

Testimony of Jeremy Fancher,
International Mountain Bicycling Association
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Hearing on “Misc. Public Lands Bills”
July 30, 2013

Thank you Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Murkowski, and distinguished members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on these important bills. It is an honor and a privilege to provide a mountain biker’s perspective on issues that are so critical to the development of our nation’s outdoor economy.

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) leads the national and worldwide mountain bicycling communities through a network of 80,000 individual supporters, 145 chapters and 340 affiliate clubs, and 600 dealer members. IMBA teaches sustainable trail building techniques and has become a leader in trail design, construction, and maintenance; encourages responsible riding, volunteer trail work, and cooperation among trail user groups and land managers. Each year, IMBA members and affiliated clubs conduct more than 750,000 hours of volunteer trail stewardship on America’s public lands and are some of the best assistants to federal, state, and local land managers. Even as IMBA celebrates the many accomplishments of our first 25 years we realize there are many challenges and opportunities ahead.

Across the United States, IMBA is working with the entire spectrum of public land stakeholders to support and develop public land designation proposals that establish long-term land protections, including Wilderness, and encourage the development of sustainable recreation opportunities. IMBA’s Public Lands Initiative (PLI) is currently engaged in 16 diverse proposals across the country at all stages of development. When carefully crafted through a collaborative process at the local level, these legislative measures account for opportunities for mountain bicycling and other quiet recreation in natural backcountry settings, which diversifies the base of stakeholder support for the bills and strengthens local economies.

This testimony will outline the importance of the collaborative process and purposeful trail planning, discuss the practical impacts of certain land designations within Senator Jon Tester (D-MT)'s Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA) on mountain bicycling and outdoor recreation, and highlight some disconcerting actions from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) regarding the management of bicycles in agency Recommended Wilderness.

S. 37, Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA)

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act was originally crafted before a truly collaborative process was implemented in Montana that accounted for outdoor recreation interests. Local stakeholder engagement prioritized input from the conservation community, the timber industry and other established interests in the state. A proposal crafted in 2010 by the Montana Wilderness Association, the Blackfoot Challenge, timber and mining interests, Montana Trout Unlimited, and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) – a coalition known as the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership Strategy -- helped form the basis for Senator Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2011. While small changes have been made to the version the Committee is considering today, this same foundation remains intact.

Without a voice for mountain bicycling at the table, land designation boundaries were originally drawn such that mountain bike access to many trails, including large portions of the iconic Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST), were disregarded. In a number of places, the bill designates Wilderness that would cut off current access to existing trail systems, which are important to mountain bikers and the local communities that host them. The result is a bill that does not take into account the desires of local mountain bikers and the potential adverse effects on the future of Montana's recreation economy.

IMBA and the Montana Mountain Bike Alliance (MMBA) have worked diligently over the past few years to strengthen relationships with other Montana public land stakeholders in an effort to find joint solutions to some of our community's concerns. While progress has been made, the necessary modifications to the current language and unit boundaries have not been made. Thus, the bill still does not account for the majority of concerns the mountain bike community has with the proposal.

As currently drafted the bill includes units that extend well beyond the Forest Service Recommended Wilderness boundaries into areas with existing and opportunity for future bike trails. In addition, the bill used inadequate GIS mapping technology that drew boundaries along section lines rather than identifiable features on the landscape, such as trails, ridgelines or drainages. This creates future management issues for the US Forest Service as-well-as arbitrarily closing entire trails that include small segments, which pass through the edges of these areas. While we remain supportive of much of the land protection being presented in the legislation, these issues need to be addressed to ensure that mountain bike interests are adequately considered.

IMBA and the MMBA wholly support all but five of the units that comprise the bill. For these few areas we have requested corrective amendments, such as boundary adjustments, to address current trail systems that would become closed to mountain bicycling and protect future opportunities that could grow a diverse recreation economy for rural Montana. A full list of these potential amendments to the proposal is attached as Appendix A.

IMBA and the MMBA have shown support for the *majority* of S.37 because our collective members support land protection in a general sense. IMBA and the MMBA applaud Senator Tester's efforts to propose a permanent solution for Montana's world-class landscapes. However, there remain aspects of the bill that fail to adequately consider mountain biking needs and fail to acknowledge the potential economic benefits that mountain biking and outdoor recreation hold for Montana's local communities.

Trail Planning: An Economic Driver

High quality trail experiences for mountain bicycling and other trail user groups are a critical component of successful outdoor recreation. It is in search of these unique outdoor experiences that tourists – and the associated economic benefits from their visit – travel to certain areas from outside the region. Creating these high quality experiences requires deliberate trail planning, which necessitates calculated collaboration between the local government, federal land management agencies, local industry and the recreation community.

Land management agencies commit a considerable amount of resources to managing the entire landscape (Forest and Resource Planning) and they put substantial efforts into deciding which roads and trails can be used by motorized vehicles (Travel Management). However, it is rare that we see a deliberate effort to plan how a trail system interacts with the landscape or how uses are managed to provide a specific experience. Managing trails based on desired experiences, sustainable construction and maintenance, and suitability for the desired conditions of the area rather than simply by mode of travel would allow the agencies to actually manage a trail system rather than a spider web of legacy routes.

Significant quantities of the trails currently in use on federal public lands were not designed or constructed to be sustainable recreation trails. They were developed as temporary extraction roads, firebreaks, or worn in as hunting routes, or game trails and have been repurposed as long-term public access routes. A purposefully designed trail system is light on the land, showcases the landscape, steers visitors away from sensitive areas, and provides a broad range of experiences.

Long distance backcountry trails in Montana such as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST), serve an important purpose in the economic development of rural communities. These trails create a link that establishes an economic lifeline for rural communities to build upon. They also play an important role for the mountain biking community as they offer unique experiences not found in front-country or urban based trail systems. Many segments of these backcountry trails pass near small towns and these segments become stand along attractions that draw in visitors.

Many rural communities in Montana and other Western U.S. states have historically been dependent upon resource extraction to sustain the local economy. In recent years outdoor recreation has filled many revenue gaps and has proven to be a sustainable economic driver. The recreation industry creates increased revenue for small businesses within many segments of the travel and tourism industry through increased visitation, including hotels, restaurants, and local outfitters. Locations with valuable recreational assets also attract outdoor businesses and industries whose owners and employers prefer to live and work close to the places they play. To create a vibrant outdoor recreation economy, the trail systems around these local communities must be designed and managed as the economic assets they are. Proposals that impact these

assets must be carefully crafted to highlight the natural resource and balance it with appropriate recreation access.

Protecting the Places We Play

Recreational uses are often overlooked during planning and legislative processes dominated by either polarized stand offs or deals struck between extractive use and pure conservation interests. In these situations recreation becomes an afterthought. Integrating consistent and thoughtful management of the ecological, social and economic value of recreation into land management decisions is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of outdoor recreation and providing an accessible connection to the outdoors.

Legislative land management designations can contribute to a “patchwork” of disjointed local areas if they are not developed through a collaborative process with a broad range of stakeholders. Where they have been developed collaboratively, legislative designations have protected both the landscape and the recreation experiences it provides.

Some designations, such as Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers, have organic acts that set the framework for how all such areas will be managed. Other designations such as National Recreation Areas or National Conservation Areas, do not. Because of the lack of an organic act some advocates from the traditional conservation community and members of Congress view them with suspicion, believing that loopholes will be discovered and allow for unintended uses.

The commands of these non-Wilderness legislative designations vary from detailed management prescriptions to slightly more directed versions of multiple use. While the majority of these designations include recreation as a purpose in their enabling legislation, relatively few are specifically targeted at protecting and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities. Managing these places to preserve and enhance the recreation experience provides substantial benefits for local residents and make crucial contributions to local economies. They are an invaluable component of the outdoor recreation landscape, yet they remain substantially under represented with regard to protection and management for the unique benefits they provide.

Recreation exists throughout the spectrum of land designations and management prescriptions. Many outdoor recreation experiences demand backcountry landscapes that are predominantly natural with little human influence. Others require settings with more hands-on management and developed facilities that are designed to handle more intense use and mitigate impacts. Mountain biking in various forms has a presence across this spectrum as well.

From backcountry epic trail rides that expose one to their natural surroundings, to lift-serviced resort riding that provides endless thrills; mountain bicycling is an ever-growing means of exploration and excitement. Ensuring that the mountain bicycling experiences offered in a given landscape are consistent with the rest of the uses and desired conditions of that landscape requires well informed land management designations and deliberate trail planning that address mountain bicycling on it's own merits.

Agency Recommended Wilderness

IMBA fully appreciates the importance of the Wilderness Act as a conservation tool and is not seeking to gain access for mountain bicycling in Congressionally-designated Wilderness areas. However, recent management activity by the Forest Service has established a troubling precedent for our community, making it even more difficult to develop community support for Wilderness legislation. In Region 1 of the Forest Service (Montana and Northern Idaho) there has been a consistent effort to prohibit bicycle use from agency Recommended Wilderness in order to make these areas of national forests more socially and politically suitable, for permanent Wilderness designation by Congress.

We are troubled by this for several reasons. First, by creating land use plans that prohibit a use in an entire area without first having a solid understanding of how, if permitted, those users would experience the area is somewhat arbitrary. If a long-range trail plan was in place before or concurrently with the landscape plan, a more tailored approach could be taken to avoid eliminating unique and challenging experiences and still achieve the conservation and landscape protection goals that are the motivation for the recommendation. Secondly, we find this to have a very chilling effect on the collaborative efforts to develop win-win land protection solutions. Lastly, we question whether managing areas recommended for Wilderness designation as

Wilderness crosses that fine line between the authority granted to the agency and those powers explicitly reserved to Congress in the Wilderness Act.

Conclusion

IMBA and the Montana mountain bicycling community welcome the opportunity to join with other stakeholders to protect Montana and to ensure current and future generations can enjoy high-quality outdoor experiences. We look forward to continued discussion of how best to meet the needs of mountain bikers and other trail users for these very special regions of Montana.

Appendix A



INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN
BICYCLING ASSOCIATION



MONTANA MOUNTAIN BIKE
ALLIANCE

Requested Adjustments to FJRA- Revised 26 July, 2013

1. Otatsy – Spread Mountain

- Adjust boundary to allow Reroute for Spread Mountain Trail from Monture Creek to Camp Pass. Adjust boundary for Lake Creek Trail to the North Fork Blackfoot trailhead.

2. Anaconda Pintler Map, est. 1,000 acres

- Adjust FJRA boundary east to Forest Plan's Recommended Wilderness Area to maintain recreational trail opportunities utilizing the CDT, the Bender Point Trail and Trail #110, resulting in removal of 1,000 acres from the proposed wilderness designation.

3. West Big Hole, North Unit Proposed Wilderness addition

- Corridor for loop option in the Rock Creek and Moose Creek drainages.

4. West Big Hole, South Unit Proposed Wilderness addition

- Move proposed Wilderness Boundary to the West side of the rebuilt section of the CDT to allow continued bicycle access to the CDT and the trail loop trail connectors to the east.



4b. West Big Hole, South Unit Proposed Wilderness addition

- Move proposed Wilderness Boundary to the West side of the CDT and south of the rebuilt Upper Miner Lake trail leaving Upper Miner Lake in proposed Wilderness.

5. Italian Peak, North, est. 900 acres

- Allow for future CDT bypass trail that would become the proposed FJRA Wilderness boundary and acreage west of the trail remains proposed Wilderness.



6. Italian Peak, Central, est. 1900 acres

- Make the CDT the FJRA proposed Wilderness boundary, creating potential for additional Recreation Management Area.

7. Italian Peak, South, est. 20 acres

- Make the Divide Creek Lake Trail the FJRA proposed Wilderness boundary.

8. Lima Peaks, West

- A 10-mile corridor is requested for Little Sheep Creek to provide a Lima Peaks recreation trail utilizing the CDT, a portion of which is not Recommended Wilderness Area.



Lima Peaks, East, est. 500 acres

9.

- Make the CDT the FJRA proposed Wilderness boundary between Shineberger Creek and Sawmill Creek to match Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness Area.

10. Centennial – Hell Roaring

- Propose making the CDT the boundary between the Jefferson Wilderness Unit and the Centennial Wilderness Unit and create a 4-mile corridor between Red Rock Pass and Lillian Lake keeping a continuous 55-mile CDT non-motorized recreation route through the Centennial Mountains.



11. Centennial - Mt Jefferson, est. 10 acres

- Although the FJRA proposed wilderness boundary does not follow the Forest Plan for Mount Jefferson (marked in hatching), MMBA requests a small proposed Wilderness boundary adjustment for trail #165 to maintain continued bicycle access to Lake Marie from the Idaho side.