

STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BICYCLING ASSOCIATION

**HEARING ON HR. 1349 –
TO AMEND THE WILDERNESS ACT TO ENSURE THAT THE USE OF BICYCLES,
WHEELCHAIRS, STROLLERS, AND GAME CARTS IS NOT PROHIBITED IN
WILDERNESS AREAS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**SUBMITTED TO THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LAND**

DECEMBER 6, 2017

The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman McClintock,

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (“IMBA”) is honored to provide written testimony regarding HR 1349, a bill that directly impacts the mountain bicycling community.

Founded in 1988, IMBA is the leading mountain bike advocacy organization in the United States, and a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational association. Our mission is to create, enhance and protect great places to ride mountain bikes. In pursuing our mission, we are a catalyst for putting trails on the ground all across the country and positioning mountain biking and trails as a tool communities can use to solve many challenges; including economic development, public health and wellness, and youth engagement in the outdoors.

IMBA’s 35,000 passionate members and more than 400 local chapters and clubs ride on and help maintain tens of thousands of miles of trails on public lands across the country, contributing more than \$2.8 million in-kind volunteer labor annually. IMBA’s network also includes more than 1,000 corporate and retail supporters who influence the \$887 billion outdoor recreation economy, which supports 7.6 million American jobs.

For 30 years, IMBA has increased trail access for an estimated 8 million mountain bikers, including nearly 11,000 high school athletes in the National Interscholastic Cycling Association. Mountain bikers are widely considered to be exemplary public land stewards and highly engaged advocates, and IMBA is proud to represent these community leaders.

IMBA's Position on The Wilderness Act

IMBA's longstanding position on trail access in federally designated Wilderness is as follows: IMBA will continue to respect both the Wilderness Act and the federal land agencies' regulations that bicycles are not allowed in existing congressionally designated Wilderness areas. IMBA is not supporting H.R. 1349.

As part of our commitment to trail access and public land stewardship, we have been involved in discussions about Wilderness and other forms of legislatively driven protections for public lands for decades. We find that when mountain bikers are given a seat at the table in these discussions, we can protect important trails while finding common ground with those who are looking to create new conservation designations.

Examples like the Continental Divide Wilderness and Recreation Act in Colorado and the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Act in Montana have been widely celebrated and serve as models for how collaborative efforts involving mountain bikers throughout the process can lead to advancing both conservation and recreation. But some discussions are less inclusive and, in those cases, we actively oppose new Wilderness designations that would negatively impact revered riding opportunities.

Encouraging Mountain Bike-Friendly Land Protections

We are actively working with leaders in the conservation community to ensure that the aforementioned collaborative scenario becomes the standard across the country. As we gain ground in these efforts, we feel it is unwise to amend the Wilderness Act—one of the nation's most important conservation laws—when the outcome mountain bikers desire can be reached through on-the-ground collaborative efforts. While trail loss due to past Wilderness designations remains a frustrating reality to many mountain bikers, where possible we work with members of Congress to regain access to important lost trails. The most recent example of this was the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act of 2014 that reconnected a cherished high-alpine loop by removing a severed part of the trail from Wilderness.

As part of our commitment to balancing conservation and human-powered recreation, we are helping to drive legislative efforts that will protect the places we ride by establishing a more uniform system of National Recreation Area designations with specific inventory and recommendation guidelines for recreation. Representative Rob Bishop's Recreation Not Red Tape Act (H.R. 3400) does just that, and IMBA actively supports that legislation.

Mountain bikers are particularly encouraged by the Volunteer Enhancement Initiative that H.R. 3400 would establish, which will help IMBA chapters better engage with federal agencies to maintain trails and address the federal trail maintenance backlog. The bill would also expand recreation opportunities by identifying seasonal locations ripe for additional recreation assets, and would add recreation to the missions of more federal land management agencies to increase opportunities for places to ride.

Inconsistent Management of Recommended Wilderness

Separate and apart from congressionally designated Wilderness, the U.S. Forest Service uses an administrative designation called “recommended wilderness.” This administrative designation, which is a power wielded by the bureaucracy and does not require congressional input, is inconsistently applied across Forest Service regions. As a result, recommended wilderness has effectively closed 800 miles of cherished mountain bike trails.

In most of its regions, the U.S. Forest Service allows continued mountain bike use within recommended wilderness areas. However, Region 1 has taken a different approach. Region 1 automatically excludes all types of mechanized transportation from these areas, even human-powered forms, despite the forest service manual’s recommendation to follow a hierarchical adaptive management approach before prohibiting such uses.

The unique path that Region 1 has taken has had far-reaching impacts in the mountain biking world. In a 2016 Travel Management Plan, the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana used two recommended wilderness areas to close 178 miles of cherished trails. Similarly, in 2009, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in Montana used the creation of other recommended wilderness areas to close 367 miles of trail to mountain biking.

As more national forests undergo plan revisions under the 2012 Planning Rule, thousands of miles of unique and highly valued trails could be at risk if the current trend in Region 1 continues or is expanded to other areas of the country. A diversity of trails and trail experiences are important to mountain bikers across the country and they are also an essential part of the nation’s recreation infrastructure that creates millions of jobs, many of them in rural areas.

We have raised these concerns with the Secretary of Agriculture and will not waiver in our fight to see this administrative mechanism reformed in a way that makes sense for mountain bikers across the country.

Mechanized Versus Motorized

We also want to briefly highlight a growing need for Congress and the federal agencies to more carefully consider the differences between mechanized and motorized uses of trails and public lands. Frequently, legislation will give direction to agencies regarding “mechanized or motorized” uses, lumping both platforms into a single sentence. In many cases, treating these uses as the same or even substantially similar does not reflect important differences in patterns of use and unique management requirements.

Conclusion

IMBA’s members and staff work tirelessly to create, enhance and protect great places to ride. We are unwavering champions for access and land protection that allows robust recreation in America. We look forward to continuing our work with this committee and other champions of recreation to ensure that the interests of mountain bikers are clearly heard.