



WILDERNESS WATCH

Keeping Wilderness Wild

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Rep Rob Bishop's House Natural Resources Committee to 'Mark Up' GOP Bill Opening All Wilderness Areas to Bikes and Other Wheeled Contraptions

*Over 130 Conservation Groups Tell Congress:
Keep Bikes Out of Wilderness*

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MISSOULA, MONTANA – On Wednesday, Rep Rob Bishop's (R-UT) House Natural Resources Committee will 'mark up' a GOP bill (H.R.1349) that would weaken the 1964 Wilderness Act and open up all of America's protected Wilderness areas to mountain bikes and other wheeled contraptions.

A broad coalition of 133 conservation and Wilderness organizations from across America have asked Congress "to reject an unprecedented call to amend the Wilderness Act to allow for the use of mountain bikes in designated Wilderness."

"For over a half century, the Wilderness Act has protected wilderness areas from mechanization and mechanical transport, even if no motors were involved with such activities. This has meant, as Congress intended, that Wildernesses have been kept free from bicycles and other types of mechanization and mechanical transport," the 133 organizations wrote Congress.

The sign-on letter from the 133 organizations (<http://bit.ly/2AU0ume>) was prepared ahead of a one-sided December 7th hearing in the U.S. House's Subcommittee on Federal Lands on H.R. 1349.

"Last week's one-sided hearing showed the extraordinary bias and corruption of the democratic process by the anti-wilderness Republican leadership of the House Resources Committee. Not a single person or organization supporting Wilderness was allowed to testify. Not only were no wilderness supporters or experts allowed to testify, but none of the federal agencies that administer Wilderness, like the U.S. Forest

Service, were allowed to testify either. And none of the 133 organizations that signed onto the letter of opposition to HR 1349 were allowed to testify,” explained Kevin Proescholdt, Conservation Director of Wilderness Watch.

In the letter to Congress, the 133 conservation groups point out:

“In a seemingly cynical attempt to use people with disabilities as a justification for the bill, the legislation lists ‘motorized wheelchairs’ and ‘non-motorized wheelchairs’ as the first uses to be authorized in the bill (even prior to the listing of ‘bicycles’), despite the fact that the 1990 amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have allowed wheelchairs in designated Wilderness for more than a quarter-century.”

HR 1349 supporters 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.

“The 1964 Wilderness Act (36 U.S.C. 1131-1136) banned all types of mechanized transport, including bicycles, in designated Wilderness. Section 4(c) of that act states, “[T]here shall be...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.” (italics added)

“We see this for what it is: an assault on the very idea of Wilderness and the values of the Wilderness Act,” 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.”

“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. Bicycles have their place, but that place is not inside Wilderness areas,” said Proescholdt.

“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 in these areas,” the 133 conservation and Wilderness protection organizations wrote Congress.

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