

*We are human power in action.
We promote wilderness values.
We preserve and protect our public lands.*

OSV Lawsuit

Lawsuit Against California's OSV Grooming Program

In January 2011, Snowlands Network sued the State of California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Division to force changes in the State's program of grooming snowmobile trails throughout California. Snowlands was joined by Winter Wildlands Alliance and the Center for Biological Diversity as co-petitioners in the lawsuit.

Among other arguments, petitioners contend that the Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) grooming program creates an imbalance in winter recreation opportunities in California, unfairly favoring OSV activity over skiers and snowshoers and impacting the environment in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Winter recreation depends on access via plowed roads and trailheads. California provides access to winter recreation on national forest lands through its OSV grooming and Sno-Park programs. More than 80% of the access provided under these programs is open to motorized use and thereby dominated by snowmobile users. The motorized users displace skiers and snowshoers due to the noise and noxious exhaust of their vehicles. Accordingly, these programs shape winter recreation in California, as well as facilitating the incursion of OSVs deep into the wilderness. Petitioners contend that the program violates CEQA by its adverse impacts on wildlife, *Continued on Page 6*

Snowmobiles Still Exempt From Management

Forest Service Denies Petition Asking for Change

Not unexpectedly, on March 29 the Forest Service denied a request by Winter Wildlands Alliance, Snowlands Network and about 90 other organizations representing 1.3 million members requesting that the agency amend the 2005 Travel Management Rule by removing the exemption of snowmobiles from mandatory management [see Snowlands Bulletin, Fall 2010 at

www.snowlands.org/pages/newsletter/newsletters/pdf/fall2010.pdf].

In denying the request, the Forest Service held that by including the option for a local forest official to determine whether to manage snowmobile use, the 2005 Rule provides an "adequate mechanism for regulating over-snow vehicle use" and that national regulations for over-snow vehicle use are not required by *Continued on Page 6*

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Update

Snowlands Network's Quiet Quadrant Campaign

By Gail Ferrell, President, Snowlands Network

The **Quiet Quadrant Campaign**, championed by Snowlands Network, is aimed at fixing the current imbalance in opportunities for quality non-motorized winter recreation in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Snowlands Network is working with the Forest Service to correct this imbalance and has proposed a specific alternative to the current land use plan. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) of the U.S. Forest Service is in the process of updating the current land use plan within the Lake Tahoe Basin. This updated plan will include planning for winter recreation within the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Skiers and snowshoers far outnumber snowmobilers in the Lake Tahoe Basin. In fact, in winter, human powered recreationists outnumber motorized users 10 to 1 in the Lake Tahoe Basin! This data reflects the users of public lands, not resort skiers nor users of

Continued on Page 5

President's Corner

By Gail Ferrell

Former U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth named 'Four Threats to Public Lands'. One of those four threats is 'unmanaged motorized recreation'. Even though the United States Forest Service (USFS), the managing agency, recognizes the devastating effects of such machines in many areas, the agency has been unable to control misuse of machines and abuse to the environment. This is especially true for snowmobiles, since the United States Forest Service has hindered itself in its' ability to manage snowmobile use due to the lack of management directives for these machines. (Please see article "Snowmobiles Still Exempt From Management" in this Bulletin.)

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) authored the concepts of wilderness and resource management during his time working with the then new United States Forest Service during the early part of the 1900's. Leopold did not witness the rise of motorized recreation and subsequent effects on the land, air, wildlife and other recreationists. He did, however, author a land ethic that we have yet to achieve. He inspired our nation to conserve the land for future generations.

Leopold was one of the founding members of the Wilderness Society, which currently lists 500,000 members. The era of Leopold's life gave him a particularly poignant view: he saw the history of our explosion of commercial exploitation of land and resources while peering over the precipitous ledge of the future with limited open land available for recreation and even less undisturbed land for wilderness preservation. We owe a great deal to him for his forward thinking on conservation and management of natural resources. And hence, I am curious, what would Aldo say about motorized recreation?

Perhaps most widely known for his essay "The Land Ethic", Leopold calls for humans to treat land with utmost respect and to realize that every creature, the land and animals, are all part of the natural system. The essay defines the land ethic in human action and attitude: "...a land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens

from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such". Respect for animal and plant life are foundational to Leopold's view. We might ask, what would Aldo say about the effects of winter motorized recreation on wildlife?

Studies of observable wildlife responses to snowmobiles have documented elevated heart rates, elevated glucocorticoid stress levels, increased flight distance, habitat fragmentation as well as community and population disturbance. In addition to the direct physiological stress of snowmobiles, evidence suggests that popular winter trails can fragment habitat and wildlife populations (Baker and Bithmann, 2005). Fish can be directly impacted by snowmobile traffic across ice, disturbing fish concentrations in over-wintering areas.

Leopold's Land Ethic can be directly applied in areas where wildlife are threatened. The American marten (*Martes americana*) is considered to be a species of concern by the United States Forest Service in the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). The compaction of snow, trail grooming, noise and habitat fragmentation are all possible factors impacting marten populations (Cablak and Spaulding, 2003). Consequently, snowmobile use must be carefully considered in the 6879 ft and 10,000 ft elevation range where marten are *Continued on Page 3*



Snowlands Bulletin

The Snowlands Bulletin is published by volunteer-led Snowlands Network, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Snowlands Network PO Box 2570 Nevada City, CA 95959 530.265.6424 www.snowlands.org

Mission

We promote opportunities for quality human-powered winter recreation and protect winter wildlands. We educate the public and government agencies about winter recreation and environmental issues.

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President's Corner *(continued)*

found to occur.

Lahontan Cutthroat Trout are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reintroduced the species to the headwaters of the Upper Truckee River in Meiss Meadows. The Meiss Meadow population is one of the only high-elevation meadow populations of Lahontan cutthroat trout in the Sierra Nevada (USDA Forest Service 2008). What would Aldo say about the illegal snowmobile trespass in the Meiss Meadows area south of Lake Tahoe?

Leopold writes that ethics applied in a broad sense are part of the ecological evolution of humans (Leopold, 1991). What has not evolved, Leopold writes, is an "ethic dealing with man's relationship to land and the non-human animals and plants which grow upon it". Evidence is demonstrated by environmentally destructive activities that degrade plant communities.

Snowmobiles can cause significant damage to land cover through direct physical injury as well as indirectly through snow compaction. Impacts on soil and vegetation include retarded growth, erosion, and physical damage (Baker and Bithmann, 2005). When snowmobiles are riding over the snow, abrasion and breakage of seedlings, shrubs, and other exposed vegetation is common.



Photo credit: Gail Ferrell

Aldo Leopold concerned himself with the natural landscape, which inevitably includes the air and water. Leopold taught us that when an environment changes due to human influence, that change can affect all parts of the natural system, often negatively. Snowmobiling degrades both air and water quality. Snowmobile emissions are especially alarming if one considers two-stroke snowmobile engines. A two-stroke snowmobile can emit as much hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide as 100 cars and create up to 1,000 times more carbon monoxide. The incomplete fuel combustion of two-stroke snowmobile engines results in up to one-third of the fuel being unburned and emitted out the tail-pipe (Blue Water Network, 2002). Two-stroke snowmobiles account for the majority

of non commercial snowmobiles used in many national forests and especially in the protected Lake Tahoe Basin.

The byproducts produced by snowmobile engines are toxic to both humans and wildlife. Such pollutants as ammonium, nitrate, sulfate, benzene, toluene, xylenes, aldehydes, 3-butadiene, and other polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are known to be hazardous to humans and animals (EPA, 1993). In fact, benzene, toluene, and xylenes are known carcinogens (Baker and Bithmann, 2005). Winter recreationists are especially at risk because the concentration of these emissions increases with elevation and cold. Given the research, does off road snowmobiling constitute a conservation ethic? What would Aldo say?



Skiers suffer from snowmobile exhaust from a single machine at Tahoe Meadows (Photo Gail Ferrell)

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LTBMU Management Plan Revision

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, which manages the national forest lands in the Tahoe basin, has been in the process of revising its land management plan for several years. Snowlands has been actively involved in this process, seeking changes to the forest management plan that provide greater protection to skiers, snowshoers and others seeking to recreate free from the noise and pollution of over snow vehicles. Among other objectives, we have sought to have the plan prohibit highly-polluting two-stroke snowmobiles from the basin (similar to the existing prohibition on two-stroke jet skis) and to designate more lands as free from any snowmobile use, in particular in the Quiet Quadrant (the northwest corner of the basin.)

We are encouraged in our meetings with the Forest Service that they appreciate our concerns. However, implementing change is always difficult and although snowmobile users are a small minority of Lake Tahoe visitors, they are generally very outspoken in the opposition to any restrictions on their activities. Accordingly, it is very important that as many people as possible express their personal concerns to the LTBMU, either through letters or emails to the Forest Supervisor. The LTBMU will hold additional meetings on the forest plan revision in the future (as of the date of writing this, no dates have been set) but you can express your concerns at any time – **AND YOUR VOICE WILL HAVE AN IMPACT**. All you need to say is that you desire to recreate on lands free from the noise and exhaust of snowmobiles! Telling the LTBMU how snowmobiles have impacted your experience also adds weights to your comments.

You can address your thoughts and concerns to:

Nancy Gibson – Forest Supervisor
Jeff Marsolais – Deputy Forest Supervisor
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
35 College Drive
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Or via email:

ngibson@fs.fed.us (Nancy Gibson)
jmarsolais@fs.fed.us (Jeff Marsolais)

Please send a copy of your correspondence to Snowlands Network. The number of comments received by the Forest Service provide valuable data in our discussions with land managers.

Mail: Snowlands Network
P.O. Box 2570
Nevada City, CA 95959
Email: projects@snowlands.org

Volunteer Opportunities with Snowlands Network

Snowlands Network is a volunteer based non-profit organization. As such, our volunteers play a vital role in the excellent work Snowlands Network is able to accomplish. If you have a talent and can volunteer some time, please contact our President, Gail Ferrell via email at gail@snowlands.org and she will find a perfect fit for your talents. Here are some of our volunteer needs:

Internships with Snowlands Network

As a small nonprofit, interns are valued immensely and immersed in real, quality projects, resulting in excellent on-the-job experiences. For a student seeking experience in the outdoor industry or conservation field, or for skiers or snowshoers looking for an effective way to use their extra time, Snowlands Network is the place to be. Length and hours for all internships are negotiable; typically, stipends are not available.

Snow School Coordinator

Snowlands Network is currently seeking an outgoing and hard working candidate looking for a fun and engaging experience in conservation and non-motorized recreation advocacy by securing elementary and middle schools in the greater Reno/Sparks and Lake Tahoe Area to participate in a winter ecology program for 4th – 8th graders called 'Snow School'.

Outreach and Events Coordinator

Snowlands Network is currently seeking an outgoing and hard working candidate looking for a fun and engaging experience in conservation and non-motorized recreation advocacy by working with affiliated organizations in the greater Reno/Sparks and Lake Tahoe Area to participate in program and event administration.

Scientific Research Intern

Intern is responsible for researching scientific issues related to winter recreation, wildlife and the natural environment and a quality human-powered recreation experience.

For additional information on any of these positions or if you would like to volunteer in a different capacity, please email Gil Ferrell at gail@snowlands.org.

Help Snowlands Network reach our goal of 2000 members. Give the gift of membership to Snowlands Network or ask a friend to join.

**Snowlands Network:
Your voice for human-powered winter recreation.**

Quiet Quadrant Update *(continued from page 1)*

commercial guides for snowmobiling.

As stated in an earlier article by Snowlands Network in our last newsletter, 53% of the public lands within the Lake Tahoe Basin are open to snowmobiling. However, some of those public lands are Wilderness which are far from plowed roads and provide a challenge to access in winter on skis or snowshoes. A more realistic view of how much land is available for human-powered winter recreationists, free from the motorized world, is **31%! Less than one third** of public lands are accessible for human powered winter recreation within the LTBMU! With skiers, snowshoers and snowplayers outnumbering snowmobilers 10 to 1, this must be changed!

The LTBMU is probably a year away from making decisions about land uses on federal land, but it is not too late for you to write a personal email or letter to the Staff at the LTBMU and tell them to adjust the imbalance in winter recreation. They can do so by adopting the Quiet Quadrant: the area between Hwy 267 and Hwy 50, including the Mt. Rose Hwy, 431. This area contains both state and federal lands that are both open and closed to snowmobiling. (Please see map.)

Please write to the LTBMU and tell them you need and want the adoption of the Quiet Quadrant for human-powered winter

recreation. Tell them why you want the adoption of the Quiet Quadrant.

Send your letters to:

Nancy Gibson – Forest Supervisor
Jeff Marsolais – Deputy Forest Supervisor
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
35 College Drive
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

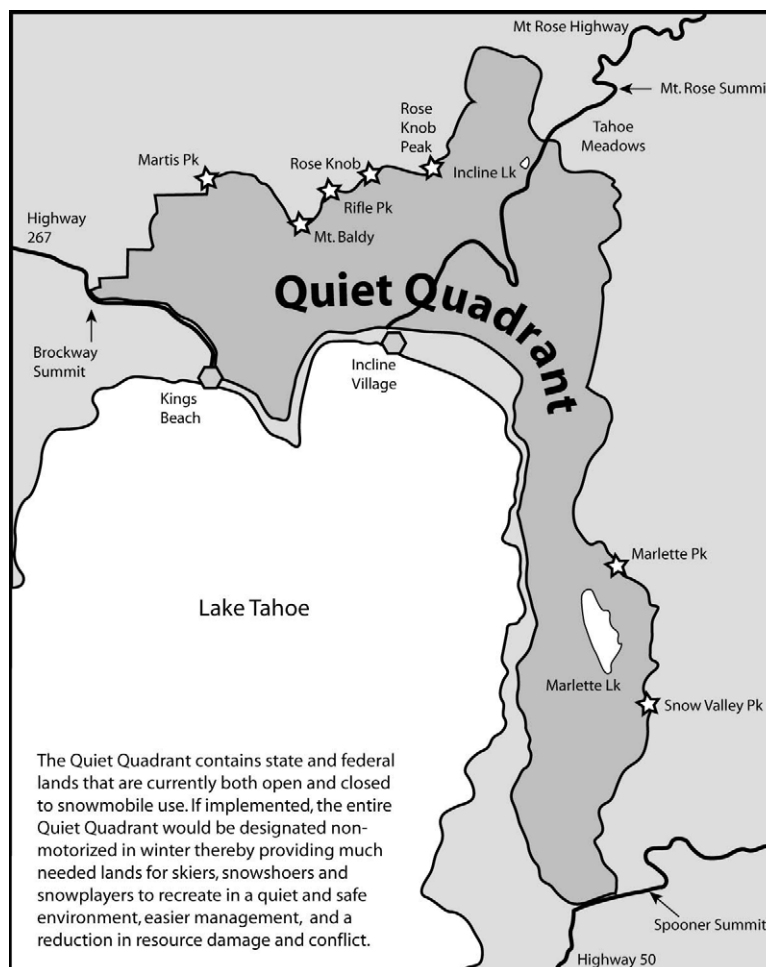
Or Via email:

ngibson@fs.fed.us for Nancy Gibson
jmarsolais@fs.fed.us for Jeff Marsolais

Please send a copy of your correspondence to Snowlands Network. Knowing the number of comments received by the Forest Service provides us with valuable data in our discussions with land managers.

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Nevada City, CA 95959

Email: projects@snowlands.org



Snowmobiles Exempt *(continued from page 1)*

law.

“Quiet recreation and responsible stewardship are getting the short end of the stick,” said Mark Menlove, executive director of Winter Wildlands Alliance, the organization leading the petition effort. “Our petition provided the legal and ecological rationale for the Agency to restore balance between motorized and non-motorized use in winter and to meet their obligation to protect public lands for future generations. We’re disappointed that the agency continues to duck their responsibility.”

Menlove added that the decision sends mixed signals. “The petition response openly acknowledges that snowmobiles can have adverse impacts on air and water quality, native vegetation, fish and wildlife populations and habitat, and on other recreationists, and yet the Agency refuses to include snowmobiles in the framework that has proven successful in managing all other motorized use.”

In denying the request to remove the over-snow vehicle exemption, the Forest Service did agree to develop guidelines or factors for local officials to consider if they choose to implement winter travel planning but gave no timeline for when those directives might be announced. “We appreciate the offer to establish better guidelines,” said Menlove, “but guidelines are of little use without a directive to actually follow them.”

Marcus Libkind, Chairman of Snowlands Network, and Snowlands volunteer John Bowers continue to take an active part in the effort to change this unacceptable situation. “We knew the petition was a long-shot, but we wanted to give the Forest Service a chance to do the right thing,” said Libkind. “We knew that the court system would probably be the venue where this issue is determined. We’re ready to go the distance on this critical issue.”

OSV Lawsuit *(continued from page 1)*

ecosystems, and other users.

The lawsuit is a substantial step in bringing more balance into winter recreation on the national forests in California. Snowlands does not desire to prohibit snowmobiling, but skiers and snowshoers should be able to visit areas free from motorized use. Skiers and snowshoers greatly outnumber snowmobile motorists, but snowmobile use dominates winter trailheads. There are few readily-accessible areas where a skier or snowshoer can reliably escape the noise and exhaust of snowmobiles. The few trailheads and areas which are reserved for human-powered recreation are increasingly overcrowded and do not meet public demand.

Further, the snowmobile community *must* transition to quieter and cleaner vehicles using best available technology. The restrictions instituted in Yellowstone Park on two-stroke vehicles provide a roadmap of how snowmobile use can be made more acceptable. In contrast, over 95% of the snowmobiles used in California are two-stroke machines, which release tremendous quantities of carbon monoxide, greenhouse gases, and other pollutants. Carbon monoxide is harmful to skiers and snowshoers because it impairs the ability of the bloodstream to carry oxygen – an extra concern at altitude. Because carbon monoxide is purged from blood slowly, over time, even the brief but intense exposure which occurs at a trailhead can impair one’s endurance and performance. Other ingredients in snowmobile two-stroke exhaust are known to have long-term impacts on human health. Snowmobiles are – by far – the most polluting recreational vehicle in common usage, and California’s promotion of snowmobile activity without pushing the industry towards cleaner and quieter vehicles is indefensible.

We will keep you posted on the progress of the lawsuit, which is still in its preliminary stages.



Can you identify this location?

Photo by Scott Sady

Threading the Needle of Opportunity on the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area

Just north of Yosemite National Park, Leavitt Peak (11,570') is near the middle of the Sierra Nevada. On paper, the massif is divided between the sprawling Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (HTNF) and, to the west, the Stanislaus National Forest. Otherwise a remote high ground, nearby access from California's scenic Sonora Pass Highway 108 makes Leavitt Peak a classic summer day hike. From the highway, several miles up a dirt road will take you to 9,556' Leavitt Lake – the established and practical limit for wheeled vehicles, including bicycles. From there, Leavitt Peak is a steep walk-up on a thin trail – about 2,000 feet of gain over maybe two miles of open rocky and gravelly slopes. You will meet and cross the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) as you march up the last of the summit ridge.

The arrival of snow season brings more challenge. Snows push the nearest (eastern) access farther down the highway, back to the Cal-trans lockdown gate near 6,800', just west of the USMC Mountain Warfare Training Center. From that east side highway gate, Leavitt Lake is about nine miles distant and nearly 3000 feet overhead. Nevertheless, the east side seems somewhat more approachable if you consider that the alternative west side approach is more than 20 miles of snowbound highway. And once the east side highway melts out to 8400' (usually by late April), skiers can bag the fantastic high terrain with daylight to spare.

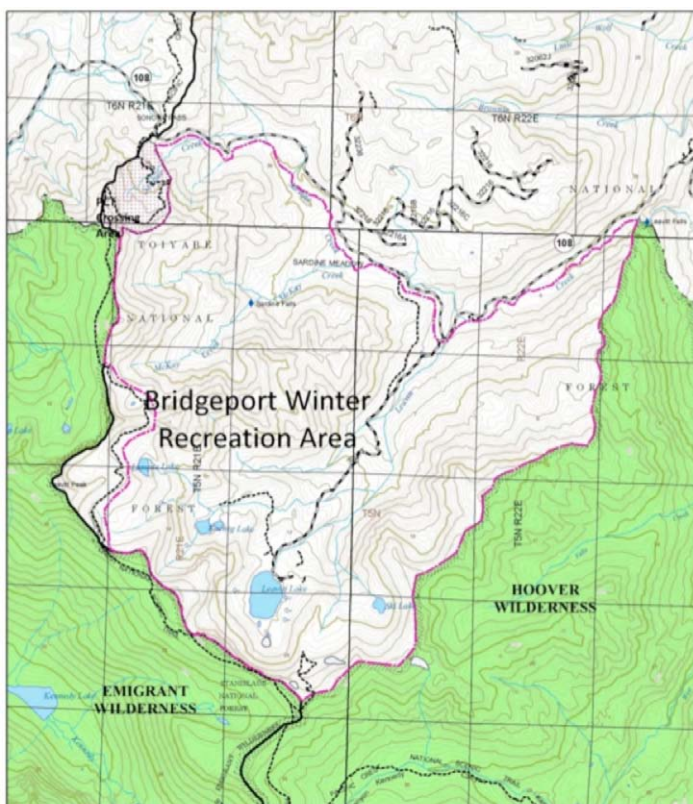
Predictably, the partly-groomed, partly-feral grade of the wintry highway serves to draw snow motorists toward the Sierra crest from both sides of the range. Therefore, self-powered travelers increasingly rely on preparation and timing to thread the needle of opportunity in this Sonora Pass neighborhood.

In 2005, HTNF-recommended wilderness reached from Sonora Pass to Tower Peak at the edge of Yosemite National Park. Four years later, the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (OPLMA) officially enlarged the Hoover Wilderness neighboring Yosemite (converting ~46,000 acres of 'recommended' wilderness to official status) and in the same stroke carved a motorized loophole into about 11,000

acres of recommended wilderness nearer to the California Scenic Highway 108. This unique cutout is now called the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area (BWRA) and Congress there requires the HTNF to integrate off-road snowmobiling into terrain which had been off limits to all motorists without exception. This makes the 11k BWRA a noteworthy INCREASE in California acreage available for off-road specialty snowmobiling.

The recent history of the BWRA is troubling. By 2004, the recommended wilderness had, through forest service neglect and inaction, devolved to a common destination for snow motorists seeking freedom from rules - even though terrain from the West Walker River drainage to Sonora Pass was long-established and clearly mapped "closed yearlong to all motorized vehicles." Leavitt Lake became a jump-off for organized raids which extended snowmobile trespass and impacts deep into adjacent Emigrant Wilderness and on into Yosemite.

A history of public complaints shows that the Humboldt-Toiyabe and the neighboring Stanislaus National Forest were aware of the lawless snowmobiling, but the cold-season violations were ignored or neglected long enough for the 'anything goes' motoring to become habitual. Snow motorists came to regard rules as optional, and it showed. Snowmobiles could be found loop-driving over the (non-motorized) Pacific Crest Trail any day of the week and running down all kinds of stuff along the way, even into late spring.



By creating the BWRA, the 2009 Act in some sense rewarded this lawlessness: Congress installed snowmobile off-road specialty driving on USFS terrain where not even bicycles are permitted off roads. But in so doing, Congress obliged the USFS to apply particular standards to management of the BWRA and its surroundings. For instance, the agency must prioritize enforcement activities on and around the BWRA to "prohibit degradation of natural resources," to "prevent interference with non-motorized recreation on the [PCT] Trail," and to "reduce user conflicts."

Snowlands believes that, with respect to the BWRA, the USFS is now obliged to manage

Continued on next page

Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area *(continued from previous page)*

snowmobiles as necessary to make the off-road specialty motoring fit in with preexisting lawful uses of long standing. [1] This is a significant challenge for the USFS (the new plan is just a start), and self-powered visitors, respectful motorists, and other stakeholders stand to benefit if the USFS formula actually accomplishes the objectives expressed in the 2009 Act.

Here's a link to the HTNF's BWRA snowmobile management plan which was issued in May, 2010:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf/projects/bridgeport/BWRA-FINAL-2010-05-07_w_DN.pdf

As directed in the 2009 act, the HTNF is also planning the designated place for snowmobile crossing of the Pacific Crest Trail. Snowlands Network has monitored these planning efforts from their beginning, and the HTNF has received dozens of letters with suggestions for sensible snowmobile controls on the BWRA and its surroundings. Self-reliant forest users spoke meaningfully in this planning effort and we believe that the HTNF took our suggestions to heart. They have produced what may be the most thorough management plan for off-road snowmobile activity yet approved by the USFS anywhere.

Some Features of the BWRA

To promote respectful, law-abiding and sustainable snowmobile recreation on and near the BWRA, the Bridgeport Ranger District will employ a variety of measures and controls, such as:

- Snowmobile fuel caching (stashing jugs of gasoline) is prohibited on the BWRA.
- To monitor demand and daily use during snowmobile season, the HTNF requires all recreational BWRA visitors to obtain a (free) BWRA use permit for each visit during the snowmobile season. [2]
- Seasonal (temporary/supplemental) moveable and removable snowmobile-specific signage will be installed.
- Water quality will be periodically monitored and compared to baseline values at specified locations.
- More field personnel will be employed for winter patrols and BWRA management duties. Since the HTNF BWRA Management Plan (May, 2010) indicates the need to add three permanent personnel to the Bridgeport District for management efforts in support of the BWRA, the author estimates that the startup cost for snowmobile management on the BWRA will exceed \$400,000 over a two-year period.
- A well-defined snowmobile season with start and end dates which depend on adequate snow cover.

For instance, snowmobile season on the BWRA opens on the first Saturday in December if there is at least 24 inches (61 cm) of snow depth measurable at the origin of Leavitt Lake road (jct

Hwy 108 ~8400'), or sometime thereafter once (if) adequate snow accumulates at depth markers there. The snowmobile season will close after the last Sunday in April, or earlier if snows at the origin of Leavitt Lake road have consolidated and retreated to 12 inches in depth. On May 11, 2011, there was still about two feet of snow at the origin of Leavitt Lake road even though the prescribed BWRA snowmobile season closure date - the last Sunday in April - was April 24. The result was a noteworthy windfall for knee-reliant visitors. It was actually possible, in prime spring conditions, to ski to Ski Lake in complete absence of snowmobile traffic and ruts!

As the HTNF proceeds with management of the BWRA and its surroundings, the strengths and weaknesses of the BWRA management plan promise to be instructional. If you are interested in joining Snowlands' ongoing long term snow-season monitoring effort on the BWRA and surroundings, or elsewhere in California and Nevada, just drop us a line.

[1] A principal winter user of the BWRA and its surroundings for more than five decades is the US Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center which provides cold weather alpine training specialized for armed forces.

[2] The HTNF requires a use permit for each visitor who enters the BWRA during snowmobile season. Snowmobile season on the BWRA extends from a snow-dependent opening date, never earlier than the first Saturday in December, to a snow-dependent end-date never later than the last Sunday in April. The permit is required only on the BWRA - that is, about 7,300 acres including Ski Lake, Leavitt Lake, Latopie Lake, Sardine Meadow/McKay Creek and terrain below the falls in Sardine Canyon. South of Sonora Pass, the PCT winds east and west astride the Sierra crest but never enters the BWRA. Thus, a BWRA permit is never required for skiing or shoeing anywhere upon the PCT. Similarly, a BWRA permit is never required for snowmobile or other travel anywhere along the Highway 108 corridor since the highway is entirely outside the BWRA.

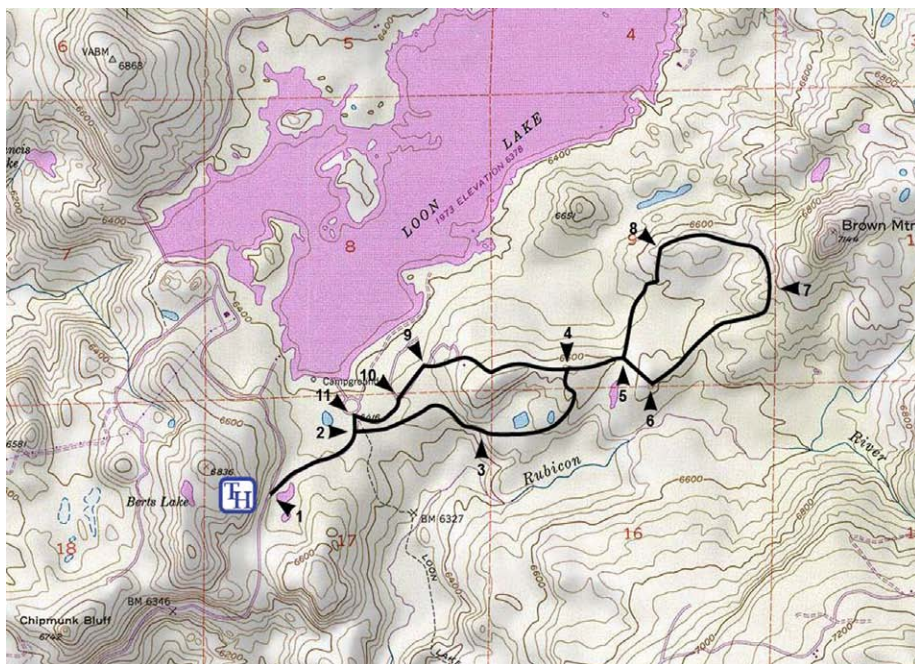
For those wishing to enter the BWRA during snowmobile season, whether motorized or afoot, the USFS has made the permit so easy to obtain that there is no excuse for not having one. Permits are available in advance by email; they can be obtained at HTNF district offices in Bridgeport and Carson City and at the Summit Ranger District of the Stanislaus NF, and they can also be self-issued at the east side trailhead and even at a quasi-mobile self-serve station right at snowbound Sonora Pass. Here's a link for the permit online:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5247614.pdf

The use permits enable the USFS to measure recreational demands on the area, and the permit system promises to bring some measure of accountability to snowmobile motorists on the area (who remain exempt from license plates in California).

Orion Trail

Nestled away up Ice House Road near Loon Lake off Highway 50, the Orion Trail includes skiing over wonderful touring terrain with vistas interspersed along the way.



The Orion Trail consists of two loops connected by a “cherry stem.” There are views of the peaks to the south and of moon-like Loon Lake to the north from both loops. The outer loop adds a bit more adventure as you wind your way out to the base of Brown Mountain; its brown face can be seen above the trees before you reach it.

The inner loop is rated beginner-intermediate but keep in mind that it would be significantly more difficult if it were not for the blue diamonds and signs that mark the trail. Therefore, it is important to keep track of the markers and turn back if you can't find the next one unless you are skilled in navigation with map and compass. The outer loop is rated intermediate and also requires careful following of the blue diamond markers.

When snow conditions are good, the outer loop offers perfect slopes, rarely steep, to practice downhill turns of all types. Try to visit here when spring-like conditions afford easy travel over corn (ego) snow and turning is a pleasure both in the open areas and areas with scattered trees. Keep in mind that at this low elevation any

powder snow quickly turns to mush as the temperature warms rapidly.

The Orion Trail was conceived and planned by dedicated members of the El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol (<http://ednsp.org/index.html>) and marked by the Patrol and volunteers from Snowlands Network.

The route

From the trailhead (1) [numbers in parentheses correspond to numbers on map] ski northeast on the snow-covered road for 0.4 mile until you reach the sign marking the Van Vleck turnoff (2).

Ski east and then southeast for a total of 0.5 mile on the trail towards Van Vleck Bunkhouse until you reach a trail junction (3) where the Orion Trail branches off from the Van Vleck Bunkhouse trail.

This junction is marked with a sign. You have passed the trail junction if you find yourself descending to the Rubicon River.

Veer left at the trail junction to continue on the Orion Trail, and follow the marked trail as it loops east and then north of 0.5 mile until you reach a ridgetop (4). At the ridgetop you will encounter another

Difficulty: Beginner-intermediate for inner loop, intermediate for combination inner and outer loops.

Length: 2.8 miles round trip for inner loop, 4.9 miles round trip for combination inner and outer loops.

Starting Elevation: 6500 feet.

Cumulative Elevation Change: +300, -300 feet for inner loop, +600, -600 feet for combination inner and outer loops.

Navigation: Road and marked trail.

Time: Several hours for inner loop, half day for combination inner and outer loops.

Season: Late December through early April.

Snowmobiles: Not permitted.

Maps: USGS Topo: 7.5' series, Loon Lake.

Start: Junction of Ice House Road and snow-covered road to Loon Lake Campground. From Highway 50 turn north onto Ice House Road. Drive 24 miles to the intersection where you must turn right to stay on Ice House Road. Turn right and continue for 4.4 miles until you reach the snow-covered road to Loon Lake Campground. This location is 0.9 mile before the Loon Lake Chalet.

signed trail junction. The Orion Trail's outer loop and Brown Mountain are to the east (right), and the Orion Trail's inner loop and the trailhead are to the west (left). This is a wonderful place to enjoy a snack or lunch while enjoying the scenery.

Continuing on the outer loop

Turn east (right) and ski down the broad ridge for 0.2 miles until you reach a broad saddle (5). Here you will encounter another signed trail junction that marks the start of the outer loop. Although the loop ahead can be skied in either direction, it will be described counter-clockwise because this direction results in the largest open area being downhill.

Ski southeast for 0.1 mile until you reach an obvious vantage point (6). Brown Mountain is visible in the distance.

Many skiers refer to this as lunch

Continued on next page

Orion Trail

(continued from previous page)

rock though with deep snow you might not see the rock.

Ski northeast for 0.6 mile until you reach the highest point of this tour at the southwest base of Brown Mountain (7). You will emerge from the trees just as you reach the highest point of the tour. Here and just ahead you will have your best views of stark Loon Lake to the northwest.

Ski north down an open slope and then west through open and lightly wooded terrain for a total of 0.5 mile until you reach the west end of a broad high point (8).

Ski south for 0.5 mile until you reach the broad saddle and trail junction (5) where you started the outer loop.

Ski west up a broad ridge for 0.2 mile until you reach the ridgetop and trail junction (4). Now you are back on the inner loop.

Completing the inner loop

Ski west (straight) and follow the marked trail as it first passes on level terrain to the north of a broad high point and then drops for a total of 0.6 mile until you reach the snow-covered summer Wilderness trailhead (9). An outhouse may be visible at the trailhead.

Ski on the snow-covered road to the southwest for 0.1 mile until you reach a road junction (10).

Turn south (left) and follow the snow-covered road as it loops south and then west for a total of 0.2 mile until you reach another road junction (11).

Turn south (left) and follow the road as it turns southwest for a total of 0.5 mile back to the trailhead (1).

More information

Visit www.BackcountrySkiTours.com for more information on these and other destinations including mileage logs, elevation profiles and GPS waypoints.



Benefit A Success

Renowned Yosemite-area climber Doug Robinson brought in the crowd at the Snowlands Network benefit in March 2011 at Patagonia in Reno, Nev.

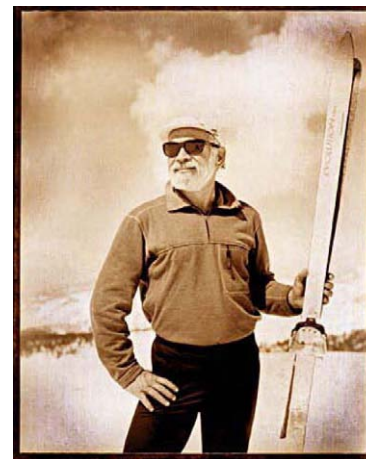
Mountaineer, climber, skier, and award-winning author Doug Robinson spoke in Reno at a special benefit for Snowlands Network. The lecture and slideshow, “Wild in the Sierra: Backcountry Skiing the Highest Sierra,” featured Robinson’s reflections about his 50 years of climbing and skiing throughout the Sierra. Snowlands Network greatly appreciates the support from Patagonia Service Center and the Environmental Programs and in particular from Ron Hunter, who has supported this effort to bring such an outstanding speaker to Reno.

Thank you Patagonia!

Robinson, the recipient of the 2010 American Alpine Club Literary Award, has given voice to the thoughts and concerns of the climbing community ever since he articulated his ideas about “clean climbing” in the early 1970’s arguing that rock climbers should climb in a way that left no trace of their ascents. Robinson’s writing has led some to call him the “bard of the climbing community;” he has been referred to as a “modern day John Muir” because of the poetic way in which he combines adventure and observations about the natural environment. His climbing video, “Moving Over Stone,” was a best seller, and has taught several generations of climbers how to take to rock and mountains.

The first President of the American Mountain Guides Association, Robinson was also a pioneer of Sierra ski touring, having made numerous traverses across the Range, including a 1970 traverse of the John Muir Trail. He was also instrumental in introducing modern ice climbing to the United States, both in first ascents in the Sierra and beyond.

Doug Robinson’s pure philosophy of taking to wilderness is emblematic of what Snowlands Network represents as advocates of human-powered winter travel in the Sierra.



Doug Robinson (photo by Jim Herrington)

Welcome New Members

By Annette Glabe, Snowlands Membership and Administration

Hello Snowlands Members!

Starting into my sixth year in charge of Snowlands Membership, your names have become familiar friends. Although I have met few of you face to face, your dedication to and continuing support for Snowlands' mission makes us fast friends! We care about the same thing; that there is peaceful, safe winter wildlands for all to enjoy now and for many generations to come.

I handle all the day to day "nitty-gritty" of maintaining the Membership database and the corresponding communications. Always feel free to contact me with questions, concerns and suggestions. If I cannot assist you, I will put you in touch with our dedicated President, Gail Ferrell, one of our committed Directors or a resourceful, knowledgeable Volunteer who can!

I also have the pleasure of making new friends! Welcome to all the New Snowlands Members:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| John Mock | Joy Bridgeman |
| Bill and Maria Lambert | Greg Case |
| Sydney Temple and Sarah Kupferberg | Lynn Epstein |
| Ted Yednock and Doug Frazer | Mike and Mary Handel |
| Linda Stewart | Dave and Nancy Zentner |
| Nancyann Leeder | Barbara Zwieg |
| Debbi Landshoff | Tyler Simonton |
| Raymond Cassell | Andrew Hudson and Caralin Adair |
| Laurel Harkness | Kathy Schwerin |
| Kalle D Hoffman | Wendy Wyels |
| Craig Morgado | Arlene Jamar |
| Marsha and Les Cohen | Dr. Michael and Joan Pokroy |
| Randy McNatt | Alan and Camille Gertler |
| Marius and Ada Poliac | Richard Peevers |
| Pierson Bourquin | Marcie Schubert |
| Anne Hendricks | Stephen Langdon |
| Shannon Wilson | John Cobourn |
| Sarah Thompson | Shreesh and Neena Taskar |
| Larry Bruguera | James M Wallis |
| Wendy S and Andre Urruty | Foster Boone |
| Jean Ross | |

Your membership is vital and much appreciated

Thank You!!!



Our success depends on you! Join and support us today. Also, please tell your friends about Snowlands Network. Together we can save and protect our snowlands.

Sign up here or join online: www.SaveOurSnowlands.org

\$30 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other _____

Got Bumper Stickers?



Help support Snowlands and share our **Wild About Snowlands** message with friends! From bumpers to snowboards to school notebooks, our bold sticker is a striking statement. It measures 7-1/4" x 3-3/4" and has a bright blue mountain slope with black lettering.

One for \$5 Five for \$15

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