



Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience

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RE: American Hiking Society Comments on Proposed Rule *General Provisions; Electric Bicycles*

On behalf of American Hiking Society (AHS), our members, supporters, and the millions-strong hiking community nationwide, we respectfully submit these comments on the National Park Service proposed rule, *General Provisions; Electric Bicycles*. This proposed rule would amend 36 CFR Parts 1 and 4 *General Provisions* and *Vehicles and Traffic Safety*, concerning the use of electric motorized bicycles. As discussed below, AHS supports providing clarity by further defining the classifications of “electric bicycle” through this rule. We do not support permitting their use on non-motorized trails given the lack of data on the impact on trails and all user groups.¹

Our nation's public lands and trails provide access to millions of recreation users every year including hiking, mountain biking, equestrian use, and electric motorized bicycle use. As NPS considers changes to the definitions of “electric bicycles,” and electric motorized bicycle use on non-motorized trails we encourage the agency to consider the impacts on all user groups, the trails themselves, and the surrounding environment.

Social and Physical Impacts of Electric Motorized Bicycles Use on Non-Motorized Trails

AHS strongly supports the use of public lands for all types of recreation activities and for all types of users and welcomes the increased recreational opportunities that electronic motorized bicycles can provide regardless of “physical fitness, age, or convenience.”² However, to allow motorized recreation on non-motorized trails will degrade the natural, cultural, recreational and social values for which that land is managed. We urge NPS to reserve non-motorized trails for non-motorized use.

¹ AHS bases these comments on the organizations Electric Bicycle Position Statement, available at, <https://americanhiking.org/policy-positions/electric-bicycle-position-statement/>.

² 85 Fed. Reg. No.68 19712..

The hiking community seeks out NPS' non-motorized trails for recreation, solitude, and the physical and mental benefits that these trails provide. The addition of motorized users, through electric motorized bicycles, raises concerns over trail conflict and safety, increases trail maintenance needs, and could displace hikers and other non-motorized trail users.

Safety of All Trail Users

The use of electric motorized bicycles can jeopardize the safety of non-motorized trail users in several ways. First, many NPS trails and roads experience high visitation and usage. Adding electric motorized bicycle riders to the mix will create more congestion. Increased congestion combined with already frequent conflicts on trails between fast-moving mountain bikes and slower-moving hikers and horseback riders can result in increased safety concerns on the trail.

Second, research by Brigham Young University³ indicates that electric motorized bicycles travel faster on average than mountain bikes, including the potential to travel quickly uphill, while other users are travelling quickly downhill, further increasing the risk for accidents. Higher speeds by one user group increases the risk for all user groups. Allowing potentially fast-moving electric motorized bicycles on trails will exacerbate these conflicts and further marginalize the hikers, equestrians, and other users whose safety and enjoyment are at risk. This is especially true as NPS predicts increased electric motorized bicycle usage by those who might not otherwise be able to ride a bicycle because of "physical fitness, age, or convenience" onto trails, especially those at "high altitude or in hilly or strenuous terrain." Given the limited research into electric motorized bicycle usage, it's a logical assumption that users with limited experience or who might not otherwise ride a bicycle due to the aforementioned characteristics may access more challenging and remote non-motorized trails of which they are unfamiliar and unprepared, creating safety issues for both themselves and other users.

Trail Impact

Electric motorized bicycles may add more trail users onto non-motorized trails. These users will have the capability to travel a longer distance more frequently resulting in heavier use in previously less utilized and remote sections of trails. With the maintenance backlog for NPS trails at \$461 million, and the agency understaffed, it's unclear how NPS will address the increased trail maintenance and management needs resulting from the impact of this type of usage.⁴

Electric Motorized Bicycles on Non-Motorized Trails Impact on Hiking Experience

The hiking community often seeks out trails as a respite to their day-to-day lives. This includes seeking solitude away from motorized vehicles and technology to enjoy a quiet, slow-moving, natural environment. The addition of electric motorized vehicles to non-motorized trails can lead to a reduction in the numbers of trails where hikers feel safe and welcome. The phenomenon of technological

³ Hall, et. al, 2019, Pedal-Assist Mountain Bikes: A Pilot Study Comparison of the Exercise Response, Perceptions, and Beliefs of Experienced Mountain Bikers (*JMIR Form Res* 2019;3(3):e13643). doi:10.2196/13643

⁴ NAT'L PARK SERV., NAT'L PARK SERV. ASSET INVENTORY SUMMARY FY18, available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/identifying-reporting-deferred-maintenance.htm>.

displacement can occur where recreation users with more advanced forms of transportation displace other users. Hikers, equestrian riders, and others could find it uncomfortable to share trails with fast electronic motorized bicycles coming from both directions, uphill and downhill, resulting in non-bicycle users essentially being forced off of these trails. This is especially true with electric motorized vehicles having access to trails with “challenging alpine climbs” or “high altitude or in hilly or strenuous terrain” and being able to go further and faster into more remote areas.

Definition of Electric Motorized Bicycle

We understand the addition of a new definition of “electric bicycle” to 36 CFR 1.4 that defines the current classifications of electronic motorized bicycles, but for the reasons stated above, we *oppose* explicitly excluding electric motorized vehicles from the definition of “motor vehicle” found at 36 CFR 1.4, which belies the inherent motorized nature of these “electric bicycles”. We also caution that challenges will remain with continuing to define electric motorized bicycles and their current classes since rapid technological developments may result in quickly outdated definitions.

Conclusion

AHS thanks NPS for the opportunity to submit public comments and urges the agency to reconsider the provisions of the proposed rule that would permit electronic motorized bicycle use on non-motorized trails. Given the concerns outlined above and the impact on all trail user groups, adopting the proposed rule would not benefit the trails community as a whole and would, in fact, have negative effects on all users of NPS-managed trails.