



# New York Mountain Bicycling Coalition

## *NewsLetter*

*Winter, 2000*

### **Vacancy on The New York State Trails Council for Mountain Biking**

John Butkus of the Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club (MHCC) writes to announce that an opening has come up on the New York State Trails Council (NYSTC) for a mountain biking member. Dan Vickery, who as a member of the Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club in the capital area has represented us well, will be stepping down, and a new MTB rep is needed to serve with John and also Frank Steiner of RBC on this council. The NYSTC meets four times a year.

Presence on the NYSTC is very important. This council has say in the award of TEA-21 Recreational Trails Program money, and its recommendations carry weight with state land managers. The most recent Finger Lakes Trail Newsletter is urging hikers across the state to lobby the NYSTC to designate all long-distance trails in the state to be designated hiking-only on state land. Without adequate representation on this council, we lose the opportunity to represent our position. John and Frank work hard to represent us, but an additional representative is needed. If you are interested and can attend the four meetings a year, please contact Jon Sundquist at 716-655-5130 or [trailhead@wnymba.org](mailto:trailhead@wnymba.org), or Anne Odel directly at [anneodel@aiusa.com](mailto:anneodel@aiusa.com).

### **2000 IMBA State Representatives Summit**

Your humble New York state IMBA rep made the pilgrimage to the land of winter riding to attend the 2000 IMBA state representatives summit at Flat Creek Ranch outside of Austin Texas on February 11-13. This was a great meeting with some great riding. In this issue of NYMBC news, I will try to convey as much as what we covered since the more folks it gets to, the more it will help getting trails open, which of course is the whole point of our efforts.

Jim Hasenauer, one of IMBA's founders started things off with an excellent summary of where we are at. He pointed out what he sees as the three biggest trends that are working against our access to the trails. The first is the increased reference to "mechanized" recreation. This terminology was originally introduced in the mid-80's when regulations for federal Wilderness were changed to specifically prohibit bikes (and hang gliders). While federal Wilderness is a big loss that IMBA wants reversed (a big uphill battle), at least this designation was limited to those areas designated as federal Wilderness. However, this designation, and other management policies unique to Wilderness areas, are slowly being applied to lots of other public land resulting in closures to bikes. The second big threat is the increased tactic of closing trails based on implied biological threats when these have not been substantiated by any type of reasonable study. This tactic often is applied to close areas to bikes before studies are conducted, even there is no reason other

than preconceived biases that bikes are causing impacts to biological receptors. The third major threat to access is increased illegal trail building by cyclists. We certainly have a right to be frustrated by the amount of trails open to us. But when this frustration leads to trails built without the land manager's permission, we are shooting ourselves in the foot, since such actions get managers particularly upset.

As advocates on the ground, we have to be on the alert to these approaches to limit our access, and be ready to defend ourselves. But rather than strictly act defensively, Jim stressed how we have to continue our proactive work with land managers, as we have done rather effectively throughout most regions of NY, but to also get more involved on the political level.

Jim also gave his well known talk about talking. He is a professor of communication, and his tips come in handy when public meeting time comes around. Put simply, you have to be clear in your mind what points you are trying to make, and make sure you know who your audience is. And don't forget the preacher's rule when you set up what you are going to say: (1) tell them what you are going to tell them, (2) tell them, and (3) tell them what you told them.

Gary Sjoquist of Minnesota followed on with what was billed as what every state rep needs to know, but really served as a good summary of what all advocates need to know to be effective. Gary works for Quality Bicycle Products as an advocacy director, as had great insight into working with retailers and the industry in general. However, he acknowledged this it is a lot of work to get these folks involved. He addressed the constant refrain of "how can I get more volunteers involved". He stressed the need to let go of certain projects to give others the chance to succeed. Unless you really want to do everything yourself, accept what others produce, even if you would have done it differently.

Gary also gave a great overview of the opportunities available through the TEA-21 program. This is the federal transportation program that is the successor to ISTEA. This program has a considerable amount of money available for trails programs. In New York, trail funds under this program are recommended for use by the New York State

Trails Council. These funds are available for trail maintenance work (including tool and equipment purchase), acquisition of easements or property for trails, and development of railside facilities, such as parking areas. 20% of the cost must be supplied by the applicants, but this can be contributed through volunteer labor.

Bill Harris of Colorado and Jim Haagen-Smit of California followed with more about recruiting members and volunteers. Stressing the need to not burn yourself out, the emphasized the need for having lots of social rides another activities to bring in new folks and build from the bottom. Make sure you have jobs that aren't back-breaking letter writing, editing the newsletter, etc. to spread around. Other sources of volunteer help include AARP retired volunteers, CEO's, etc., private schools looking for events to "get into nature", community service projects for high schoolers, and major corporations that promote volunteers/community service project. And don't forget to thank the volunteers in person and in newsletters, recognizing above and beyond efforts.

Dave Scull is a former legislator from Maryland who is also a MTB advocate. He talked about how to help get funding for your local land managers. He pointed out that we have a winning case for influencing the appropriation of money for park and forest agencies and often times all you have to do is show up. Politicians like seeing folks ask for money that isn't for themselves, but rather is for the good of the whole. My favorite quote was his characterization of politicians once you get their attention: "Hey, this is a group I need to worry about - they found me!"

Representatives from the BLM and the forest service talked on Saturday night. A National Park Service representative was not available, but Dan Vardamis of IMBA, who has been doing a lot of research and advocacy work on access in National Parks gave a presentation on the state of access there. My notes from these talks aren't as thorough as I was still recovering from the blistering pace of the riding we did that afternoon (the IMBA staff are incredibly good and strong riders!). But Dan documented that access has been increasing in the historically closed National Parks. The National Forest Representative was not able to shed too much insight on the pending roadless

initiative proposed by the Clinton Administration. The fate of that program, and the potential impacts it may have on access is tied up in political fights in Washington.

We were also treated to an all-too-brief presentation of the extensive research and summary performed by Don Weir of Alberta who has documented and summarized the scientific literature available on the physical and social impacts of mountain biking. Many sections of his drafts of his research are available on the IMBA mailing list archives (<http://www.cyclery.com/lists/imba/imba-arc> [hive-hyper/](#)) for June and July 1998 (sort by author, and look for Don Weir).

Much of this information may be old hat for many long time advocates, while there are always more and more new folks getting into the fight for more access. IMBA is an exceptional resource for the knowledge and the tools needed to fight for access. What was truly invaluable was getting to meet all the folks I have known only by e-mail for the last few years. Oh yeah, and the great riding, especially for February.

### **Access Changes Faced in Buffalo and Albany**

Popular riding areas at opposite ends of the Erie Canal are facing changes in management. In Albany, use of the Pine Bush Preserve is coming under scrutiny by the Pine Bush Preserve Commission which manages the area. The commission is proposing limiting bike use to designated trails, which would likely eliminate all the interesting ones from use. The commission was taking comments up through last December.

At the other end of the state, a new administration in Erie County means a new parks commissioner. The most popular places to ride in the county have been undeveloped county-owned land banks that had been posted no trespassing for liability reasons (but not enforced). This policy is now changing with the new administration. Representatives from WNYMBA have met with the new commissioner and with other user groups to recommend continued use by bicycles. However, resolution of new regulations has not yet been finalized.

### **NY's MTB Access Report Card**

As part of the follow up to the IMBA summit, each state representative is preparing a report card for the status of MTB access in each state. This report card will serve as a "quick and dirty" reference for cyclists, advocates, land managers, industry representatives, and the media. Assigning such a rating to New York is difficult, as access varies depending on proximity to urban areas. NY provides some of the best mountain biking in the country, yet access is severely limited near New York City. Nonetheless, I have forged ahead to rate the state, letting it serve as a benchmark to improve upon in the coming years. Ratings are A through F, just like in school.

IMBA is rating not only states as a whole, but on the following individual criteria. First, the potential for additional trail access in the future, either on existing trails now closed, or on new trails. I rate this a B-. Advocates have been getting more trails open, quite often through active, permitted trail building programs. Holding us back are the strong organization of hiking groups that are not interested in seeing trails opened to bikes, especially near New York City.

Next is the general attitude of land managers toward bikes and shared trail use. While the DEC is generally willing to accept bikes, with some exceptions, state park access varies widely. Despite the limitations in downstate parks such as Harriman, I rate manager attitudes a B from the access that has been gained in state parks by local advocates.

Third, we rate attitudes of other use groups. Although cooperation is strong with the New York State Horse Council, the effectiveness of hiking organization downstate in keeping bikes of trails in that area force a C overall for this criteria.

Next is press coverage. Press coverage is fairly light, and of mixed content, warranting a C rating.

Overall, I'm rating NY a C, defined as "things are OK, there is definitely room to improve, but things could be worse." We've got lots of really great riding, but a lot more can be opened, and there's plenty of bridges to build with other user groups.

For more information on NYMBC:

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For info on how to help keep trails in your area open, contact your local MTB advocacy organization.

Founding Organizations:

Western NY Mountain Bicycling Association  
Rochester Bicycle Club (RBC)  
Central NY-DIRT (Dedicated Individuals for Responsible Trail-use)  
Mohawk-Hudson Cycling Club (MHCC)  
Westchester Mountain Biking Association  
'Gunks Mountain Biking Association  
Fats in the Cats  
Concerned Long Island Mountain Bicyclists

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