



October 25, 2020

Sent via email to: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=ORMS-2619>

Director, Recreation Staff

1400 Independence Avenue SW

Washington, DC 20250-1124

RE: Forest Service Manual 7700 Travel Management; Chapter 7700, Zero Code; Chapter 7710 Travel Planning

Dear Director,

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the USFS proposed changes to the Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7700 and 7710 regarding the use of motorized electric bikes (e-bikes) on National Forest system lands. We support multiple uses on our nation's public lands including our National Forests. We recognize that motorized recreation is a valid and important recreational activity on these lands as is non-motorized forms of recreation including horseback riding, hiking, and traditional bicycling.

Black Hills Back Country Horsemen of South Dakota

Founded in 2010, the Black Hills Back Country Horsemen of South Dakota (BH BCH SD) is a chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA). As such our mission is to perpetuate the common-sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use. We assist the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) and other public land management agencies in South Dakota with maintenance of trails

and equestrian facilities. In the past ten years we have contributed over 2,800 volunteer hours maintaining over 5,700 miles of non-motorized trails in the Black Hills. These hours represent an in-kind monetary contribution of over \$750,000. We LOVE our trails!

Comments on Proposed Changes to FSM 7700 and 7710

We applaud the Forest Service for recognizing that e-bikes are indeed a form of motorized recreation and travel. Thus, placing the agency direction for management of e-bikes in this portion of the Forest Service Manual is very appropriate.

However, we do have some concerns with the direction as it is currently proposed.

The proposal does not adequately address safety of other recreationists

We, as equestrians, along with many other non-motorized recreationists travel at a relaxing 3-5 miles per hour. We appreciate the sights, sounds, and smells of the forest environment. During the time we spend on the trail we communicate with nature, with our animals, and with our fellow trail users. We are concerned that e-bikes with their ability to travel at speeds up to 28 mile per hour present a significant safety hazard to other non-motorized trail users. Having to always be on the look out for high speed vehicles on single-track trails will significantly reduce our ability to enjoy the trails.

We are also concerned with our safety. One of our members was involved in a collision between his horse and a traditional mountain biker on a trail in a wide open meadow. The possibility of a collision is increased with increased speed. E-bikes are relatively quiet and give little warning of their approach to horse or riders. The silent, swift approach of an e-bike is comparable to a predator in the mind of a horse or mule. The result can be that an animal will react suddenly and/or violently injuring the rider and possibly the horse itself. This is especially worrisome on narrow trails with limited space to get off the trail. In addition, the kinetic energy involved in a collision is significantly higher when the speed of a collision is increased. This increased risk and severity of a collision (with a horse, hiker or traditional biker) due to incompatible speeds is not taken into account adequately in the current proposal. For these reasons, we object to relying solely on trail management objectives (TMOs) to determine compatibility of e-bikes on non-motorized trails managed for bicycles.

We also request that the proposal assume that any e-bike can travel up to 28 miles per hour and the proposal be re-written to better address safety concerns related to the incompatible speeds among e-bike users and other non-motorized trail users. We request e-bike use be evaluated and determined based on the current design speeds of trails and roads.

The proposal includes definitions that are not identifiable or enforceable

We are concerned that the proposal is not enforceable due to the proposed definitions of the three classes of e-bikes. There is no easy way to differentiate between the various classes of e-bikes in a field setting. There is next to no visual differences and the various classes are not labelled. In addition, there are e-bikes that can be programmed to function as either Class 1, 2 or 3 with the push of a button. There are even YouTube videos with work-arounds to either negate or override the governor of many e-bikes.

This effectively renders the restriction of e-bike use on trails based on Class 1, 2 or 3 completely useless and unenforceable.

We suggest that there are really only two classes of e-bikes: 1) those that require pedal-assistance, and 2) those that do not require pedal-assistance. This difference is readily identifiable in the field setting because in order to move on the level or uphill, the rider must actively be pedaling with a pedal-assist e-bike. However, since there are pedal-assisted bikes that can reach 28 miles per hour, we question the need for this differentiation.

We request the description of classes of e-bikes be re-written to identify a feasible method of differentiating between the types of e-bikes OR consider dropping the classification entirely as it could well be a short-term, transient definition due to developing technology.

The proposal does not adequately address displacement of other recreationists

BH BCH SD has spent many hours over the past ten years helping to maintain non-motorized trails on the Black Hills NF. Due to the safety and enjoyment concerns mentioned above, we are concerned that equestrians, hikers, and other users of non-motorized trails will be displaced from non-motorized trails where e-bikes are allowed. Currently on the BHNH there are over 700 miles of motorized trails and roads in addition to over 5,000 miles of roads “open to all vehicles” including thousands of miles of Maintenance level 2 and 3 roads. However, there are only 450 miles of non-motorized trails. Allowing use of e-bikes on any or all of these non-motorized trails could severely reduce the true non-motorized trail experience on the Black Hills NF.

The current proposal does nothing to help identify or prioritize trails or areas to be open to e-bike use. To preserve a truly non-motorized trail experience in a safe setting for equestrians and other trail users, e-bike use should be prioritized on motorized trails and/or low level Forest Development Roads (FDRs) wherever possible.

We request that the proposal include direction to prioritize existing motorized trails and roads for e-bike use over existing non-motorized wherever possible.

The proposal includes repetitive, unnecessary, and misleading NEPA guidance

We are concerned that the agency has include NEPA guidance into the FSM at an inappropriate location. Additionally, this portion of the proposal makes conclusions that may not be appropriate. We object to the wording included in the proposal at 7715.5, 4 (c). FSM 1950 provides detailed direction for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) including the use of programmatic analyses. The language included in the proposal inappropriately suggests that the effects of e-bike use are similar to the effects of bicycle use. The agency has not to our knowledge completed any analysis to support this suggestion. In fact, based on our concerns listed above, we do not agree that effects are similar.

We request that the proposed wording at 7715.5, 4. (c) be deleted.

Conclusion

We recognize that the Forest Service is attempting to accommodate an increasing amount of recreational use on our public lands. We also recognize that e-bikes can provide a healthy, lower cost alternative for people who do not have the physical capacity to otherwise get out and enjoy our National Forests. We applaud the Forest Service for soliciting public input on how to include e-bikes into the recreational setting of the Black Hills NF and other Forests across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alice Allen", with a stylized, cursive script.

Alice Allen, President
Black Hills Back Country Horsemen of South Dakota
P.O. Bo 478
Rapid City, SD 57709