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My Turn

A perspective from the mountain bike community on the Columbine-Hondo wilderness

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I would like to provide some perspective from the mountain bike community with regards to a bill that will turn the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area into designated wilderness.

First a little background, Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act (S.776) has been crafted to permanently protect 45,000 acres of national forest land while restoring a key recreation asset in the region, including the Lost Lake and East Fork trails in the Red River area for mountain bike use. It has come to my attention that a few mountain bikers in the community are inadvertently threatening this bill.

Many stakeholders in the region, including ranchers, acequia associations, neighborhood associations, municipalities, Taos County, numerous corporations, Taos Pueblo, Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, Congressman Ben Ray Lujan, Congresswomen Michelle Lujan Grisham, and Del Norte MtB Alliance, the local chapter of International Mountain Bike Association, have all joined other conservation-minded organizations, including the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition, to help shape the proposal. After a very lengthy and sometimes difficult coalition building process, this bill has the broad based support of the Taos community.

The delicate balance of community support needs to stay strong if this bill is to stay on track and be signed into law. There are reports that some mountain bikers are riding in the Wilderness Study area, disregarding the management intent and ignoring the fact that mechanized travel, including biking, is not permitted. It is this ignorance or blatant disrespect for management practice that could unravel years of collaboration and progress. Because so much of this collaboration is built on trust and respect it is critical that those riding trails like Goose Creek, Lost Lake, and Long Canyon find alternatives.

When passed, this bill will open up 20 miles of pristine, high-alpine single-track for us all to enjoy. Furthermore, by working with this collaboration of community members we are building relationships that will provide support for additional trails down the road. Furthermore, when mountain bikers support this bill we stand a good chance on getting support for other initiatives, like getting some more trails up by Horse Thief Mesa.

Please, I urge all mountain bikers to respect the efforts of this coalition and recognize that in the big picture mountain bikers have so much to gain to be threatening this bill.

Ben Thomas is the board chair for the Del Norte MtB Alliance, the local International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA).