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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on proposed amendments to FMS code chapters 7700 and 7710.

I am a mountain biker actively engaged in the biking community here in WA state. I started mountain biking 20 years ago when going to undergrad in Bellingham, WA. I have kept mountain biking as my primary hobby ever since because it is a great way to stay fit, get into nature, and have fun (among many other benefits too long to list in this comment). I spent 4 of those 20 years mountain biking while in graduate school in Colorado, and have regularly gone on mountain biking trips in the Western US. My family are boosted members of Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, the local trail organization/advocacy group.

I appreciate that they notified me of the opportunity to comment, especially since I do not agree with their position stated on this matter.

Having read the drafted changes to the Code, I agree with your classification, that bicycles are solely human powered. If it has a motor, it is, by definition, motorized, and should be classified differently because of its different capabilities. I also agree with your proposed definitions for e-bike, and in 7710, the criteria set forth to regulate use of motorized vehicles (including e-bikes) on existing non-motorized trails.

I have been incredibly frustrated by what I perceive to be the bike industry's greed in endeavoring to sell e-bikes as a way to get people into mountain biking, though this has been veiled as "increasing access" for those differently abled. I wholeheartedly agree that differently-abled riders should have similar opportunity to get outside on a bike as a fully-able-bodied biker, but this is a very small proportion of e-bike purchasers and riders. The majority of e-bike riders are able-bodied riders who just want to use a motor to increase their ability to traverse more ground. I can't fault e-bikers for wanting to bike more than their fitness permits, but I have significant concerns about the consequences of increased e-bike presence on trails that are currently and should continue to be restricted to non-motorized use:

1. This will increase traffic to the point that it is unsustainable. As the population grows, our natural solitude will become more and more traveled, and areas which were once a great way to escape will become increasingly well-traveled to the point that solitude on a bicycle will be a thing of the past. When anyone can go anywhere for any length of time, made possible by a motor, solitude disappears, just as it does when helicopters fly rich flyfishers into Montana wilderness. Human power is generally limited, which has a great way of self-limiting trail use. Introducing motors expands the area of humans, spoiling the intent to preserve the wild nature of the forest. I think this is directly contradictory to the purpose of the preservation of public lands.
2. Having traveled elsewhere where trails are regulated differently, I have seen the harms of allowing all users to access all trails (i.e. motorcycles on biker/hiker/equestrian trails). This completely spoils the trails, and the nature of a bike ride. I do not want WA to go the way of areas like UT, where motors have ruined nature. Mind you, UT terrain is more rocky/arid, and as a result, can proportionally handle more intense use. Allowing motorized use on Pacific Northwest Trails would be disastrous because of their inability to handle large amounts of use, due to the makeup of the soil. We cannot allow this, at least, not without extensive evaluation on a trail-by-trail basis.
3. The risk for accident increases. The majority of bike trails are multi-user, 2-way. Having been a biker for some time, I have encountered enough other trail users in an abrupt way to the point that a collision was narrowly avoided. The riskiest area for a collision is a descending trail with uphill traffic, and limited visibility. If uphill users are now able to go uphill quickly (as is made possible by the motors of an e-bike; currently otherwise impossible), the risk for collisions increases. The frequency and severity of close calls has increased due to the advent of e-bikers (speaking from direct experience in areas where e-bikes are expressly forbidden). This is because e-bikers can go uphill faster than any other trail user ever has. Previously, collisions have generally been avoidable because trails are not saturated with users, and trails are designed to mostly permit enough line-of-sight to give riders time to brake so collision can be avoided. Further compounding this risk of collision with the increased uphill e-bike speeds is the fact that the average e-bike rider is less of an avid rider, usually less fit and less skilled, with e-bikes providing a way for them to get outside where their fitness might otherwise be limiting. Such

riders tend to be less aware of their surroundings, and less able to control their bike vs. an average mountain biker, thus further increasing the risk of an injurious accident. I think it will continue to be near-impossible, as it always has been, to attempt to regulate the speed of descending bikers. Hills fortunately regulate the uphill speed of all trail users, that is, until the advent of electric motors on bicycles and e-bikers poaching trails illegally. I am hopeful that your restrictions will help to prohibit e-bike use on trails for which e-bikes would cause significant issues (overcrowding, trail degradation, safety concerns), and restrict e-bikes to motorized trails or other trails which have been carefully evaluated to ensure the aforementioned issues are avoided. As it stands now, local trails here which disallow e-bikes are full of e-bike users who are knowingly ignoring the rules/law. I honestly hope that increased regulation will help to reduce the footprint of e-bikes. I am tired of the bike industry having such a loud voice pushing e-bikes (which has now permeated the recommendations of our local Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance), and hope that my opinion is of value in hearing what riders want, and not just what the bike industry and other special interest groups want (\$\$\$).

Thank you for your time in reading this,
Erik Kellison