



Mountain Bike Position Statement

Philosophy

Hiking trails, or foot-only trails, are pathways developed and managed for quiet, slow travel and the enjoyment of nature away from mechanical conveyances, including bicycles. American Hiking Society is dedicated to the preservation and protection of foot-only trails as an important resource for the hiking public. Multi-purpose trails, which address a variety of recreation needs, may accommodate both foot and bicycle travel, but should be designed to protect the interest of hikers and bicyclists in a manner that enhances the safety for both types of user groups.

American Hiking Society is devoted to the interests of hikers and the creation and protection of trails that serve hikers. Foot-only trails offer the best opportunity to design sustainable trails that best meet the unique needs of hikers and provide them with the highest quality experiences. Where there are multi-purpose trail systems or corridors, American Hiking supports the development and stewardship of parallel stretches of foot-only trails within those systems to avoid the loss of hiker use because of substantial user conflict.

American Hiking seeks to work cooperatively with mountain bicycle organizations, and encourages cooperative trail planning and stewardship at the local level by hikers and bicyclists. Inherent in this spirit of cooperation is the position that the experience of hiking and the interest of hiking constituents must vigilantly be protected, whether on foot trails or multi-purpose trails suitable to hikers. Where the interests of hikers cannot be guaranteed in a multi-purpose trail system, foot-only trails must be incorporated and protected.

Policy

The American Hiking Society supports the principle of managing trails for the primary purposes for which they are currently intended. New uses and types of travel should be evaluated for their impact on the primary purpose of the trail.

Trail uses should be based upon the collective input of all hiking stakeholders, which may include local users, American Hiking Society, and other national, local and state groups when dealing with federal lands, as well as any attendant resource concerns. In issues involving local and state trails, American Hiking may defer to the local hiking constituency.

When requested by a local hiking constituency, American Hiking may assist on behalf of hikers or intervene to mitigate conflict. Particularly in matters pertaining to federal land, American Hiking may speak on behalf of hikers at large, particularly where the hiking constituency is not organized.

American Hiking Society opposes the use of mountain bicycles in designated wilderness areas and areas under consideration for wilderness designation. AHS also believes that the sections of National Scenic Trails, where mountain bikes are already prohibited, should remain closed to

bikes. AHS supports the current National Park Service policy for bicycle route designation [36 CFR 4.30], requiring a written determination and/or special regulation stating that bicycle use is consistent with the protection of a park area's natural, scenic, and aesthetic values, safety considerations and management objectives, and will not disturb wildlife or park resources.

Hiker-Biker Trail Guidelines

Additional guidance is provided for evaluating the acceptability of multi-purpose trail proposals accommodating foot and bicycle travel. American Hiking Society supports the following design and management criteria.

Safety. Trails should be designed to allow for safe passage of one traveler by another, and provide for adequate visibility to avoid collisions. Design should account for varying speeds of travel. Existing trails require evaluation of the need for vegetation clearing or rerouting to ensure adequate visibility.

Environmental Protection. Trail surfaces should be designed to sustain all allowed uses under all conditions, or be managed with provisions that protect against environmental damage and erosion under certain conditions. Additional resource protection measures may also be needed to sustain bicycle use on wet soils, at stream crossings, and along steeper trail grades. Evaluations should consider the acceptability of these changes to hikers, particularly when adding bicycle use to foot trails.

The Experience of Hiking. Trails developed for multiple uses should be designed with consideration given to the needs and concerns of people traveling on foot. Existing trails require evaluation of the need for trail widening, relocations, and removal or modification of tread drainage features, steps, bridges and other potential barriers to bicycle use--modifications that can compromise the experience of hikers. Research has demonstrated the potential for conflicts between hikers and bicyclists, particularly at higher levels of use and differences in rates of speed by hikers and bikers.

Adopted by the American Hiking Society Board of Directors: October 19, 2013