

Speech Text – Tuesday, August 5, 2003, Heritage Forest Tour
Given by Sue George at Blue Ridge Mountain Sports in Charlottesville, VA

I've been invited to speak with you tonight specifically from the point of view of a mountain biker. I, my husband, and my friends all enjoy roadless areas in the context that others will address tonight—hiking, climbing, canoeing, etc; however, it's specifically the mountain biker's perspective that I'm privileged to share with you tonight.

I'm here on behalf of the Charlottesville Area Mountain Bike Club aka "CAMBC". We are a new club, just started this summer for the purposes of mountain bike trail advocacy, trail maintenance, and for bringing together people of common interests. Our focus is local, but we are aligned with a related national organization, known as IMBA or the International Mountain Bike Association. The International Mountain Bike Association is a national and international education and advocacy organization with roughly 500 member clubs and 32,000 individual members. IMBA's mission is to promote mountain bike opportunities that are environmentally sound and socially responsible.

In October of 1999, former President Bill Clinton went to Reddish Knob in Virginia's George Washington National Forest to unveil his administration's plan to permanently protect roadless areas in the National Forest System from future development. We mountain bikers were not surprised at his choice of location. After all, Reddish Knob is a beautiful place at roughly 4000 feet with thousands of acres of perfect mountain bike terrain surrounding it and spectacular views into West Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley. Many mountain bikers have made the trek up to Reddish Knob as part of a wonderful ride on the network of surrounding trails.

Clinton called national forests "places of renewal of the human spirit". I can't think of a better phrase to describe what happens on a mountain bike ride in any of our regional roadless areas. Besides participating in a healthy activity, you get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life in our developed world and get to enjoy nature alone or with a close group of friends. Spending time in these wild areas lets you come back to the rest of your life with a renewed sense of purpose and contentedness.

Mountain bikers prefer to ride in natural settings, away from the world of automobiles, buildings and other developments. We enjoy riding in quiet, backcountry areas. Most experienced riders prefer singletrack trails. As one of IMBA's state representatives puts it, "Mountain biking on singletrack is like skiing fresh powder." [*Excerpted from IMBA letter*]

Roadless areas are by definition the realms of singletrack trails. People travel through roadless areas on narrow pathways, as opposed to roads. Mt. Bikers particularly appreciate opportunities to ride bikes in roadless areas, and they strongly desire access to trails that traverse pristine landscapes. [*Excerpted from IMBA position statement*]

On a typical local ride, mountain bikers might visit the trails in the Little River Roadless area or those traversing the Kelley Mountain Roadless area and nearby Sherando Recreational Area. We might go out for just an hour or two with our family or we might go out for an all-day, 8 hour epic ride. In the spring, we might enjoy a climb up Hearthstone trail to Reddish Knob, observing along the way how the signs of spring diminish as we get higher and higher. In June, we might climb up Kennedy Ridge and descend Mill Creek Trail or Torry Ridge, enjoying the blooming purple rhododendrons along the way. In late July and early August, we might seek out trails that go near open meadows, stopping to sample blackberries encountered along the way. On a beautiful fall day when all the leaves are changing, we might traverse the southern part of the Shenandoah Mountain trail, then coming down off Three Sisters Knob or down Jerkemtight trail. Even in winter, we enjoy riding the trails off Reddish or Flagpole knobs. The light snow covering those trails represents the perfect opportunity to challenge ourselves and hone our bike handling skills.

Mountain bikers do not only take from Roadless areas. We also give back by participating in forest planning and performing trail maintenance. The Shenandoah Mountain Bike Club, of which I am also a member, based in Harrisonburg, VA, performed 1403 hours of trail maintenance in 2002. For this year, they're already up to over 450 hours. The hard work they and other mountain bikers do on the trails helps keep them in pristine condition for all trail users.

All of the nearly 60 million acres of NF lands covered by the roadless rule will continue to be open to the public for recreational purposes such as hiking, hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, canoeing, rock climbing, and mountain biking. The covered area is roughly the size of VA and WV combined. The roadless area designation helps find a needed balance between public forest lands used for conservation and recreation and industrial development. It is one of several tools that will help us protect, for current and future generations, pristine areas from logging, mining, and drilling. I urge you to support efforts to preserve the significance of roadless areas.

If you're interested in joining CAMBC, please visit our website at www.cambc.org or see me for a membership application.

Thank you for inviting me to talk tonight.