

For Release: December 7, 2017

## **133 Conservation Groups Tell Congress: Keep Bikes Out of Wilderness**

***U.S. House hearing on GOP bill opening all Wilderness areas to bikes and other wheeled contraptions is Thursday, December 7<sup>th</sup>***

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A broad coalition of 133 conservation and Wilderness organizations from across America, including Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, has asked Congress “to reject an unprecedented call to amend the Wilderness Act to allow for the use of mountain bikes in designated Wilderness.”

The sign-on letter from the 133 organizations was prepared ahead of a December 7th hearing in the U.S. House’s Subcommittee on Federal Lands on a Republican-sponsored bill (H.R. 1349), which would open up all of America’s 110-million acres of Wilderness to mountain bikes and other wheeled contraptions.

“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 in a sign-on letter prepared for the December 7th hearing.

A copy of the letter to Congress signed by 133 conservation groups can be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/2AU0ume>.

Designated wilderness comprises just 17% of all federal lands. Over eighty percent of U.S. public land is potentially already open to bicycling.

“Wilderness remains a rare and threatened resource around the country as well as in the Adirondacks and the Catskills,” said Adirondack Wild’s David Gibson. “The federal Wilderness Act should not be compromised by allowing mechanized travel because such use negates the very values and purposes for which the Wilderness was designated in the first place. New Yorkers reached that conclusion many years ago.” Both the Adirondack Park and Catskill Park State Land Master Plans define Wilderness like the federal Act and prohibit bicycling there.

“Were it to become law, H.R. 1349 would be not only very damaging to the Wilderness, but an affront to millions who are passionate about wilderness here in New York and around the country and who want reassurance that their favorite wilderness areas remain wild and not mechanized,” he said. “Bicycling can be practiced in most areas and settings not set aside expressly for their wild values. Many bicyclists don’t want wilderness rules changed at all. They appreciate that Wilderness is rare and that they can enjoy biking in so many other settings,” Gibson added.

“The personal challenges that come through safely visiting and enjoying remote, rugged wilderness settings could be all but lost or severely compromised with the introduction of mountain bicycles as mechanized transport,” said Adirondack Wild’s Dan Plumley, a resident of Keene in the Adirondack High Peaks region.

“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.”

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 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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