

## A SORDID & DESTRUCTIVE AFFAIR MOUNTAIN BIKING IN THE NATIONAL PARKS (CONTINUED)

existing information, evidence accumulated through scientific process, common sense, and conflict elimination; it is irresponsible and unacceptable to keep passing the buck – in this case approving mountain bike environmental abuse and social conflict – because of (false) claims that a smoking gun has not yet been identified.

The loss of wildlife habitat security, much of it due to fragmentation and fracturing of habitat by roads and trails built for motorized and mechanized vehicles like mountain bikes,<sup>(10)</sup> is a world wide problem directly linked to critical declines in fish and wildlife population viability and ominous losses of biological diversity. National Parks and wilderness areas were established partly to counter these threats and to prevent landscape degradation commonly associated with private lands and public lands “managed” for extractive consumption and mechanized exploitation.

As the Earth’s life support systems deteriorate in the face of over threshold human populations and industrial use, the value of intact and protected public lands in counteracting these forces has never been greater. When new trails are constructed to cater to bikers, or hikers and the walking public are driven from trails by high speed vehicles (bikes), or “trails” become roads as they are hardened and widened to accommodate speed and all weather biker travel, wildlife displacement and harassment escalate and habitat security and effectiveness are damaged and lost. <sup>(11)</sup> Mountain bikes and bikers have attacked even remote remnant ecological and biodiversity strongholds because of their extensive reach – even 50 km does not deter them.

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Mountain bikers are notorious regulatory cheats and their history of illegal trail construction (and its associated destruction of soil and vegetation) virtually everywhere they descend on a piece of land is legendary, just as is the inability of management personnel and agencies to police biker activity and protect the land and legitimate land users through effective enforcement. <sup>(12)</sup> It is a massive and thoughtless distortion to imply that these activities are somehow compatible with “unique and treasured protected areas”! <sup>(13)</sup>

Choking budgets and staff reductions imposed on land management agencies are widening the gap between enforcement (protection) and user violations, giving free rein to mountain biker environmental destruction and social conflict. This is not what Canadians or Americans expect of their National Parks or public lands and it is not the purpose for which these unique landscapes were established.

It is increasingly difficult to tell whether Canadians and Americans just don’t care about the destructive onslaught of mountain biking – I don’t think this is the case for many of them – or whether they have been pounded into a state of numbness by government and corporate resistance to public participation; it may also be that they have been so blitzed by incessant commercialization and private sector exploitation of public resources and corruption of public processes that their defenses have simply been overwhelmed and they no longer realize that they have been, and are being, taken to the cleaners.

A significant portion of this retreat is, I suspect, related to the deep and expanding cultural gap in North American society initiated and fueled by specialized activities and occupations and closely linked corporate and commercial interests.<sup>[2]</sup> This gap consists on one side of special commercial interests like mountain bike manufacturers and dealers who see public lands like National Parks as cash cows waiting to be exploited, and on the other side, the majority of society who have for a hundred years struggled to protect the cultural and ecological integrity of public lands and the rights of citizens and visitors to build and restore their physical and emotional sense of well being through direct and indirect communion with the natural world.

Already suffering the consequences of regulatory vulnerability, National Parks management is caving in to the pressure from the Chamber of Commerce lobby and mountain bikers to ignore cumulative impact and “throw the kitchen sink”

into the mix of users, and they are doing so without hearing from, listening to or respecting the traditional quiet users and supporters of Parks.

The attempted sweep of mountain biking into National Parks is a not-so-thin edge of a phalanx of privatization schemes wherein National Parks, and all other public lands, have thrown open the doors to ecologically and socially destructive and objectionable user behavior in order to pander to commercial and economic interests. One thing is certain – we, the people, have been out maneuvered by political manipulation and betrayed by national and regional environmental groups flying the flag of stakeholders. North Americans are slowly letting themselves become “customers” (a dangerous downgrade from citizen status), and customers always pay when using a “product.” National Parks, which we still own and once thought we controlled, are no exception.

In this case the costs are enormous – loss of ecological well being, loss of a national and traditional common currency of ownership, pride and equal access, loss of public oversight of National Park decision making, and elimination of the legal right to participation in establishing the vision and direction of Park management by any citizen who chooses to exercise that right.

Commercial interests, and now mountain bikers, are determined to turn our National Parks into Disneyland replicas.

### EPILOGUE:

There exists a last minute antidote to the mountain bike threat. It requires an awakening by citizens across North America, who have a right and responsibility to call for:

1) a moratorium or injunction prohibiting all mountain biking in all National Parks (as well as State and County Parks), Designated Wilderness Areas, Roadless Areas and Wildlife Refuges (mountain bike vehicle use on roads like other vehicles excepted).

This injunction should remain in place until:

2) any and all citizens who chose to be heard, are heard, via legally mandated public hearings held across the country, regarding whether Americans and Canadians are prepared to sacrifice a century long culture and tradition of National Park enjoyment, pride and ecological integrity for an activity that is inherently conflict driven and environmentally destructive, and

3) an independent assessment of the environmental, social, cultural and decision making impact of mountain biking on Public lands, with full public disclosure and comment periods, has been completed.

**One thing is certain – we, the people, have been out maneuvered by political manipulation and betrayed by national and regional environmental groups flying the flag of stakeholders.**

### SOURCES:

[1] Parks Canada. 2010. *Parks Canada’s National Assessment of Mountain Biking. Meeting in Ottawa, Ont., March 23-25, 2010. From Canadian Environmental Network website, 03 March 2010.*

2 Prentice, J. 2010. *New recreational activities in national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. News release of 09 September 2010, Parks Canada, Ottawa.*

3. Gyurina, S. 2009. *Subject: Re: BikesBelong - assuming you know about this organization. E mail by SG, Dated Mon, 3 Aug 2009*

4. Sands, W. 2010. *Hermosa plan takes shape. October 214, 2010. The Durango Telegraph (CO).*

5 See Harris, P. B., and J. M. Houston. 2010. *Recklessness in context: Individual and situational correlates to aggressive driving. Environment and behavior 42(1): 44-60.*

6 Medical Society of Metropolitan Portland. 2010. *In Forest Park, biking and hiking don’t belong together. Published: Wednesday, June 30, 2010, In OregonLive, By the Board of directors.*

7 See Jacques, P. J., Dunlap, R. E., and M. Freeman. 2008. *The organisation of denial: Conservative think tanks and environmental scepticism. Environmental Politics 17(3):349-385, for an understanding of this agenda, its origins, and its drivers.*

8 Quinn, M., and G. Chernoff. 2010. Mountain biking: a review of the ecological effects. For Parks Canada, National Office. Mistakis Institute, Univ. of Calgary, Calgary, AB.

9 Medical Society of Metropolitan Portland. 2010. In Forest Park, biking and hiking don't belong together. Published: Wednesday, June 30, 2010, In OregonLive, by the Board of Directors.

10 Mountain bikers routinely argue that they use their vehicles as transportation, demanding that they be allowed to drive through natural areas, whether they be wilderness or National Parks, so they can go from town to town! See, for example, endnote 4.

11 The prospect of three and/ or four wheeled bikes, and bikes driven by electricity, are now only in the formative stage, but the expansion of facilities and services these glorified bikes will bring with them parallels that associated with the ballooning size of "off road" vehicles that now a) rival automobiles in width and size, b) have dramatically escalated environmental impacts, and c) have overwhelmed regulatory agencies!

12 Johnson, J. And Porter, K. 2010. Trail wars at Annadel State Park. The Press Democrat. Published: Monday, July 5, 2010 at 7:32 p.m. There are dozens of public reports of illegal behavior, regulatory violations and failure to regulate similar to those reported in this article.

13 Prentice, J. 2010. New recreational activities in national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. News release of 09 September 2010, Parks Canada, Ottawa. I suspect, and sincerely hope, that Minister Prentice did not make this assertion; that responsibility likely rests with a woefully under informed and/or seriously compromised Public Official.

14 See Ehrlich, P.R., and A. H. Ehrlich. 2010. The culture gap and its needed closures. International Journal of Environmental Studies 67(4):481-492.



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David McCargo...  
Anchorage, AK  
BARBARA CHURCHILL...  
Bethesda, MD  
BILL LIPE...Moscow, ID

**These are the noble BACKBONE members who didn't send a photo. But I am standing by ...pen in hand...JS**

**THE UN-TOONED BACKBONES**



**LIETIME BACKBONER**

**STEVE RUSSELL**  
Moab, UT



**SANDY WOLFE**  
Questa, NM



**ANDREW KEETON**  
from Mike Reed..  
OKC, OK



**John Tappon**  
Corvallis, Oregon

**PAUL CLEARY**  
Tulsa, OK



**CLARK TROWELL**  
Green Valley, CA



**DAVID YARBROUGH**  
Waddy, Kentucky



in memory of  
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