

CHAPTER 4 – BICYCLING POLICIES

Federal transportation policy and associated funding priorities affect the resources and support available for bicycling initiatives on Federal lands. A review of this policy finds support of alternative modes of transportation (relative to automobiles) has steadily increased over the past 40 years. Presented below is a chronology of this policy (as revealed through Congressional acts, appropriations, and policy statements), focusing on bicycling issues. It will be seen in this chronology that in 1994, the USDOT set specific goals for increasing bicycle and pedestrian travel in the United States as part of the landmark National Bicycling and Walking Study. Furthermore, and as discussed in more detail below, the specific issue of bicycling in national parks and Federal lands comes up as part of a study of alternative transportation needs for Federal lands mandated by the Transportation Equity Act of 1998 (TEA-21).

This chapter presents an overview of the NPS, USFS, FWS and BLM mission statements and agency documents that guide their transportation decisions. It then provides a chronology on Federal transportation policies as they relate to bicycling, as these policies will also affect support for biking initiatives on Federal lands. These policies generally fall into two categories: transportation or health initiatives that support active recreation and transportation such as bicycling.

**AGENCY OVERVIEW**

Federal lands totaled approximately 690 million acres in 2006, encompassing almost a third of the land mass of the United States. Table 3 shows the number of acres managed by each land management agency discussed in this guide. The BLM manages the most land with 258 million acres, while the NPS manages the smallest area of 85 million acres.

The FHWA's FLH program provides funding for public roads on these lands that are not the responsibility of State or local government. The FLH program works with land managers to plan, design, construct, and rehabilitate highways and bridges on Federal lands. FLH provides funding for more than 90,000 miles of Federal roads, and public-authority-owned roads that serve Federal lands.

**Table 3: Federal Lands Acreages.**

Land Program	Acres
National Park Service	85 million
U.S. Forest Service	193 million
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	94 million
Bureau of Land Management	258 million

**NPS Mission**—“The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.”

The NPS comprises 390 areas covering approximately 85 million acres in every state (except Delaware), the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. These areas include parks, monuments, battlefields, military parks, historical parks, historic sites, lakeshores, seashores, recreation areas, scenic rivers and trails and the White House. The fundamental purpose of the National Park System is resource preservation. Visitors can experience and learn about their natural and cultural heritage in the national parks (NPS, 2007).

Balancing visitor experience and conservation of natural and cultural resources with the transportation network is a major challenge. NPS lands can draw large crowds during peak tourist seasons, causing problems with congestion, parking shortages, and air quality. Bicycling offers one option to alleviate these problems and it is popular on many NPS lands, despite a lack of safe infrastructure. Many NPS roads are narrow and dangerous for bicyclists. While there are some mountain biking opportunities, NPS lands tend to be more popular with road cyclists.

While bicycling infrastructure and programs can help NPS solve transportation issues, many parks are designed to be viewed through the windshield. Changing traditional travel modes in national parks can be very challenging. For example, the steps required to open an NPS trail to bicycling are complicated and have taken as little as three months or as long as two years, depending on the political and social volatility of the issue and other factors. IMBA describes the process to open a NPS trail to bicycles in "How to Open a NPS Trail to Bicycles: The Process Explained" (IMBA, 2008).

The broadest level of NPS planning at the Unit level is the NPS General Management Plan (GMP), which is required for each land unit. GMPs often define transportation-related challenges. Parks must create sustainable transportation systems that will define the quality and integrity of parks in the future. Bicycles should play a role in achieving a sustainable transportation system. Strategic action plans, implementation plans and annual performance plans contain increasing levels of detail. The NPS Transportation Planning Guidebook, published in September 1999, provides NPS planning policy and transportation planning details. This guide is a useful resource for land managers and is available online at <http://www.nps.gov/transportation/tmp/planning.htm>.

**USFS Mission**—“The USFS manages national forests for multiple uses and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, wood, and recreation.”

The USFS manages 193 million acres (roughly the size of Texas) that include 155 national forests, 22 national grasslands, more than 380,000 miles of roads and more than 133,000 miles of trails. Congress established the USFS in 1905 to provide quality water and timber for the nation’s benefit.

The USFS has many miles of backcountry trails and roads offering ample opportunities for bicyclists, including mountain bike trails, remote dirt roads with little or no traffic and scenic paved roadways. In the off-season, mountain bike rental shops are popular at ski areas located on USFS lands in many small western communities. Long distance bicycle touring groups and special events such as fundraisers and bike races often use USFS roads and trails. A few examples are the Tour of Colorado, Ride the Rockies, Triple Bypass, and the Courage Classic in Colorado. Some of these events draw over 5,000 bicyclists.

USFS Travel Management Plans establish where visitors can travel legally in or on motorized vehicles (i.e., off-highway vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, etc.) within the National Forest. These plans also guide decisions on which trails are opened to non-motorized use, including bicycles, horses and pedestrians. Since mountain biking is a relatively new sport that has only been popular since the 1980s, older USFS travel management guidance documents do not address mountain biking specifically. Mountain bikers are getting more involved with updates to USFS travel management plans to ensure continued access for bicycles. The USFS is involved in a program with various non-governmental organizations (NGO) that has the potential to include bicycling programs. See "More Kids in the Woods" later in this chapter for details.

**FWS Mission**—National wildlife refuges are first and foremost national treasures for the conservation of wildlife. The FWS mission is “working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people (FWS, 2008).

The FWS manages 94 million acres and is responsible for 632 management units, including 548 wildlife refuges, 37 wetland management districts, and 50 coordination areas.

A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. A CCP must be developed for each refuge in the Refuge System by 2012. A CCP is a 15-year master plan that identifies issues, goals, objectives and strategies for refuge management, including transportation systems. The CCP provides refuge managers with a blueprint for management, and it provides neighbors and others a clear picture of what the Service intends to do in terms of managing habitat, protecting wildlife, and providing a place where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent activities (FWS, 2008).

With regard to bicycling, refuge managers must decide if it is an appropriate refuge use at the local level by determining compatibility with the “big six” allowable recreational uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental interpretation, and environmental education. If a new use is not appropriate, the refuge manager can deny the use. Although bicycling is not identified as one of the six wildlife-dependent recreational uses, it often appears to be compatible with refuge goals.

Refuges are often centered around waterfowl habitat, offering a quiet rural setting with spectacular waterfowl and wildlife viewing and mild grades. Bicycles can complement the six wildlife dependent recreational uses, allowing visitors a quiet, active way to observe and photograph wildlife as well as fish and hunt in some cases. Bicycling can be less physically demanding than walking, allowing access to places that may be too far to walk. Bicycling can become the major mode of transportation in areas where established roads and trails restrict motorized use at little or no cost to the refuge. These various observations are drawn from a review of six compatibility determinations involving bicycle travel from around the country. These evaluations, summarized in Appendix C, all concluded that bicycling is a compatible refuge use with certain stipulations.

**BLM Mission**—Working with its partners at the local, state, and national levels, the BLM will meet its mission of “sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”

The BLM manages 258 million acres of land and accommodates 53 million visitors per year. The BLM was established in 1946 to manage Federal lands located primarily in the western

United States, including Alaska. The BLM manages multiple resources and uses, including energy and minerals; timber; forage; recreation; wild horse and burro herds; fish and wildlife habitat; wilderness areas; and archaeological, paleontological, and historical sites. The BLM carries out a variety of programs for the management and conservation of resources. These public lands make up more than 40 percent of all land managed by the Federal government (BLM, 2007).

Resource Management Plans (RMPs) are prepared for each land unit and guide how BLM manages its land units, including the transportation system. Policies for consideration of bicycling as a transportation mode on roads differ for each state. Decisions regarding mountain bicycle access on BLM lands are made at the local level, with no nationwide regulations. Federal regulations exist for nationwide management of off-highway vehicles on BLM land, but none currently exist for mountain bikes. The BLM has an informal "open-unless-designated-closed" policy for mountain bikes ([http://www.imba.com/resources/agencies/blm\\_trail\\_policy.html](http://www.imba.com/resources/agencies/blm_trail_policy.html)).

BLM's "open-system" approach is being replaced by a strategy of comprehensive travel management, in part because of extensive motorized travel on unrestricted lands. BLM is conducting comprehensive travel management across approximately 130 million acres of open designated lands. This includes resource management, road and trail design, maintenance, and recreation and non-recreation uses of roads and trails. Travel activities in this context incorporate access needs and the effects of all forms of travel, both motorized and non-motorized.

BLM lands tend to be less developed than other public lands and many are well known for their mountain biking opportunities. Back Country Byways or mountain roads on BLM lands are often lightly traveled and offer stunning scenery for road bikers. BLM lands have many opportunities for long distance tour routes connecting towns and other Federal lands.

### **FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

Pucher (1997) suggests that changes in transportation policy can significantly affect mode shifts from autos to bicycles. Contrasting low bike use in the United States to much higher use in several Western European countries, he discusses a number of factors such as climate, topography, access to transit, trip distance, and presence of a university. He concludes that public transportation policy is the primary reason for the drastically different levels of bicycle use. Table 4 shows significant transportation policies relating to bicycling over the past 35 years.

Federal transportation agencies and Congress have taken steps over the last 35 years to promote bicycle use. The following section describes significant policy changes in more detail.

**Table 4: Federal Transportation Policy Timeline.**

1973	Federal Aid Highway funds first used for bicycle facilities
1990	USDOT policy created to mainstream bicycling into transportation network
1991	ISTEA greatly increases funding for bicycle facilities and programs
1994	National Bicycling and Walking Study sets goals to increase bicycle travel
1998	TEA 21 increases bicycle facility and program funding
2005	SAFETEA-LU significantly expands support for bicycling programs

### Federal Transportation Policy Chronology

**1973** Federal-aid Highway Act. States were allowed to use a limited amount of Federal-aid highway system funds for the construction of separate or preferential bicycle lanes and facilities, and pedestrian walkways. During the 18-year period between FY1973 and FY1991, 20 states used Federal-aid highway funds for bike and pedestrian use, totaling \$41 million (Lipford, 2000).

**1990** The FHWA Administrator described bicycling and walking as "the forgotten modes" of transportation. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) adopted a new national transportation policy that sought to mainstream bicycling and pedestrian needs into our transportation system.

**1991** Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), making billions of dollars available for a range of transportation projects, including bicycling and walking improvements.

**1991–1994** Congress appropriated \$1 million to complete the National Bicycling and Walking Study (NBWS). The NBWS consisted of a series of 24 case studies investigating bicycling and walking issues. The study set two overall goals:

- Double the percentage of total trips made by bicycling and walking in the United States from 7.9 percent to 15.8 percent of all travel trips.
- Simultaneously reduce by 10 percent the number of bicyclists and pedestrians killed or injured in traffic crashes.

"Accommodating Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel: A Recommended Approach" is a policy statement aimed at integrating bicycling and walking into the transportation mainstream and was adopted in 1994 as part of the NBWS. This policy is available online at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/design.htm>. A nine-point action plan and 60 action items were assigned to at least one of the modal administrations within the USDOT (e.g., FHWA, National Highway Safety Administration, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Federal Railroad Administration, or Office of the Secretary of Transportation). The USDOT has made significant accomplishments in five key areas: publications; research and technology transfer; outreach and partnerships; increased attention to pedestrian issues; and increased

funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects. A 10-year status report on the NBWS is available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/study/>. For guidance on mainstreaming bicycling, see <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/BP-Guid.htm>.

These 24 case studies contain valuable information for a variety of bicycling and pedestrian issues. A list of the 24 case studies is shown in Appendix D.

**1998** The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) continued funding to create an integrated, intermodal transportation system. Section 3039 of TEA-21 required a comprehensive study of alternative transportation needs in national parks and other Federal lands. This study was initiated due to concerns of high use that compromise visitor experience and degrade natural, cultural and historic resources. The study identifies opportunities to:

- Preserve sensitive natural, cultural and historic resources;
- Reduce pollution;
- Relieve traffic congestions and parking shortages;
- Enhance visitor mobility and accessibility;
- Provide improved interpretation, education, and visitor information services; and
- Improve economic development opportunities for surrounding communities.

This study recognizes that many impacts to public lands are due less to the number of people visiting than the number of automobiles. The first part of the study, completed in 2001, focused on transit services (trams, buses, historic trolleys, trolley cars, waterborne vessels, and aerial tramways). Bicycling and walking were not fully considered as a viable part of an alternative transportation system. Results identified transit needs on NPS, BLM, and FWS lands. The second part of the study, completed in 2004, documented alternative transportation system needs on 30 USFS managed sites. This second part recognized bicycling as alternative transportation, but still focused primarily on transit. As the study developed, it was acknowledged that transit by itself is not the only option. Providing safe options to bike and walk can also reduce impacts of automobiles. Other literature supports bicycling as a way to enhance visitor experience.

**2005** SAFETEA-LU authorizes \$244 billion to fund Federal surface transportation programs from 2005 to 2009. In SAFETEA-LU, Congress greatly expanded opportunities for bicycle facilities and programs.

- Congress created the Alternative Transportation on Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) program funded at \$97 million from 2006 to 2009.
- Congress funded the Safe Routes to School program. These funds may be used on Federal lands that have schools in the land unit, or nearby.
- Congress funded the Non-Motorized Pilot Program, providing \$25 million to each of four cities (Marin, CA; Minneapolis, MN; Sheboygan, WI; and Columbia, MO) to demonstrate and promote active transportation. These cities invested in active transportation infrastructure—such as rail-trails—with supporting programs to increase the share of trips taken by biking or walking.

- Congress changed Section 217 for the FLH Program to clarify that FLH Program funds can be used for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, with or without a road project, as long as the project meets the USDOT definition of transportation.

See <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/> for SAFETEA- LU funding details.

See Appendix F for transportation funding applicable to bicycling, including matching requirements, resources and an overview of statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes. Also see <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/bp-broch.htm>.

There are various policies, agreements and initiatives in place that promote health and physical activities such as bicycling. The following paragraphs contain a summary of agency travel planning methods, policies and agreements found that relate to bicycle use on public lands. Two general policies applicable to all agencies are:

- **The 2001 Executive Order Trails for America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** instructs Federal agencies to work with States, municipalities, tribes and private groups to protect, connect, promote, and assist trails of all kinds throughout the country. The order also instructs the Federal Interagency Council on Trails to coordinate information and program decisions, as well as policy recommendations, to foster development of America's trails. The council, established in 1969, is an interagency working group that includes the BLM, NPS, FWS, USFS, Army Corps of Engineers (COE), and the FHWA ([www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/eofinform.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/eofinform.htm)).
- **The National Trails System MOU.** The BLM, NPS, FWS, USFS, Army COE, and FHWA encourage long-term interagency coordination and cooperation to enhance visitor satisfaction, to coordinate trailwide administration and site-specific management, to protect resources, to promote cultural values, to foster cooperative relationships, to share technical expertise, and to fund lands and resources associated with the National Trails ([www.nps.gov/nts/memorandum2006.html](http://www.nps.gov/nts/memorandum2006.html)). Representatives of the agencies meet regularly as part of the Federal Interagency Council on Trails. The Council is the primary forum where actions related to this MOU will be carried out and where reports concerning accomplishments related to the MOU will be issued.

Agency-specific policies include:

- **NPS Management Policies, 2006, Section 9.2 Transportation Systems and Alternative Transportation.** Depending on a park unit's size, location, resources, and level of use, the NPS will, where appropriate, emphasize and encourage alternative transportation systems, which may include a mix of buses, trains, ferries, trams, and—preferably—non-motorized modes of access to and moving within parks. In general, the preferred modes of transportation will be those that contribute to maximum visitor enjoyment of, and minimum adverse impacts on, park resources and values (<http://www.nps.gov/policy/MP2006.pdf>).
- **Climate-Friendly Parks program.** This is a joint partnership between the Environmental Protection Agency and the NPS. This program is intended to protect our parks' natural and cultural resources and ensure their preservation for future generations. Reducing fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions from park facilities and operations is one goal of this program. Providing more options to visitors for non-motorized access

can help managers meet this goal.

(<http://www.nps.gov/climatefriendlyparks/index.html>).

- **Healthier US Initiative and Executive Order 13266.** This order calls on Federal agencies to seek to improve the flow and use of information about personal fitness and increase the accessibility of resources for physical activity. The NPS Committee on Health and Recreation formed in 2004 supports this initiative. The Committee on Health and Recreation National Park System Advisory Board can be accessed online at <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/health/npshealthrpt06.html>.
- **MOU between the DOI and the DOT November 1997.** Key points in this MOU related to bicycling consist of: integrating transportation planning into normal NPS activities; including bicycle and pedestrian safety, for implementation within the National Park units. Several demonstration parks identified in the MOU include Zion, Grand Canyon, Acadia, Yosemite and Golden Gate National Parks. The agencies may collaborate on joint funding and technical assistance, and work cooperatively on policies that promote mutual goals of improving health, community livability, and protection of resources. For example, the DOT's goal of increasing walking and bicycling opportunities is consistent with the DOI's goal of having trails within fifteen minutes of most Americans (<http://www.nps.gov/transportation/tmp/memo.htm>).
- **National Park Service Centennial Initiative.** This is a campaign to boost NPS funding for the agency's 100th anniversary in 2016, challenging park partners to match Federal dollars to support National Parks. It includes programs to get visitors out of their cars and onto bicycles. NPS is committed to reaching all park visitors with environmental messages to encourage changes in their daily lives that will better protect the environment. Bicycle facilities can help meet project goals and are an important component in some Centennial Initiative projects as described below (NPS, August 2007).
- **More Kids in the Woods.** In 2008, the USFS started placing a strong emphasis on reconnecting children with nature consistent with the national “No Child Left Inside” initiative. Author Richard Louv’s book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, released in 2005, sparked interest in the consequences of the disappearing connection between children and nature. More Kids in the Woods is a challenge grant, initially involving 24 programs across the nation and \$1.5 million in USFS and non-Federal funds. Bicycling on USFS lands has tremendous potential to be a part of this initiative as a fun way for kids to explore and connect with nature. To learn more about projects funded by this program see <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/woods/index.shtml>.
- **FWS National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.** This Act establishes appropriate uses for the refuge system. This policy ensures priority is given to the six wildlife-dependent recreational uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education and environmental interpretation. However, the refuge manager must still determine if each individual use is compatible at a given refuge.



- **BLM National Mountain Bicycling Strategic Action Plan.** This plan provides guidance on mountain bike policies. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that mountain bicycle use on BLM public lands is managed in an environmentally responsible way with regard to ethics, conflicts and impacts, and that opportunities for this activity are not only recognized, but provided, on public lands where appropriate ([http://www.blm.gov/mountain\\_biking/](http://www.blm.gov/mountain_biking/)).

