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Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1349 (Subcommittee Chairman Tom McClintock)
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Good afternoon, Chairman McClintock, ranking member Hanabusa, and subcommittee members.

I'm Ted Stroll, president of the Sustainable Trails Coalition. We founded STC to restore the Wilderness Act of 1964 to its two original purposes: conservation and rugged, self-reliant recreation. Chairman McClintock's bill, H.R. 1349, will accomplish this.

The Act was a conservation milestone. The recreation aspect, however, went off-kilter because federal agencies misunderstood the law.

The Act endorsed "primitive and unconfined" recreation. Two years later, in 1966, the Forest Service correctly interpreted this language to allow all forms of human-powered travel. But 18 years after that, in 1984, the agency changed its mind, limiting overland travel to horse-riding and limited forms of walking. The National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management later adopted the same rule.

What does limited forms of walking mean? It means no bicycle-riding. It means no walking with a baby stroller. It means paraplegic veterans cannot use arm-propelled adaptive cycles.

As Senator Frank Church warned the Forest Service in 1977, in response to increasingly severe restrictions on Wilderness uses, "If Congress had intended that wilderness be administered in so stringent a manner, we would never have written the law as we did."

For me and tens of thousands of cyclists, riding a bicycle on dirt trails is a lifelong passion. It's an exhilarating, fantastic way to see America's wild places. Mountain biking offers great physical and psychological benefits.

As Wilderness expands, however, we're ousted from trails we may have ridden for decades. Wilderness started out small in 1964. It's now larger than the entire land area of California.

STC endorses this modest, cautious reform. H.R. 1349 doesn't give bicycling a blanket permit. It ends the antiquated blanket bans, but stops there. It leaves in place regulations that let local forest and park supervisors decide who can be on a

particular Wilderness trail. This was the Forest Service's own rule from 1981 to 1984.

Here's an example of the problem. Nationwide, the Maah Daah Hey Trail in North Dakota is the longest Forest Service trail that allows bicycling. The trail draws cyclists from around the U.S. and Canada and benefits North Dakota's economy. Some 70 percent of trail visitors are mountain bikers.

However, we cyclists can't ride all of it. Note the magenta area at the top of the map, which I've highlighted with a box. In that area, there's a short stretch of the Maah Daah Hey Trail that runs through a Wilderness area in Theodore Roosevelt National Park. This severs the trail for bicycling.

Current rules won't let the park superintendent open the trail to bicycle-riding even if she wants to. H.R. 1349 would restore that authority to her. We think it would benefit the National Park Service, because mountain biking is environmentally benign and introduces younger people to the outdoors.

The government's map shows horsemen and a mountain biker happily greeting each other on the Maah Daah Hey Trail. It won't be any different on the brief Wilderness segment.

Any people who oppose H.R. 1349 should ask themselves, Why don't I trust the local forest or park supervisor to manage a Wilderness area?

Top-down prohibitions were issued decades ago, when mountain biking was new and little-understood. They remain frozen in place. It's time to let local land managers regulate human-powered travel.

We mountain bikers thank the subcommittee for your interest in resolving this long-neglected problem. I welcome any questions. Thank you.