

To the Editor,

I received a good bit of feedback from our members regarding Ryan Bell's article (*Wilderness Act Turns 50, WH Oct. 2014*). I want to emphasize to the readers of *Western Horsemen*, the Back Country Horsemen of America strongly objects to bikes in designated Wilderness – always has, always will.

Ryan T. Bell deserves praise for seeking common ground among trail users. Yet he appears to not completely appreciate the origins of the Wilderness Act. Ryan's main premise—that use of bikes could have been included in the Wilderness Act of 1964—is incorrect and inconsistent with the primary purpose of the Act. The preamble states the purpose of the Act is “to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States...” (Wilderness Act, Section 2(a)).

While it might appear relatively benign by some people to request that Congress amend the Wilderness Act to authorize bike use, Ryan correctly asks where would Congress draw the line as to what additional mechanized or motorized modes of travel were to be allowed, both now and in the future. It is a slippery slope.

The timelessness of wilderness is one of its greatest virtues. The slow pace of travel afforded on foot or via canoe, raft and horseback beckons to centuries of pioneer-styled tradition and self-reliance; a pace of travel that represents an important component of the wilderness experience.

BCHA understands that compromise is a necessary element of any process to designate new Wilderness areas. For example, Back Country Horsemen have demonstrated support to Congress for the current Hermosa Creek (Colorado) proposal listed in Ryan's article. The authors of the Wilderness Act had to navigate a minefield of compromises to get this landmark legislation to pass through Congress 50 years ago. We are thrilled they did.

We agree with Ryan that Wilderness is a birthright - but not solely for the horsemen. The birthright applies to all people, whether or not they ever venture into a designated Wilderness area. Bicyclists have only to park their mechanical transport at the trailhead to begin their wilderness experience. For the mobility-challenged, the primitive and slow-paced mode of travel provided via horse or mule is an unforgettable experience. Importantly, it is in keeping with centuries of tradition. Hurray for America's Wilderness and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act.

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