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January 5, 2018

G. Sam Foster,
Executive Director

Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

James Golden, Past
Chair

Johnny Hodges,
Secretary

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Richard Stem

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) is a professional and science-based organization with members consisting of Forest Service retirees and associates. We write in this instance to oppose HR 1349, a bill which proposes to amend the Wilderness Act of 1964. We represent many, many individuals who have devoted much of their professional lives to ensuring that the provisions of the Wilderness Act were properly implemented.

Tom Thompson

Marlin Johnson

Jack Troyer

The proposed amendment would specifically allow “non-motorized bicycles” as well as other forms of motorized and non-motorized mechanical transport. Our greatest concern with this proposal is the provisions related to bicycles. In today’s world of outdoor recreation, this would open up the entire wilderness system to mountain bikes and would not only be counter to the intent and purpose of the original Act, it would change use patterns, degrade the wilderness experience, negatively affect other wilderness users, impact the primitive character, increase wilderness management and maintenance costs, add a high potential safety issue, and open the door to a continual erosion of the purpose and intent of the Wilderness Act.

Steven Eubanks

Michael Rogers

Ranotta McNair

Malcolm “Mac”
Gramley

Ronald Scott

For a nearly a century the Forest Service has embraced the concept of wilderness and for a half century has been a leader in wilderness management and protection under provisions of the Wilderness Act. Many of our members were heavily involved in working to ensure that wilderness was valued and managed as one of the agency’s important multiple uses. One of NAFSR’s ten principle beliefs and values is: “Protecting Special Areas and Landscapes, like designated wilderness, monuments and other special landscapes to maintain their unique character.” This proposed amendment goes totally counter to that belief and value.

Pete Griffin

Rich Guldin

Hank Kashdan

Jane Kollmeyer

Bill Timko

Even though the Wilderness Act was passed over fifty-three years ago, its provisions have continued to be honored and reinforced by the twenty-seven subsequent sessions of Congress as new wildernesses were added to the system. Each wilderness addition has

Lee Nightingale

Susan Giannettino

Chiefs Emeritus

R. Max Peterson
F. Dale Robertson
Dale Bosworth
Abigail Kimbell

NAFSR --- *Sustaining the Heritage*

been studied, debated, and action taken only after careful consideration of the provisions, impacts, and boundaries. The proposed HR 1349 amendment would without question change the original intent set forth in the 1964 Wilderness Act as well as the subsequent designations on each wilderness. The boundaries that have been established on each of the individual wilderness areas existing today, whether large or small, were based on the provisions of the original act and to change or amend those provisions or assumptions erodes the trust and intention not only of many past Congressional leaders, but also the varied interests who participated in the designation processes over the years. The very foundation and assumption of what wilderness is and how it should be managed would be fractured should this amendment be made.

The second section of the original Act stated that *“In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.”* Mountain bikes are part of that “growing mechanization” that was of concern.

The Act is clear that *“there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.”* Mountain bikes are without question a form of mechanical transport that was not believed to be acceptable in wilderness.

There are hundreds of millions of acres of federal land open and available for mountain bike use without intruding on designated and protected wilderness and essentially changing the entire wilderness experience for all who don't choose to mountain bike.

Again, we strongly oppose this legislation based on its negative impact to the nation's wilderness preservation system and to the people who use, enjoy, and treasure wilderness. If there is valid reason to consider any exception to the provisions of the Wilderness Act for a specific wilderness, then that exception should be proposed and considered only as an amendment to the designation of that specific wilderness as has been done in several instances over the years.

James L. Caswell, Chair

James L. Caswell
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

cc: Chief Tony Tooke, U. S. Forest Service
Representative Raul M. Grijalva