

December 15, 2010



Flagstaff Biking Organization
PO Box 23851
Flagstaff, AZ 86002
<http://www.flagstaffbiking.org>

Bureau of Land Management
Moab District
Attention: Katie Stevens
82 E. Dogwood
Moab, UT 84532
katie_stevens@blm.gov
Sent via electronic mail

Dear Ms. Stevens,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Magnificent Seven Trail System. We are excited and pleased to see the Moab BLM District considering this much needed addition to the mountain bike accessible trail system!

Background on Flagstaff Biking Organization

Flagstaff Biking Organization (FBO) is a group of cyclists who came together to “promote bicycling as a safe and attractive means of transportation and recreation in Northern Arizona.” Our initial project was to put on a Bike to Work Week for our community in May 2002. Building on the success we started to expand our efforts to keep people informed of cycling related issues and galvanize support for better and safer facilities, trails, and trail access. Please see <http://flagstaffbiking.org/about-fbo/> for more information.

Many of our members recreate in Moab. Moab is recognized as one of the most popular mountain bike destinations in the world. The relatively close proximity of Moab makes it an extremely popular recreation destination with mountain bikers in Northern Arizona. Please consider our comments as generally representative of our 200 + paid members’ concerns.

Current issues and need

Growth in all trails-based recreational demands

The demand for recreational trails in the Moab area has grown dramatically since the town's transition from a mining community to one of the premiere destinations in the world for outdoor recreation. Over the past 20 to 30 years, the popularity of all trails based recreation has increased, as has the popularity of the Moab area as a destination for trail users. Not only has the sport of mountain biking grown in popularity within this time frame, but so has the popularity of various forms of Off Highway Vehicle recreation. Most of the trails in Moab are shared use, motorized and non-motorized. This increase in use has led to a substantial increase in the number of users on the trails in the Moab area, and the potential for user conflict and decreased user satisfaction has increased dramatically. Mountain bikers in northern Arizona are among the many users who value the opportunities for riding presented by the unique landscape in Moab.

Cumulative loss of recreational routes

Contributing to the number of users on routes has been the implementation of the BLM Moab District's Resource Management Plan, (RMP), which restricted all bicycle and motorized travel to designated routes. The implementation of this plan has pushed users who may have been otherwise dispersed on non-system routes to a limited number of designated system routes. Many of our members lament the loss of opportunities for cross-country travel and the subsequent reduction of routes that the new RMP caused.

Importance of single-track experience

The most popular form of mountain biking is the single-track route. Although Moab offers the unique experience provided by the various sandstone "slickrock" routes throughout the area, there exists a need for single-track trails as well to best serve the needs of mountain bikers recreating in the area. Flagstaff is a "mecca" for single-track trail riding, and more single-track opportunities in Moab would provide a nearby option with a much different flavor from northern Arizona's ponderosa forested trails.

Importance of mountain biking to the Moab economy

As stated above, Moab is among the most popular and most unique mountain bike destinations in the world. It is important to recognize that the majority of businesses in Moab benefit directly and indirectly from the economy generated by the visitation of mountain bikers to Moab. The above mentioned conflict issues, the desire of riders to explore new opportunities and the growing competition amongst communities in the inter-mountain west to draw mountain bike users point to an overwhelming need to provide for more, and more dispersed, opportunities for mountain biking in the Moab area. As we mentioned in our above background statement, a substantial number of mountain bikers from northern Arizona vacation in Moab on a frequent basis.

Flagstaff Biking Organization supports Trail Mix's Proposal, Alternative A

Alternative A provides best solution to issues and needs

Since Alternative A contains the maximum amount of non-motorized single-track, it best addresses all of the needs expressed in the beginning of our letter, and throughout the “Purpose and Need” section of the EA. Given the amount of effort put into a process such as this, we see this as the “most bang for the buck” in providing for the recognized needs. Mountain bikers from northern Arizona would wholeheartedly welcome this new single-track trail opportunity in the Moab area.

Recreation impacts to wildlife are not changed by this trail

The existence of user created routes and off-trail travel previous to the recent implementation of the current RMP within the desert bighorn sheep habitat, coupled with the continuing success of these herds, would seem to indicate that recreation has had negligible negative impacts to the sheep. Although it might be assumed that designation of this route will increase usage beyond historical numbers, this is not necessarily true. Some consideration may also be given to the fact that a designated route will concentrate use in a specific corridor within, rather than dispersed throughout, this area, as was the case previous to the restrictions enacted by the RMP. This may in fact contribute to a reduction in impact to the herds.

In addition, the entire Gemini Bridges/ Gold Bar area sees an exceedingly high number of users within proximity to the trail because of its popularity with all sorts of recreational users. Very few natural barriers exist to the surrounding landscape that would mitigate noise and other human disturbance to the desert bighorn herds. The designation of this trail would seem inconsequential to the cumulative human impacts to the bighorn that are already present.

Lack of Wilderness characteristics

We agree strongly that all of the areas that are proposed for this trail lack the characteristics for wilderness that would preclude the construction of a trail open to bicycles.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to comment. We are strongly in favor of the expansion of opportunities for mountain biking in our region, and are pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in this process. Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions regarding our input. Please keep us informed of any progress in this process.

Sincerely-

s/Anthony Quintile

for the Board of Flagstaff Biking Organization

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