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## AERC Trails Grant Recipient Cache Creek Ridge Ride Completes Successful Three-Year Trail Development Project

*Implementation Lessons Provide Blueprint for AERC Ride Managers*

**AUBURN, California – August 10, 2015** – The Cache Creek Ridge Ride volunteers have been involved in planning, maintenance, repair and identification of trails in the Cache Creek, California area for more than six years. The group of dedicated volunteers, led by the Stalley Family including Chuck and Pam and their daughters Jennifer and Alyssa, contributed more than 100 hours to trail maintenance in the 2014 - 2015 ride year alone. In 2014, they submitted an AERC Trails Grant proposal to make an 8-mile loop out of the Cache Creek Ridge trail - a premiere scenic portion of the Cache Creek Trail, which has ultimately become a case study in AERC grant implementation.

The AERC Trails Grant allowed them to begin research and development on an area inside The Payne Ranch, a non-wilderness, recreation area owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Ukiah Field Office, Ukiah, CA. The area is an old cattle ranch with roads and trails, which go in straight lines out to points without connecting into loops. AERC Trail Master and geologist Robert Sydnor, AERC Trail Master Michael Shackelford and AERC Ride Manager Chuck Stalley were all instrumental in planning the two-phased project that took three years to complete.

To fund Phase I of the project, the group received approval of \$3,000 in AERC Trails Grant funding which allowed the BLM and the trail developers to scout and flag the trail to allow for NEPA studies to begin. The BLM evaluated the spiked trail in January of 2015 and made recommendations for the trail re-route where they encountered draws and washes along the proposed route. Finally, CCC crews returned to the site in the Spring to spike the route revisions. This marked the exhaustion of the original grant funds and concluded Phase I of the trail project.

A request for funds was made to continue work brushing the spike trail, which was completed

and approved by the BLM in March of 2015. Funds were applied to this project from an AERC grant written in April of 2015. In Phase II, the group began work on a loop trail to augment the currently out and back trail. It was agreed that the loop would enrich the riding experience for both the endurance event hosted on this property as well as the many recreational riders and endurance riders training in this location.

Chuck Stalley, a member of the Bear Creek Unit Steering Committee representing equestrians and the Cache Creek AERC sanctioned rides, notes that the group had the advantage of an official memorandum of understanding with the BLM, which allows for current and future use of trails for endurance events. The original BLM use plan for the Payne Ranch clearly indicates equestrian trail riding and hiking as the main purposes for which it was transferred to the BLM, with those activities receiving priority in managing the future development and use permits for the location. This Unit is charged with the preservation and development of the property and is supportive of thoughtful trail planning and networking the trails for maximum enjoyment of riders and hikers.

Upon completion of the project, AERC Trails and Land Management Committee Chair Monica Chapman believed that this project could be held up in example and asked Chuck Stalley and his wife Pam to share their experiences and lessons learned during the project to help provide a Trails Grant playbook for other ride managers. Here are their tips, in their own words:

- First we contacted the landowners, in this case the BLM land managers, and held a PLANNING MEETING where they were asking for input into the future use of the Cache Creek Recreation area. BLM managers agreed to our idea to make a loop trail as hikers and equestrians both like to do loops rather than out and backs. This would make the final out and back trail into a loop for the Cache Creek Ridge Ride.
- Next we were able to DEFINE A COALITION of support to finance the trail construction and early on asked AERC to partner with The Cache Creek Ridge Ride and the local BLM. Volunteers were organized and two AERC Trail Masters were contacted to consult and advise. This show of support encourages land managers to commit to matching funds and effort. Building a coalition of interested parties is important.
- Our third lesson? BE FLEXIBLE! We thought Winter would be the right time, but it turns out Spring worked better. It has been important to be flexible and work with people when they are available, even though Spring is the busy time for endurance

riders.

- Finally, it helps to GEAR UP if you are going to be in the trail building business. Chainsaws, a four-wheeler, a trailer, a four-wheel drive pickup, GPS and all the safety gear that goes with it is nice to have.

“It has been an educational experience to commit to a four mile equestrian trail in a remote area,” added Mrs. Stalley. “I just keep telling myself and others that someday my grandchildren might ride over this section of trail and say ‘My grandparents designed and helped build this trail!’”

All of the combined hard work that went into enhancing the trails during this project paid off when on May 2, 2015 the AERC sanctioned Cache Creek Ridge Ride managed by Jennifer Stalley, hosted their 25 / 50 mile ride competition and 148 riders finished the ride. Plans are underway to address an additional, third phase of the project later in 2015.

**About the AERC's Trail Master Program** AERC sponsors Trail Master classes across the U.S. In addition to teaching endurance riders the proper way to design and build new trails -- and maintain and improve existing trails -- we invite two land managers to attend the class with riders. Mornings are spent in the classroom. A written test follows at lunch, and afternoons are set aside for field work and getting one's hands dirty.

Those who graduate from the four-day course are certified crew leaders, and can go anyplace to lead crews in the proper way to maintain, build and design trails. By working together with our land managers we can build sustainable trails for the future.

**About the AERC** In addition to promoting the sport of endurance riding, the AERC encourages the use, protection, and development of equestrian trails, especially those with historic significance. Many special events of four to six consecutive days take place over historic trails, such as the Pony Express Trail, the Outlaw Trail, the Chief Joseph Trail, and the Lewis and Clark Trail. The founding ride of endurance riding, the Western States Trail Ride or Tevis Cup, covers 100 miles of the famous Western States and Immigrant Trails over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. These rides promote awareness of the importance of trail preservation for future generations and foster an appreciation of our American heritage.

The American Endurance Ride Conference, established in 1972, is headquartered in Auburn, California, “The Endurance Capital of the World.” For more information please visit us at [www.aerc.org](http://www.aerc.org).

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