



**Testimony of Jenn Dice
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Hearing to receive testimony on the following bills: S. 233, S. 268, S. 375, S. 714 and S. 730

Before the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee

Wednesday, May 25, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide input on S. 268, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2011. The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) appreciates the effort by U.S. Senator Jon Tester and his staff to maintain an ongoing dialogue regarding the concerns of the mountain bicycling community. IMBA supports many of the proposed Wilderness areas and applauds the senator's desire to include Special Management Area (SMA) and Recreation Management Area (RMA) designations that will protect the undeveloped nature of these areas while embracing the recreational values for which these lands are cherished.

Founded in 1988, IMBA leads the national and worldwide mountain bicycling communities through a network of 80,000 individual supporters, 750 affiliate clubs, and 600 dealer members. IMBA teaches sustainable trail building techniques and has become a leader in trail design, construction, and maintenance; encourages responsible riding, volunteer trail work, and cooperation among trail user groups and land managers. Each year, IMBA members and affiliated clubs conduct almost one million hours of volunteer trail stewardship on America's public lands and are some of the best assistants to federal, state, and local land managers.

Wilderness designations are a difficult issue for IMBA and mountain bicyclists. On the one hand we want to preserve the beauty and experience of wild landscapes for future generations. On the other hand, federal land management agencies interpret the Wilderness Act of 1964 to prohibit the use of mountain bicycles. Our decision to support a Wilderness proposal or bill is not one we take lightly. Only when we have worked with the Wilderness proponents to develop win-win solutions can we fully support the designation.

Benefits to the Montana Recreation Economy

Of the thirty-five (35) units, totaling 1,019,764 acres, IMBA supports thirty (30) in their entirety. We request boundary adjustments in the remaining five (5) units. The changes would lead to a net reduction of Wilderness of 23,419 acres and a net increase in Recreation Management Area acreage of 16,319. Thus, IMBA supports 97.7 percent of the acreage in the current draft of this bill.

Rural communities around the West can no longer depend entirely on resource extraction. Many small towns have diversified and now reap the benefits of a recreation goods and services economy. The recreation industry creates jobs through increased visitation, which drives retail sales and services across multiple channels. Locations with valuable recreational assets also attract outdoor and cycling industry companies that have

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employees and owners who prefer to live and work close to the places they play.

This bill includes many provisions that support the recreation economy by opening trails to cyclists through the release of more than 66,815 acres of Wilderness Study Area (WSA), and the creation of more than 369,500 acres of Recreation Management Area or Special Management Area. Some trail examples are:

- Tobacco Roots RMA: Lost Cabin Trail and the Tobacco Root Trail totaling roughly 30 miles
- Axolotl Lakes former WSA: Proposed Virginia City Trails estimated at 30 miles
- West Pioneer RMA: West Pioneer Loop and additional trails totally potentially 220 miles
- Lost Creek RMA: 15 miles of existing trail
- Thunderbolt Creek SMA: 40 miles of proposed trail

IMBA does not agree with the Forest Service Region One (R1) decision to ban bikes from Recommended Wilderness, however, we applaud Senator Tester's efforts with this legislation to move this issue forward by proposing a permanent solution for these world-class Montana landscapes.

Continued Mountain Bicycle Access to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and Other Trails

Since the deliberations for S. 268 have evolved over many years, it is important to note that the USDA Forest Service recently released their new directives for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) which states, "Bicycle use may be allowed on the CDNST (16 U.S.C. 1246(c)) if the use is consistent with the applicable land and resource management plan and will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the CDNST."

Cycling on the CDNST in Southwestern Montana is a unique and important recreational asset. While there are some sections of the trail not appropriate for mountain biking, many portions of the trail are. IMBA places high priority on the CDNST and has asked for several small adjustments to keep this important trail open to mountain bicycling.

- Anaconda/Pintlar Wilderness Additions: IMBA requests boundary adjustments for the CDNST, Bender Point, and Trail #44 to Twin Lakes. This boundary adjustment would result in a reduction of Wilderness of less than 3,000 acres.
- Italian Peak: A boundary adjustment of roughly 4,000 acres is requested here to allow continued access to the CDNST.
- Centennial/ Mt Jefferson: In several extremely short sections along the southern border of the proposed Centennial Wilderness, the CDNST crosses the boundary. We request that the trail become the boundary to maintain the possibility of future bicycle access. We further request that the boundary between these two units be a non-wilderness corridor, allowing non-motorized access to the existing CDNST with no net loss of Wilderness acreage.

IMBA requests several other important adjustments:

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- Lima Peaks: We request that this area become two units divided by a non-wilderness corridor, allowing non-motorized access on the Little Sheep Creek Trail. The resulting Wilderness units would both be roughly 17,000 acres and the Wilderness reduction would be less than 1000 acres.
- Scapegoat Wilderness Addition: We request the enlarging the Otatsy Recreation Management Area to encompass the Falls Creek Trail and allowing non-motorized access to this trail. This would expand the RMA to roughly 15,289 acres and reduce the Scapegoat Wilderness addition to 18,178 acres. The result would be a net increase in protected lands of 2,500 acres.
- West Big Hole Recreation Management Area and Wilderness: We believe this important Recreation Management Area should allow bicycle access to the trails within the north and south Wilderness units. We believe non-motorized trail corridors would be the best way to maintain this access, which would result in less than a thousand (1000) acre reduction of Wilderness and is still protected by the Recreation Management designation. These two proposed Wilderness units within the West Big Hole RMA were not Forest Service Recommended Wilderness.

Stewardship Trail Projects and Road to Trail Conversions

Finally, the Act stipulates that forest and watershed restoration projects will be designated each year. These stewardship projects use new best management logging practices with regard to timber sales, road densities, wildlife habitat, trail development, and allow for revenue from timber sales to remain in the district. IMBA hopes the USDA Forest Service and Senator Tester will consider directing potential funding to trail building in order to replace trails where mountain bikes are no longer allowed. IMBA will participate at the local level to aid in the creation of new trails. IMBA appreciates that the legislation has suggested road to trail conversions in some cases, and offers our professional trail building expertise in creating an environmentally sound, sustainable trail systems.

IMBA and the Montana mountain bicycling community welcome the opportunity to join with others to protect Montana, to ensure current and future generations can enjoy high-quality outdoor experiences away from development, noise, and poorly planned resource extraction. We look forward to continued discussion of how best to meet the needs of mountain bikers and other trail users for these very special regions of Montana.

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