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New Legislation is an Assault on the Very Idea of Wilderness and the Values of the Wilderness Act *The Sustainable Trails Coalition is attempting to amend and weaken the Wilderness Act*

MISSOULA, MONTANA – Last week Utah Republican Senators Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee introduced the so-called “Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Act,” a piece of legislation that would ride rough-shod over the Wilderness Act of 1964 by opening up America’s National Wilderness Preservation System to mountain bikes and other machines. The bill would also allow chainsaws and wheeled devices like carts and wheelbarrows in Wilderness.

For over 50 years the Wilderness Act has protected wilderness areas designated by Congress from mechanization and mechanical transport, even if no motors were involved with such activities. This has meant, as Congress intended, that Wilderness has been kept free from cars, trucks, ATVs, snowmobiles, bicycles, and all other types of motorized and mechanized transport.

“We see this for what it is—an assault on the very idea of Wilderness and the values of the Wilderness Act. Make no mistake, the goals of the Sustainable Trails Coalition are one of the biggest threats to the National Wilderness Preservation System,” said George Nickas, executive director of Wilderness Watch. “At a time when wilderness and wildlife are under increasing pressures from increasing populations, growing mechanization, and a rapidly changing climate, the last thing Wilderness needs is to be invaded by mountain bikes and other machines.”

It’s noteworthy that the Sustainable Trails Coalition had to enlist the help of some of the most anti-environmental and anti-wilderness members of Congress to carry their legislation. According to the League of Conservation Voters (LCV), Senator Orrin Hatch and Senator Mike Lee each have a lifetime environmental voting score of just 10 percent, while the most recent LCV scorecard gave Senator Hatch a zero percent and Senator Lee four percent.

Earlier this year, over 110 conservation and Wilderness organizations from across America wrote all members of Congress urging them to oppose attempts to amend and weaken the Wilderness Act and Wilderness protections by allowing bicycles in designated Wilderness. A copy of that letter is here: <http://bit.ly/1VFoL1U>

In the letter, the groups wrote: “These mountain bikers erroneously claim that mountain bikes were allowed in Wilderness until 1984, but then banned administratively by the U.S. Forest Service. This claim is simply not true.”

“Mountain bikes are exactly the kind of mechanical devices and mechanical transport that Congress intended to keep out of Wilderness in passing the Wilderness Act. Bikes have their place, but that place is not inside Wilderness areas,” explained Kevin Proescholdt, conservation director of Wilderness Watch.

“We believe that this protection has served our nation well, and that the ‘benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness’ would be forever lost by allowing mechanized transport and other machines in these areas.”

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