



Senator Larry Craig, Chair  
Senator Ron Wyden, Ranking Member  
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests  
364 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

September 27, 2006

Dear Chairman Craig and Ranking Member Wyden:

On behalf of the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) and the Oregon Mountain Bike Alliance (ORMBA) I offer comments on S. 3854 the Lewis and Clark Mount Hood Wilderness Act of 2006 and H.R. 5025 the Mount Hood Stewardship Legacy Act.

IMBA and ORMBA first thank the senators, representatives, and staff for their tireless efforts to craft land protection language for Mount Hood. We applaud the collaboration that has resulted in this legislation, preserving natural resources and many mountain bicycling opportunities.

My family has a long history of recreating on and around Mount Hood, and of celebrating our public lands. The Van Winkles arrived on the third wagon train that traversed the Oregon Trail. My grandfather, Lewis Clark, was named on the 100-year anniversary of the expedition. Exploring Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge while growing up had a transformative effect on me, fostering my appreciation of wild places and an ethic of land protection. Like many outdoors people, pristine, wild lands are what draw me the strongest — where I can get away from roads, crowds, and other constructs of urban life. I have found my mountain bike to be the best way for me to reach it.

For the past three years I have worked for IMBA, traveling North America and consulting with communities on their trail systems. I was surprised to find how well Mount Hood is known across the country, and around the world. *Bike* magazine describes the riding like this: "some of the finest singletrack in the mountain bike universe lies within an 80-mile radius of Hood River, Oregon." My travels have helped me better appreciate the incredible network of trails, and returning home to Hood River has strengthened my desire to protect them.

Mountain biking is a very popular sport, with 39 million participants nationally and close to 400,000 participants in Oregon (according to a recent study by the Outdoor Industry Association). Outdoor recreation is a way of life for Oregon residents, and many tourists travel to the state to experience our trails via mountain bikes.

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Like hikers and equestrians, cyclists have a fundamental interest in protecting undeveloped public lands. The opportunity for solitude and a connection with nature on narrow trails is an extremely important component of mountain bicycling, and is treasured by experienced cyclists. Wild areas provide a riding experience equivalent to powder days for skiers, matching the hatch for anglers, reaching the summit for mountaineers, or playing Pebble Beach for golfers.

### **About IMBA and ORMBA**

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), founded in 1988, leads the national and worldwide mountain bicycling communities through a network of 80,000 supporters and more than 650 affiliated clubs, including 19 in Oregon.

IMBA teaches sustainable trailbuilding techniques and has become a leader in trail design, construction, and maintenance. We encourage responsible riding, perform volunteer trailwork, and foster cooperation between trail user groups and land managers. Nationwide, IMBA members and affiliated clubs conduct close to one million annual hours of volunteer trail and advocacy work, and our members are dedicated to assisting the efforts of federal, state, and local land managers.

The IMBA-affiliated Oregon Mountain Bike Alliance (ORMBA) is a network of Oregon-based organizations, bicycle clubs, individuals, and companies interested in enhancing mountain biking opportunities while protecting state forests. ORMBA's mission is to preserve, protect, and promote mountain bike access for diverse riding experiences through education, communication, and unified action. Representatives from three major clubs in Oregon have been working on this bill in conjunction with the sponsors and others: the Portland United Mountain Pedalers (PUMP) represents cyclists around Portland, the Columbia Area Mountain Bike Advocates (CAMBA) represents cyclists around the Columbia Gorge, and the Central Oregon Trails Alliance (COTA) represents cyclists in the Bend area.

### **Wilderness Designations — One of Many Congressional Protection Methods**

Bicyclists love to ride remote backcountry areas on narrow trails — just like hikers and equestrians — and feel conflicted when Wilderness is proposed that affects significant biking trails. On the one hand, we want to protect the areas we ride. Yet we don't want to lose access to the trails we have ridden for almost two decades.

To preserve the lands we care about, bicyclists support protection of many pristine areas and undeveloped public lands. The challenge is the agencies have defined Wilderness to ban bicycle access. Bicyclists therefore must seek modifications of Wilderness proposals that will allow our quiet, low-impact, muscle-powered form of recreation to continue.

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Nationally, our organization hopes to shift the land protection discourse from Wilderness only conversations to one that is more inclusive of other designations. Why is Wilderness seen as the only option for land protection? More and more it is being applied for political, rather than resource protection reasons. Instead, we need a toolkit of strong protections to apply the right designation to suit each area's distinct history and its future.

### **Senate Bill S. 3854 – Lewis and Clark Mount Hood Wilderness Act of 2006**

S. 3854 bodes well for mountain bicycling and maintains many boundary adjustments that will accommodate access to significant trails. With a few key amendments to the legislation, we believe it can protect the land and allow our existing, historical use to continue.

Most promising for cyclists, the bill creates a 17,700-acre Mount Hood National Forest Recreation Area (NRA) that will allow mountain biking to continue in areas such as Fifteen Mile Creek, Boulder Lake, Shellrock Mountain and Hellroaring Creek. ORMBA and IMBA strongly endorse the NRA proposal and suggest expanding it to several other key areas.

IMBA believes that the proposed NRA is a positive solution in public lands policy regarding Wilderness, as it protects the land while allowing bicycling. Instead of taking away trails our community has enjoyed for decades, National Recreation Areas are a way to protect Mount Hood for our children to enjoy, and also to engage more of the Oregon bike community in land protection.

National Recreation Areas have been used in many places around the country and on National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and USDA Forest Service lands. NRAs can be narrowly defined in legislation and we encourage the committee to specify potential recreation uses. Further, we ask the committee to consider writing in language that would bolster the mountain's protection by prohibiting mining.

### **Trails Closed to Mountain Bicycling by S. 3854**

Some media outlets have written that mountain bike trails are not significantly affected by the proposed legislation, and that very few trail miles will be closed under both bills. In fact, S. 3854 would close 102 miles of trails currently open to bicycles, and H. R. 5025 would close 43 miles around Roaring River. A list of the trail mileage closed is attached. Both bills would preclude future trail development in Wilderness areas.

In the spirit of compromise and forwarding land protection, IMBA and ORMBA have prioritized the most important trail areas we hope the committee will consider keeping open to bicycles. We ask the committee to protect Larch Mountain, Twin Lakes, Bonney Butte, and Roaring River through National Recreation Area status. We believe protecting these areas by a NRA

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eliminates the unnecessary choice between Wilderness and our continued access. These areas need to be protected from development, road building, and resource extraction. They do not need to be protected from mountain bikes. Available trail resource science demonstrates that hikers and bicyclists have similar impacts on the land, and both do less damage than horse travel. Both hikers and equestrians are allowed in Wilderness.

IMBA also asks the committee for a minor boundary adjustment to help re-open the Clackamas River Trail. IMBA advocates have started conversations with the Forest Service concerning this area and this narrow adjustment would help restore a trail that was open to our use for many years.

### **Positive Provisions in Both S. 3854 and H.R. 5025**

We are pleased both the Senate and the House bills include:

- An investment of almost \$800,000 in un-obligated special use permit fees to be retained for trails and recreation on Mount Hood.
- Consideration for high-use recreation areas that are popular within the mountain bike community; these trails were left outside proposed Wilderness boundaries to allow for continued bike access.
- A seat on the Mount Hood National Forest Recreational Advisory Council for a mountain bike representative.
- The suggestion that the Forest Service consider creating singletrack trails open to bicycles from decommissioned roads.
- Recognition of recreation as a dynamic social and economic component of Mount Hood.

### **House Bill H. R. 5025 Mount Hood Stewardship Legacy Act**

IMBA supports the House Bill as written but suggests the inclusion of National Recreation Area status for Roaring River. Forty-three miles of trails would be closed in this area, affecting 77 more miles, as critical connectors would be made effectively off-limits. IMBA submitted testimony on the H.R. 5025 suggesting non-wilderness trail corridors for 28 miles of the highest priority trails. A National Recreation Area may be another way to keep these trails open for the entire parcel.

It is important to note many differences between the 16-year-old Forest Plan and what is happening on the trail. There are many, many miles of trails that, in the 16 years since the

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Forest Plan, have remained legally open to our use because the Forest Service has actively maintained these trails and chosen not to close them.

Mountain biking is a healthy, human-powered outdoor activity with minimal environmental impact and a positive economic influence for Oregon. Mountain biking is an inherent use on Mount Hood and many accommodations have been made in the legislation for other historical and existing uses. We ask the committee to do the same for bicycles by expanding National Recreation Areas to other important trail systems: Larch Mountain, Twin Lakes, Bonney Butte, and Roaring River

The Mount Hood National Forest Plan is more than 16 years old and IMBA and ORMBA look forward to helping the Forest Service develop new singletrack trail opportunities for mountain biking. Mountain bicyclists are avid trail stewards and contribute thousands of hours of volunteer trailwork across the state and on Mount Hood. If more lands are designated Wilderness, and thus made off-limits to cyclists, an important constituency will be shut out.

In the future, IMBA and ORMBA hope to work with the committee and the bill's sponsors to introduce legislation that will protect more acres around Mount Hood and around Oregon. Oregon is known for being solutions-minded and looking for new ways to tackle old problems. We believe that there are more appropriate land protections than Wilderness that will allow for existing recreational user groups, but protect the land, and the trails we so highly value.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Jill Van Winkle

IMBA Trail Specialist

Enclosure: List of trails closed by S. 3854

