

Mountain Bikes Should Be Regulated with Other Non-Motorized Trails Users

The National Park Service (NPS) should streamline its rules so that park superintendents can more easily open trails to bicycles on the land they manage. Currently, the process is needlessly lengthy, requiring years of paperwork, review, and written approval (twice, in fact) from the NPS Director and Assistant Secretary of Fish Wildlife and Parks.

This current burdensome process acts as a disincentive to many parks. This out-dated regulation, (36 CFR 4.30) was incorporated in the early 1980s and doesn't reflect modern mountain bike management. It is also not consistent with the manner in which other federal public land agencies manage trail access.

Background

Currently, about 20 National Parks offer mountain biking on narrow dirt trails and another 20 allow riding on dirt roads. Park units with mountain biking on trails are required to go through a convoluted special regulations process, while access to dirt roads can be done more easily.

Suggested Change

Park superintendents should be given better tools for opening trails to bicycling. Bicyclists should be treated like other non-motorized trail users, such as equestrians. The special regulations process that restricts bicycling on trails is unduly burdensome and duplicates protections that are already embodied by the NPS General Management Plan and National Environmental Policy Act.

What A Rule Change Will and Won't Do

- A rule change will not diminish protections that ensure appropriate trail use. All regular NPS regulations, General Management Planning processes and the National Environmental Policy Act still applies. Nothing will change at the local level and absolutely no environmental processes will be shortchanged. The public will still have ample opportunity to comment.
- The current system is not working. Most NPS units that now feature mountain biking have known for years that they are out of compliance with the complicated process that is on the books today. These parks are unwilling to undertake the time-consuming special regulations process and thus bicycling opportunities are in this state of limbo and can't be fully embraced. Mountain biking needs to be managed better at the local level where parks know the clear process to get things done.
- Mountain biking can and does succeed in national parks. More than 30 parks have successfully managed mountain biking for more than a decade on roads and trails. Families and community members have successfully enjoyed these parks on their bikes for years. The trails are signed, managed and documented in the superintendents compendium.
- Changing 36 CFR 4.30 won't change Wilderness or Wilderness Study Area Regulations in any way. Mountain Bikes will continue to be banned from these areas.
- NPS units that are not interested in expanding opportunities for bicycling will not be affected. Changing the rule will not force mountain biking on any park unit, and

superintendents that do not see opportunities for mountain biking in their parks will not be asked to adopt it.

- The use of special regulations is time-consuming, costly and burdensome. Special regulations is directed mostly at motorized users, such as personal watercraft, motorboats, snowmobiles, ORVs, seaplanes, amphibious aircraft, commercial fishing and trucking, mining and aircraft. Once everything is done at the park level it can take 2-3 years to emerge from the DC regulatory process.

- The NPS policy is in stark contrast with that of the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, which allows all non-Wilderness trails to be managed as “open unless designated closed.”

- Treating mountain bicyclists similarly to equestrians will streamline one rule, not amend all NPS rules.

- Special regulations would still apply if building new trails or opening existing trails is of a highly controversial nature (36 CFR, Chapter 1, Part 1, Section 1.5).

Bicycling is an NPS Solution

Visitor Enjoyment: Parks are better experienced on foot and by bicycle than from inside cars and RVs. Bicycling helps Americans get exercise and connects people with the natural world. It's fun, and a low-impact activity.

Private Sector Investment: The Centennial Initiative stresses the importance of working with the private sector and the bicycle industry and its retail network are a strong ally.

Improves Visitation: Visitation numbers are down at many NPS units: improving opportunities for bicycling and promoting trails tourism could benefit economic conditions for nearby communities.

Trail Improvements Make Strong Signature Projects: Two hundred NPS signature projects have been identified in the first year of the Centennial Initiative, including some that would improve conditions for biking, hiking and equestrian use. Volunteers from the mountain bike community could help build environmentally-sound sustainable trails.

Relevancy for Youth: Many parks lack relevance with today's youth – bicycling is a fun way to help kids fall in love with their park and become future stewards.

Parks Need Our Help: Many NPS trails are in disrepair. Annually, IMBA members and clubs conduct almost one million hours of trailwork on public lands.