Testimony of XXXXXX

on HR 1349

Presented to the

Federal Lands Subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee

December XX, 2017

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Colleen Hanabusa and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of XXXXX and our XXX members, we would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to comment on H.R. 1349. The (organizations name) strongly opposes H.R. 1349 and we encourage members of the subcommittee to oppose this legislation. H.R. 1349 would open wilderness areas to a number of forms of mechanized use, most notably bicycles, the effect of which would be to completely redefine and threaten wilderness areas nationally.

Mountain biking in wilderness not only violates the letter of the law but also the clear intent of the law, which anticipated growing pressures for unforeseen types of mechanized use to impinge on the wilderness values the Act was designed to protect. The original 1964 Wilderness Act states, “…there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, **no other form of mechanical transport**…”. The law clearly established the "enduring resource" of Wilderness to be the last refuge from the influence of mechanization. We believe this law is needed today now more than ever and underscores the heightened need for all public lands users to work together to ensure we are balancing our recreational desires with the conservation values of the lands themselves.

Undermining one of our nation’s critical conservation laws to allow for mechanized transportation (mountain bicycles) would forever change the primitive, backcountry experience millions of Americans seek out and enjoy each year. The Wilderness Act is simple and clear, wilderness areas are established “…in order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing **mechanization**, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition…” H.R. 1349 amends the very section of the Wilderness Act (Section 4(c)) that prohibits the use of motorized and mechanized devices, undermining one of the main reasons the Wilderness Act was passed into law in the first place.

In addition to undermining the intent of the act, the bill attempts to use wheelchair access as a lead reason for amending the Wilderness Act. In this respect, the bill is unnecessary because, section 507 of the Americans with Disabilities Act makes it clear that wheelchairs are already allowed in Wilderness.

Of the 109 million acres of designated Wilderness, half of this is in Alaska. With the exception of California and Arizona, no other state, has more than 10% of its land base in Wilderness. Most states are under 5%. There are plenty of non-Wilderness federal lands that are open to mountain biking and where additional mountain bike trails and opportunities can be created.

In several locations around the country, wilderness advocates, recreation organizations and mountain bike groups have successfully worked together to develop legislative proposals that preserve access to important mountain bike trails and protect adjacent areas as Wilderness. These collaborations are widely celebrated and serve as models for building successful partnerships between stakeholders and land managers. Divisive legislation like H.R. 1349 significantly undermine stakeholder groups’ ability to work together.

For horsemen, bikes in Wilderness would represent a significant safety hazard and would be extremely problematic given that:

* Wilderness trails were not designed for mountain bikes, which are capable of rapid speeds. Combined with their often silent approach, bikes would create significant safety hazards for horsemen especially on steep, narrow or winding trails.
* Bikes in Wilderness would represent a serious safety hazard for persons on horseback or leading a pack string, when a bike startling the least-trained horse or mule among the pack string could bolt and/or endanger the entire party.
* The Wilderness Act’s promise of solitude or a primitive and unconfined recreational experience would be lost if horsemen were forced to constantly scan the trail ahead and over their shoulder for rapidly approaching bikes.

(ADD LOCAL CHAPTER/UNIT SPECIFIC ISSUES HERE)

Back Country Horsemen are strongly opposed to H.R. 1349. The proposal would undermine one of our nation’s bedrock conservation laws and derail years of work to bring mountain bicyclists, horsemen, recreation organizations and conservationists together. We strongly urge members of the subcommittee to reject this proposal.