

April 23 2020

Back Country Horsemen of Washington Trailhead Communication Plan –

Trail Work Leader And Trail Ride leader

1. Purpose

- a. In order for Back Country Horsemen of Washington (BCHW) to be in compliance with the United States Forest Service (USFS) Health and Safety Code Handbook (FSH 6709.11), a Trailhead Communication Plan (TCP) is a requirement for tailgate safety briefings. The TCP is applicable for other land management agencies' volunteer trail projects and equestrian recreation activities. Subsequently, the USFS TCP was used for compiling the BCHW TCP guidelines. These guidelines work for all land managers, so specific references to USFS or rangers has been generalized to "land managers.

2. Planning

- a. Communication management is critical for proper conduct in case of an injury or life threatening situation involving work crew or ride members. Prior to the work/ride party, Trail Work Leaders and Trail Ride leaders are responsible for developing and discussing communication procedures and alternatives in the event a person(s) becomes seriously ill or injured.
- b. The Trail Work Leader/Ride Leader of the group is normally responsible for ensuring the development of the Communications Plan, including who will be contacted in the event of an emergency, notifying the land manager Volunteer Coordinator (see below) at a minimum of the planned work days, trails worked and trails they ride.
- c. The Trail Work/Ride Leader shall verify that the working days/hours of a land manager radio operator is consistent with the planned days and times of the work/ride party.
- d. The Trail Work Leader/Ride Leader shall verify the communications device/system (radio, cellular telephone or other) is viable between the area in which the work party or ride is to take place and the location of the emergency contact. If not using land manager radio and personnel for emergency contact, this verification must include confirming portable-to-portable radio or cell phone connection between the off-site emergency contact and the trail or area on which the work/ride party is to occur. If the communications plan prescribed direct cell phone contact with 911,

advance notification of the 911 operator is **not** done but the ability to telephone some other number from the trail/working area must be accomplished. (It is understood that there will be some locations on trails in which the radio, as well as cell phones, will not work; the Trail Work/Ride Leader needs to know the trail well enough to know where the nearest area would likely be in which communications would be successful.)

- e. Ensure several members of the work party understand the information which will be needed by any responders

3. Implementation:

- a. Prior to a work party or ride, conduct a tailgate briefing to insure that a TCP is in place and understood by all participants before embarking and/or leaving trailhead.
- b. Follow existing land manager or BCHW procedures for an Emergency Evacuation Plan (EEP) and Emergency Action Plan (EAP).
- c. Develop and implement TCP, EEP, and EAP procedures in cases where no emergency evacuation management is outlined.
- d. Carry maps and a GPS, plus be competent with their usage.
- e. Identify to the group the second person knowledgeable about the area and knowing the way back to trailhead.
- f. Ensure you have communication equipment as specified in tailgate safety briefing documents. This equipment might be one or several of the below listed possible communication devices.:
 - i. Two-way radio(s)
 - ii. Mobile phone - Do not rely totally on cell phone coverage.
 - iii. Satellite phone
 - iv. Satellite messenger
 - v. Have agency compatible radios on work or ride crew. Ensure radios have properly programmed frequencies and are in working order. If using land manager radios, get their operating instructions from them.
- g. Take extra set of batteries before leaving on the trip.
- h. Be knowledgeable on usable repeaters and best locations to use radios during an emergency.
- i. If crew divides into multiple teams, a copy of the TCP/EEP/EAP must accompany each team, and teams must be able to communicate with each other and implement the EEP/EAP if necessary.
- j. Check in and check out before and after project in accordance with BCHW and land manager instructions.

4. Communications during normal work hours for work parties or rides

- a. The TCP infrequently involves the use of land manager or other VHF radios programmed to the frequencies used by the land manager network of radio repeaters.

- b. During normal land manager working hours, these radios are used to contact “Fire Dispatch” or, in some cases, the “Front Desk” in the land manager office. Land manager employees at these positions have information readily available pertaining to the location of official, numbered trails in the district, including roads to the trailheads and possible evacuation points from the trail.
- c. The TCP requires a contact be available to answer radio (or cell phone, as applicable) calls from the crew/group involved in the work/ride party and have a telephone or radio dispatch capability to forward requests for assistance to appropriate search and/or rescue/medical assistance.
- d. In some cases, a communications plan may be approved in which the crew/group is to dial “911” to directly request assistance. In these instances, the Trail Work Leader/Ride Leader must be able to execute the other responsibilities and phone calls that would normally be completed by the emergency contact.
- e. When the work/ride party is to be conducted during normal land manager office hours and radios are being used, ensure the land manager is contacted prior to beginning work/ride party and at the conclusion of work party for each day. A work/ride party must then be conducted only during the radio operator's work day or and “after hours plan” needs to have after hours approval via the land manager..
- f. If a work/ride party is to be conducted in an area other than a numbered, recognized land manager trail, determining the location, description and access route to be utilized. Provide this detailed information to the Volunteer Coordinator (see below) and emergency radio or cell phone contact (including Fire Dispatch and Front Desk if the land manager office is serving as the emergency contact since they will not have this information for other than recognized trails) before beginning the work party. Utilize the **Emergency Evacuation Plan/Emergency Action forms** to document these information/directions
- g. When an emergency contact other than the land manager office is to be used, ensure they understand normal radio protocol (if using radio)
- h. Understand the potential confusion and unfamiliarity with the location of workers if a 911 operator answering the emergency call is not located in the area of either the work party or the emergency contact.
- i. Have the direct phone number(s) of emergency dispatch which would likely be involved in coordinating assistance/rescue.
- j. Have the land manager volunteer coordinator and land manager employee names/numbers, at least one of which is to be notified if emergency assistance is being requested.

5. **Communications outside normal work hours for work parties or rides**

- a. When communications are to rely on radios and the land manager office is not staffed by an employee familiar with radio operation, a volunteer with

another portable radio compatible with the repeater system may be utilized as an emergency contact for the work or ride party.

- b. In some cases, cellular telephones may be utilized when working outside of the normal working hours for the land manager where cell phones may work in a few locations where portable radios cannot communicate with the repeater system.
- c. In cases where work is contemplated during days/hours when the land manager office is not staffed with a radio operator, the Volunteer Coordinator should be contacted as far in advance as possible to obtain concurrence with the communications plan and system.

6. Volunteer Coordinator

- a. This person will normally be the land manager employee or an assistant involved in working with the leader of the group planning work/ride activities. However, other employees may be involved in such planning or approval when the volunteer coordinator is absent or for other reasons. In such cases, the volunteer coordinator assistant shall be provided a copy of EEP/EAP forms (on other than standard/numbered trails) and other necessary information listed above to be given to the "volunteer coordinator".

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