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Comments: Recreation opportunities on public lands have changed throughout the years and it is the job of land managers to address those changes while protecting the resources and ensuring sustainability while also providing the best user experience.

The last big change in recreation policy came with the creation of mountain bikes, with the significant shift of allowing mechanized travel on forest trails. It allowed a clear definition between a bicycle and a motor vehicle and opened up an entirely new use for trails. The battle to allow bikes was huge with opponents stating that opening up trails to bicycles would degrade the resource and ruin the trail experience for other users. Since that time, mountain bikes now account for a significant amount of trail use and land managers have developed sustainable trails for multiuse with some trails now constructed with bicycles as the primary use. Though we now have extensive opportunities for mountain bikes creating exceptional experiences, the Forest Service initially was not quick to research, understand and accommodate into National Forest lands.

Changing technology has presented continued adjustment of trails. No one would have expected back in the '80s that full suspension mountain bikes with 6" of travel and lightweight carbon frames would be the future. And, thanks to changing technology, we have arrived at the next major policy change, the potential addition of a motorized vehicle on forest trails that have excluded all motorized vehicles. With the improvements to electric motors and batteries, it is now possible to have a lightweight motorized mountain bicycle that is only about 20 lbs. heavier than its non-motorized version. The e-bike industry has taken off and as part of understanding what e-bikes are capable of they have defined them by class (as the new directive lists).

The question is whether these bikes will compromise the trail systems if allowed, (roads that already have motorized use will be basically unaffected). All the same arguments will arise regarding the class I bikes on current multiuse trails. The irony is that many of the arguments made by current mountain bikers are the exact same as made by the hikers about mountain bikes back when they were trying to access lands. The current directives proposed here do not need comment on the impacts e-bikes will have on trails as they do not regulate them, but simply acknowledge and define them and allow individual managers to implement policies regarding their use on trails. I feel this is a proactive position for the Forest Service to take, as it will allow the discussion and input to take place with the ability to enact specific policies in specific areas.

The bottom line is that these are public lands and providing the general public the ability to access them for various types of recreation, while staying within the prime directive of protecting the resources and making sure recreation opportunities are sustainable, is the main role of the land manager. Those opportunities will change and evolve with time and policy must be dynamic to flow and accommodate change, instead of simply putting up roadblocks in the name of "protection". Because the best way to keep our public lands in pristine condition is to simply allow no one access.

As stated in the beginning of these directives, e-bikes present a new opportunity for a wider range of recreation users to access and enjoy our public lands. I support the new directives in FSM 7700 and 7710 and hope the Forest Service will stay proactive in the inclusion of e-bikes on National Forest lands. There will be a lot of issues that will arise as different areas approach the inclusion of e-bikes. The inclusion of mountain bikes has shown that over the years changes in recreation can be accommodated and integrated while still protecting our public lands. I believe e-bikes can be a part of that.

I would recommend that land managers and the industry keep constant communication and collaboration on maintaining standards on e-bike classifications as technology may continue to change. Reviewing and potentially updating these classifications in policy will make sure everything stays clear and allow manufacturers to design based on what is allowed on specific types of roads and trails.