



Protecting Marin Since 1934

January 4, 2018

Congressman Jared Huffman

999 Fifth Ave.  
Suite 290  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Subject line: **H.R. 1349 Would Allow Mountain Bikes in Wilderness Areas**

Dear Representative Huffman:

We are writing on behalf of the members of Marin Conservation League to express our deep concern over the recent approval by the Committee on Natural Resources of H.R. 1349, which would amend the Wilderness Act to allow use of mountain bikes in wilderness areas. We applaud you for your staunch opposition and urge you to continue your fight to defeat the bill when it goes to the House floor. **This shortsighted proposal should be defeated!**

### **Background**

H.R. 1349 would amend Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act to declare that provisions of the Act that currently prohibit the use of motorized vehicles, aircraft, or other forms of mechanical transport shall not prohibit the use of motorized wheelchairs, non-motorized wheelchairs, non-motorized bicycles, strollers, wheelbarrows, survey wheels, or game carts within any wilderness areas. Basically, the bill would give authority to local agency personnel to decide if and where bicycles would be allowed on trails in wilderness areas under their jurisdiction.

Sustainable Trails Coalition was founded in 2015 for the express purpose of reversing the Wilderness Act, even though many mountain bikers have a strong conservation ethic and recognize that wilderness should be off limits to bicycles. Members of the Coalition include Marin County's Access4Bikes. The Coalition claims that Congress intended to allow human-powered travel in Wilderness when it passed the Wilderness Act in 1964, and for years afterward bicycling was allowed until it was banned by the Forest Service in 1984. It is important to note that as mountain biking grew from an infant sport into mass production, the Forest Service, confronting increasing user conflicts and uncharted territory in the regulation of "mechanized vehicles" in wilderness, established the blanket ban on bike access to wilderness under their jurisdiction. Other federal agencies followed suit.

**The purpose of wilderness is to ensure that our wild country remains wild.**

The National Wilderness Preservation System, created by the 1964 law, ensures that some of

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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 a bedrock law that protects America's iconic landscapes and the wild landscapes that we've safeguarded for generations.

Wilderness provides a place and rare opportunity to escape from the fast-moving, increasingly mechanized world. Wilderness designation protects America's most sensitive habitats and prevents the fragmentation of essential plant communities and fish and wildlife habitat that keeps wildlife populations healthy and diverse, particularly large mammals that need wide-ranging home territories to fulfill their life needs.

**Public lands already provide for a variety of recreation.**

The proposed legislation fails to recognize that America's 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.

Across the country, sportsmen, wilderness advocates and mountain bicyclists have collaborated to preserve access to key 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 address the desires of all recreational visitors.

**Marin Conservation League supports protecting America's wilderness.**

We oppose attempts to rewrite the Wilderness Act to allow mountain bikes in wilderness. H.R. 1349 is yet another attack on our public lands that undermines one of our nation's bedrock conservation laws and jeopardizes America's wilderness. Opening wilderness to mountain bikes would forever change the primitive experience of these areas. We urge Congress to protect our last remaining wild places by rejecting H.R. 1349.

Sincerely yours,



Kate Powers, President

cc. Representative Tom McClintock