

ELECTRIC MOUNTAIN BIKES - COMING TO A TRAIL NEAR YOU?



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Imagine tackling your next mountain bike uphill grind with the power of two or three Lance Armstrongs in your legs. The prospect sounds somewhat appealing — my 54-year-old legs and lungs might appreciate a boost every now and then.

The new crop of electric bikes (e-bikes) can generate tremendous power, in either pedal-assist or direct-drive modes. And when this technology is placed on a mountain bike it raises some questions.

While attending Eurobike a few weeks ago, I saw several brands of full-suspension, electric mountain bikes (photo is an electric motor attached to the crank/bottom bracket of a full suspension bike). As with many things in bicycling, Europeans are out in front with regard to electric bikes, especially with how they are regulated on roads. This fast-growing segment of European bicycle sales was in the beginning all about making the daily commute more manageable. But like anything in the bicycle industry, innovation spread quickly to other categories, including mountain bikes.

This should raise questions for those of us that have advocated and lobbied for bikes to be managed as a nonmotorized form of recreation. The prospect of e-bikes on dirt trails has forced IMBA to consider guidance on how this new category of bikes should be managed when off-road. For more info, please read [IMBA's Motorized/Nonmotorized Position Paper](#).

Will IMBA eventually need to retool our approach to sustainable trail design and construction to accommodate these bikes? We recognize the benefits of e-bikes, yet also recognize that this type bike creates many added challenges for land managers and for IMBA's approach to mitigating the impacts of bicycling in natural environments.

We vetted our draft position through many other mountain bike advocacy leaders and groups from throughout the world. Most agreed, as did IMBA's board, that mountain biking should remain a nonmotorized activity. Therefore, we conclude that riding e-bikes on natural-surface trails is not mountain biking. Further, we state that e-bike regulation for off-road travel should fall under motorized land management policies and rules.

IMBA doesn't think responsible motorized recreation is a bad thing — not at all. But it's not mountain biking, and human-powered activity should not be regulated in the same way power sports are managed. What do you think? I welcome your feedback and input as IMBA continues to consider this fast-emerging technology.