

Mountain biker and wilderness relationship: It's complicated

By Grayson Schaffer, Outside

On Aug. 7, President Obama signed into law a bill that converted just over 275,000 acres among the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains into federal wilderness – three separate areas collectively known as the Boulder–White Clouds.

For years, it's been obscure and sparsely trafficked by hikers, mountain bikers, off-road motorcyclists, skiers, hunters, and cattlemen. The president's signature brings to a close a long and sometimes ugly debate. But it has also left many local mountain bikers, who've long ridden trails in the Boulder–White Clouds, disappointed that they'll no longer be allowed in.

The entire process has put riders in the increasingly familiar and uncomfortable position of opposing wilderness legislation.

According to the Outdoor Foundation's most recent participation report, there are roughly 8 million mountain bikers in America and 10 million backpackers. And mountain biking, which didn't exist to have a seat at the table when the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964, is only getting more popular.

For bikers, the insult is compounded because older and more clearly detrimental practices like cattle grazing and mining are grandfathered into wilderness areas, as are many airstrips.

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