



Promoting opportunities for quality, human-powered winter recreation and protecting winter wildlands

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Snowmobile Plan Challenged to Protect Wildlife, Quiet Recreation

SACRAMENTO, *Calif.* – Snowlands Network, Winter Wildlands Alliance and the Center for Biological Diversity today filed a lawsuit challenging the California Department of Parks and Recreation’s 10-year plan to fund clearing and grooming for snowmobile trails on 11 national forests each winter. The environmental review of the “Over Snow Vehicle Program,” which was approved Dec. 20, did not adequately address impacts to wildlife, air or water quality, or conflicts with quiet winter recreation.

“The program allows snowmobiles in areas that would otherwise remain inaccessible to these noisy and polluting activities,” said Lisa Belenky, a senior attorney with the Center. “Many imperiled species are affected, including the Sierra Nevada red fox, American pika, bighorn sheep and wolverine. The state should be doing more to protect wildlife in these areas during the critical winter months.”

The OSV program shapes winter recreation on national forests, promoting motorized over nonmotorized recreation. Winter recreation in the snow-covered forests depends on access from plowed trailheads; more than 80 percent of the official winter-recreation trailheads in California national forests are dominated by motorized recreation.

Backcountry skiing and snowshoeing are two of the fastest-growing winter sports in America and are both largely incompatible with snowmobile recreation. The OSV program’s promotion of snowmobiling effectively removes substantial areas of the national forest from use for sports like skiing and snowshoeing. Very few areas in California are protected for clean, quiet human-powered winter recreation, and nonmotorized users are increasingly crowded into those areas to escape the air pollution and noise from snowmobiles. Yet all activities can be accommodated if appropriate measures are taken to reduce user conflicts and protect wildlife, plants and water quality.

“The experience of crossing a pristine and quiet winter landscape has to be experienced to be fully appreciated,” said Marcus Libkind, Snowlands’ chairman and author of guidebooks on ski touring in California. “The emergence of snowshoeing as a mainstream sport is now bringing hundreds of thousands of new quiet users onto the winter landscape. This trend should be supported by the state and its communities, among other things as a valuable contributor to the tourist economy. Skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling can all exist on our national forests, but the state needs to encourage clean and quiet human-powered recreation by the creation of safe areas for these winter activities.”

“The national forest lands are intended to be multiple-use,” said Mark Menlove, executive director of Winter Wildlands Alliance. “However, multiple-use does not mean all uses in all places. Indeed, it means the opposite. It means that low-impact uses such as skiing and snowshoeing are protected and insulated from higher-impact uses such as snowmobiling. This concept of multiple-use is well established, and it is

disingenuous when the snowmobile community asserts otherwise. Multiple-use does not mean all areas open to all uses, it means reasonable use is made available to everyone.”

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The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 315,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

Snowlands Network is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation with over 600 members that represents the interests of skiers, snowshoers and other winter recreationists who desire to recreate in areas free from motorized use in California and Nevada.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation with approximately 1,300 members that advocates for a quality human-powered snowsports experience on public lands nationwide. WWA brings together 35 affiliated organizations that together have an additional 30,000 members.