

# UpFront

## Uneasy riders

*Mountain bikers run into some new roadblocks*

**BY BILL MEAGHER AND PETER SEIDMAN**

**M**ountain bikers say they're feeling the chill of a cold shoulder these days. Whether it's Barbara Boxer's California Wild Heritage Act or the Tamalpais Conservation Club's objections to the state parks department's plans to create two new trails, one message is coming through loud and clear for the two-wheeler: Find someplace else to ride.

Marin's favorite senator will introduce a bill soon that would place the highest federal protection designation—wilderness—on 2.5 million acres of publicly owned land, mostly in Central and Southern California. A smorgasbord of federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service, currently manages the land. The wilderness designation allows public use of the land for fishing, hiking and back-

packing, horseback riding, rock climbing, camping, canoeing and rafting, and cross-country skiing.

Mountain biking, however, is forbidden—it is banned in all federal wilderness areas. Along with the federal wilderness designation comes a prohibition against vehicles, including cars, trucks, snowmobiles, motorcycles and bikes. The only exceptions to the law include forest-service vehicles, firefighting trucks and emergency vehicles.

Closer to home, mountain bikers are finding themselves at odds with the venerable Tamalpais Conservation Club, an organization founded in 1912 for the purpose of ensuring that Marin's signature mountain remains unspoiled. The problem, at least from the mountain bikers' perspective, is that the Conservation Club is protesting the California Department of Parks and Recreation plans to turn two fire roads, Coastal and Lone Tree roads, into relatively narrow multi-use trails. The Conservation Club is concerned that the trails will be too narrow to adequately accommodate everyone, and that mountain bikers essentially will chase away hikers, joggers and equestrians unwilling to share space with any Kamikaze-like riders. And the

mountain-bike community is concerned that the Conservation Club's protests eventually will ban them from using the new multi-use trails, giving them less access to the mountain than they now have. Access for mountain bikers has been a contentious issue for decades. Even though the majority of riders on the mountain have been polite and considerate, the tension between the equestrian, hiker and jogger community, and the mountain-bike community has at times been palpable.

Both sides of the mountain-bike access issue agree on one thing: the planning processes that are leading to new regulations are unfair and possibly illegal.

The Bush administration has been attempting to roll back environmental regulation since taking office, and on the surface of things it seems as if Boxer's bill is a bit out of place. But the senator's deputy director, Tom Bohigian, says, "The senator has a strong record on a wide variety of environmental issues, and this plan pre-dates President Bush's election. The wilderness designation is the highest degree of protection we can give land and it will forever keep these lands open to most recreational uses

*continued on page 6*

**NE**

## Changing

College of Marin future of their facilities. College. After months, likely course is to let proceeds to upgrade and officers recommend options: lease all or campuses and build a new campus option. A possible new site has it promised to raise h

## Plus more

Also on the COM items relevant to the partner IVC with Sa vide selected bache. Another would lease of Evanston, Illinois center. Another plan housing multi-level

## 'Hi. Want

One of Dubya's s education legislation over to military recr phone numbers of a opt out, but unless High is about to sen out provision. The M Districts that don't

## Radio sys

continued from page 5

and protect the land from development and other uses." Development as well as logging and drilling for oil or gas are prohibited on land with a wilderness designation.

It also would ban mountain bikers. Contrary to popular opinion—at least according to Boxer's Web site—not all knobby-tire disciples think that's such a bad thing. Her Web site states that Boxer's bill enjoys the support of at least some mountain bikers and includes a link to a Chico-based organization called Mountain Bikers for Wilderness. Featured on her Web site is a letter from the organization supporting Boxer's bill, even though it would effectively shut the door to mountain bikes across 2.5 million acres of land, including some national parks.

Some major mountain-bike advocacy groups, including the Southern California branch of the International Mountain Biking Association, are infuriated that Boxer has featured the link to Mountain Bikers for Wilderness and included the letter on her site. Another group objecting to Boxer's information campaign is called the Warriors Society, which claims Boxer's office is using a phony organization to support her bill. Chris Vargas of the Warriors Society says Mountain Bikers for Wilderness was formed as a political tactic to make it look as though Boxer's bill has support in the mountain biking community, and Boxer's staff knew the group wasn't legitimate.

Members of Bikers for Wilderness

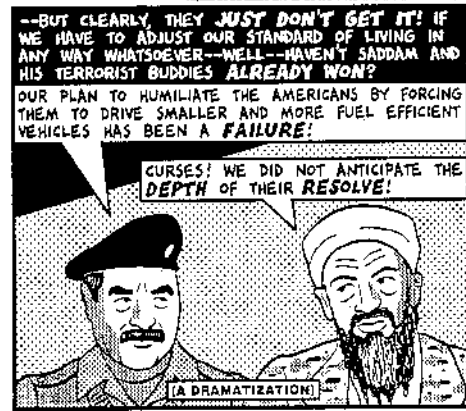
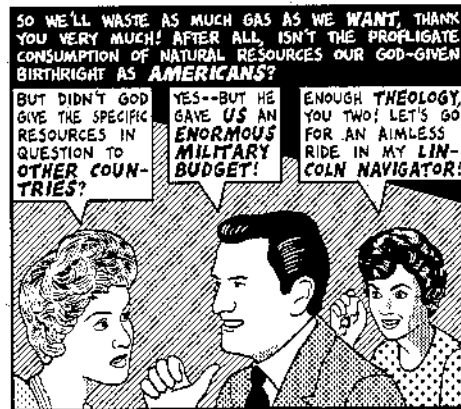
acknowledge that they are not an organization in the formal sense but rather an informal group of people who ride together. Don Massie, who speaks for the group, says the riders learned about Boxer's bill, discussed the issue and then formed Bikers for

Wilderness, which sent the letter to Boxer's office supporting her bill. Massie says the wilderness designation is important enough to elicit support, even though it might restrict mountain-bike access. Boxer's office

continued on page 8

## THIS MODERN WORLD

## Tom Tomorrow



*continued from page 6*

never approached either the informal group of riders or later the Bikers for Wilderness to solicit support, Massie maintains. It was entirely a local initiative, he says.

Speaking for Boxer, Bohigian says neither the senator nor her staff went hunting for endorsements from the mountain-bike community, regardless of whether an organization was "formal" or "informal." It's not beyond belief, he says, that some bikers would support Boxer's bill on their own.

Abby Minot, an officer with the Marin Bicycle Trails Council, says she initially supported Boxer's bill but has changed her position. "I come from a backpacking background, so the idea of protecting land makes sense to me," she says. "But then I began looking at some of the motivations of the supporters, who really want to keep bikes out, who have a different agenda, that's when I changed my mind."

While Minot says she has turned against Boxer's bill, she has even more trouble with the Tamalpais Conservation Club's latest moves, which she says could wind up keeping mountain bikes from using the two new trails on Mount Tam. "Sometimes you just get tired of mountain bikers being demonized," she says.

The Conservation Club says it's not demonizing anyone, but it legitimately objects to the state's plan to change the two fire roads into multi-use trails because the state failed to give proper public notice about the proposed project.

Although the state Department of Parks and Recreation held a public meeting last November to describe the project and take comments, the agency failed to notify a number of key organizations about the process. In addition to leaving the Conservation Club out of the loop, the state failed to contact the Sierra Club Marin, the Mount Tamalpais Interpretive Association, the Alpine Club, the Marin Audubon Society, the Marin Conservation League, the Marin Horse Council and the Bay Area Trails Preservation Council. Dave Boyd, a senior ecologist with the Department of Parks and Recreation, says the agency made the mistake of using an outdated mailing list to notify the public about the process, and no one intentionally excluded the Conservation Club or any other organization.

Larry Minikes of the Conservation Club says he and his fellow members don't buy the explanation Boyd is selling. "We have been working with the state for too long for them to simply forget to let us know about a project or a meeting," Minikes says. The Conservation Club is serious about its objections and has hired local environmental attorney Dotty LeMieux, who also happens to be the president of the Marin Sierra Club.

Since she went to work for the Conservation Club, LeMieux has been busy filing complaints with the state, ranging from the charge that the state failed to properly let the public know about the

Conservation Club. Mountain bikers might take at least a little comfort in Boyd's statement supporting a continued multi-use philosophy for the new trails, even if they are narrower than the current fire roads they would replace: "We are the recreation department, and when it makes sense we try to make our parks as available to as many different types of uses as possible. In this case, we don't feel that we can exclude any uses from the trails."

But Minikes and the Conservation Club seem unwilling to back down—or move over—and let mountain bikers have access to the two new trails without a fight. "All you have to do is take a look at China Camp [State Park] since they have had multi-use trails," he says. "I am out there, and the traditional users like runners, hikers and equestrians have left to find other trails because there are so many mountain bikes. People do not feel as comfortable as they once did at China Camp, and we are afraid the state is not being realistic about the outcome of putting narrower trails on Mount Tam."

Minot of the Marin Bicycle Trails Council agrees that many mountain bikers use the trails in China Camp, but so do other users. "I still see hikers there, though maybe not many horses." Boyd backs that assertion and says hikers and runners are still using China Camp in big numbers, according to park rangers.

But the Conservation Club maintains that comparing China Camp to what might happen on Mount Tam is misleading. Among the objections the club submitted to the state is this: "It is a virtual certainty Bike Magazine and other publications and a variety of mountain bike-based websites would publish photos and written commentary with the intent of advertising the creation of two trails of less than 72 inches in width in what is well known as the birthplace of the mountain bike... Completion of this project in its current form virtually will assure a significant increase in anticipated worldwide mountain bike use, thereby creating a major new international attraction to the property."

Minot of the Bicycle Trails Council believes the Conservation Club's concern that hordes of international bikers will flock to Mount Tam is unfounded. "The two trails combined are less than 5 miles long; nobody is going to travel a great distance to ride such short trails. Most of the people who ride are not that much different than me. I'm just trying to keep my 48-year-old body in shape."

Both Minikes and Minot chafe at the suggestion that this spat over the use of trails on Mount Tam is just the latest installment in a seemingly unending saga of Marin hiker-biker feuds. "The only place people don't get along is at [public] meetings," says Minot. "On the trails, I'm always amazed at how polite hikers and bikers are."

Minikes stops short of claiming some of his best friends are bikers. "I ride, I'm out

too long for them to simply forget to let us know about a project or a meeting," Minikes says. The Conservation Club is serious about its objections and has hired local environmental attorney Dotty LeMieux, who also happens to be the president of the Marin Sierra Club.

Since she went to work for the Conservation Club, LeMieux has been busy filing complaints with the state, ranging from the charge that the state failed to properly let the public know about the project to the Conservation Club's belief that the state has based the project on false or nonexistent data and a claim that the project requires an environmental impact report.

Ecologist Boyd says the state is still reviewing the objections submitted by the

48-year-old body in shape."

Both Minikes and Minot chafe at the suggestion that this spat over the use of trails on Mount Tam is just the latest installment in a seemingly unending saga of Marin hiker-biker feuds. "The only place people don't get along is at [public] meetings," says Minot. "On the trails, I'm always amazed at how polite hikers and bikers are."

Minikes stops short of claiming some of his best friends are bikers. "I ride. I'm out there myself, so I don't have a problem with mountain bikers. My problem is with how the state has handled this so far, and the fact that the narrow multi-use trails are not good for everyone."

Contact the writers at [meagher\\_seidman@yahoo.com](mailto:meagher_seidman@yahoo.com).

