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U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and
Public Lands of the Committee on Natural Resources

Hearing on
H.R. 980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act

May 5, 2009

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on H.R. 980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act.

The American Motorcyclist Association is a 300,000-member organization that promotes and protects responsible recreational access to public lands using off-highway motorcycles, dual sport motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (referred to here as OHVs and ATVs respectively).

As you know, if H.R. 980 is signed into law, it will designate more than 24 million acres of public lands in western states as Wilderness or Wilderness Preservation System land. By designating these lands as Wilderness, the legislation will close off traditional responsible motorized access to millions of acres in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming.

Our public lands are for the enjoyment of all Americans and not just an elite few who would have you build a fence around them for those who are physically able to enjoy them. Enthusiasts who enjoy the public lands of our nation are not just the nimble and fit but also families with small children who wish to recreate together as well as active senior citizens and the handicapped who enjoy the freedom to access the outdoors that OHVs and ATVs provide.

AMA fully supports appropriate Wilderness designations where there is broad local support. However, Congress must designate new Wilderness areas as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964.

H.R. 980 does not meet the definition of Wilderness. Indeed, The Wilderness Act defines Wilderness, with a capital 'W', as those areas which are essentially in a natural state, where changes are produced by the environment itself - not by the hand of man. Much of the land in question is criss-crossed by roads, trails, power lines, dams, bridges and structures. Surely this does not meet the definition of Wilderness.

Since 1964, Congress has done a great deal of work to find and designate appropriate areas as Wilderness. Today, with the recent addition of 2 million acres designated in the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act, there are already 708 federally imposed 'Wilderness areas' totaling 108 million acres of land in 44 states. These 108 million acres of land now exceed the amount of all developed land in the United States.

It is also important to note that while all of the affected land in this legislation is in the western United States, the legislation was offered by a Representative from New York City. Indeed, not one House member representing the affected areas has chosen to co-sponsor H.R. 980. This is very telling—the local population in the area affected does not support this bill. Shouldn't the people who live in these areas have some say in whether or not they should be banned from riding in them?

This single piece of legislation proposes to increase Wilderness by nearly 25% in one stroke of the pen without local support of those who recreate on that land.

In fact, a compelling argument could be made that this type of broad legislation does more to protect public lands *from* future generations rather than *for* future generations.

It is my sincere hope that this Subcommittee continues to engage the public in their deliberations on the disposition of public lands. The AMA and its members stand ready to serve as a resource for you and your staff as you further consider responsible public access to America's public lands.

Again, I wish to thank the Chairman, the ranking member and the Subcommittee for holding this hearing on H.R. 980.