

Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen, Inc.

11 June 2007

Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen
Post Office Box 815
Brooksville, Florida 34605

The Honorable Charles Bronson
Commissioner, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0800

Dear Mr. Bronson,

The Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA) is a national organization that is dedicated to addressing the issues related to access of public lands in this country for recreational equestrian use. The BCHA was formed in the early '70's in Montana and now has chapters in 22 states with 11 BCHA chapters in the eastern states. BCHA recently recognized the Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen, Inc. (FFBCH) as an affiliate chapter – the first in Florida.

The BCHA is proud of its tradition of providing public land managers with volunteer support to aid them in providing equestrian recreational opportunities. In 2006 for example the BCHA supplied over 130,000 volunteer horses at an estimated value of over \$3.2 million dollars to public land managers nationwide.

The 2005 American Horse Council Study placed the economic impact of the horse industry in Florida as third – behind only California and Texas. It estimates that there are 500,000 horses in Florida with 160,000 of these horses used for recreation. Recreational equestrians have a significant economic impact on Florida and these 160,000 horses represent a large demand for equestrian recreational opportunities in Florida.

According to US Forest Service studies – the demand for equestrian recreational opportunities has undergone explosive growth since 2000. This growth is expected to continue as baby boomers near retirement age. In January of 2007, FFBCH did a survey which targeted recreational equestrian use in the Croom tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest. The results of our survey verify the growth trends in recreational equestrian use. The results of the survey also show that recreational equestrians are moving in large numbers within close proximity to public lands because of recreational opportunities.

Florida has more public lands than any other state east of the Mississippi River. Florida is adding public lands to its inventory. This public land should support the significant equestrian recreation community and support the growth in the demand for equestrian recreation that we are experiencing in Florida. The Florida Forever Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of America was organized to represent the horsemen to insure the access for quality equestrian recreation in Florida's public lands and to provide support to land managers in addressing this growing demand.

Enclosed is our inaugural newsletter. We look forward to working with the appropriate agencies in the Department of Agriculture. By working with you, we hope to make a difference.

With Best Regards

Dr. Truman W. Prevatt, Ph.D
President, Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen

Enclosure: Florida Forever Back Country Horsemen Newsletter, May 2007

Copies to:

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