

February 16, 2009

Secretary Kenneth Salazar
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C., 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Our national parks preserve the most sacred and distinct features of America so that generations may enjoy them forever. On December 18, 2008, on their way out the door, the Bush Administration proposed a new regulation that would diminish the backcountry of many national park system units. This rule could not only negatively change the backcountry experience for park visitors, but would allow a non-conforming use in proposed and recommended wilderness violating the National Park Service Management Policies.

The Association of National Park Rangers, the Tamalpais Conservation Club, the Bay Area Trails Preservation Council, Wilderness Watch, Wild Wilderness, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Grand Canyon Wildlands Council and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) request that you withdraw the proposed rule.

We endorse the use of bicycles throughout our parks. In fact, it is a great way to travel through the developed areas of park units like the C&O Canal National Historical Park in the District of Columbia and Maryland. We support encouraging park visitors to enjoy our parks from a bicycle in place of a motor vehicle. But the proposed rule eases the use of mountain bicycles in undeveloped park areas – the backcountry, far from paved park roads.

This rule does not replace automobiles with more benign bicycles; it makes it easier to allow high-speed, extreme mountain biking on trails where hikers and equestrians enjoy touring and viewing scenery and wildlife. The rule could also introduce mountain bikes to an area that is proposed or recommended for wilderness designation and flies in the face of the National Park Service Management Policies.

Since 1987, in the Administration of President Reagan, the Department has required that use of bicycles on foot and horse trails in park backcountry be reviewed under the regulatory process. The Department recognized then the potential for fast-moving mountain bicycles to disrupt the enjoyment of park backcountry by visitors who access quiet and remote backcountry places by foot or horse.

Presidents from Nixon to George H.W. Bush have recommended that Congress designate as wilderness several million acres in nearly 20 parks. Previous Secretaries of the Interior have proposed that the President recommend still more. In wilderness, mountain bicycles are prohibited. As long as these lands remain to be designated by Congress, it would be unwise to open them to mountain bicycles, as the Bush rule would allow.

Please ensure that your Department protects undeveloped park backcountry. The Organic Act of 1916, as amended, mandates that the National Park Service provide for the enjoyment of the parks' natural, historic, and scenic features and their wildlife without derogation of the values and purposes of parks. Authorizing uses that may conflict with that enjoyment must remain subject to the strictest scrutiny.

Sincerely,

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Association of National Park Rangers

Larry Minikes
President
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George Nickas
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