

OVCBCHW

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Here is a condensed version of the Legislative Report presented to the Board of BCHW.

BCHW once again has had a very successful legislative advocacy session in Olympia. There were a surprising number of topics and bills that involved us even though this was a mid-biennium session normally focused on supplemental budgets. We didn't get everything we wanted to at the current time in the winding down session, but there were a number of successes that we can be proud of.

Of big help this year was our lobbyist Terry Kohl, who tracked bills, signed in at hearings, and testified for us. It certainly also helped to have a strong turnout of over 50 for the BCHW Legislative Day, an event which included Representative Judy Warnick as the guest speaker. There is nothing better than many BCHW members making the trek to Olympia to visit their legislators and leave the impression that we are both a committed public lands partner and one uniquely in a position to have constituents located everywhere in the state.

Committee live testimony through the session included that provided by Joan Fleming (Scatter Creek Chapter) and Juelie Dalzell (Buckhorn Range Chapter). Joan and Karen Johnson also represented BCHW in the high profile collaboration of recreation leadership groups known at the Big Tent Coalition. We had not one but two events in Olympia on outdoor recreation that included the Governor (both Big Tent at the DNR building and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition reception in the Governor's mansion). Once again, we represented the entire equestrian industry and user base in Washington State at these events. It has been up to us alone during this biennium to extol the economic, social, and even political importance of horse use and ownership, until such time that an umbrella group for our varied disciplines and interests reforms.

When it came to bills, we stayed focused on those that involved our access to lands. We supported a Community Forest Trust Account bill that will be used with the Teanaway forest plan, and that bill has just passed both the House and Senate. We pushed for two State Parks bills, one that would provide for a good neighbor policy along the John Wayne Trail, and one that would encourage State Parks partnerships with non-profits. Both of these bills passed the Legislature, prodded on by a dedicated effort by the BCHW Legislative group.

One bill with an interesting trajectory was HB2151, the Recreational Trails bill. When introduced, we puzzled it over and were not very supportive, particularly with its proposed introduction of event gate fees (with most of the revenue going to the agencies). It was a bill that grew out of issues and discussions at DNR's Reiter Foothills, but applied statewide, and it was a mix of good, bad, and confusing provisions. DNR pulled the recreation and conservation stakeholders together to see if there was a way we could rewrite this bill to make it acceptable to most everyone, and at the same time add in some language that would address new DNR's concerns with volunteer liability when working on DNR lands. The bill went through a few different renditions as well as some high drama when what we supported going into committee was not what passed out of committee. What started as our opposition had turned to support, and then back to opposition. The House modified the bill on the Floor, which brought us back into support. It was hard to push out an advocacy alert during this period since the bill (and thus our position) could change before some of our members even received the alert!!

Smoother sailing was found in the Senate where SHB 2151 stayed intact right up to waiting for a vote in the last days that the Senate could vote for it. We called upon membership once again to write their Senators, and on the very last day the bill could pass.....it did.

So with the drama over, once again, we approach spring in good shape, with no roadblocks other than the all-to-typical funding shortages, and with lots of volunteer work to perform. Our most recent accomplishment in Olympia was to receive a Proclamation from Governor Inslee honoring March 15th as "Back Country Horsemen Day". March 15th is well known to us as the Ides of March, Julius Caesar's assassination, Christopher Columbus returns to Spain, Maine joins the Union, and last but not least

.....Back Country Horsemen of Washington has their 2014 Rendezvous in Ellensburg.

And so we enter the Year of the Horse at a full gallop.