

**Horsemen and Equestrians: Important Notice and Comment Period
Regarding Trail Classification on US Forest Service Lands**

**US Forest Service
Interim Final Directives National Trail Classification System
Available for 60-day Public Comment**

On October 16, 2008, Forest Service published in the Federal Register interim final directives for the national trails classification system. These interim final directives incorporate revisions to the agency's national trail classification system, consisting of the Trail Classes and Design Parameters. The interim final directives will be available for public comment for 60 days. Comments must be received by December 15, 2008. Please send comments to Jonathan Stephens, National Program Manager for Trails and Congressionally Designated Areas, US Forest Service, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources Staff, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Mail Stop 1125, Washington, DC 20250; or by facsimile to (202) 205-1145. Comments also may be submitted by following the instructions at the Federal rulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Visit the US Forest Service web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/> for the full federal register notice and to review the Trail Class Matrix and Design Parameters

Backcountry Horsemen of America (BCHA) has been integrally involved with the development of the Interim Final Rule and writes the following summary, "The Interim Final Rule is a significant improvement over earlier drafts. The new trail standards will permit use of pack and saddle stock in almost all trail classifications. It also provides flexibility to use bridges and provides for signing at trail junctions in most classifications. Overall, the interim rule addresses most of the concerns that BCHA had with the initial rule, but there are still areas, such as Trail Classification 1, where BCHA remains concerned. There is a 60-day comment period for the new interim final rule (from October 16, 2008) during which BCHA will express its remaining concerns. BCHA's recommendations are as follows:

BCHA Recommendations:

1. that BCHA request Trail Classification 1 (TC1) clearing limits be increased to a width of 3-4' and a height of 8' (the previous hiker standard for a way trail). This standard will minimally accommodate saddle stock preserving the historical range of opportunities available to equestrians.
2. that BCHA request that the clearing width for Trail Classification 3 (TC3) be changed to reflect 8' rather than the range of 6-8' (the same as previously recommended for a mainline trail).
3. that BCHA request additional emphasis, in both the Training Reference Package and training presentations, requiring that Trail Management Objectives and Trail Classes be

derived from appropriate decision documents -- land use plans, trail specific plans, etc. -- and not use levels, current condition or current and anticipated trails budgets.

4. that a 'footnote' be included with the pack and saddle stock parameters discussing the relationship of obstacles and tread width or multiple trails. It relates to the discussion of "Obstacles" in the Trail Class Matrix and the wording "intended to provide increased challenge". The wording suggests that "obstacles" may intentionally be left or created in a trail tread. This is a consequence of the shift from 'trails as part of a transportation system' to 'trails as a recreation facility'. Comments provided on the 2006 draft indicate that some users, such as mountain bikers, feel that obstacles are desirable to 'provide challenge'. Where trails were historically regarded as a means of accessing recreational opportunities, now, to some users, they are the recreational opportunity.

The fear with this wording -- "intended to provide increased challenge" -- is that it might encourage trail managers that are not familiar with the characteristics of pack animals to leave obstacles (or intentionally place obstacles) that could be removed with minimal effort during construction or maintenance.

5. A brief letter or message to line officers and trail managers from Deputy Chief Holtrup encouraging them to openly share information on Trail Management Objectives and Trail Classes, when requested.