



Mountain Bikers Aren't "Mechanized" Trail Users

As mountain bicycling became popular in the 1980's, many land managers were unsure of how to manage this new activity. Sometimes, mountain bikes were lumped together with "motorized" vehicles, instead of "non-motorized" user groups such as hikers and equestrians. More often, land managers created a third category to describe mountain bikes, "mechanized."

Today, mountain bicycling is usually treated correctly as a non-motorized activity, fitting for a muscle-powered, quiet, low-impact method of travel. However, the term "mechanized" persists in some areas.

The Problems With "Mechanized"

The term "mechanized" reinforces and institutionalizes the notion that bicycling is fundamentally distinct from hiking and other non-motorized activities. However, **calling bicycling mechanized contradicts the one place that the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) offers a definition.** According to the CFR, "mechanical transport" refers to "any contrivance... propelled by a non-living power source."(36CFR-293.6a) Bicycles are powered by humans and are clearly a muscle-powered form of recreation.

Environmental Impacts

Mountain biking also warrants management as non-motorized on the basis of its environmental impacts. **A growing scientific consensus has shown the effects of mountain biking are similar to hiking and much less than horses or OHVs.** For a more complete discussion of the impacts caused by mountain bicycling versus those of other user groups, see "Natural Resource Impacts of Mountain Biking" at: imba.com/resources/science/impact_summary.html.

Policy Recommendations

A two-category management policy should be used for classifying recreation: non-motorized and motorized. Most national forests and thousands of state and local parks around the country follow this system and have proven it to be the most effective management policy. By doing so, they eliminate a confusing "mechanized" category, streamline management, and fairly consider all forms of recreation based on their impact on the natural environment, other trail users, and power source.

If land managers insist on a third category of management, then we suggest simply calling us bicycles rather than the complicated term of "mechanized." We again request land managers to apply identical policies to bicycles and non-motorized trail users, such as hikers, that create similar impacts.

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