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Mountain Biking: It's Fun But User Conflicts on the Rise

August 16, 2011

Dear [member_name_first]:

Most of us live in Northwest Montana because of the unparalleled outdoor life available at our doorstep. Access to National Forest public lands is a big part of our quality of life. But what happens when we find our favorite Forest Service trails aren't quiet or safe any longer?

Mountain biking is a fun, fast, and exciting way to travel and its has grown tremendously on the Flathead and Kootenai National Forests in recent years. However, recent [news articles](#) - and first hand reports - have begun to show that conflicts between mountain bikers and foot and horse riders are on the rise.

Worse, some mountain biking proponents - feeling entitled to do 'whatever they want' on 'public lands' - are deliberately expanding trails on the national forest without proper authorization from the Forest Service. In one word: "illegally".

Headwaters Montana thinks it's time for the [Flathead](#) and [Kootenai](#) National Forests to take a step back and **address mountain biking at a programatic scale before user conflicts get any furtherout of hand** .



Bigfork artist Jerry Sprunger got the gist of the growing conflict between mountain bikers and hikers on Flathead National Forest trails. Click the thumbnail to enlarge. (Credit: Jerry Sprunger and Bigfork Eagle)



No Free Ride

The Flathead Beacon covered the story of illegally created mountain bike trails on Crane Mountain near Bigfork. These trails and others scattered through the national forests demonstrate both a public desire for

What's the Conflict?

The issue here amounts to *conflicting expectations and public safety* on forest service trails . Most Forest Service trails were build in the 1930's as part of the [Civilian Conservation Corps](#) (CCC) employment program during the Great Depression. They were designed for hiking and horse use, and as a basic transportation network for national forest management. Needless to say, mountain biking had yet to be invented.

Today, mountain bikes are durable and capable of navigating most Forest Service trails. But the public acceptance of mountain bikes on traditional horse and foot trails lags behind. Why? *Because mountain bikes can startle hikers and spook horses and lead to accidents, thrown riders or gear.*

Additionally, members of the mountain biking community are building trails without Forest Service authorization. Mountain biking has also been shown to disturb wildlife's use of habitat.

dedicated mountain bike trails and the need for Forest Service to address the issue on a forest-wide basis through a public planning process open to all. (Click on image to read full story.)



Hike the Flathead National Forest!
The Flathead National Forest has hundreds of miles of hiking and horse trails. Most were build in the 1930's as part of the CCC
(Click on the map to see the list of

huge economic and social benefit for residents and visitors.

The Flathead and Kootenai Forests should address this issue outside of the forest planning process. The Kootenai Forest is well into it's planning process, and the Flathead is several years away with its.

Mountain bike conflicts on traditional foot and horse trails are fast coming to a head. We can continue to make public recreation on our national forests better and safer - and all users would be better served - by addressing the mountain biking issue. The need is now.

What You Can Do:

Please write the Flathead and Kootenai Forest supervisors and ask them to conduct an evaluation of mountain bike use on national forest trails.

Write the Flathead Forest Supervisor [here](#), and the Kootenai Forest Supervisor [here](#).

~ We Thought You'd Like to Know! ~

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