

Should foot races be booted from the PCT?

By Yitka, Outdoor

You're hiking through a grove of spruce trees on the Pacific Crest Trail when you hear voices up ahead. Fifty yards away you spot a few pop-up tents and several dozen people hanging out, cheering. They offer you a cold soda and some chips and cookies. They're hosting a trail running race, they explain – so watch out for runners coming the opposite direction.

Despite its reputation as a Mecca for through-hikers, the PCT is host to a growing number of trail races, which draw between 75 and 400 trail-runners to small sections of the trail during about a dozen weekends between March and October. The atmosphere of these events may not call to mind the type of meditative experience Cheryl Strayed chronicled in her best-selling book, *Wild*, but does sharing the trail with a few hundred runners on a given day diminish the experience of the individual? That question is at the heart of an emerging controversy over the overarching purpose and meaning of the trail as a public resource.

In October, a trail-race director in Washington named Candice Burt had hoped to use a 50-mile stretch of the trail for a new 200-mile ultramarathon she is organizing for August. She contacted the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA), the nonprofit that partners with the U.S. Forest Service to manage the PCT, and a representative “basically told me [the race] wasn't going to happen.” Even though the PCTA doesn't issue race permits, the group's influence over the permit issuing Forest Service is undisputed.

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