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Electric Bicycles (E-Bikes) on Federal Lands

Electric bicycles (or “e-bikes”) have become a popular mode of recreation across the nation’s parks, forests, and trails. Proponents of e-bikes see them as a way to increase access to and within these places, particularly for individuals who may otherwise not be able to bicycle owing to physical limitations, age, or other factors. At the same time, some have raised concerns regarding potential environmental and safety issues posed by the use of e-bikes in areas intended for traditional, nonmotorized bicycles and/or pedestrians. In addition, uncertainty around whether e-bikes should be classified and treated as traditional bicycles or as motorized vehicles has led to confusion among land managers and users alike. In response to these and other issues, federal land management agencies (FLMAs) are adapting their policies and regulations to ensure the use of e-bikes on lands under their jurisdiction complies with their management directives and legal requirements.

What Is an E-Bike?

Although definitions may vary across jurisdictions and between agencies, the term *e-bike* typically refers to two- or three-wheeled bicycles with small electric motors (not more than 750 watts) that provide assistance in generating momentum through pedaling or via a hand throttle. The design and capabilities of e-bikes vary, but FLMAs generally have established a three-tier classification system that limits what may or may not be considered an e-bike based on maximum assisted speed (see **Table 1**).

This system is generally consistent with other definitions of the term *e-bike* established elsewhere in law by Congress. For example, the Consumer Product Safety Act, as amended in 2002, defines *low-speed electric bicycles* under this three-tier classification ([15 U.S.C. §2085](#)). More recently, in 2021, Congress enacted a similar definition for the term *electric bicycle* for the purposes of surface transportation programs ([23 U.S.C. §217\(j\)\(2\)](#)). For FLMAs, agency policies distinguish among these various classes of e-bikes, with certain areas closed or open to certain classes (see “Agency Regulations and Guidance”). E-bikes that fall outside of this classification system are typically considered motorized uses and may be subject to different legal and/or regulatory restrictions on federal lands. (For more information on motorized recreation on federal lands, see CRS Report R48076, [Motorized Recreation on Federal Lands](#), by Mark K. DeSantis.)

Agency Regulations and Guidance

Department of the Interior. In August 2019, then-Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt signed Secretary’s Order 3376, “Increasing Recreational Opportunities Through the Use of Electric Bikes” ([SO 3376](#)). Among other purposes, the order directed certain Department of the Interior (DOI)

bureaus—the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)—to revise their regulations and add a definition for e-bikes consistent with [15 U.S.C. §2085](#) and to exempt e-bikes from the definition of motorized or off-road vehicles. The stated goal of this directive was to clarify the regulatory status of e-bikes across federal lands so as to “increase recreational opportunities for all Americans, especially those with physical limitations, and to encourage the enjoyment of lands and waters managed by the Department of the Interior.”

Table 1. Federal Lands E-Bike Classification System

Class Type	Description
Class I	Equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 miles per hour
Class II	Equipped with a motor that may be used exclusively to propel the bicycle and that is not capable of providing assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 miles per hour
Class III	Equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and that ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 28 miles per hour

Source: Department of the Interior, Secretary’s Order 3376, “Increasing Recreational Opportunities Through the Use of Electric Bikes,” August 29, 2019. Similar classification language has been promulgated in regulations by certain federal agencies (see “Agency Regulations and Guidance”).

In response to this directive, each of the aforementioned DOI bureaus promulgated regulations governing the use of e-bikes on lands under its jurisdiction (see [43 C.F.R. §8340.0-5](#) for BLM; [36 C.F.R. §§1.4 and 4.30\(i\)](#) for NPS; [50 C.F.R. §27.31](#) for FWS; and [43 C.F.R. §420](#) for BOR). Although the finalized rules vary slightly across agencies, all of the regulations generally implement similar policy changes that include

- excluding e-bikes from agency definitions of motorized (e.g., NPS) or off-road (e.g., BLM, BOR) vehicles;
- allowing for the use of e-bikes, or certain classes of e-bikes, in a manner consistent with traditional bicycles, including (at the discretion of the authorized official) on nonmotorized roads and trails;
- limiting, to varying degrees, operators of Class II e-bikes from using the motor exclusively to propel the

bicycle for an extended period of time without pedaling; and

- clarifying land managers' authority to limit or restrict e-bike use as needed under certain conditions or for certain reasons.

On September 1, 2026, NPS [proposed a new rule](#) that would limit or rescind some procedural requirements, such as the current environmental review requirements for designating certain areas for bicycle use (including e-bikes). In addition, the proposed rule would limit notice and comment requirements for designating e-bike usage on certain park roads and parking areas.

Forest Service. Although not subject to S.O. 3376, in 2022, the Forest Service (FS) also finalized directives in its [agency manuals](#) that clarify how e-bikes are managed on national forests and grasslands. Similar to the DOI regulations, the FS policies classify e-bikes in accordance with the three-tiered system (see [Table 1](#)). However, unlike the DOI rules, the FS defines an e-bike as a type of motor vehicle. As a result, e-bikes are not permitted on nonmotorized trails and in nonmotorized areas unless their use is specifically designated. The policy requires that when considering whether to designate roads, trails, or areas for e-bike use, the “appropriate level of environmental analysis, including programmatic analyses, should be evaluated.”

Powered Micromobility Devices (PMDs)

Agency policies guiding management of e-bikes on federal lands generally do not apply to or address powered micromobility devices (PMDs), such as e-scooters, hoverboards, and Segways. As a result, the use of such devices was generally subject to agency rules for motor vehicles. In August 2026, NPS [finalized a rule](#) differentiating these devices from motor vehicles and providing a management framework for how and where such devices may be allowed on NPS lands. Specifically, the rule defines a PMD as “a human-operated, self-propelled device with a curb weight of less than 150 pounds and without an internal combustion engine,” but does not include devices such as e-bikes, coasting devices (e.g., skateboards), and motor vehicles. The rule prohibits PMD use except in locations designated by park superintendents and requires rulemaking prior to allowing such use in areas that “have never been improved by artificial or processed materials” (e.g., asphalt).

Recent Litigation

In May 2022, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia issued an opinion finding that NPS had improperly relied on a categorical exclusion to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. §§4321 et seq.) in issuing the agency’s final rulemaking for the use of e-bikes in national parks (*Pub Emps. For Env’t Responsibility v. Nat’l Park Serv. (PEER v. NPS)*, 605 F. Supp. 3d 28 (D.D.C. 2022)). The court remanded the rule to NPS and directed the agency to conduct additional NEPA analysis but left the rule in place pending completion of such analysis. In August 2024, NPS issued a [programmatic environmental assessment](#) determining that the nationwide regulations would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment.

Emerging Issues

Legislators and land managers may face questions in the coming years as e-bike technology, production, and user trends evolve. Proponents of e-bikes suggest that the use of these devices can decrease reliance on other motor vehicles, thereby [reducing greenhouse gas emissions](#) and improving [air quality on federal lands](#). Other stakeholders have raised concerns regarding whether heavier, fast-moving e-bikes [may cause erosion or damage to trails](#), many of which are already experiencing degradation due to high visitation and usage. A [study conducted by the Federal Highway Administration](#) (FHWA) looking at the potential impacts of e-bikes on public lands found limited literature or experimental studies examining whether there were any meaningful differences in the ecological impact of e-bikes compared with traditional bicycles. Similarly, [limited research is available](#) regarding potential increased disturbances to wildlife as a result of e-bike usage.

E-bikes also have raised safety concerns among [consumer protection groups](#) and [legislators](#) due in part to their high-speed capabilities. Possible issues could include increases in collisions and injury rates due to e-bikes sharing trails with pedestrians or other users, as well as increased severity of injuries. In addition, the potential for e-bikes to allow visitors to travel greater distances and access more remote areas could result in more complex and dangerous search and rescue efforts. Legislators or land managers may consider additional educational or regulatory safety measures to address these potential concerns. Alternatively, e-bikes also could serve as valuable emergency response vehicles and could assist search and rescue operations teams operating in remote areas.

As e-bike usage increases, consideration also may be given to whether or to what degree agencies should establish biking infrastructure within or around federal lands. This includes the potential addition of charging stations for e-bikes. Adding or expanding charging infrastructure for e-bikes may be considered within the context of agency budgetary constraints, whether such facilities can or should rely on certain renewable power sources, and concerns about encouraging e-bike use at areas already experiencing high visitation rates.

Similar to other recreational activities, e-bikes also can raise questions around equity and access to federal lands. On the one hand, e-bikes may increase access to public lands, particularly for individuals with mobility impairments or others who may find traditional bicycling or hiking challenging. However, given the high purchase and maintenance costs of e-bikes, personal e-bike ownership may be inaccessible to many individuals. This issue might become less pronounced should upfront costs drop in future years. In addition, agencies could consider installing or incorporating e-bikes into existing or future bikeshare systems.

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