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Organization:

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Comments: To the USFS Forest Planner,

I would like to express my concern about the Bear and Magdalena Mountains Phase 2 Inventory Map and the areas marked for possible reclassification as wilderness. I support the concept of wilderness, but find it lacking in practice due to the prohibition of "mechanized" travel, which includes bicycles.

When the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964, it was unlikely that offroad bicycles, ie. mountain bikes, were considered a possibility, and the intent of the act was to limit the use of motorized travel, as these machines have the ability to do considerable damage. I understand that when mountain bikes did start coming into popular use, the act was reinterpreted (in 1986) to ban them because of concerns about the potential damage they may cause. Since then, a popular culture of using mountain bikes has developed, and this culture includes a deep respect for nature. Mountain bikers strive to limit damage to trails from erosion, treat other trail users courteously, and leave the places they visit as they have found them. In fact, the most environmentally conscious people I know are, by and large, mountain bikers themselves.

I suspect an important reason for designating additional areas as wilderness is to reduce the need for fire suppression, so that already limited fire-fighting resources can be reserved for areas with the greatest need. If this is the case, I fail to see why a low impact activity such as mountain biking (on currently established trails) couldn't be grandfathered in. Indeed, many economic activities that have much larger environmental impacts can be grandfathered in, while still serving the goals of leaving natural processes like wildfires to take place without human intervention.

The Magdalena Mountains are the closest mountains to Socorro, and therefore regularly used by local riders. (I was one of them when I attended New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.) They offer unique scenery and challenge, as well as a respite from the heat of the valley in the summer months.

Popular trails used by local cyclists that are in areas designated for wilderness consideration include:

- Mesa Trail (Tr. 13)
- Copper Canyon (Tr. 10)
- South Baldy (Tr. 11)
- North Baldy (Tr. 8)
- Hop Canyon (Tr. 25, 25A)
- Sawmill West and East Forks (Tr 19, 93)
- Six Mile Canyon (Tr. 14)

This list is not exhaustive. If these areas and trails were reclassified as wilderness this would be a big loss to the local cycling community. Please consider our interests in your assessment of lands suitable for wilderness.

Sincerely,

Sebastian Pivnicka