

Arkansas Wildlife Federation • Planning & Conservation League (CA) • Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Colorado Wildlife Federation • Conservation Northwest (WA) • Delaware Nature Society
Florida Wildlife Federation • Georgia Wildlife Federation • Conservation Council for Hawaii
Idaho Wildlife Federation • Prairie Rivers Network (IL) • Louisiana Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Council of Maine • Conservation Federation Missouri • Montana Wildlife Federation
New Hampshire Audubon • New Mexico Wildlife Federation • Association of Northwest Steelheaders (OR)
PennFuture • South Carolina Wildlife Federation • South Dakota Wildlife Federation
Texas Conservation Alliance • Virginia Conservation Network • Wyoming Wildlife Federation

July 21, 2017

The Honorable Tom McClintock), Chairman,
House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
The Honorable Darin LaHood, Vice Chairman
The Honorable Colleen Hanabusa, Ranking Member
The Honorable Bruce Westerman
The Honorable Don Young
The Honorable Niki Tsongas
The Honorable Steve Pearce
The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
The Honorable Glenn Thompson
The Honorable Norma Torres
The Honorable Raul Labrador
The Honorable Ruben Gallego
The Honorable Scott Tipton
The Honorable Jimmy Panetta
The Honorable A. Donald McEachin
The Honorable Anthony Brown
The Honorable Daniel Webster
The Honorable David Rouzer
The Honorable Raul Grijalva
The Honorable Jack Bergman
The Honorable Liz Cheney
The Honorable Rob Bishop

Re: H.R. 1349

Dear Subcommittee Chairman, Vice Chairman, Ranking Member and Members:

Our Federations collectively represent hundreds of thousands of hunters, anglers, wildlife viewers, and other conservationists across the West. We write to express our strong opposition to the referenced bill.

H.R. 1349 was introduced on March 2, 2017 by Congressman Tom McClintock, and was referred to your Subcommittee on Federal Lands on March 17 pursuant to your jurisdiction over the The National Wilderness Preservation System. The bill seeks to amend Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1133(c)) with the following language: "Nothing in this section shall prohibit the use of motorized wheelchairs, non-motorized

wheel-chairs, non-motorized bicycles, strollers, wheelbarrows, survey wheels, measuring wheels, or game carts within any wilderness area."

Our organizations support appropriate bicycle access to public lands. We have worked collaboratively with mountain bikers in various aspects of resource and travel management planning to help promote and expand sustainable bicycle access alongside hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and other recreational activities. We have contributed to identification and resolution of many issues on public lands managed by federal agencies, for example, in Colorado, California, Montana and New Mexico. By working together, we have been able to ensure extensive access for bikers to public land. 98 percent of all the trails on non-wilderness public land the US Forest Service manages are open to bicycles; only an estimated three percent of trails on federal public lands are located in designated wilderness areas.

The purpose of the Wilderness Act, as stated in Section 2(a), is "to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition . . ." Wilderness is described in the Act as having "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." The Act specifies that only primitive travel by foot or horseback be allowed in designated wilderness areas, with the exception that, after the enactment of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), wheelchairs are permitted. It established the National Wilderness Preservation System to "secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

Biking bears a marked distinction from primitive outdoor recreational travel activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, camping, and horseback riding. Biking is a mechanized mode of travel which presents several challenges to the concept of wilderness. Bicycles tend to involve far greater speed, especially in descending terrain, than the non-mechanized modes of transportation contemplated by the Wilderness Act. Bicycles can cause erosion to primitive trails, damage habitat, and disturb wildlife, which depend on Wilderness Areas for refuge. Allowing bicycles in Wilderness Areas has the potential to increase conflict with other users.

As noted above, although the bill references wheelchairs, they have been allowed in Wilderness Areas since enactment of the ADA in 1990. Section 507(c)(1) of the ADA specifically provides that "Congress reaffirms that nothing in the Wilderness Act is to be construed as prohibiting the use of a wheelchair in a wilderness area by an individual who disability requires use of a wheelchair...." In that respect, the bill is unnecessary.

We thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Respectfully,

Suzanne O'Neill, Executive Director
Colorado Wildlife Federation

Dave Chadwick, Executive Director
Montana Wildlife Federation

Ellen McNulty, President
Arkansas Wildlife Federation

Howard Penn, Executive Director
Planning & Conservation League (CA)

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director
Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Brian Winslow, Executive Director
Delaware Nature Society

Manley Fuller, Executive Director
Florida Wildlife Federation

Mike Worley, Executive Director
Georgia Wildlife Federation

Marjorie Ziegler, Executive Director
Conservation Council for Hawaii

Brian Brooks, Executive Director
Idaho Wildlife Federation

Carol Hays, Executive Director
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Rebecca Triche, Executive Director
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Lisa Pohlmann, Executive Director
Natural Resources Council of Maine

Brandon Butler, Executive Director
Conservation Federation Missouri

Doug Bechtel, President
New Hampshire Audubon

Garrett VeneKlasen, Executive Director
New Mexico Wildlife Federation

Bob Rees, Executive Director
Association of Northwest Steelheaders (OR)

Jacqui Bonomo, Executive Vice President and Chief Operations Officer
PennFuture

Ben Gregg, Executive Director
South Carolina Wildlife Federation

Chris Hesla, Executive Director
South Dakota Wildlife Federation

Janice Bezanson, Executive Director
Texas Conservation Alliance

Mary Rafferty, Executive Director
Virginia Conservation Network

Mitch Friedman, Executive Director
Conservation Northwest (WA)

Dwayne Meadows, Executive Director
Wyoming Wildlife Federation

Collin O'Mara, President and CEO
National Wildlife Federation