INCREASED USE

One of the benefits of electric mountain bicycles is that they decrease the barrier to trail use, allowing more people to exercise and enjoy open spaces. In many cases, a marginal increase in trail use will not negatively affect the trail or existing users.

If the increase in new users has a negative impact on the trail tread, targeted maintenance should be provided to mitigate electric mountain bicycle use. If user experiences are degraded because of the inclusion of a new user group, additional trail opportunities should be developed.

New trail users may not be familiar with common trail etiquette and will need information on proper behavior. Positive, engaging signs that promote the “rules of the trails” will help ensure that a new group of trail users values good stewardship and conduct.
INCREASED USE

Bringing in new trail users or increasing the use of trails by existing users is a positive benefit of electric mountain bicycles. In the United States, obesity is a nationwide health epidemic and exercise can contribute to lower weight, a decreased risk for heart disease and a reduction in blood pressure and diabetes.

Unfortunately, not all trail users like to share the trail, regardless of their use, and will react negatively to the presence of a new user group. This is particularly true when the new users are viewed as “different” (in this case, astride an electric mountain bicycle). This may be exacerbated by the potential for increased travel distance allowed by an electric mountain bicycle, as existing users will not only see a new user type but may see them in more places throughout the trail network.

It is up to each land management agency, in consultation with their stakeholders, to determine which users are allowed where in a trail system. If a land management agency decides that trails are open to electric mountain bicycles, then the recommended best practices can help reduce potential negative interactions.

Creating new trail opportunities does not just mean building new trails. Opening existing trails to a wider range of users or reactivating under-utilized trails are options. New opportunities can be created specifically for the new use or for existing users who are feeling displaced.

Etiquette education cannot be overemphasized when bringing new users onto trails. Trailhead signs are helpful and there exists language and graphics to educate all users. “Rules of the trail” and information on nearby riding opportunities can also be provided at the point-of-sale for electric mountain bicycles and through industry websites.

peopleforbikes.org/e-bikes