight is simple

Other User Groups are Organized--We are Not.

What is a horseman?

The horseman rode with Teddy Roosevelt up San Juan Hill; Rode with Col Longstreet's Cavalry as they stormed off Pigeon Mountain and broke the back of the Union army at Chickamauga; Rode with the Major Mosby as "The Gray Ghost" terrorized the Union army; Galloped with the "hunt" chasing the fox cross country through the centuries across the English and later the American countryside; Tamed the West; Tamed and opened up Florida.

Teddy Roosevelt once said that

"the only way to see this great land is from the back of a horse."

The late President Ronald Reagan, who rode his horse across the rough Southern California country side to relax from the stress of his job was fond of quoting Winston Churchill,

"there is something good the outside of a horse does for the inside of a man."

The horseman is an independent sort be he or she a dressage rider, eventer, fox hunter, endurance rider or trail rider. He or she prefers the company of their horse. The horseman doesn't have much time for politics and has less time for bureaucracy. The horseman views his or her ability to ride a horse on the last vestige of open land in this country, our public lands, as his or her right to exercise our cultural heritage. It is this heritage that connects all of us to our past and in doing so connects us to our future. It is a heritage the Federal Government is in the process of formally recognizing in law as the Right-to-Ride legislation works it way through Congress.

Given that a horseman is an independent sort, one would think that the last thing he or she would do is organize. However, when the Government makes decisions that impact our ability, as horsemen, to exercise our cultural heritage, things have a way of changing.

The Backcountry Horsemen was established by a group of visionary horsemen in Montana in the 1970's when it was clear if they didn't step forward and work to stop the loss of access, it would soon be too late.

In March 2007, the recreational horsemen of Florida organized. On that day the first Back Country Horsemen of America chapter in Florida was formed. It is known as the **Florida Forever Backcountry Horsemen**.

The purpose of the Florida Forever Backcountry Horsemen will be:

- To work with the various government agencies in the establishment, maintenance and management of trails and other resources for equestrian recreation,
- To work to insure that public lands remain open to recreational equestrian use,
- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of equines in America's forest.

The task will not be fast nor will it be easy. The Forest Supervisor at the Withlacoochee State Forest (300,000 acres of public land) says recreation is not one of their high priorities. The priorities are set by the state legislature and by DOF management in Tallahassee. Without a high priority, there will be no downward pressure for local land managers to provide recreation. We must change that. We must write our state legislators and senior state land managers to demand recreation be given the high priority it should have. We must demand that pressure be sustained on local land managers to address our needs. Our equine recreation population has grown, but the equine recreational potential in OUR public lands have not.

We can change that, but we must use our collective voice.

On our web site we will provide contact information for the senior land managers in Tallassee. To guarantee our access we must become activists – we must demand that we are heard. We must learn what democracy means and use it!

I would like to welcome everyone that has joined the FF BCH. I would like to invite those that haven't to join us and join the fight to reverse the tide of denied access of horses on public lands in Florida. I would also invite the public land managers of Florida to work with us so that together we can provide a quality recreational experience for the horsemen of Florida. Working together we can make a difference.

Ride Long – Ride Hard – Ride Safe

Truman Prevatt
President, Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen
