

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



# Winter Travel Management Update

After a one year hiatus, the level of activity for members of the public monitoring five California forests doing snowmobile planning has increased over the past six months. The delay was caused by a wait for Lassen National Forest to revise their final environmental impact statement for their Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) Use Designation plan. Faced with an October 31, 2018 deadline for completing five draft environmental impact statements, the forest service is doing its best to get the documents out the door for public review.

The imposed schedule is a result of a settlement in a lawsuit brought by Snowlands Network, Winter Wildlands Alliance, and the Center For Biological Diversity in 2011 against the Forest Service for grooming snowmobile trails on eleven national forests without doing the appropriate level of environmental analysis. The government agreed to perform analysis for grooming on five California forests: Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas, and to complete the process by December, 2015. The deadline has been extended several times since. The first extension was agreed upon when Winter Wildlands Alliance won a lawsuit requiring the Forest Service to designate where snowmobiles are allowed to go on national forests in compliance with executive orders issued in the 70's and a subsequent Travel Rule established in 2005. To avoid duplicate efforts, the use designation process was combined with the grooming analysis. Other extensions have been granted over the years as the Forest Service has requested more time to complete steps in the process.

## Lassen

Lassen was the first of the five forests to issue a draft EIS, which it did in January, 2016, and an final EIS in August, 2016. The draft decision issued with the FEIS would have kept open 78% of the forest to OSV use and maintained the current level of grooming. The plan would have closed significant areas for non-motorized recreation, including 31,730 acres in the Butte Lake area, 19,040 acres in the Fredonyer-Goumaz area, and smaller acreages in the McGowan Lake, Colby Mountain, Lake Almanor, and Eagle Lake areas. Lassen would continue to allow State-funded grooming on 349 miles of trails, the most of any California forest.

After objections by several organizations the plan was withdrawn. The objections included the fact that the plan designated areas in which OSV use was to be prohibited, leaving the rest of the forest open to OSV use. The 2015 Travel Rule regulating these plans clearly states that areas in which OSV use is allowed should be designated, and the rest of the forest is closed. Other defects in the plan included 1) the range of alternatives was not broad enough, 2) the resulting open area was larger than a ranger district, 3) snowmobiles were allowed on a national non-motorized recreation trail, and 4) snowmobile use was allowed along the Pacific Crest Trail. The Forest Service requested a 22-month extension on all of the deadlines to address these problems.

Lassen issued a revised DEIS in October 2017 and a new FEIS in March 2018. The revised plan added an alternative with 55% of the forest open to OSV use, and the forest was divided up into eight "OSV areas" using paved highways as boundaries. However, the new alternative was not selected, and the OSV areas are adjacent to each other, so no actual change on the ground would occur as a result of these revisions. Worse, the Butte Lake, Fredonyer-Goumaz, and west shore of Lake Almanor areas would now be open to snowmobiles, so the revised plan was actually a step backwards for non-motorized recreation.

Snowlands objected to the new plan to no avail (the Forest Service did say it would reconsider a closure along the west shore of Lake Almanor). Since no more administrative measures are possible, the only recourse now to improve the Lassen OSV plan will be in the courts.

The other four forests had put their OSV plans on hold waiting for the completion of the Lassen plan. After *Continued on page 3*

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# President's Corner

By Marcus Libkind

I hope all of you have been enjoying the warm summer days. As I write the weather is a bit cooler and friends who live in the mountains tell me it feels like fall is approaching. Then comes our favorite; the season we all enjoy – winter.

The last two winters have been very different in terms of snowfall. Two years ago it was extremely plentiful; almost a near record winter. Then last winter it was the opposite. So what is it going to be this winter? Just like in the stock market, past performance is not an indicator of future results.

In 2009 I wrote an article titled “The Truth About Snowfall” (<http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/general/snowfall>

[data.htm](#)). In it I look at the statistics associated with snowfall data, and it turns out that the dispersion in the data is so great that the only thing that one can say for certain is that it will likely continue to fluctuate greatly.

So while I would like to give you some hope that the snow gods will look favorably on us this coming winter, anything I say, or for that matter anyone says, is pure speculation at best. We'll just have to think snow and hope for the best.



## Banff Film Festival

Ignite your passion for adventure, action and travel! The Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour will exhilarate you with amazing big-screen stories when it comes to the Fox Theatre in Redwood City on February 21 and 22, 2019. Journey to exotic locations, paddle the wildest waters, and climb the highest peaks. The Thursday and Friday shows are different, so come to both nights.

The Banff Mountain Film Festival is the premiere international film competition featuring the world's best footage on mountain subjects. The festival began in 1976 and is held annually in Banff, Alberta, Canada. The World Tour offers you the opportunity to see the best of the films entered in the festival.

This event is hosted by REI and is a benefit for Snowlands Network. Come enjoy a fantastic night (or two) of movies and support Snowlands' advocacy at the same time.

With the 2018 Banff Film Festival attracting more than 1900 attendees to Redwood City you can bet it will be an even greater hit in 2019. Don't forget; put it on your calendar today.

**Date** Thu, Feb 21 and Fri, Feb 22, 2019  
**Where** Fox Theatre, 2215 Broadway Street, Redwood City  
**Time** 7:00 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)  
**Tickets** Tickets go on sale December 15 on the Fox Theatre website <https://www.foxrwc.com>

**BANFF** EIGHTY FIVE 1933 2018 YEARS  
CENTRE FOR ARTS AND CREATIVITY

## Backcountry Film Festival

Enjoy a night of winter adventure films accompanied by snacks and beer! Participate in a silent auction and raffle to benefit Snowlands Network and promote human-powered winter sports and protect winter wildlands. Immerse yourself in a night of films that capture the spirit of winter. Adventure, environment and climate, youth outdoors, ski culture – you'll find it all in this award-winning lineup.

The Backcountry Film Festival is produced each year by Winter Wildlands Alliance.

**Date** Thu, Nov 29, 2018  
**Where** Patagonia Reno Outlet  
130 S Center St, Reno  
**Time** 7-10 PM  
**Tickets** Tickets on sale online at <https://www.snowlands.org> or at REI Reno  
Tickets \$12 in advance or \$15 at the door



# Winter Travel Management Update (continued)

Lassen had issued a revised decision, progress in the other forest plans resumed.

## Tahoe

Tahoe was the second forest to issue a DEIS, which they did in April, 2018. Learning from the mistakes made by Lassen, the Tahoe DEIS included five alternatives with a broad range of percentages allocated to OSV use, from 33% to 60%, with their Preferred Alternative at 50%. Snowmobilers were up in arms over the reduction, as the original Proposed Action issued in February 2015 allocated 86% of the forest for OSV use, a 1% decrease from the current status. People who submitted comments supporting the increased closures on Tahoe's website were subjected to harassment, and the Forest Service had to shut down the public comment site.

Snowlands submitted joint comments with Winter Wildlands Alliance that generally supported the Preferred Alternative, but requested additional non-motorized areas around Castle Peak and the Sierra Buttes, with smaller improvements at Loch Leven Lakes, Carpenter Valley, and Martis Peak. No opposition to the continued grooming of 217 miles of snowmobile trails was included in our comments.

After the comment period ended, Tahoe asked motorized and non-motorized representatives to try to work out compromise solutions. Two meetings were held under the auspices of the Truckee River Watershed Council. (Because of public meeting and government transparency regulations, the Forest Service has difficulty sponsoring invitation-only meetings.) However, no consensus emerged from those meetings, as snowmobile representatives held fast in opposition to any additional closures from the current status. Tahoe also asked for additional time to prepare a final EIS and decision, which was granted. They hope to publish the FEIS and Record of Decision in early 2019.

## Eldorado

Eldorado National Forest was next by issuing a DEIS in June 2018 and an FEIS on October 31, 2018. Their Preferred Alternative would decrease the percentage of the forest open to snowmobiles from 75% to 55%. The areas south of Carson Pass, including Woods Lake, would be closed, as would the area around Loon Lake and Van Vleck Bunkhouse. However, the area around Ludlow Hut and Richardson Lake and the Anderson Ridge area off Highway 88 would remain open. The State of California would continue to fund the grooming of 58 miles of snowmobile trails.

Snowlands is analyzing the FEIS in detail and will probably submit objections within the 45-day period in an attempt to improve the final plan.

## Stanislaus

Stanislaus published a DEIS in August, 2018. With its extensive federally-designated wilderness areas, Stanislaus has a smaller percentage than the other four forests currently open to

snowmobiles: 59%. All five alternatives in the DEIS lower this percentage by significant amounts (as little as 11%) by not designating land below 5000 feet and eliminating areas which they claim are undesired by snowmobilers. Twenty-five miles of snow trail would be groomed.

Even with those extensive closures, some important areas for non-motorized recreation are being designated for OSV use: Osborne Hill and the area south of Lake Alpine, Big Meadow, Mattley Ridge, Cabbage Patch, Black Spring, and Herring Creek Road. Snowlands submitted comments on the plan requesting that all of these areas be closed to snowmobiles.

The Preferred Alternative opens some areas for snowmobiling that were designated as Near Natural in the 1991 Forest Plan, which means that no motor vehicles should be allowed. However, no forest orders are in effect giving the Forest Service the legal authority to enforce the closures, so snowmobiles have been entering these areas for many years. If these areas are designated open in the final plan, the forest plan will have to be amended.

## Plumas

Plumas issued a DEIS on October 25. The Preferred Alternative would keep 72% of the forest open to snowmobiles, less than the current 95%. Much of the reduction comes from closing all land under 3500 feet in elevation, about 11% of the forest. Snowlands is analyzing the alternatives and will be encouraging people to support Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative, but with certain modifications. Alternative 2 closes five small areas for non-motorized recreation, but permits snowmobiles in proposed wilderness areas and allows grooming near Bucks Lake Wilderness.

## Others

Inyo National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) are due to begin OSV Use Designation projects soon. Inyo actually started on a plan in February 2016, but decided to put that plan on hold because it was in the process of revising its forest plan. The revised land management plan was released in August 2018, so Inyo is expected to address OSV planning some time in 2019. LTBMU has had OSV designation on their schedule of planned actions for many years, but they have yet to enter the scoping phase. Stakeholders in the LTBMU winter recreation, including Snowlands Network and snowmobile organizations, have been meeting for years to work on issues of winter recreation, but with little progress and no consensus reached.

## Learn More

You can learn more about winter recreation planning on the Snowlands website:

<https://www.snowlands.org/wtm>

Be sure and sign up for the Snowlands email alert list on our website to be kept informed as these Forest Service plans grind to an eventual conclusion.

# Conflict Reporting

Have you ever been on a trip into the backcountry in winter and had your experience diminished by the presence of snowmobiles? Maybe you were skiing along an unplowed forest road and the quiet was shattered by the noise and smell of a two-stroke engine. Perhaps you were skinning to the top of a ridge after a recent storm with the anticipation of cutting turns through some great powder, only to observe a pack of snowmobiles intent on high-marking the entire slope. Or maybe you were working your way down some corn snow late on a spring day only to encounter a maze of frozen-out snowmobile tracks in your path making conditions treacherous.

If anything like this has happened to you, then you have experienced what is considered a “use conflict.” A conflict occurs whenever one type of use diminishes the experience of another user. And it doesn’t matter whether or not the vehicles that caused the conflict were operating legally in an area where they are permitted. Legal or not, motor vehicles can impact the enjoyment of non-motorized users.

If you experience a use conflict while visiting a National Forest, you may be interested to know that the Forest Service wants to know about it. They have the responsibility for managing off-highway motor vehicle recreation on national forest land and are required to “minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands” [2015 Travel Rule]. The only way to do this is to create separate areas for motorized and non-motorized recreation, but motor enthusiasts oppose any attempt to do so.

Snowmobilers claim that there is no conflict among users and they should be allowed to travel throughout the entire forest. To counter this claim, we need you to report when you experience a conflict. The snowmobile doesn’t have to be operated illegally, unsafely, or in a closed area. You should submit a report anytime you feel that your experience was damaged by the presence of snowmobiles. You don’t have to see the vehicle for a conflict to occur, as even tracks left by vehicles can degrade your experience.

For eighteen years, Snowlands has been collecting conflict reports on our website. We now have a database of about 300 reports going back to 2001 from 100 reporters. Most of these reports have been submitted to the relevant agency.

Our Lands Monitoring Coordinator, Jeff Erdoes, can work with you to make sure that your report gets submitted to the proper agency. You can submit photographs, GPS tracks, or other information with your report. If we can collect enough of these reports, we can apply pressure to the Forest Service to create more non-motorized areas where snowmobiles are excluded.

Please try submitting a report this season, even if just to try out our website form. You can let us know that you don’t want your report to go to the government agency. We will not release your identifying information without your permission.

Check out our reporting form here:

<https://www.snowlands.org/conflict>

and give it a try this season. Join us in making the world a better place for non-motorized winter recreation.

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## Join Us!

The Bay Area Chapter Sierra Club Snow Camping Section is entering its 50<sup>th</sup> season with a calendar of trips and events happening from January to March 2019. Each year volunteers lead instructional trips in the Sierra Nevada, where the essentials of

safe winter camping are taught in a fun and congenial environment. The program usually sells out quickly, so check out their website at [www.snowcamping.org](http://www.snowcamping.org) for access to the photo gallery. The program application period opens early October.



# Featured Tour: Andesite Peak

Writing about the tour to Andesite Peak has special meaning now, because the Tahoe National Forest Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation designates a small area of land to the west of Andesite Ridge as non-motorized in winter. This makes the easiest route to the peak entirely within a non-motorized area, although there is a snowmobile route through it. Snowmobiles will have to stick to the designated route, with no cross-country travel allowed here.

In our ongoing efforts to represent the winter non-motorized community, Snowlands is working to ensure that this small non-motorized area remains in the Final EIS, and if we get our way the small area would be increased in size.

Our rationale for advocating for this designation is that the adjacent Castle Valley area is too crowded to provide a quality backcountry experience. Located near the Donner Summit Sno-Park and the Boreal Ridge Ski Area, the route up Castle Valley to Castle Pass and beyond to the Peter Grubb backcountry hut is the most heavily used ski and snowshoe area on Tahoe National Forest and possibly in California.

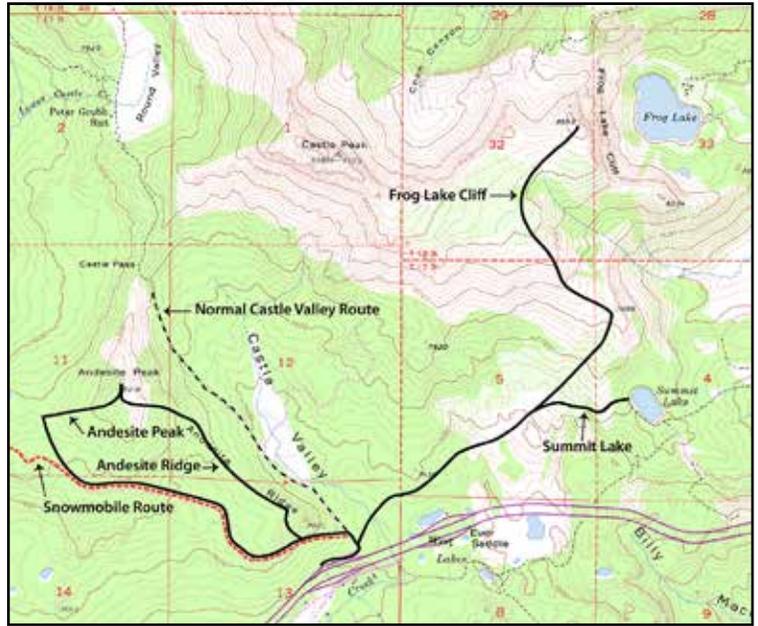
Currently a sign a short distance from the trailhead directs skiers and snowshoers to the right up Castle Valley and snowmobilers to the left to the west of Andesite Ridge. But with as many as 300 visitors to Castle Valley on a fair-weather day, the area is severely over-crowded.

The west side of Andesite Ridge, where snowmobiles are directed, can be used as an alternative tour for skiers and snowshoers, with a visit to the summit of Andesite Peak being an ideal destination.

The intermediate 4.6-mile round trip tour to Andesite Peak is entirely within the proposed non-motorized area, though it initially follows the snow-covered road that is the snowmobile route. But the openness of the area allows one to travel off the road if you desire, and even now very few snowmobiles use the route.

The advanced-intermediate 3.4-mile round trip tour along Andesite Ridge to Andesite Peak leaves the snowmobile route very early but is considerably steeper. Much of this route is through well-spaced trees, and in powder or spring conditions offers an outstanding downhill return run. This route passes by an old abandoned miner's cabin. As you can imagine, on a clear day the views are spectacular from the summit of Andesite Peak with nearby Castle Peak being the obvious eye-catcher.

Two other tours start at the Castle Valley trailhead and go east.



Snowmobiles are prohibited at the start of these tours, although they are allowed farther on. Snowlands has requested that this entire area be closed in the Final EIS.

A tour to Summit Lake and back is 3.4 miles over intermediate open, rolling terrain, with the lower slopes of Castle Peak nearby to invite telemark turns.

The tour to Frog Lake Cliff is more difficult with 1400 feet of elevation gain over 2.9 miles. The destination is a spectacular overlook 1000 feet above Frog Lake, and the return descent offers 1200 feet of unobstructed slopes.

The new motor vehicle designations will likely not be in effect until the 2019-2020 season.

You can find descriptions, maps, and waypoints for these and many other tours at the website [www.backcountryskitours.com](http://www.backcountryskitours.com). Here is a link to the tours to be found in the Donner Pass area:

<https://tinyurl.com/DonnerSnoPark>

You can find out more about the OSV Use Designation process on the Snowlands website:

<https://www.snowlands.org/wtm>



*The view looking south from Andesite Ridge (photo by Marcus Libkind)*

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**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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