

February 2nd, 2021



The Honorable Jared Huffman
Representative – California 2nd District
United States House of Representatives
899 Fifth Avenue, Suite 290
San Rafael, CA 94901

Subject line: S. 1695 - Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act

Dear Representative Huffman:

We are writing to express our opposition to Senator Mike Lee’s bill S.1695 in the Energy and Natural Resources Sub-Committee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining to amend the Wilderness Act to allow use of mountain bikes in Wilderness areas. The bill was presented to the committee on November 18, 2020; it would amend the Wilderness Act to allow human powered mechanical transport.

This legislation would undermine a bedrock environmental law, which was written to maintain primitive activities in wilderness. These are our most wild undeveloped lands, and opening them to mechanized activities, such as mountain biking, would jeopardize the protection of wilderness areas in national parks and public lands. This legislation violates both the spirit and intent of the Wilderness Act.

Legacy of the Wilderness Act.

The National Wilderness Preservation System, created by the 1964 law, ensures that some of our remaining wild country remains as it has been for hundreds of years. By law, wilderness areas do not allow road building and other forms of development, and they prohibit motorized and mechanized vehicles, including mountain bikes. The proposed legislation would undermine long standing law that protects America’s iconic landscapes and the wild landscapes that we’ve safeguarded for generations.

Wilderness provides a place to escape from the fast-moving mechanized world, a rare opportunity. Wilderness also prevents the fragmentation of essential fish and wildlife habitat that keeps wildlife populations healthy and diverse, particularly large mammals that need vast home territories for their life needs.

We understand that, similar to rules on bicycles, and recently e-bikes, in national parks, S. 1695 would not mandate that non-motorized travel be allowed in wilderness areas, but would give the authority to local officials of the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of

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Marin Conservation League was founded in 1934 to preserve, protect and enhance the natural assets of Marin County.

Reclamation, and U. S. Forest Service to determine allowable forms of non-motorized, human-powered travel over permitted routes in the units under their jurisdiction. This would result to an array of differing standards and a patchwork of “allowable” and “non-allowable” access in wilderness areas across the country. Once such a precedent of bikes is set, then other more invasive forms of activities could be lobbied for in the future.

The proposed legislation fails to recognize that America’s vast public lands already provide for a variety of recreation, including mountain biking, hiking, hunting, fishing, and horseback riding. We have plenty of public lands, including backcountry, that are open to bikes and motorized vehicles as well as hikers and equestrians who can enjoy public lands in their own way while limiting conflicts.

In opening the last wilderness to mountain bikes, S.1695 will forever change the primitive experience of these areas. Across the country, sportsmen, wilderness advocates and mountain bicyclists have collaborated effectively to preserve access to key mountain bike trails and at the same time protect the adjacent wilderness areas. These successful efforts offer good models for building partnerships between diverse stakeholders and land managers. We believe that type of collaboration is the best way to achieve success.

In conclusion, Marin Conservation League supports protecting America’s wilderness. We oppose attempts to rewrite the Wilderness Act to allow local agency officials to determine access for mountain bikes in wilderness. S.1695 is yet another attack on our public lands that undermines one of our nation’s foundational conservation laws, jeopardizing America’s wilderness. We urge Congress to protect our last remaining wild places by rejecting S.1695.

Sincerely,



Robert Miller



Terri Thomas
MCL Board Member; NPS Retired