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Statement on Mountain Bikes as Related to SNRA+

I have recently introduced legislation that will create three new wilderness areas in the majestic Boulder-White Clouds and Jerry Peak areas. Under this proposal we will have wilderness from the doorstep of Ketchum (Hemingway-Boulders Wilderness), northward towards Stanley (White Clouds Wilderness), and across to the East Fork of the Salmon and beyond (Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness). These wilderness areas alone would encompass over 430 square miles of some of Idaho's most majestic peaks, valleys, lakes and streams. They embrace Idaho treasures that would remain in perpetual solitude for future generations to hike, climb, explore, fish and hunt in a manner that will not be disturbed by manmade activities.

My bill will also ensure that traditional recreational users such as snowmobilers, hunters, motorbikers, backpackers, day hikers, mountain bikers, heliskiers, outfitters, campers and others will be able to continue the recreational activities they have come to love and enjoy in the backcountry areas of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA). These diverse and historic recreational users are an important part of the SNRA and contribute significantly to the local economies of Stanley, Ketchum, and Challis.

Recently, I have heard concerns from some mountain biking advocates that my legislation will impact tourism and business in Idaho. It goes without saying that mountain biking is an important activity in the Boulder-White

Clouds area. Mountain bikers significantly use and enjoy this area, and at the same time are strong supporters of local businesses.

The views and opinions of mountain bikers have been very important to me since I began work on CIEDRA over a decade ago. At that time, mountain bike advocates made it clear to me that the Fisher-Williams Loop was a prized trail and mountain biking experience; and I agreed it should not be wilderness or closed to mountain bikes.

While I am not a mountain biker, I have been told by members of the mountain bike community that my bill will continue to provide a wide variety of back country experiences for mountain bikers, from beginner to advanced-expert, on some of the most rugged and scenic high elevation trails in the United States.

For those advanced-expert mountain bikers, we leave open the epic Bowery Loop to the East Fork (Germania Creek Trail and Grand Prize/West Fork of East Fork Trails). This allows for loop access from Smiley Creek to the East Fork of the Salmon River and back – described as “abusive” in a mountain biking guidebook. This grueling 30 mile loop lies between the proposed White Clouds and Hemingway Boulders Wildernesses.

Additionally, the difficult Garland Lakes/Martin Creek Trail to Warm Springs Meadow, and Rough Creek and Lookout Mountain trails will remain open. Riders will see incredible scenery as they head up the Big and Little Casino Creek Trails, as well as the Boundary Creek, Gladiator Creek and Galena Gulch Trails.

Mountain bikers who want to access the solitude of high mountain lakes can ride the Frog Lake Loop to remote Frog Lake and the Fourth of July Trail to Fourth of July Lake and Washington Lake. For a one of a kind ride, Railroad

Ridge will remain open to mountain bikes. There is no place on earth like Railroad Ridge for views, scenery, fauna, geology and tranquility.

For those who are concerned about losing access to backcountry trails, backcountry is a term that refers to land that is isolated, undeveloped, remote and difficult to access. All of the trails I have mentioned are certainly backcountry trails.

When completed, the Galena Lodge mountain bike trail network will provide 54 miles of non-motorized trails that will offer opportunities for families and those of all skill levels.

Sun Valley residents and recreational tourists will continue to have an abundance of mountain biking opportunities in and around the local area in the Pioneers and Smoky Mountains including Adams Gulch, Fox Creek, Chocolate Gulch, Oregon Gulch, Warm Springs Ridge, and Bear-Parker Gulch.

These are just a few of the many trails left open to mountain biking in the Boulder-White Clouds and Ketchum area. I firmly believe that some mountain bike advocates are undervaluing these incredible mountain biking experiences and opportunities.

I agree with mountain biking advocates when they tell me that having Ants Basin and Castle Divide trails in wilderness will be a loss of two very unique and incredible back country rides. I also agree with wilderness advocates when they tell me that this is the very reason why mountain bikes should not be allowed. The crux of the issue is that these trails are in the core of the proposed wilderness and have some, if not the most, scenic, undisturbed, and outstanding wilderness characteristics one can find.

While I am not certain that mountain bikes should be banned in all wilderness areas, the fact is they are. I cannot change that. Unfortunately, my bill seems to have become a proxy for a larger debate between mountain bike advocates and wilderness advocates on whether mountain bikes (or mountain bike corridors) should be allowed in wilderness areas. That needs to be resolved at a national level and not through area-specific legislation.

For those who are intent on leaving biking corridors open through the White Clouds and Hemingway-Boulders wildernesses, they do so knowing that the result will be the loss of 430 square miles of wilderness, and the ultimate protection that wilderness provides. They know that we would lose a plan that all recreational users can and should be able to live with. They know that acrimonious divisions over the management, implementation, and uses in the national monument will continue for some time.

Allowing corridors in the three proposed wilderness areas is non-negotiable, and the three wilderness areas in my bill will each remain undivided and without corridors. I am certain that anything less will result in a monument.

In regards to mountain bikers and their impact on the local and state economy, mountain biking advocates have told me that while they agree the Boulder-White Clouds deserve protection, if “critical adjustments” to my legislation are not made, then my bill “will gravely impact the tourism and business economy of rural Idaho and the state as a whole.”

I think this idea goes too far. I do not believe that if Ants Basin and Castle Divide trails are closed that no one will come to Ketchum or Stanley to mountain bike on the Fisher-Williams Loop, Frog Lake Loop, the epic Bowery Loop or all of the other remaining trails and loops that remain open. I firmly believe that there will continue to be significant riding opportunities to support a recreation economy based on mountain biking tourism.

I also believe that a national monument designation has the potential to disrupt all forms of recreation in the Boulder White Clouds or create a priority ranking where one form of recreation could be placed above or below others. My bill will ensure that mountain bikers and all traditional recreational users, both motorized and non-motorized, will be able to continue the recreational activities they have come to love and enjoy in the backcountry areas of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA).

Thank you for taking the time to read my views on the mountain biking issue. I would be interested in your thoughts or comments if you would like to provide them to me. Please email me with the subject line "Mountain Bikes" to: Simpson.SNRA@mail.house.gov

Sincerely,

Mike Simpson