



OPPOSE HR 1349 - WHEELS OVER WILDERNESS

H.R. 1349, the “Wheels Over Wilderness” bill, introduced by Congressman Tom McClintock (R-CA), carves a gaping loophole in the 1964 Wilderness Act, which has stood for a half-century as one of America’s bedrock conservation laws. The bill would open America’s 110 million acres of wilderness areas to mountain bikes, an unprecedented assault on wilderness areas across the country.

The Wilderness Act Prohibits Mountain Bike Use in Wilderness

The Wilderness Act prohibits the use of motorized vehicles, motorboats, and “other forms of mechanized transport” in wilderness areas.¹

For five decades Congress has resisted efforts to undermine the Wilderness Act by opening wilderness areas to uses that are currently prohibited. These efforts have failed due to strong public support for wilderness. This latest effort deserves to fail as well.

America’s Public Lands – Room For Everyone

America’s public lands are national treasures and every year hundreds of millions of people visit these lands to hike, camp, bike, fish, ride horseback, and paddle. Spanning over 600 million acres of forest, desert, mountains, rivers, prairie, and grassland, our public lands retain plenty of room for all types of recreation.



The Bob Marshall Wilderness is a haven for equestrians, hikers, and hunters.

Just one-sixth of our public lands are designated as wilderness areas. Excluding Alaska, just one-eighth of public lands are designated as wilderness. When considering all lands, less than three percent of the land in the lower 48 states is wilderness. With less than 3% of the land in the continental United States designated as wilderness, there are plenty of lands—including public lands—that remain open to mountain bicycles outside wilderness.

Mountain Bikes Do Not Belong in Wilderness

Mountain bicycling is a wonderful form of outdoor recreation. But like some other recreational pursuits, it is not suitable for wilderness. The primitive and unconfined recreational experience provided by

wilderness would be lost should hikers and horsemen be forced to constantly scan the trail ahead and over their shoulder for rapidly approaching bikes. As a form of mechanization the National Wilderness Preservation System was established to exclude in order to protect wilderness’s rustic and primitive character. In short, wilderness is meant for

¹ 16 U.S.C. 1133(c).

forms of transport—foot, horseback, and canoe—that are compatible with an experience based on solitude, tranquility, and compatibility with the wilderness environment.

Places like Montana’s Bob Marshall Wilderness, the John Muir and Ansel Adams wilderness areas of the Sierra Nevadas, and the Shenandoah Wilderness along the Appalachian Trail have long been enjoyed by hikers and equestrians. These experiences would be indelibly altered by mechanization along the same trails that have been non-mechanized for hundreds of years.

H.R. 1349 also attempts to use wheelchair access as a reason for amending the Wilderness Act. Section 507 of the Americans with Disabilities Act already makes clear that wheelchairs are permitted in wilderness.

There Are Better Approaches to Enhancing Mountain Biking Opportunities

Across the country, wilderness advocates and mountain bike organizations have worked together to develop legislative proposals that preserve access to important mountain bike trails and protect adjacent areas as wilderness. Efforts like the Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act in Colorado and the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act in Montana have been widely celebrated and serve as models for building successful partnerships between stakeholders and land managers.

These efforts have secured the support of wilderness advocates and mountain bikers. This collaborative approach is the best way to address public land management issues.

CASE STUDY: HERMOSA CREEK

For years, broad coalitions that include wilderness advocates and mountain bikers have worked to find common ground to accommodate a wide variety of activities on public lands.

For instance, in southwest Colorado, a series of meetings involving a lot of give and take among diverse community stakeholders resulted in the designation of both a wilderness area and a special management area. The agreement set aside roughly 70,000 acres for mountain biking, dirt biking, snowmobiling and other purposes and about 37,000 acres of designated wilderness.

Similar efforts have produced agreements in California, New Mexico, Montana the southern Appalachians and other parts of the U.S.

H.R. 1349 is yet another attack on our public lands that undermines one of our nation’s bedrock conservation laws, jeopardizes America’s wilderness and won’t advance mountain biking. The legislation is opposed by conservation organizations, sportsmen, equestrians, outfitters, and others who support retaining that small percent of our nation's rustic outdoor heritage that remains as wilderness.

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