

FACTivity



The question you will answer in this FACTivity is, "Should forest managers allow mountain biking in potential wilderness areas?"

Methods

First, read the introductory material that follows. You may want to search the Internet for more information about the wilderness mountain biking debate. (See "Web Resources" following this FACTivity.) After you have read the introduction and done additional research, your teacher will form small groups with four to six students.

Based on your reading and research, discuss the question given above. Use the graphic organizer that follows the introductory material to organize your thoughts. Your group will decide if they would allow mountain biking in potential wilderness areas. Your group can also come up with a **compromise** position. For example, you might recommend that limited mountain biking could be allowed in some potential wilderness areas if certain conditions were met.



Photo courtesy of Forest Service, Northern Region.

Using the second graphic organizer, write your group's decision and justification about allowing mountain biking in potential wilderness areas. After all groups have made a decision, your teacher will hold a class discussion about mountain biking in potential wilderness areas. After hearing all of the arguments, hold a class vote about whether to allow mountain biking in potential wilderness areas.

Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 states that:

Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and, except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, *no other form of mechanical transport*, and no structure or installation within any such area.

(Emphasis added)

The statement that prohibits “...no other form of mechanical transport...” is the statement that prohibits mountain biking in wilderness. When the Wilderness Act of 1964 became law, few mountain bikes were found in the backcountry.

Introduction

In 2009, some Forest Service managers decided that mountain biking should be prohibited in areas that have been identified as potential future wilderness areas. These areas were not wilderness areas at the time, but they had the qualities necessary for wilderness designation. The managers felt that mountain biking in these areas might destroy some of the qualities that made the areas eligible for wilderness designation. National Park Service managers agreed with them.

Garry Oye (ō ē) was chief of the National Park Service’s wilderness and recreation section. He said, “Existing lands that have been determined to be eligible for wilderness, they should not be considered for potential mountain bike trails at this point. We wouldn’t want to **authorize** a use if we’ve already determined that the lands should be considered for wilderness. We wouldn’t want to allow a use that would **compromise** that future designation. That’s consistent with our policies.”

The International Mountain Biking Association felt differently about the decision to prohibit mountain biking in these potential wilderness areas. This association had been working with the National Park Service to study mountain biking in certain national parks. Although mountain biking was already allowed in some national parks, the association was interested in opening more national parks to mountain biking. Areas in some of those national parks and

national forests had been identified for possible designation as wilderness areas.

“There is a wilderness experience, a truly backcountry experience, that is part of the idea and the concept behind wilderness,” said Michael Carroll, associate director of The Wilderness Society’s Wilderness Support Center. “Wilderness preserves a landscape that is similar to the landscape that our fathers and their fathers before them were able to experience. It’s hard to argue that that experience has been preserved when you have heavy traffic zipping by on mountain bikes after you’ve spent two days hiking in.”

The International Mountain Biking Association had worked to build partnerships with the National Park Service. They had met with officials and sent trail crews out to both repair trails and demonstrate how to build trails that will stand up to mountain bike use. The association had not suggested that trails be built in wilderness. The association had focused on creating more riding opportunities elsewhere in national parks. When new mountain biking trails were built in national parks, the association hoped to show that trails can be well designed and used cooperatively by hikers and bikers.

Mountain bikers also argued that they take good care of the trails that they use. They



Photo courtesy of Forest Service, Northern Region.

argued that they support wilderness areas and want to enjoy the same backcountry experience as hikers, backpackers, and horseback riders. They just want to enjoy the experience on a mountain bike.

Additional Resources

Wilderness Mountain Biking Forum

http://www.warriorsociety.org/News/mtn_bike.pdf



Graphic Organizer 1

for the Mountain Biking Question

Use complete sentences, proper grammar, and correct punctuation.

Benefit of Wilderness (see sidebar on pages 14–15)	How Mountain Biking Might Affect Wilderness Benefits in the Area
Clean water and air	
Wild animals and plants	
Recreation	
The economy	
Legacy	
Science	



Graphic Organizer 2 for the Mountain Biking Question

Use complete sentences, proper grammar, and correct punctuation.

Group Members: State the group's decision about allowing mountain biking in potential wilderness areas and provide justification for this decision.	

Introductory information adapted from <http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2009/10/forest-service-drawing-line-mountain-bikers-potential-wilderness-national-park-service-agrees4742>.

Web Resources

Wilderness

<http://wilderness.net>

Wilderness Investigations

<http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/k12>

Discover the Forest

<http://www.discovertheforest.org/where-to-go>

Tips for Taking Kids to the Backcountry

http://www.trails.com/list_1145_tips-taking-kids-backcountry.html

The Wild Foundation

<http://www.wild.org/>

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Lands Categories

http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_pacategories/

Locate Protected Areas Worldwide

<http://www.protectedplanet.net>

Natural Inquirer Wilderness Benefits Edition

<http://www.naturalinquirer.org/Wilderness-Benefits-Edition-i-11.html>

Using *Natural Inquirer* to Interpret Real-World Data

<http://www.naturalinquirer.org/>