

Southern District 4-H Horse Camp provides a unique learning experience

AT A GLANCE

The Southern District 4-H Horse Camp offers a quality program for youth that focuses on their horse project. It also impacts their confidence in the project, showing long term positive outcomes.

The Situation

There is a need to meet the growing demand for hands-on, skill-based learning opportunities within the popular 4-H horse project. While many youth are passionate about horses, they often lack access to individualized instruction or real-time practice outside of local club meetings. This camp addresses that gap by providing a concentrated, multi-day learning environment where youth can build confidence, improve horsemanship and connect with peers outside their club who share similar interests. Camps are also shown to increase engagement and retention in 4-H, offering a fun, memorable setting for personal development. Because horse projects attract a large number of youth across the state, offering a camp experience allows UI Extension to reach more participants with quality education and reinforcing key life skills. Ultimately, the camp creates a supportive environment where learning feels meaningful and enjoyable, often becoming one of the most cherished parts of a member's 4-H journey.

Our Response

The Southern District 4-H Horse Camp has been held annually at the Cascade Lake 4-H Camp in Donnelly each June for more than 10 years. Youth spend four



A group of horse camp attendees on the trail course in June 2025.

days at camp learning a variety of horsemanship skills designed to enhance their knowledge and abilities in their horse projects.

Chaperones, who are all certified 4-H volunteers, also attend and each chaperone can only be responsible for three youth during the camp. This often turns the camp into a more family style camp environment due to parents (certified volunteers) also being present. Camp attendees stay in cabins, and each cabin has a trained teen camp counselor and adult chaperones. A required chaperone meeting is also held a month prior to camp where chaperones sign up for various duties and camp rules are stated so that the camp can be as safe as possible for everyone.

The 4-H horse camp committee, composed of certified 4-H volunteers, strives each year to create a high-quality program that benefits youth in all areas of their lives. At 4-H horse camp, participants work with professional horse trainers to address specific challenges faced by each youth and horse team. Campers also enjoy a true camping experience that includes hands-on activities, community service projects, horse-related animal science lessons and first-aid instruction all within an overnight camp environment.

The goal of the camp is to provide a program for youth that aligns with the National 4-H Index Study, which states, “Youth who experience a high-quality developmental context in 4-H tend to score higher across the four program outcome areas of civic engagement, college and career readiness, healthy living and science.”

Program Outcomes

All youth demonstrated an increase in skills and knowledge based on self-reported outcomes from the variety of workshops offered. These workshops included trail obstacles (addressing surprises youth may encounter while riding, such as noises and unexpected situations that require problem-solving), desensitizing their horses using objects and scenarios that can stress both horse and rider, and learning about horseshoeing and horse hoof health.

One hundred percent of youth self-reported that they left camp with greater confidence in both their individual projects and their partnerships with their horses.

- All youth reported gaining knowledge of horse anatomy, as well as an understanding of what a farrier does and why their work is important.
- Safety when working with horses is always a top priority, and 100% of participants reported an increased awareness of safety practices, including those related to riding, handling horses and administering first aid for both humans and animals.

- All participants indicated they plan to return to camp next year, supporting continued youth retention in the University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program.
- Youth noted that having a professional farrier and a professional horse trainer onsite providing individual and group lessons was highly beneficial. They shared that they plan to apply the knowledge gained from those experiences after camp.

Seventeen youth completed surveys, and all indicated that being in a camp environment, including campfire time, swimming, shooting sports, cabin accommodations and service-learning projects, allowed them to meet new people with similar interests whom they would not otherwise have the opportunity to interact with in their traditional 4-H clubs.

The Future

Pre- and post-camp surveys are conducted annually to assess participants’ knowledge in relation to the camp’s core teaching objectives. These surveys also give youth and adults the opportunity to provide feedback, which the camp committee uses to refine and enhance the program each year. Based on input from both campers and adults, the committee plans to continue inviting horse industry professionals, as was done in 2025, and expand future programming to include experts such as veterinarians, saddle makers and equine dental specialists.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Southern District Youth Horse Council

4-H Horse Camp Planning Committee

Scholarships for youth are provided by their county programs and by the Southern District Youth Horse Council.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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40-25-troland-horse-camp • 10/25