

December 18, 2017



Board of Directors and David Wiens, Executive Director
International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA)
PO Box 20280
Boulder, CO 80308

RE: HR 1349 Restoring Local Decision Making of Bike Use in Wilderness Areas

Dear Board of Directors and Mr. Wiens:

The Folsom Auburn Trail Riders Action Coalition (FATRAC), a chapter of IMBA, is deeply disappointed by IMBA's recent testimony regarding HR 1349, by Congressman Tom McClintock, which would restore the Wilderness Act to its original intent and remove the blanket ban of bikes in Wilderness Areas. We ask that IMBA Board reconsider its position on the bill in light of recent amendments and take specific actions as described below.

In its written testimony, IMBA stated, unequivocally, that "IMBA is not supporting HR 1349." IMBA went further to state, "we feel it is unwise to amend the Wilderness Act." These statements sent a clear message to Congress that IMBA opposes efforts by the Sustainable Trails Coalition (STC) to remove the blanket ban on bikes in Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas, despite an agreement signed by the two organizations in May 2016 that led most of us to believe that IMBA would remain a neutral entity and allow the STC to pursue its advocacy work. IMBA, which is not a lobbying entity under its 501(c)(3) designation, instead chose to submit written testimony that has been widely accepted by anti-bike advocacy groups, such as Backcountry Horseman's Association, that the only national mountain biking representative group (IMBA) opposes HR 1349.

IMBA's action will have far reaching negative consequences for mountain bike access at the national and local levels. The debate around bike access has gained national attention with heated debate spreading throughout conventional media and social media outlets. Yet, IMBA's testimony implies that mountain bikes are incompatible in remote backcountry protected lands, that bicycles do not belong on singletrack trails, and that trails cannot be shared with hikers and equestrians. This messaging will eventually spill into our own local efforts to gain equitable trail access. It will become fuel to the fire that if bikes are incompatible in one area, they are certainly incompatible in other parks and protected areas.

Further, IMBA's stance on HR 1349 is completely contrary to the very basis for founding IMBA right here in California 30 years ago—to fight large-scale bike bans. As stated on your explanatory blog, "IMBA's mission does not include amending the Wilderness Act and never has." As a "neutral" entity, IMBA should have never weighed in with any written testimony regarding HR 1349. This broke all rules of common political practices, and was clear proof of IMBA's naiveté in the political arena. Even more confounding, the remaining portion of IMBA's testimony laid out several reasons why bikes *should* be allowed in Wilderness Areas. IMBA's follow-up blog post explaining your testimony further contradicted itself. Sadly, this attempt at nuancing your message is completely lost upon anti-bike advocacy groups,

and many IMBA members (as evidenced the blog commenters). They see the one and only national mountain biking association, supposedly representing all of its members, as opposed to the STC efforts. Upon reading IMBA's statements, and listening to interviews of IMBA staff members trying to explain their position on bikes in Wilderness Areas, it's become impossible to understand the rationale behind IMBA's decision to not support HR 1349.

We therefore urge IMBA to immediately retract its written testimony and issue a short statement indicating it is either neutral, or in support, of HR 1349. We note that HR 1349, as recently amended, makes it permissive for land managers to permit bikes on certain (not all) trails in Wilderness Areas. HR 1349 simply removes the large-scale, blanket ban and restores decision making locally, as it existed under the Wilderness Act prior to 1984. Passage of this bill would then allow local chapters to do our job of developing relationships with local land managers and other trail user groups for reasonable trail access. This is how IMBA and local chapters were always intended to operate.

In the past, IMBA supported efforts to amend the Wilderness Act to allow bicycling. Specifically, HR 3172 was a bill sponsored by James Hansen (UT) in 1989. IMBA "welcomed the bill" (Attachment A). Bicycling access and environmental protections are not mutually exclusive -- IMBA can support both.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Wetter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matt" and last name "Wetter" clearly legible.

Matt Wetter

FATRAC Board President

Attachment: HR 3172 (Hansen) – IMBA Supporting Wilderness Act Change to Allow Bikes

Attachment A: IMBA's Support for Change to the Wilderness Act to Permit Bicycling (1989)

WILDERNESS ACCESS BILL IN CONGRESS

James Hansen (R-UT) has introduced H.R. 3172, a bill to amend the Wilderness Act of 1964 to allow bicycle access. Currently, bicycles are banned — along with all other mechanized forms of transportation — from all areas designated as wilderness.

Hansen cites the growing use of mountain bikes as the primary reason for the amendment. "The mountain bicycle is an innovation of the 80s and therefore was not considered when the 1964 Wilderness Act was drafted."

The bill, with 22 co-sponsors, has been received cautiously by the mountain bike community — and with open opposition by environmental groups. Their big fear is that the bill will open up the previously unamended Wilderness Act for a host of other amendments detrimental to the purposes of the legislation.

The League's newly formed Mountain Bike Committee is debating their stance on the issue. The International Mountain Bicycling Association welcomed the bill, provided that a rational federal land access policy, with strong environmental safeguards, is adopted.