Before Departure

- I have read the necessary permits and am familiar with regulations for the area I will be visiting
- I have a good map of the area and know how to read it.
- My stock and I are in condition for the challenges of the backcountry.
- I have checked my vehicle, trailer, camping gear, and tack to ensure it is in good working order. I have planned my trip to travel as light as possible.
- I have the proper equipment for stock management and cleanup, such as tree saver straps, a rake and shovel.
- I have advised a responsible party of my route and date of return.

On the Trail

- I will be of assistance to other users when a need arises.
- While traveling on the trail I will try to remove obstacles whenever possible. I will avoid cutting switchbacks.

Setting Up Camp

- I have located my campsite at least 100 feet from any water source.
- I have located an area for personal sanitation at least 100 feet away from any water source or campsite.
- I have located my highline 100 feet away from any water source, and preferably out of sight of other camps and trails.
- My camp is neat and organized, and I am using colored traps and tents that blend into the surroundings.
- I will conserve firewood by using a propane gas stove for cooking.

Leaving Camp

- I am packing out all my trash, including unburned items from the fire ring, plus any trash I have found while visiting the area.
- I have naturalized the site by spreading pine needles and twigs, and have scattered

Gentle with Other Users

Follow the Golden Rule, which is to "treat others the way you would like to be treated." Be of assistance when a need arises. Treat others with respect and common courtesy. Greet others with a smile and a friendly hello.

Help improve our image as Gentle Users by acting as good stewards.

Our Philosophy and Purpose

- To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's backcountry and wilderness.
- To work to insure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use.
- To assist the various government and private agencies in their maintenance and management of said resource.
- To educate, encourage and solicit active participation in the wise use of the backcountry resource by horsemen and the general public commensurate with our heritage.
- To foster and encourage the formation of new units of the organization.

Backcountry Horsemen of California

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rev. 2/2010

Gentle Use

A Pocket Guide for Backcountry Stock Users

Gentle Users

Are you a Gentle User? It is imperative that all stock users visiting backcountry and wilderness areas educate themselves to become Gentle Users. We must be sensitive as to how we use the backcountry resource to eliminate the need for more regulations that effect stock use. The future is in our hands!

Courtesy and Common Sense are key words to remember as you strive to improve Gentle Use skills.

Gentle Planning Ahead

Know before you go! Do your homework on regulations pertaining to camping, campfires, grazing, feed, bears, trails and terrain. Inquire about necessary permits for your trip. Obtain a good map of the area and know how to read it.

Plan your menus or take items tat are lightweight or that can be repackaged easily. Consider using a stove for cooking to be less reliant on fires. Determine if you will need bear proof food containers to store your food.

Check your equipment and tack to ensure it is in good order. Be prepared for emergencies. First aid kits for you and your stock are important to have.

Familiarize your stock with bridges, logs, water, and rocky areas. Practice with electric fences, highlines, pickets, or hobbles before leaving home! Accustom your stock to any supplemental feed before leaving.

Gentle on the Trail

Take it easy! Stay on the trail. Remove deadfalls whenever possible to prevent creating a new trail. Avoid cutting switchbacks. This will help to prevent erosion and costly repairs.

Gentle with Wildlife

We should respect wildlife as we share its habitat. Take special precautions to avoid disruption of feeding, resting, and nesting areas. A dog is a great companion, but please ensure it is well mannered and under control.

Gentle on the Eyes and Ears

Select pack covers, tarps, and tents with colors that blend into the surroundings. Keep your campsite and highline area neat and orderly. Set up your camp out of sight of the trail whenever possible. Noise pollutes too! Keep it to a minimum. Use as few stock bells as possible. Avoid loud talk or yelling. Play music softly. Site in your firearms before you go on a backcountry hunting trip.

Gentle on the Forage

Camp where there is ample forage for your animals. Avoid wet or boggy meadows. Be familiar with a variety of methods to help manage the grazing. Options to consider include: loose grazing, highlines, electric fences, pickets or hobbles. Be familiar with any grazing regulations that may pertain to the area you are visiting.

Gentle with your Animals

Allow for plenty of rest, and be sure your stock has plenty of feed and water. A good packer limits the load weight to approximately 150 pounds per animal. Ride and pack well conditioned animals, using equipment that fits properly.

Gentle Stock Management

Loose grazing causes the least impact. If you keep a leader of the herd in camp, also keep a buddy, so they will stand quietly.

Highlines are a good low impact option. Select trees that are at least 8 inches in diameter, in a firm dry area with little or no ground vegetation. Tree saver straps placed around each tree will help protect the bark. Highlines should be at least 100 feet away from water, and out of sight of other camps and trails.

Electric fences are also acceptable. They should be moved periodically to ensure the areas are not overgrazed.

Avoid tying stock directly to trees except for loading and unloading, or for short breaks.

Naturalize your campsite before leaving by spreading pine needles and twigs. Scatter manure and fill in any holes under highlines or around trees that may have been created by your stock.