

# IMPACT

University of Idaho  
Extension

Nez Perce Reservation, 208.621.3514  
PO Box 365, Lapwai, ID 83540

## Horsemanship education leads the way

### The Situation

The Nez Perce Tribe has developed their own Nez Perce horse breed registry and owns over 30 horses. The horse is an important part of Nez Perce culture and heritage yet few tribal members own horses. The tribe wants to re-establish their connection to horses but does not have an educational program in place. However, they have horses and facilities that have been made available for extension program use.

Many people, youth and adults, who want to have a horse experience cannot afford to own a horse or pay for private lessons. In addition, there are those who own horses but have minimal knowledge about horse care and horsemanship. Research has shown that horses can be utilized effectively to build life skills and have therapeutic benefits for youth and adults.

### Our Response

The Extension Educator, Valdasue Steele, is in the unique position to offer the missing horsemanship education piece using her own expertise, horses and equipment. Horsemanship education is available to all residents of the Nez Perce Reservation, free of charge, and is delivered in multiple formats.

The summer months are the busiest time, but horsemanship is available in late afternoons and evenings during the school year as well as during holidays and breaks. The program is offered year round as weather and arena conditions permit.

Most of the participation is by individual, family and group lessons on an appointment basis, usually weekly. The annual average number of participants from 2008 thru 2010 has been 78 (74% American Indian, 23% adults and 77% youth). There were many more youth and adults who had a one time, or short term, horse experience as part of environmental edu-



Horsemanship students Tyra (L) and Betsy (R) put their skills to work on a mountain trail ride.

cation day, summer youth culture camp, and spring break clinics which totaled well over 200 additional participants annually.

In addition, a 2 credit horse science course is being offered for the third year at the Lapwai High School. Steele provides the hands-on component where the students have the opportunity to work directly with horses during their regularly scheduled class period.

Steele provides co-leadership to a new 4-H horse project club that started up two years ago. Most of the youth in that group used borrowed horses in order to participate.

### Program Outcomes

All horsemanship education students are able to demonstrate their increased knowledge of safety, ground handling, grooming, picking up feet, saddling, control and equitation. In addition, students have gained confidence, leadership and communica-

tion skills. Many have decreased their fear of horses and a few have made decisions about horse ownership as a result of their participation.

The success of the horsemanship program has resulted in an increased level participation and demand. Steele is at the point where she would like to mentor and teach adult tribal members to be horsemanship education volunteers and instructors.

The level of community interest and participation has prompted the Nez Perce Tribe to change the focus of its horse program from a breeding operation to getting horses professionally trained and make them available to tribal members for riding. In addition, the Nez Perce Tribe has received a federal grant to conduct a feasibility study for an equestrian center. Eventually, Steele envisions a transition to tribal members teaching horsemanship to tribal members using tribal horses.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**Valdasue Steele**, Extension Educator  
Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program FRTEP  
Nez Perce Reservation  
PO Box 365  
Lapwai, ID 83540  
Phone: 208.621.3514  
E-mail: [vsteele@uidaho.edu](mailto:vsteele@uidaho.edu)

7-12vsteele-hormanship.pub  
4/12