



*In This Issue*

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## FAW Petitions ANF To Prohibit Mountain Biking On All Non-Motorized Trails

The non-profit Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) is petitioning the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) to formally amend their 2007 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to prohibit all bicycling on all non-motorized trails across the forest.

The ban would not apply to the Jakes Rocks mountain biking trail, of which FAW was an early supporter. The group is asking that pedestrian access to that trail be prohibited due to safety concerns.

The twenty-year-old wilderness advocacy organization's petition focuses largely on the rapidly emerging threat of dangerous electrified motorbikes, commonly termed "e-bikes," and the inability to easily differentiate between e-bikes and regular mountain bikes. Aided by secret hidden electric motors, e-bikes can reach unnatural and unsafe speeds with relatively little effort.

Removing all bicycle use from all non-motorized trails in the ANF is critical in order to uphold the integrity of the land and trails. The increased popularity of e-bikes makes this action more urgent, as they represent a threat to hikers. This is especially true for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and young children, who do not have the reflexive capabilities to

dodge an incoming e-bike.

With the advent and growth of e-bikes, mountain biking must be permanently removed from any non-motorized trail in the ANF where it is currently allowed. If the Forest Service fails to take this common-sense action, the liability will be on their hands when, not if, hikers are struck and injured by a careening mountain biker illegally riding an e-bike on a non-motorized trail.

Mountain biking, whether e-biking or regular biking, jarringly disrupts the tranquil, sacred atmosphere of a non-motorized trail — it diminishes the hiking experience, and does not enhance it. It forces the modernity of man's mechanical influences onto the wilderness and into the consciousness of the hiker, shattering the atmosphere of allowing hikers to escape said influences.

"Friends of Allegheny Wilderness obviously supports mountain biking at Jakes Rocks, where the trails were specifically designed, engineered, and built for that activity," said FAW executive director Kirk Johnson. "But mountain biking, especially with the advent and exploding growth in popularity of electric motorbikes, has no place on any hiking trail anywhere on any tract of public lands in America."

FAW previously successfully challenged an ill-advised scheme by the ANF to open up hiking trails within the 9,705-acre proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area — the largest inventoried roadless area on federal public lands in Pennsylvania. This idea would inevitably have included mountain bikes trespass on nine miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail. After a fraught, nearly four-year battle, the ANF formally cancelled the proposed Tracy Ridge Mountain Biking On Hiking Trails project in September of 2019.

FAW has long maintained that the Wilderness Act of 1964 must be fairly applied to the ANF, just as it would be to any other federal public lands, and that more than 50,000 acres of the 514,185-acre ANF potentially qualify for inclusion in America's National Wilderness Preservation System, to be permanently protected from all forms of development for future generations to use and enjoy in their natural state.

During the most recent ANF Forest Plan revision process, more than 6,800 of 8,200 public comments received by the agency — eighty-three percent — specifically advocated for FAW and their 2003 Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest.