

Dear Trail Users, Neighbors, and Residents of Helena,

The Montana Bicycle Guild (MBG) is the nonprofit organization that organizes the Montana Enduro Series. The first race of the 2019 season, the 12th annual Helenduro, took place in Helena's South Hills last month. The event was fully permitted through the City and brought hundreds of people to town – participants, their families, and friends – to participate, spectate, and enjoy our City and her public lands.

The MBG has dedicated itself to acting with honesty, integrity, and with respect for our public lands, other trail users, and the law. This is true for the races the MBG organizes and the work the MBG does on public lands. We are not a bunch of kids racing bikes. We are doctors, teachers, nurses, engineers, environmental scientists, lawyers, local business owners, students, and professionals of all ages. We are also birders, wildflower watchers, geocachers, rock collectors, history buffs, parents, children, dog walkers, anglers, hunters, backpackers, and yes, hikers.

We respect our natural environment and our public lands. We understand how important it is to protect those spaces. We support and promote the healthy, outdoor lifestyle on these trails that Helena's residents have enjoyed for generations and seek to protect that lifestyle for families, young people, and future generations of trail users. We understand that a consensus decision is vital to having community support for a robust and properly managed public lands program. In addition to efforts we make within close to home with the Helena Parks and Recreation Department and Prickly Pear Land Trust, we continue to work closely with the Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Backcountry Horsemen, and Montana Wildlife Federation, as part of the Montana High Divide Trails Group. The MHDT is the preeminent organization that public land managers look to and rely on for consensus recommendations about management decisions in the greater Helena landscape.

Helena Hikes recently made many unfounded claims about the Helenduro and bicycles in the South Hills. Helena Hikes' letter is ominous, warning the reader of threats to cherished spaces. It employs the divisive language of a political campaign. It is not respectful language intended to bring people together in search of common ground in a constructive dialogue. It calls on people to question the countless safe, positive, and friendly interactions between trail users, and delegitimize bicycle use in the South Hills.

We understand and recognize that every trail user group has its bad apples. But common sense tells us that finding one or two bad apples does not mean you burn down the entire apple orchard. We understand that not everyone will agree with the MBG on every issue, but we remain committed to solving problems within an inclusive process and through open and honest dialogue. However, without that honest, open dialogue where we all start with the truth and agree to the same basic set of facts, everyone would just be shouting over each other and nothing meaningful or lasting would ever be accomplished.

The remainder of this letter presents the MBG's rebuttal of Helena Hikes' letter, line-by-line and claim-by-claim. It is lengthy, detailed, and adheres to everything above. The Montana Bicycle Guild has the utmost respect for this place we all call our home. Anyone who suggests otherwise is not telling you the truth.

Sincerely,

The Montana Bicycle Guild

No.	Helena Hikes Letter Text	MBG Response
1	Another event took place on Memorial Day weekend that gives us pause.	<p>The Helenduro has, for the past two years, taken place on Memorial Day weekend. The MBG chose this weekend to accommodate other local groups' events in May, such as Prickly Pear Land Trust's Don't Fence Me In Run. The Helenduro has happened for the last 12 years. Prior to the MBG's inception, there were up to four Helenduro events per year in the South Hills.</p> <p>The "us" referred to in that sentence represents the five signatories who comprise the Helena Hikes steering committee: Lisa Bay, DD Dowden, Barry Hood, Tony Jewett, and Sanna Porte.</p>
2	A high-speed mechanized race occurred	<p>"High-speed mechanized race" is hyperbole and a misuse of a common description of how bicycles are categorized in Wilderness areas. Wilderness is a specific type of public land and not at issue in the South Hills. However, Helena Hikes is attempting to use common definitions sourced from debate about "mechanized transportation" as it's used from the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the accompanying federal regulations and apply those to Helena's Open Lands. While it is possible to literally see a Congressionally-delegated Wilderness Area from the South Hills (the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness to the north), use of "mechanized" to describe bicycle use does not apply to the South Hills and is inappropriate language for an urban forest interface.</p> <p>Further, the actual definition (quoted here in relevant part) of "mechanical transport" as it applies to the Wilderness Act of 1964 does not include bicycles. That regulation defining "mechanical transport" states that it "shall include any contrivance which travels over ground ... on wheels ... <i>and is propelled by a nonliving power source contained or carried on or within the device.</i>" The emphasis is ours. People riding bicycles can't be described as a "nonliving power source." Bicycles are prohibited from wilderness areas expressly by a different federal regulation.</p> <p>Finally, it seems redundant to say that it is a high-speed race. It's a race. Races are contests to see who can finish fastest/first. That's why it was permitted, advertised, and promoted as a race.</p> <p>Here's the statutes and regulations referenced above: 16 U.S.C. 1131 (the statutory ban of "mechanical transport" in Wilderness) 36 C.F.R. 293.6 (regulation defining "mechanical transport") 36 C.F.R. 261.16 (regulation expressly prohibiting bicycles)</p>
3	over an extensive chunk of the South Hills	<p>The 2019 race footprint was significantly reduced from years past and specifically excluded half of the South Hills landscape. Mount Helena and west side trails, Wakina Ridge, and the Mount Helena Ridge were not incorporated into the route. This tighter footprint</p>

		<p>was a deliberate choice by MBG to reduce the impact on other trail users.</p> <p>Prickly Pear Land Trust’s Don’t Fence Me In Run took place over a much more significant portion of the South Hills two weekends before the Helenduro.</p> <p>We need to be clear that we don’t take issue with PPLT’s event. In fact, we have often supported the event by volunteering and helping PPLT with course marshaling and cleanup. It is a wonderful event that celebrates our access to open lands. The reference here is to point out that Helena Hikes does not object to this significant event, only to the bicycle race. As PPLT has noted in their social media posts, there were more than 1,260 participants, or more than 10 times the Helenduro’s 119 participants.</p>
4	On a very rainy Sunday, May 26,	<p>This is a subjective description of the weather. It rained for about an hour and a half in the afternoon. If any averment is intended by this statement, it is not explained here in sufficient detail.</p> <p>Further, as is recorded by numerous internet weather sites, while there was rain on the 26th, most of the rain fell after the course was closed at 3:30 PM.</p> <p>https://darksy.net/details/46.5927,-112.0361/2019-5-26/us12/en</p>
5	posing a danger to other trail users	<p>Safety is a primary concern for the MBG. To suggest otherwise is malicious or uninformed. Safety is why we posted maps and notices at all trailheads surrounding the event course days before the event. It is why we publicized the race to ensure the most notice possible – and we thank partners like Prickly Pear Land Trust for sharing the information on their social media channels. It is why we included, as we always do, a message to let our participants know that the event takes place on public land and on public trails, and that they may encounter people who are inattentive or simply ignoring warnings and walking on the permitted route. It is why we have extensive medical planning and work closely with Search and Rescue and other emergency professionals prior to and during the event. All of these claims are easily and readily verifiable.</p> <p>Further, this year we told Helena Hikes the specific event route a month before it was announced to our participants.</p>
6	and causing damage to the wet trails.	<p>This is an accusation that is not backed up with any proof. In fact, in accordance with a City-approved post-event mitigation plan, we hiked the length of the course with trail tools the day after the event to survey and remedy any areas that may have been disturbed. There were a couple of spots that we smoothed, but it was mostly just a long walk with tools on a rainy Monday.</p>

		<p>More importantly, a survey of those trails today reveals no evidence of any event having taken place. And “damage” that occurred was superficial, not permanent, and/or the remedies employed by the MBG the day after the event were 100% successful. This is identical to previous events.</p>
7	<p>You may be familiar with the annual Enduro mountain bike race.</p>	<p>We certainly hope so! We specifically reached out to and informed Helena Hikes about the race a month before the event, and they sent an announcement out to their email list!</p>
8	<p>As you know, Helena Hikes is a conservation group dedicated to safety, protecting our natural landscape, and sharing the trails.</p>	<p>The Montana Bicycle Guild supports these goals. Our documented volunteer hours demonstrate this.</p> <p>Additionally, as all our members are hikers, too, Helena Hikes does not and cannot claim to represent the voice of all hikers in Helena. Helena Hikes is a small number of individuals who are championing this cause.</p>
9	<p>We are concerned that the increasing use of our trails for high speed mechanized activity is contrary to these values.</p>	<p>This is change in topic. The letter, at this point, changes from issues about the specific Helenduro event to criticisms about bikes generally. “High speed mechanized activity” sounds more ominous than “riding bikes.”</p> <p>We note that “sharing the trails” is one of the Helena Hikes stated values, and yet “increasing use of these trails” by other trail users “is contrary to these values.”</p>
10	<p>There was a time when all users enjoyed our trails together in harmony, with respect for each other and for the resource.</p>	<p>No need for nostalgia; this is still very much the case. The overwhelming majority of trail user encounters are polite, friendly, and exactly what you would expect them to be. This sentence implies that <i>some</i> users lack respect for each other and for the resource. We’re meant to understand that mountain bikers are the problem.</p> <p>More people are noting one disturbing change, however: anti-biker rhetoric has increased dramatically over the last year. Multiple Helenduro participants reported being challenged, scolded, or subjected to abuse by hikers. This is a new development in the 12 years of this event, and not in keeping with Helena’s reputation.</p> <p>Helena cyclists have long been proud of the fact that user conflict is nearly non-existent here. The Montana Bicycle Guild has made every effort to foster and continue that legacy by acting with respect, decency, and courtesy.</p>

11	With the advent of more sophisticated biking machinery	<p>The implication here is that bicycles are getting faster and faster through time. South Hills trails are generally smooth and obstacle-free. The attainable top speeds on these trails hasn't changed significantly in 30 years.</p> <p>It is also important to note that there is "current technology" that bikes have, such as robust and reliable brakes that allow for more quicker, safer, and controlled stops as well as the better suspension components and tires that allow for superb braking and control.</p>
12	along with a vocal minority of trail users bent on speed, competition, and thrills,	<p>Use of the phrase "vocal minority" is an attempt to compartmentalize and marginalize the bicycle community in Helena. Further, it is an attempt to mischaracterize the MBG and what we do.</p> <p>And, using Helena Hikes' label, the "vocal minority" is not a bunch of kids racing bikes. The "vocal minority" is doctors, teachers, nurses, engineers, environmental scientists, lawyers, local business owners, students, and professionals of all ages. We're also birders, wildflower watchers, geocachers, rock collectors, parents, children, dog walkers, anglers, hunters, backpackers, and yes, hikers. We understand and respect our natural environment, our public lands, and how important it is to protect those spaces. We also understand that a consensus decision is vital to having a robust and properly-managed public lands.</p> <p>Nobody in the MBG (or the biking community that we're aware of) is "bent on speed, competition, and thrills." We respect the trails, we respect the open lands, we respect the process, and we respect other trail users. The MBG hosts one race event per year in the South Hills. That's it. We always publicize, promote, notify and work within the law to put the event on.</p> <p>We are always receptive to dialogue. That's why we've invited Helena Hikes members to our community meetings that take place on the first Thursday of the month. To date, we have not been invited to any Helena Hikes meetings.</p>
13	we are in danger of losing that balance.	<p>This is exaggeration to incite an emotional response to the reader.</p> <p>There are countless interactions that happen every day in the South Hills between trail users. And they are overwhelmingly friendly and positive, and respectful.</p> <p>There are also lots of times where you don't see another soul on the South Hills trails save wildlife. Those times are special and cherished by all trail users. But it is important to remember that they are not guaranteed in what is a large urban forest interface.</p>

14	Helena Hikes Steering Committee members believe we need to restore the balance by reducing high-speed mechanized use on our trails	The Helena Hikes steering committee states its intentions here in plain words: reducing bicycle use on our trails.
15	and finding appropriate venues for mechanized racing	<p>Again, the Helenduro is one day per year. The majority of the trails were only used for the permitted event for a few hours, and MBG made many efforts to inform other users of alternatives.</p> <p>It is ironic to point out that all the alleged damage and bad things that Helena Hikes claims were caused by the Helenduro would somehow be ok if they were “in an appropriate venue.” This part is also reminiscent of numerous “Not In My Back Yard” arguments raised in recent times. NIMBY, for short.</p>
16	We would like to have a system where we enjoy our trails along with our biking neighbors; where etiquette, safety, and respect for the environment and for each other underscore the use of our trails.	<p>These goals are not unique to Helena Hikes. We have worked very hard over the last six years to achieve these same goals, and we have the résumé to prove it.</p> <p>In part, here are some examples: We close illegal trails constructed by others. Two examples are Horse 2.0 and the 2006 direct route. We work within the confines of the system and with land managers; see the permitting for the Helenduro and contracts with the Forest Service for trail maintenance. We are actively involved with the City Open Lands planning and process and provide volunteers for Prickly Pear Land Trust. We count amongst our partners the Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Backcountry Horsemen, and Montana Wildlife Federation, by way of the Montana High Divide Trails Group to come up with common sense, consensus agreements from trail users. We work with dozens of business, organizations, and groups throughout Montana and US to promote bicycle races and to build and maintain trails in our public lands. We count under our nonprofit Helena’s bike kitchen, the Queen City Wheel House, and the local high school NICA mountain bike team.</p>
17	We don’t oppose mountain bike races. However, we don’t think our public South Hills trails/natural area City parks, with their heavy concentration of pedestrians, are an appropriate venue.	<p>These two sentences reach two obvious conclusions based on the letter up to this point. However, it is important to point out a couple issues:</p> <p>The second sentence here claims that there is a “heavy concentration of pedestrians” on the trails. We’re not denying that a lot of trail users enjoy the South Hills. However, the footprint of the race was intentionally reduced this year and specifically excluded Mount. Helena, the most popular hiking spot in town per Prickly Pear Land Trust trail count data, and supported by the recent trail study done in conjunction with the University of</p>

		<p>Montana. Other trails specifically excluded were the West Side trails, Wakina Ridge, and the Mount Helena Ridge.</p> <p>This next point is raised again <i>only</i> to point out the inconsistency: The Don't Fence Me In Run took place over a much more significant portion of the South Hills two weekends before the Helenduro. As PPLT has noted in their social media posts, there were more than 1,260 participants. Photographs of the event show people running 4-5 abreast on singletrack trails in the Open Lands. It is difficult, if not impossible, for other trail users to use these trails during the PPLT event. However, Helena Hikes' steering committee does not raise any issue with this event.</p>
18	We would like to hear <u>your</u> thoughts on this.	So would we! If there are ways to help inform the bike community about specific issues that hikers or other trail users are having, please let us know. We could no doubt come up with very reasonable, common sense solutions to a lot of these alleged or reported issues if we just sit down and have a conversation!
19	Here are some of the issues we see:	This implies that there are more issues that didn't make the cut. We'd like to know what those issues are, too.
20	1: Technology allows mountain bikes to achieve ever-higher speeds	<p>This argument is unsupported and only exists to prop up the conclusory allegation that bikes are somehow going faster and faster.</p> <p>See response #11 above.</p>
21	Recent speeds clocked and posted by bikers on local trails range from 20 to 36 mph (up to 12 times faster than a walker going 3 mph).	<p>High speed is defined extremely subjectively in this statement. The Helena Hikes steering committee's determination of "high speed" looks only to the top of the recorded times. It does not consider the average speed or the slowest speed, and it only considers speed in the downhill direction. Again, singling out one bruised apple does not mean the orchard must burn.</p> <p>Further, it ignores a lot of those "current technology" bits they just mentioned. A bicycle traveling 20 mph on a trail can stop in approximately 17 feet. If proper technique is used, a bike can stop in less distance. Remember, this is a person and a 30-pound bicycle, not a person and a 4,000-pound car.</p> <p>Strava, the app cited to by Helena Hikes, is notoriously inaccurate. It relies on recreation-grade GPS in cellphones, further subject to sampling limitations of the native software. More importantly, as anyone who has ridden a bicycle on the DeFord trail can attest, a speed of 36 mph on the DeFord Trail is improbable. Experience with Strava will tell you that someone forgot to turn off their Strava app and drove down Davis Gulch Road next to the Deford trail.</p>

22	<p>These speeds pose a serious safety hazard to hikers, runners, pets, and wildlife.</p>	<p>Helena Hikes presented selective data. As noted above, this is not the typical, average speed or slowest speed. And, even if the total Strava picture, including the mean, median, and mode of the Strava data is analyzed, that does not take into account the large number of people who do not use the Strava app.</p> <p>Finally, high-speed occurs when there are good sight lines and relatively straight trail. It is not when there are tight turns and poor sight lines because people don't enjoy crashing their bikes.</p>
23	<p>2. While the Enduro is a one-day race, bikers apparently practice on various segments of the race all the time.</p>	<p>This is a conclusory statement and demonstrates a misunderstanding of what Strava is, how it works, and what it is used for. The MBG sent Helena Hikes an email with a lengthy description of the Helenduro race before the event. That email included a timeline of the event and a description of how and when we release courses and when people practice.</p> <p>Strava "segments" are created by Strava users. We do not affiliate the Helenduro or the Montana Enduro Series with Strava.</p> <p>This is an alarmist claim. The straw man is beginning to take shape (that there are races all the timme and bikes are always high-speed mechanized and we need to stop bikes and send them somewhere else).</p>
24	<p>Below are links to two videos where race organizers</p>	<p>Please watch those videos. We've linked them here as well. There are a number of hikers encountered and they're always polite and friendly. That's what encounters are like in the South Hills. There are more examples available at the linked site.</p> <p>https://www.pinkbike.com/video/487552/ https://www.pinkbike.com/video/471210/</p>
25	<p>Demonstrate segments of recent Enduro (2017 and 2018) and mention people practicing on the segments. The high speeds around blind corners are particularly concerning. You'll notice several encounters with hikers. The high speeds and blind corners are extremely concerning.</p>	<p>The videos speak for themselves. You will notice several encounters with hikers in the videos. And all of them pleasant, despite the concerns about "high speeds and blind corners."</p> <p>It is important to remember that the cameras we use film at 1080p/30fps. Human vision is much, much better than what a Go Pro Session 4 can record. More importantly, the cameras are fixed. The cameras are not representative of where a rider is looking. Just because something may be hard to see in the video does not mean that it was hard to see in real life.</p> <p>And yes, those are videos of the course. We prepare those so that people can see the course if they're coming from out of town and will not have the opportunity to practice the course. This enables</p>

		them to ride more safely and more in control when they can visualize the trail before riding it.
39	3. We appreciate the fact that Helena Enduro sponsors (Montana Bicycle Guild) encouraged racers to be courteous to other trail users.	The MBG does this at every race and event and has since its inception.
40	They also gave us a heads-up about the race so we could at least alert the 125 people on the Helena Hikes email list.	This is true. It happened, as mentioned previously, one month before the race.
41	That’s potentially helpful on race day, but not on all the other days when people are doing practice runs on the trails.	The notice to Helena Hikes provided information about pre-race practice.
42	4. Other venues are available for high-speed mechanized events that would not affect hikers/runners/animals as much.	Hikers and runners who choose not to participate in the Don’t Fence Me In Run are also impacted by that permitted event.
43	One possibility is the Great Divide ski area, which has hosted mountain bike races in the past. In fact, all other 2019 Montana Enduro series races (which include neighboring states) take place at ski areas.	<p>The remaining 2019 Montana Enduro Series races take place at bike parks, not at ski areas. These are often co-located but are not the same. Great Divide Ski Area, for example, has no bike park.</p> <p>More importantly this fails to consider that these other races also take place on public, multi-use and multi-jurisdictional trails. Hikers, runners, pets, and wildlife are also present during these events in other places.</p> <p>Great Divide would be a wonderful venue, but Great Divide lacks infrastructure. There are currently only two trails there – both built entirely by hand by MBG volunteers – and there do not appear to be any plans for a bike park there that would support the MES soon.</p>
44	5. It’s not just official races and practice runs for these races that pose a danger.	<p>Races is plural in this sentence. The Helenduro is one permitted race.</p> <p>We disagree that this event poses a danger. Practice involves stopping and learning the trail to ride it smoothly and safely. Other users can avoid inconvenience or risk by simply reading the notices that were posted at the trailheads. These notices included a map</p>

		and a basic timeline of the event, including when practice for the event was occurring.
45	Many bikers regularly try to beat the best recorded time on various trails in the South Hills using the Strava app	<p>As do runners, swimmers, etc. Strava supports up to 31 different activity types, and is primarily used as a fitness tracker. https://support.strava.com/hc/en-us/articles/216919407-Supported-Activity-Types-on-Strava</p> <p>In any activity, there are people that try to be the fastest. Or go the furthest. However, these people do not represent the group as a whole. More to the point, this should not be used to blanket label all bikers as speed-obsessed dangers on trails. Most bikers are polite, courteous, and respectful on the trail. Just like most trail users are.</p>
46	Essentially, races are taking place on South Hills trails <u>every day</u> . (emphasis in original)	This is an unsupported, conclusory statement. The letter conflates a permitted race and daily mountain biking use to extend claimed impacts from a single event to an entire activity. See response #14 above.
47	6. Clearly, downhill speed riding is a lot of fun for participants	This is an effort to label all bikers as speed-obsessed dangers on trails. This is untrue.
48	Is there a way to allow people that thrill without endangering other trail users and the environment on the South Hills?	<p>The MBG rejects the claim that other trail users and the environment are endangered.</p> <p>We'll start with the "without endangering other trail users" first:</p> <p>The directional trails on the east side of Mount Ascension were conceived for precisely this purpose – providing a safe location for downhill riding without impacting other trail users. PPLT identified this need in their 2014 trail plan update, and Helena Open Lands reiterated the need in the 2018 work plan. Next could be an education campaign. There could also careful consideration of actual problem spots within the trail network and use of signage to keep people informed, for example, that there is a blind corner coming up.</p> <p>Second, the "without endangering the environment" part of this:</p> <p>There are plenty of studies that show that bicycles and hikers cause similar amounts of erosion. Many of these are summarized in Marions and Wimpey (2007) and a more recent example is Pickering et al. (2009). The claim that bikes endanger the environment is unsupported in this letter, unsupported by literature, and by real-world observations.</p>

49	7. The Helena Enduro takes place during what is historically the wettest time of our year, with potential for significant impacts to trails and fragile vegetation.	<p>While May is sometimes the rainiest month in Helena, this claim overlooks the reality on the ground. The wettest time of the year is after the snow has melted and the ground is frozen or still saturated with snowmelt. That varies year-to-year, but is generally in March in Helena. As noted above, Helena Hikes' concern about permitted events in May doesn't extend to the Don't Fence Me In race.</p> <p>This event has happened at least once per year for the past 12 years. Yet, there is nothing presented to support the claims that there is any "lasting damage to our condition of our trails." The 2015 race took place during very wet weather, on a then-fresh Eddy McClure East trail. A single afternoon of post-race trail work was all that was necessary to address resulting issues. Any evidence of that race was erased years ago, and this trail has been named as a favorite of Helena Hikes members. The accusation of lasting damage is unsupported.</p>
50	Several of us walked sections of this year's Enduro the day after the race and documented extensive trail widening, rutting, erosion, and damage to vegetation.	<p>This is also addressed above in response #29. The MBG was also out on the trails doing work the day of and the day after the race. Yes, there were some impacts from the race. All of them were minor and easily remediated without any lasting impact to the trails.</p> <p>We've been up on the race course since the event. The "impacts" were temporary, and it is not possible, without a map, to follow or know the race course. In other words, it is not possible to tell, from an ecological and conservation standing, that this bike race took place in the South Hills on May 26, 2019.</p>
51	Biking on muddy trails is counter to PPLT's etiquette campaign standards, also posted in the South Hills trails maps.	<p>This is a misrepresentation of PPLT's etiquette campaign. The rule has always been to go through the puddle, not around it. This doesn't matter if you're on a bike or on foot. To make sure we're clear, here's PPLT's etiquette campaign post No. 4 about trail conditions:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">In all conditions, stay on the established trail. Going around icy or muddy spots widens the trail and kills surrounding plants. Wear shoes you don't mind getting muddy, traction devices like micro-spikes in icy conditions, or go "bearfoot" and use your claws to stay on trail! Shoes can dry out, but it only takes a couple of footsteps or bike tires traveling over wet grasses to damage plants and widen the trail.</p>
52	Again, we would like to hear your thoughts on all this. Please let us know what you think by replying to this email. We	Again, so would we. Constructive dialogue requires that there be a dialogue.

	welcome and value your ideas.	
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