



## **U.S. Forest Service Proposed Planning Rule Listening Sessions: Overview and Talking Points For IMBA Advocates**

Thank you for attending the U.S. Forest Service regional roundtables on behalf of IMBA, our affiliated clubs and local mountain bicyclists. IMBA is excited to participate in this collaborative process all around the country. This is a fantastic opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue with your local Forest Service managers on how their planning processes protect natural resources and manage mountain bicycling.

This guide is designed to provide key talking points for your regional meetings, and insure that mountain bikers deliver a clear message and speak with a united voice. Whether in a public forum or individual breakout sessions, this guide should help you cover major issues on how we hope the Forest Service will better plan for bicycling.

### **Introductions**

- International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) is an education and advocacy organization whose mission is to create, enhance and preserve great trail opportunities for mountain bicyclists worldwide.
- We number 750 member clubs, 35,000 individual members and more than 800 corporate partners and bike shops.
- Give information about the local IMBA affiliates that you are familiar with (e.g. club names, local trail stewardship projects, trails tourism information, areas important to cyclists).
- IMBA clubs get kids on bikes and out experiencing their national forests – mountain bike participation increased from 2007-2008 by 17.4 percent, while overall participation in the outdoors declined by 6 percent (Outdoor Foundation Outdoor Recreation Participation Study for 2008).

### **Mountain Bicycling and the U.S. Forest Service**

- IMBA has a long, successful working relationship with the Forest Service. Our first memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the USFS was signed in 1994, and it was renewed in 2006.
- IMBA-affiliated clubs annually conduct nearly one million hours of volunteer trail work on public lands. A great deal of this work is in our national forests.
- IMBA National Mountain Bike Patrols are trail stewards in forests across the country.
- National forests offer a huge amount of public lands with thousands of miles of trail open to bicycling.
- Mountain biking holds a powerful appeal to young people — it has been identified by the Outdoor Industry Association as a “gateway activity” that draws America’s youth into a range of healthy activities.
- The agency has traditionally embraced mountain biking, with an emphasis on accommodating multiple uses, and through the guideline that Forest Service trails are open to all recreational uses unless they are specifically designated closed to a particular use.

### **IMBA Asks the Forest Service to Change their Planning in A Number of Ways**

#### *1. Categorize and Treat Mountain Bicycling as a Non-Motorized Use*

- Mountain bicycling is a human-powered activity. It should be classified as a non-motorized use on national forests. Mountain bicycling is low impact, and should be embraced and consistently

*IMBA.com • PO Box 7578 • Boulder • CO • 303.545.9000 • 303.545.9076*





managed within the non-motorized family of recreation (e.g. hiking, climbing, cross-country skiing, backpacking, trail running, snow shoeing, paddling and others).

- Deputy Chief Joel Holtrop, in a June 2008 memo (#2350) to regional foresters, reinforced this notion: “I want to emphasize that mountain bicycling is a non-motorized use of National Forest System trails, along with hiking and horse back riding. In our planning and policy documents, a distinction between mountain biking and motorized uses on our National Forest system lands should be made.”
- IMBA objects when forests inappropriately group bicycles with motorized users. The confusing category of “motorized and mechanized” only obscures the issue.
- The current Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and IMBA (06-Su-11132424- 076), explicitly states the intent of the agency to manage bicycling separate from motorized users.

## *2. Forest Service Planning Should Bolster Primitive, Non-Motorized Back-country Designations*

- The current Forest Service system of recommending lands for Wilderness designation was designed without the bicycle in mind.
- Bicycling is quiet, human-powered and low impact and is compatible in pristine area settings, as established in our partnership agreement (IMBA/USFS MOU 06-Su-11132424-076).
- Cycling is often caught in a grey area of Forest Planning and not categorized or managed appropriately as the quiet, low-impact use.
- Travel Management Planning was designed for motorized route designations, not bicycling.
- The Forest Service needs to provide better guidance for its regions to reinforce existing policies that allow for bicycling to continue in pristine, backcountry settings — including Recommended Wilderness Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas (FSH 1923.03).
- Improved public land designations should give the Forest Service better management tools for improving forest health, watershed protection and mechanized trailbuilding.

## *3. Forest Service Needs Sixth Substantive Planning Principle: Sustainable Recreation*

- Sustainable, human-powered recreation will enhance natural resources, improve local economies, and represents an essential part of Forest Service planning – it deserves high planning prioritization.
- Forest Service needs clear, consistent definitions for recreation planning and should establish two clear categories for managing recreation — motorized and non-motorized.
- Please eliminate the confusing terms “trail vehicle,” “mechanized vehicle,” “wheeled vehicle” and all versions of the word “mechanized” from Forest Service planning language.
- Whether you ban or allow mountain bicycling, please simply use the terms “bicycling” or “mountain bicycling” to denote our activity.

## *4. Planning Should Provide Guidance on Economic Development and Trails Tourism from Outdoor Recreation (Substantive Principle #5)*

- The Forest Service should endeavor to quantify the financial benefits of trails tourism and recreation to local communities, and cite the economic benefits it brings to cities and counties near Forest Service properties.

IMBA.com • PO Box 7578 • Boulder • CO • 303.545.9000 • 303.545.9076





- Planning efforts should embrace sustainable recreation and attempt to quantify the economic impact of trail sports.
- Studies should be conducted to consider the economic impact to local communities of opening or closing trails.
- For forests that have seen local revenue decline from the exit of the timber or mining industries, the Forest Service should emphasize and plan for outdoor recreation as a possible economic boost.
- IMBA is consulting with cities and counties around the country on trails tourism and turning their communities into destinations for mountain biking.

#### *5. Planning Should Include the Best Available Science*

- A new forest planning rule should include guidance for a more accurate and detailed analysis of recreational activities with an appropriate, and scientifically based distinction between ecological and social impacts.
- Special attention needs to be focused on social sciences as it applies to recreation management.
- Better planning guidance is needed, in conjunction with on-the-ground training, to understand trail usage, sustainable trail construction and perceived versus actual trail-user conflict.
- Forest Service planning and guidance should use the best available science, as required by law, and always have unique and separate analysis of bicycling. Science derived from studying motorized uses can not be applied to our non-motorized activity.

#### *6. Please Update the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Users Guide*

- The Forest Service Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Users Guide was published in 1982 and does not address mountain bicycling.
- The ROS Users Guide divides recreation opportunities into six broad categories, ranging from urban to primitive. Mountain bicycling is correctly deemed as an appropriate use of all lands. This should be included in upcoming revisions.

In conclusion, IMBA hopes the Forest Service will create a new rule-making process that incorporates the following principles:

- Mountain bicycling, should be considered a non-motorized use of Forest Service lands.
- Clear regulations for bicycling should extract it from the grey area of management where it currently resides.
- The Forest Service should plan for public land protection designations that are inclusive of our human-powered use.
- The importance of comprehensive recreation planning should be bolstered.
- Guidance should be issued to the field on the best management of mountain bicycling.
- Unique and separate scientific and management analysis should be conducted for bicycling — grouping bicycling with motorized users impedes the decision-making process.
- A renewed emphasis on trails tourism and recreation will enhance visitor experiences and revive local economies.

