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Title:

Comments: Public Comment on the Forest Service's e-bike proposal

I represent a hiking group that has been operating for more than 30 years. We have outings in our National Forest almost every week and we are familiar with our local trails and their users.

Based on our experiences, observations and understanding of trail management, we strongly urge the US Forest Service to reject the use of e-bikes on non-motorized trails and to continue recognizing e-bikes as "motorized vehicles" for the following reasons (supporting references are provided at the end of this document):

Enforcement problems. Any effort to regulate e-bike use on Forest trails is fraught with difficulty. It is very hard to differentiate between different classes of e-bikes visually. Also, some e-bikes can be changed to a different class (faster speeds and/or throttle options) by a simple press of a button. E-bikes with much greater power and speed ("enduro ebikes", for example) are available, further confounding any enforcement effort. In fact, e-bike manufacturers advertise "stealthy" designs, intended to deceive others about the nature of their higher-powered bikes.

Regulatory challenges. Allowing e-bikes creates a regulatory "slippery slope", opening the door to other motorized users as they demand similar access to previously non-motorized trails. The Forest Service would have a hard time defending a decision to favor one class of motorized user over another. Arguments in favor of e-bikes on trails also apply to other motorized users on trails.

User conflicts and safety. Even Class 1 e-bikes can travel up to 20 mph, an unsafe speed for trails used by hikers and equestrians. This is especially true for narrow "single track" trails where non-motorized users are forced to scramble out of the way to avoid injury as e-bikes race down the trail (in our Forest, mountain bike users seldom warn hikers and they ignore guidance to yield to non-motorized users). Current mountain bike culture involves high speeds and aggressive riding, usually on single-track trails, and increased use by e-bikes surely will aggravate the situation.

Displacing non-motorized users. As hikers, we already have been forced to avoid several of our local Forest Service trails because of high numbers of mountain bike riders that recklessly speed down them. If e-bikes are allowed the number of bike riders will increase, their speeds will increase, conflicts will increase and non-motorized users will be compelled to stop using even more of our local trails.

Trail erosion and maintenance needs. In our Forest we see trail damage caused by non-motorized mountain bike riders, including multiple paths (braided trails), widened trails, eroded banks on turns (caused by "riding the berm"), unauthorized trail building, unauthorized construction of jumps and berms, increased rutting and tread erosion, washed-out tread, etc. These conditions are caused or aggravated by mountain bike users, and increased use, higher speeds and heavier weights of e-bikes will lead to increased trail damage.

Excessive power. Class 1, 2 and 3 e-bikes are over-powered. Forest Service's Federal Register "Notice" states that "E-bikes expand recreational opportunities for many people, particularly the elderly and disabled, enabling them to enjoy the outdoors and associated health benefits." This claim may be valid for the low-powered (250 watt and 15.5 mph) e-bikes allowed by the European Union. 250 watts is equal to the sustained output of a trained athlete, so even "elderly and disabled" persons should be able enjoy trails with bikes of that power. However, Class 1, 2, and 3 e-bikes can have up to 1 horsepower (750 watts), literally giving users "super-human power", far more than necessary or appropriate for the claimed "expanded recreational opportunities". Such

powerful machines may be appropriate when riding with traffic on city streets but they are entirely too powerful and fast for safe or considerate use on mixed-use trails.

Acceptable e-bike use. If e-bikes are to be accepted by the Forest Service, they should be allowed on trails and roads where motorized trails are currently allowed. Low-power (250 watts or less, of the type defined by the European Union) e-bike use may be tolerated for mixed-use trails with hikers and/or equestrians, provided trails are designed, constructed, maintained and managed for such use, with gentle grades, wide treads and durable surfaces.

References:

Forest Service Manual 7700 Travel Management; Chapter 7700, Zero Code; Chapter 7710 Travel Planning, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/24/2020-21128/forest-service-manual-7700-travel-management-chapter-7700-zero-code-chapter-7710-travel-planning>

CONFLICTS ON MULTIPLE-USE TRAILS: Synthesis of the Literature and State of the Practice (this comprehensive report identifies problems and offers solutions), <https://www.americantrails.org/images/documents/Conflicts.pdf>

Electric bicycle laws (European Union e-bike definition: ("Cycles with pedal assistance which are equipped with an auxiliary electric motor having a maximum continuous rated power of 0.25 kW, of which the output is progressively reduced and finally cut off as the vehicle reaches a speed of 25km/h (15.5mph) or if the cyclist stops pedaling") https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electric_bicycle_laws

Horsepower ("trained athletes can manage up to about . . . 0.35 hp (0.26 kW) for a period of several hours"), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horsepower>
Basic Mountain Biking Techniques (exemplifies the current mountain bike culture that emphasizes downhill speed on single track trails), <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/mountain-biking-techniques.html>

ENDURO EBIKES, Power, Fun & Extraordinary Transportation With Range (features e-bikes up to 8000 watts and 75 mph), <https://enduroebikes.com/ebikes/>

X1 Enduro EBIKE, (offers a "stealthy" bike that would allow those who wish to blend in"), <https://lunacycle.com/x1-enduro-ebike/>