



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



# Living and Advocating in a Pandemic

These are difficult times in which to live. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many deaths, serious illnesses, and financial hardships. For those of us who are the least affected, we are still limited in our travel. For some, it has caused separation from friends and family.

At Snowlands Network we wish you all the best and an end to the misery that Covid-19 has caused. Vaccines are being developed but will not be widely available for months, and it appears that most of us will be unprotected during the upcoming winter season.

Snowlands Network has not taken a position on whether it is right or wrong to venture into the backcountry during these times. Backcountry visits for hiking, backpacking, or skiing seem like a good idea because they are good physical exercise and naturally create social distancing. Back in April, mountain rescue organizations were urging us not to put them at risk by taking risks in the backcountry. The Forest Service and mountain communities asked people not to visit.

Although Covid-19 is still spreading, many people want to travel, especially to the mountains. Businesses that are open want you to visit. If you do travel, or even if you stay near home, please exercise social distancing, wear a mask while in public, and wash your hands regularly.

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the devastating wildfires this year have disrupted ongoing environmental initiatives in which Snowlands Network is involved. The most significant of these is over-snow vehicle management planning on six forests: Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, Plumas, and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). Decisions have been postponed, meetings have been delayed, and less efficient video conferences have been substituted for in-person meetings. The Forest Service is working to adapt to the current situation while keeping their employees and members of the public safe.

Snowlands Network has recommended that the government exercise caution in proceeding, even if it means deadlines will not be met. As a participant in the lawsuit that initiated OSV planning on five forests, Snowlands has been asked to agree to delays several times during the course of the project. We have always agreed to

these delays in the schedule to allow the Forest Service to produce a better plan than if they had been held to a strict schedule. Despite the lack of visible progress, we are working with the same enthusiasm as we have always done in the past and are monitoring the government’s management plans closely.

The current negotiated schedule required completion of plans starting in November, 2020, and ending with all five plans completed by August, 2021. When contacted, a representative of Lassen National Forest, the first forest to issue any plans, said that while they were “very close” to publishing a Final Record of Decision, it would likely not be by the end of the year. So we expect Lassen NF to have a plan early in 2021, but not soon enough to go into effect this season with a published Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM). Tahoe and Stanislaus stated that they will not have new OSVUMs this season. Plumas NF, the last forest to publish their plans, is still in the objection resolution phase, with meetings that were scheduled in spring 2020 canceled and not yet rescheduled.

The LTBMU started formal OSV planning in September 2019 with the publishing of a Proposed Action and the opening of a pre-scoping phase. This followed an attempt at collaboration between motorized and non-motorized groups that had been going on since 2013 with three public meetings held in 2016. A public comment period for winter travel management on the LTBMU is scheduled to occur December 2021 with a decision August 2022.

These dates could easily be delayed. Regardless, Snowlands Network will be monitoring progress and will keep you informed.

## In This Issue

- Living and Advocating in a Pandemic.....1
- President’s Corner .....2
- Highway 89 Corridor Management.....2
- The Gutting of NEPA .....3
- Winter Wildlands Alliance.....3
- Conflict Reporting.....4
- Featured Tour: Chickadee Ridge .....5

# President's Corner

By Marcus Libkind

If you are like me, this year you have already gotten hit hard by requests for donations to a whole range of organizations. I suspect that many are not doing so well this year because of lost jobs and general fear as to the future.

The Board of Directors at Snowlands Network has decided not to do formal member fundraising this year. That was a hard decision because our biggest fundraising event, the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour, is most-likely not going to happen due to Covid-19. We are very sad about that because we know it is also very popular with more than 2000 attendees.

Therefore, this year you will not be getting the usual annual appeal for donations. If you can afford it, you can still donate via our website [www.snowlands.org/donate](http://www.snowlands.org/donate) or by mailing a check to our us at P.O. Box 321171, Los Gatos, CA 95032.

Snowlands Network will, with the continued support of its volunteers and members, continue its advocacy work on behalf of

human-powered winter recreation in California and Nevada.

As for getting out in the snow, this is a slow start to the winter. Usually by Thanksgiving there is somewhere with enough snow to recreate in the Sierra, but it is hit and miss this year. After watching a horrific hurricane season on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the heat and fires in California, and now a depressingly poor start to the winter, we are reminded again of climate change.

I've read that General Motors sees the future bright for electric vehicles, and other manufacturers are moving in that direction. Maybe there is change in our future that will alter the direction of world climate.

We at Snowlands Network wish you a wonderful holiday season and New Year. Please be safe.



## Highway 89 Corridor Management Plan

Highway 89 or State Route 89 runs along the west side of Lake Tahoe. It is a two-lane road that in summer can be bumper-to-bumper with traffic and in winter offers little in the way of parking places for recreation. In July 2020 a Draft Highway 89 Corridor Management Plan for this road was released. It was created by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Tahoe Transportation District, and the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Lake Tahoe has long been plagued with vehicle traffic that peaks in summer, especially on weekends, when vacationers flock to the lake. Most notable is the traffic jam at Camp Richardson and at Emerald Bay, where there is insufficient parking for those visiting this idyllic overlook. It is this traffic problem that is the emphasis of the report.

The goal seems to be increased public transportation. The agencies envisage a bus/shuttle system. For now this will only be for summer times though there is mention that it might be extended to peak weekends in winter. It is Snowlands Network's opinion that any public transportation plan for SR-89 in winter must be regular to be effective, e.g. all weekends, not just specific peak weekends.

While in winter the traffic is less on SR-89, a different problem rears its head. Parking areas normally available summer are not plowed in winter. Also, summer parking lots do not provide access to the most popular winter recreation destinations along the road, e.g. access to Mt. Tallac.

In the past, skiers and others have parked along the shoulders, but this offers

both insufficient space and unsafe conditions. This has resulted in conflicts between recreationists and homeowners in nearby housing areas.

Suggestions for winter improvements include:

- Adaptive management in winter to deal with changing conditions.
- Access to parking lots in winter. Plow some after highway is plowed.
- Re-design Bayview Campground into a small 40-50 car parking lot.
- Consider 15 parking spaces at the north Emerald Bay gate.
- Identify roadside parking for winter access when transit is not running. This is key to meet demand for access to certain popular backcountry ski areas.
- Improve winter access by better avalanche management to reduce highway closures.

The Corridor Management Plan recommends improving access in three phases. Phase 1 does not include any improvements during the winter. Clearly the focus is on the higher use that occurs during the summer.

Snowlands Network will continue to monitor progress of the Highway 89 Corridor Management Plan. We expect improvements that benefit winter recreation to be slow in coming, but it is important to make sure that these lower priority parts of the plan are not allowed to fall by the wayside.



# The Gutting of NEPA

In 1969, Democrats and Republicans came together to pass the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This legislation emphasized both the need to make decisions based on science and the right of the people to have a voice in major decisions affecting the environment. Fast forward 50 years and the current Administration has shunned both science and the right for the people to have a voice in the future of our environment.

During the last three years the Administration tried to force streamlining of the environmental process down the throat of America and remove the people's right to participate in decision making as it pertains to the environment. Environmental organizations took the Administration to court time and again, and judges sided with these groups in their rulings.

In response to these defeats, the Administration has told the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the agency tasked with turning the verbiage of NEPA into a process for decision-makers to follow, to reinterpret NEPA in a more conservatively convenient

way. Their reinterpretation essentially guts the safeguards that NEPA was designed to create.

The Administration's proposed changes to NEPA, if they go into effect, would streamline the approval process for development and extractive industries and reduce the involvement of the public and our ability to influence decisions that will adversely affect the environment. Winter Wildlands Alliance and 21 other environmental and recreation organizations are suing to prevent changes to NEPA regulations.

With Joe Biden replacing the current Administration on January 20, 2021, it is likely that we will see steps to preserve the NEPA as it has been interpreted for the last 50 years. Returning to the past interpretation cannot happen with a stroke of a pen, and the new administration will have other priorities. Legally required steps must be followed, and therefore the change will not be instantaneous. Until that happens, we assume that the lawsuit filed by WWA and others will move forward.

---

## Winter Wildlands Alliance

Did you know that there is a national organization that is dedicated to improving opportunities for backcountry, non-motorized winter recreation and preserving our winter wild places? It's Winter Wildlands Alliance, and this year they are celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

WWA was founded through the efforts of local human-powered winter recreation organizations that saw a need for a national organization to foster their goals collectively on the national level.

It all began with an American Alpine Club meeting in Colorado at which our President, Marcus Libkind, shared a dinner table with the leader of a Colorado backcountry ski group. The discussion drifted to how their respective organizations and other like-minded groups could join together to increase their effectiveness.

Subsequently, a group of representatives of grassroots organizations met at a Tenth Mountain Hut. At the end of the weekend, the participants agreed that there was a need and interest

in working together to form a national organization – the name came later. Sarah Michael volunteered to lead the effort, and she became the organization's first executive director. Snowlands' Marcus Libkind and Gail Ferrell both served terms on the board of directors.

Today WWA is thriving and is engaged on many fronts. It is an alliance of over 100 grassroots environmental organizations and backcountry partners. They created the SnowSchool program that engages over 33,000 kids in science-based field trips and education across 60 sites nationwide each year. They created the Backcountry Film Festival, which is used by many of their associated groups for fund-raising. They were founding members of the Outdoor Alliance, a group lobbying for outdoor recreation with a presence in Washington, D.C.

WWA deserves your support. For more information see:

**<https://www.winterwildlands.org>**



# Conflict Reporting Helps Planning

Snowlands' Backcountry Experience Reporting system will be in operation again this upcoming season. Since 2001 we have made a form available on our website ([www.snowlands.org/report](http://www.snowlands.org/report)) for backcountry visitors to report instances of when and where motor vehicles have adversely affected their enjoyment of our public lands. With the witness' permission, Snowlands then forwards these reports to the responsible public agencies. The goal is to achieve better management that will separate incompatible uses to enable more wholesome backcountry experiences.

These reports, aside from alerting managers to potential problems on lands under their jurisdiction, have proven useful in our efforts to influence changes in land management plans. In 2005, the Forest Service adopted a policy that requires land planners, in designating areas and trails for motorized use, to minimize "*conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands.*" In 2015, the Forest Service was compelled by a lawsuit judgement to apply this rule specifically to over-snow vehicles, e.g. snowmobiles. As a result, national forests with adequate snow for recreation must now develop snowmobile management plans that thoughtfully designate where OSVs are allowed to operate.

Five national forests in California are completing these plans (see article on page 1). Snowlands has submitted report compilations (with witness identification redacted) as part of our public comments on these plans to establish where conflicts are occurring. Our position is that the most reliable means to minimize conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation is to separate the uses by designating land for non-motorized use only.

Submitting these reports will become even more impactful as we enter into a legal challenge phase if the final management plans do not sufficiently address conflict minimization. We will need evidence to convince a court that land managers fail to comply with the 2015 Travel Rule by permitting long-standing conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation.

Most of the reports received in the early years of Snowlands' online reporting system tended to focus on the lawless use of snowmobiles in restricted areas, such as wilderness. This was the most important type of report because at the time it was the only type of report upon which a government agency would act.

However, the Forest Service is now under court orders to manage snowmobile use to minimize conflict with human-powered recreation. Vehicular lawlessness, while reprehensible, is hardly the singular source of recreation conflict, in part because most vehicle users obey restrictions — and designated wilderness areas, mostly distant from plowed roads, do not see many visitors in the winter, inherently reducing opportunity for conflicts.

Decades of institutional forest service indulgence of motor vehicles on forest lands have, in some cases, produced a legacy of inappropriate 'mixed use' land designations. We want to make

sure everyone understands the importance of visitor reports of the impacts of the inappropriate presence of motor vehicles. We want to reaffirm that anybody whos' backcountry visit is diminished in any way by the presence of motor vehicles, please let Snowlands know where, when, and how. This includes conflicts that arise even if snowmobiles are permitted. If the presence of snowmobiles or their lingering impacts, such as noise, ruts, or odors, impair your enjoyment of the backcountry, then the administering agency should be addressing that conflict.

This past winter season (2019-2020) yielded many conflict reports. Snowlands received thirty reports from fifteen separate witnesses. Most of the reports were from people seeking to ski in the Tahoe Meadows and Chickadee Ridge area along Nevada State Highway 431. This area is divided between Toiyabe National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). LTBMU has just started writing a new snowmobile management plan, but it will be years in the making. The Humboldt-Toiyabe unit has not started an OSV project yet.

So please keep your forest visitor experience reports coming. These are a proven – indeed crucial – means to demonstrate to government agencies the vehicle-induced degradation of human-paced forest recreation on public land and that the principal and most reliable means to minimize such conflict, as required by government regulation, is to provide venues, trailheads, routes and accessible terrain for human-paced recreation free of vehicular interference.

Submit your reports and observations at:

**[www.snowlands.org/report](http://www.snowlands.org/report)**

When you do, you will be contacted by a member of the Snowlands Lands Monitoring team to obtain your permission to submit your report to the relevant agencies. While we invite reporting witnesses to submit pictures, maps, or data such as GPS track flog files, the simple written synopsis of events and impacts is far and away the most valuable element of any report. We will not share your personal information with anybody other than the appropriate government agency.



# Featured Tour: Chickadee Ridge and Beyond

There are many reasons to pick this tour. One is that it is located at above 8500 feet, and the terrain is skiable with a modest amount of snow, making it an ideal choice early in the season. Situated adjacent to Tahoe Meadows, it is easily accessed from both Lake Tahoe and Reno. It also affords a host of other attributes.

The high point is on a ridge located at the south end of Tahoe Meadows from which the panorama of shimmering Lake Tahoe with glistening snow-capped peaks in the background confronts you. This is an idyllic spot to enjoy lunch and spend time soaking up the rays on a warm, sunny day.

The tour to the ridgetop is of intermediate difficulty, but only a bit more than three miles round trip. The skiing is not difficult, but the route is not obvious due to a lack of landmarks. The route begins by crossing a section of Tahoe Meadows, enters trees, and then gradually ascends to the ridge. It ends with a short ski along the ridge to the high point.

Ski here after a new snowfall and while it is still cold and the slopes descending toward Incline Creek will afford an outstanding opportunity to link turns. While you may choose simply to yo-yo these slopes, you can also descend from here to Incline Village. This is a one-way tour with a descent from the ridgetop of 2000 feet. The length is a bit more than four miles one-way and is of intermediate-advanced difficulty.

Those eager for an outstanding traverse along ridges should not miss the Tahoe Meadows to Diamond Peak tour; it is only rivaled by its big brother, the tour from Tahoe Meadows to Brockway Summit tour. The tour to Diamond Peak, a bit over five miles and intermediate-advanced difficulty, will likely take longer than you suspect. Pick a fair-weather day so that you can enjoy the abundance of spectacular vistas. It ends with a 1600-foot descent down an intermediate ski run at Diamond Peak Ski Resort.



*Chickadee on Chickadee Ridge (photo by Marcus Libkind)*

## Use the following links to learn more

### **Chickadee Ridge**

[http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours\\_0600/0604\\_tour.htm](http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0600/0604_tour.htm)

### **Tahoe Meadows to Incline Village**

[http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours\\_0600/0605\\_tour.htm](http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0600/0605_tour.htm)

### **Tahoe Meadows to Diamond Peak**

[http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours\\_0600/0611\\_tour.htm](http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0600/0611_tour.htm)



*Top of Chickadee Ridge (photo by Marcus Libkind)*

**Snowlands Network**  
**PO Box 321171**  
**Los Gatos CA 95032**

---

**Snowlands Network**

PO Box 321171  
Los Gatos, CA 95032  
[www.snowlands.org](http://www.snowlands.org)  
info@snowlands.org  
530.265.6424

**Board of Directors**

Marcus Libkind, President &  
Chairman  
Jim Gibson, Vice President &  
Secretary  
Gail Ferrell, Vice President for  
Programs & Outreach, Treasurer  
Colin Wood

**Coordinators**

Jeff Erdoes, Lands Monitoring

**Staff**

Janet Hoffmann, Administrator

**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.*

© 2019 Snowlands Network