

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



Tahoe Meadows

A Winter Wonderland in Need of Care

Tahoe Meadows, straddling the Carson Range and adjacent to the Lake Tahoe Basin, is transected by the Mt. Rose Highway between Reno and Lake Tahoe. In summer Tahoe Meadows is known for its leisurely interpretative nature trail and its links to the Tahoe Rim, Ophir Creek, and Relay Peak trails. But in winter Tahoe Meadows is a recreation free-for-all.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has moved more and more folks seeking recreation outdoors, the parking competition, dangerous traffic situations, and recreation use conflicts are increasing along the Highway 431 corridor. The question is: can we work together to develop a system of shared use, safety, and protection of the area?

At 8,750 feet in elevation, Tahoe Meadows, even in a drought year, has enough snow to entice a visit. Located on the north and south sides of the Mt. Rose Highway, this area receives over 50,000 winter visitors for snow-play, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, winter hiking, and feeding the chickadees.

Adjacent to Tahoe Meadows is the Chickadee Ridge area that is a very popular ski and snowshoe destination. Tahoe Meadows is managed by the Carson Ranger District (CRD), and Chickadee Ridge is managed by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). But nearly all visitors begin their adventure adjacent to Tahoe Meadows on the CRD. Common sense says that the two

areas should be managed together as one.

Neither the CRD nor the LTBMU have the financial resources to convene a team to design a management system for the Tahoe Meadows and Chickadee Ridge area. Any such proposed plan would entail balancing many, often conflicting user requirements. Furthermore, the USFS lacks the capacity to manage the intensive recreation in this area. While the Forest Service is charged with protecting natural resources, they do not have the resources needed to protect the meadows, natural resources, and wildlife from hordes of humans. As the number of overall users increases, so do the conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreationists.

In winter, vehicles compete for parking along both sides of the highway. Additional parking would reduce the land everyone enjoys and increase the number of recreationists already using the area. Pedestrians crossing the highway will be exposed to risk. Safety along this popular stretch of highway must be addressed to prevent accidents, and many near misses have already occurred between pedestrians and motorists.

One problem in both winter and summer is the lack of restrooms along the Mt. Rose Highway and at the Mt. Rose Summit Trail a mile away. Summer restrooms are closed in winter. The result is pollution of the meadow. Dog feces litter the popular snowshoe and skiing areas, with no receptacles for dog waste. Ophir Creek, which spills into Washoe Valley, can be affected by sewage.

The greater Tahoe Meadows area is in dire need of a recreation
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Parking on Hwy 431 west of the summit is over capacity for families sledding, skiers, and snowshoers.

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President's Corner

By Marcus Libkind

Change is in the air. As I write, I'm looking forward to the first significant rain of the season tonight. We need it so badly, and with rain comes snow. I know that we all have our fingers crossed for an ample snow season.

Although we all should remain careful with regards to Covid-19, the vaccine has given many people a new-found sense of freedom. Last winter I only stayed overnight in the mountains twice. This winter I hope that number will increase significantly. I suspect that will be the case for many winter enthusiasts.

Last year the Board of Directors of Snowlands Network decided not to ask formally for donations. Regardless, many of you donated to Snowlands. Thank you for thinking of us in these troubled times.

As in other years, by the end of this year you will be receiving a request to donate. I hope that you will weigh the value in supporting the only organization that specifically advocates for the needs of backcountry skiers and snowshoers throughout California and Nevada. The alternative is not a good one.

Elsewhere in this Bulletin, you will read about the 2022 showing of the Banff Film Festival World Tour. In 2019, Snowlands hosted it to sell-out crowds with more than 2000 attendees. That was literally only weeks before Covid-19 shut

down all events and many businesses. In 2021 the World Tour was cancelled, but you were offered to see the films online. I know that many of you took that opportunity and enjoyed them.

Snowlands is preparing for the World Tour in February 2022 to be hosted in Redwood City. We are hoping that conditions will allow it to proceed as planned. Look for details in the article below and in emails that will be sent when tickets go on sale. This is Snowlands Network's largest fundraising event.

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. During the next year, five winter travel management plans will likely be issued. Snowlands will be reviewing them and determining what action, if any, needs to be taken. Read more about this in the article on page 3. You may not hear from us, but we are there working for you.

From the entire Board of Directors at Snowlands Network, we wish you a wonderful holiday season.

Please be safe.



Banff is Coming Back to Redwood City!

We are bringing back in-person screenings of the the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City on February 17 and 18, 2022. You will have the opportunity to once again join fellow outdoor enthusiasts and enjoy films of



adventure and exploration around the world on a big screen. Whisk down pristine mountain slopes, ride through awe-inspiring terrain, paddle the wildest waters, and climb the highest peaks. Thursday and Friday shows are different, so join us both nights.

The Banff Mountain Film Festival is the premiere international outdoor 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 year Snowlands Network is the sole sponsor of the Redwood City event. All proceeds will help support Snowlands' advocacy work.

Tickets will be available after January 1 at:

www.foxrwc.com/tickets/schedule.php

More information, including a film list, will be coming soon at:

www.snowlands.org/events

All current Covid regulations will be observed including proof of vaccination or negative Covid test and masks.

Sign up for our events alert list using the above link to be notified of when tickets are available and for any schedule changes.

Dates:	Thursday, February 17 and Friday, February 18, 2022
Where:	Fox Theatre 221 Broadway St. Redwood City
Time:	7PM (Doors open at 6:30 PM)
Tickets:	\$25

© Ian Durkin from the film Bottom Turn Island, from the 2020 Banff Mountain Film Festival

Tahoe Meadows (cont)

management plan to improve safety, sanitation, and resource protection. A plan need not be onerous but should identify appropriate rules and regulations to satisfy multiple user interests and increase safety. Potential management strategies could include creating a county, state, or local park. Management should be done by an agency with the appropriate capacity and experience to meet the needs of the area.

There is no easy solution for the challenges along the Mt. Rose Highway at Tahoe Meadows and adjacent areas. The situation is all

made worse by the financial woes that government agencies face. But this is an issue that needs to be addressed. A plan is needed that addresses the complex situation that includes a scenic highway, wetlands, intense winter use, the attraction of the chickadees, and of course, that beautiful snow just a step off the road.

In the meantime, the next time you strap on your skis or snowshoes, put out a handful of birdseed for a chickadee on the ridge, or carry your sled up the hill, think about the future of the meadows you so enjoy.



Photo by Scott Sady

Snowmobile Management Plan Status

The past year has seen only slight progress towards the implementation of over snow vehicle (OSV) management plans for five northern California national forests. These plans were initiated in late 2014 following a lawsuit by Snowlands Network, Winter Wildlands Alliance, and the Center for Biological Diversity concerning the absence of environmental assessment of the effects of grooming snowmobile trails. A second lawsuit by WWA on the more basic question of the impact of snowmobile use on public land in general means that national forests with adequate snowfall for winter recreation now have to implement OSV management plans, including a decision of where OSVs are allowed, where they are prohibited, and which routes may be groomed. The plans will result in an OSV use map for each forest.

Originally, the Forest Service agreed to complete final environmental analyses and decisions for five northern California forests (Plumas, Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, and Stanislaus) by January, 2018. That date was delayed several times at the request of the Forest Service. The final deadline was achieved with the release of the Plumas Final EIS and draft decision in August, 2019.

Following each release of a draft decision, commenters to the plans were able to object to the decisions. Snowlands objected to each of the five plans on the grounds that the plans did not meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the 2015 Travel Rule for motor vehicles on national forests. The problems with the first plan, released for Lassen National Forest in August, 2016, were severe enough that the plan was withdrawn by the Forest Service and the process restarted, necessitating a one-

year delay in the entire process for all five forests (the other four forests intended to use the Lassen plan as a template.)

The revised FEIS and draft Record of Decision (ROD) for Lassen NF were released in March, 2018. Subsequent FEIS and draft ROD plans were released in October 2018 (Eldorado), February 2019 (Tahoe), March 2019 (Stanislaus), and August 2019 (Plumas). Snowlands Network and Winter Wildlands Alliance submitted joint objections to each of these plans and participated in objection resolution meetings along with other stakeholders, including environmental organizations, snowmobile groups, and individuals from both motorized and non-motorized interests. However, the objection process produced little change in the draft decisions.

The Forest Service is required to respond to objections in writing within a certain period, usually ninety days. The objections for the five California forest OSV plans are reviewed by the Region 5 Reviewing Officer. If any of the objections are evaluated as valid, the reviewing officer may generate instructions to the forest on how to modify the plans to bring them into compliance to resolve the objections. It is then up to the forest to modify their draft ROD and issue a final decision and publish an OSV use map to implement the selected plan.

So far, only Stanislaus NF has issued a final record of decision, published in June 2021. They are now waiting for final approval before implementing their plan. We do not expect that this plan will be in place for the upcoming 2021-2022 winter season.

We continue to wait on the other four forests. It is expected that all five plans will be in place for the 2022-2023 season.

Ski Tours in the Sierra Nevada Comes to the Snowlands Website

Ski Tours in the Sierra Nevada started out as a single guidebook, then a series of guides, and finally a website describing more than 200 ski tours in the Sierra Nevada. Now, the latest version of that website is being hosted by Snowlands Network.

Marcus Libkind, the author, with the extensive programming help of Snowlands' Jim Gibson, has revised the previous online guide and made changes to bring it into the 21st century with respect to web publishing techniques. It now uses an enhanced method to pan and zoom high resolution maps instead of Flash. It now uses the conventions adopted by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and the design of each tour permits the viewing of the tour description and map simultaneously on devices as small as a modern cell phone. Even panning and zooming of the high-resolution maps are usable on a small device.

Included for each tour is a button to print the tour

description and the map. The printed map is sized to fit on letter-sized paper and is divided into multiple maps if that is necessary to maintain the high map resolution.

This is still a work in progress. We recently added 35 tours for Lassen Volcanic National Park and vicinity and are working on adding additional tours on the eastside of the Sierra Nevada along Highway 395. Eventually, more tours in Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon national parks will be added. The 255 tour descriptions available now will expand to well over 300.

Please check out what we have done by visiting

tours.snowlands.org

We think you will find the new website clean and easy to navigate. You will be able to find a tour by name, if you know it, or by using a set of interactive maps. Please let us know if you encounter any problems while navigating the site at tours@snowlands.org.

Conflict Reporting Makes a Difference

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 a *use conflict*. A conflict occurs whenever one type of use diminishes the experience of another user. It doesn't matter whether or not the vehicles that caused the conflict were operating legally in a permitted area. Legal or not, motor vehicles can impact

the enjoyment of non-motorized users.

Apathy is our worst enemy. Not reporting conflicts when they occur sends a signal to the Forest Service that there are no problems related to skiers and snowmobilers trying to use the same area. That is why your report of conflict is so important. It sends the message that there is conflict happening and signals to the Forest Service that they need to pay attention, as required by government regulations.

Snowlands Network makes it easy to submit a use conflict report. Use our simple online reporting form to quickly make a record of problems you encounter in the backcountry, particularly those arising from snowmobiles. We will forward the information to the responsible agency and enter it into our database.

Your online report means that authorities receive information they would not otherwise be aware of, and Snowlands gains an ever more detailed picture of where, how, and how often snowmobiles are impacting forest resources and other visitors. Snowlands uses this information in discussions with the responsible agencies. Potential legal challenges to upcoming OSV management plans may depend upon the documentation of use conflicts.

Check out our reporting form here:

www.snowlands.org/conflict

With a few fill-in and check boxes it has never been easier — or more important — to demonstrate that snowmobile activity can seriously impact ordinary, multiple uses of public lands. Please give it a try this season. Join us in making the world a better place for non-motorized winter recreation.



OSV closure violation

Featured Tour

McGowan Lake and Plantation Ridge Loop

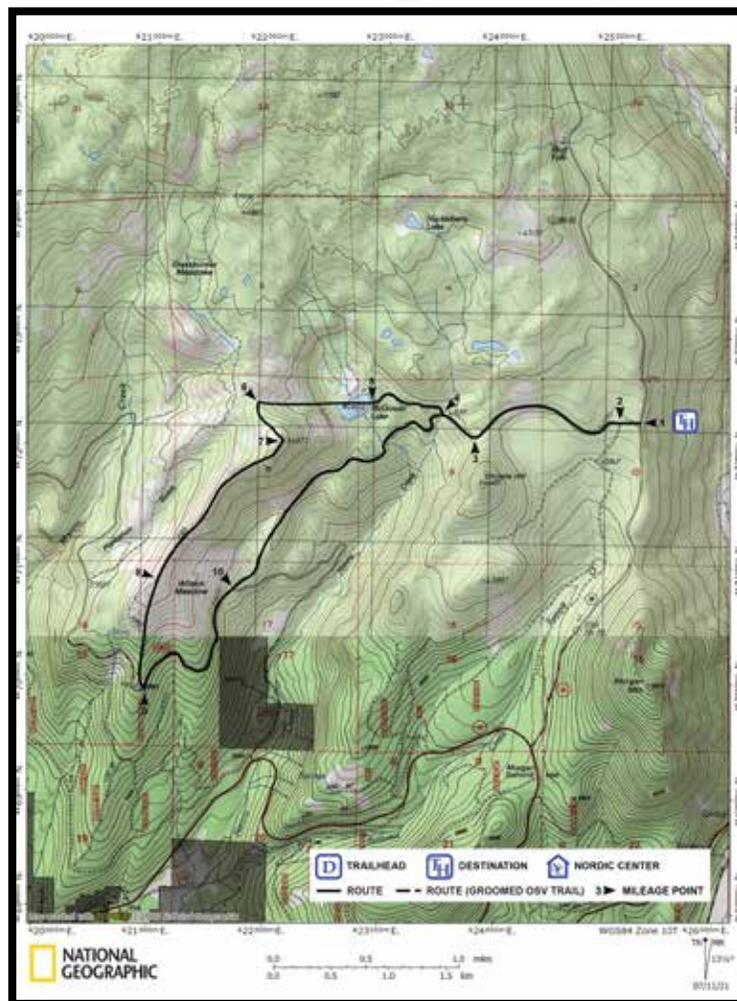
When you think of skiing in Lassen Volcanic National Park, you most likely think of entering on the snow-covered park road and maybe branching off at some point. But skiing on the road is in general confining, it is continuously up hill heading out, and the downhill is often quite fast on the return. But just outside the Southwest Entrance of the Park is a rightfully popular trailhead at McGowan Road.

McGowan Road is the start of a bunch of interesting tours. Some can be combined with tours out of Mineral to create one-way tours. Tours part way and to the summit of spectacular Brokeoff Mountain are possible. Brokeoff Mountain offers an amazing descent.

The McGowan Lake and Plantation Ridge Loop tour offers the best all-around introduction to skiing in this area. It includes the tour over a road to McGowan Lake and a traverse of Plantation Ridge, and most of the distance traveled forms a loop. The fine vistas



Skiing on Plantation Ridge



include Brokeoff Mountain, Lassen Peak, and Mt. Conard.

The loop tour to the lake and ridge is 8.1 miles round trip and has an elevation change of ± 1250 feet. It is rated advanced intermediate in difficulty, but there are alternatives if that is a bit too difficult.

The tour to McGowan Lake is only 3.4 miles round trip with an elevation change of ± 300 feet and is rated advanced beginner.

Plantation Ridge can also be reached without visiting McGowan Lake and thereby avoiding the steep climb from the lake to the ridge. This reduces the difficulty of the tour to intermediate. But if you ski to the highest and farthest point on the ridge, Peak 6647, the tour is longer and there is more elevation change than the loop tour. Alas, it is not necessary to ascend to the summit of Peak 6647 to enjoy the great views. Ski just part of the ridge and then turn around.

Use the following links to learn more

McGowan Lake and Plantation Ridge

McGowan Lake

Plantation Ridge

tours.snowlands.org/tours/00/0012_tour.htm

tours.snowlands.org/tours/00/0011_tour.htm

tours.snowlands.org/tours/00/0013_tour.htm

Truckee Donner Land Trust Completes New Frog Lake Backcountry Huts

In July 2021, the Truckee Donner Land Trust (TDLT) announced it is accepting reservations for the 2021-2022 winter season for three new backcountry huts and the renovation of an existing historic lodge on its newly acquired Frog Lake property. This property, situated above the Euer Valley a mile east of Castle Peak and a mile west of the Tahoe Donner Cross-Country area, had been family-owned since it was purchased from the Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1930s. TDLT completed its purchase of the land in June 2020. The acquisition was yet another piece in the puzzle of TDLT and Northern Sierra Partnership's "Checkerboard Initiative," which is an effort to preserve the former Transcontinental Railroad land grant private lands, which alternate with Forest Service land in a checkerboard pattern in this area.

Consistent with its other land acquisitions, TDLT made the area accessible to the public and made various public access and recreation improvements. In this instance, the land is particularly valuable to skiers and snowboarders. The site is the home of the famed Frog Lake Cliffs, a popular feature with skiers looking for challenging terrain. The lake features picturesque cross-country touring and snowshoeing along Frog Lake and the surrounding area.

To improve accessibility, the TDLT built its first overnight huts. The huts will open to the public for the first time on December 21, 2021. The three huts – the Albert M. Rockwood Hut (sleeps 8 divided between two suites), Morgan Family Foundation Hut (sleeps 4 divided between two suites), and Ted R.'s Hut (sleeps 8) – are available for reservation on the TDLT website:

www.truckeedonnerlandtrust.org/frog-lake-huts

The huts are booked in blocks of nights: Thursday through Sunday, Sunday through Tuesday, and Tuesday through Thursday. They are

heated, have flush toilets, have hot running water, and have outlets to charge mobile phones and similar devices. The Eschenbach Backcountry House serves as a communal lodge with a kitchen, fireplace, and lounge area.

There are three main locations from which to access Frog Lake in the winter (see <https://www.truckeedonnerlandtrust.org/s/Frog-Lake-Winter-Access-Final-Document.pdf> for more information.) Castle Peak Sno-Park is one with which most local skiers will be familiar. This route ascends Castle Valley and accesses the Castle Peak ridgeline to the east of the peak itself. Skiers then continue to the top of Frog Lake Cliffs and then contour north to a notch in the ridgeline to access the huts. A shorter variation on this tour is to arrange to be picked up and dropped off at the westbound Donner Summit Rest area. The second route ascends Johnson Canyon from the Donner Lake Interchange area, gains the ridge at the head of Euer Valley from the south, and then contours through the headwaters area of the South Fork of Prosser Creek before accessing Frog Lake from the southeast. This route is mostly below tree line. Finally, the third option is to ascend Euer Valley from the Tahoe Donner Cross-Country Ski Area at the end of Alder Creek Road. However, skiers must pay for a day or season pass to travel through this area.

Suggested touring destinations around the new Frog Lake huts include the obvious Castle Peak-area destinations (Castle, Round Valley, Andesite, etc.) However, given that one need not start from the road, destinations farther into the backcountry are much more reasonable, including Paradise Lake, Warren Lake, Basin Peak, and Red Mountain. We applaud the TDLT for acquiring this land, opening it to the public, and expanding backcountry opportunities in California



Snow What?

Will we have a killer snowfall this year or another drought?

The last two summers have been brutal in the Western US. Smoke from rampant wildfires filled the skies, driving us indoors or running for places to escape. During the summer of 2021, the Reno-Tahoe region of the Sierra Nevada mountains had perhaps the most toxic air of anywhere in North America due to smoke from ongoing wildfires to the north, south, and west¹.

That is because in 2000, the Western U.S. entered the beginning of what scientists call a megadrought — the second worst in 1,200 years — triggered by a combination of a natural dry cycle and human-caused climate change².

What does this mean for us in the West? Undoubtedly, we must pay close attention to water availability and water use and be cognizant of weather predictions.

Which brings us to the point: What about the snow? Will there be a ski season this year, should we just hang it up?

Let's start with some good news. An *atmospheric river* hit the Sierra Nevada in late October 2021. Donner Summit on Interstate 80 hit a record for October snowfall with 16 inches reported for the UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab. That promises to set a good base layer for backcountry skiing, if



it continues to snow³. From first hand experience, I can tell you it was heavy, wet, sticky snow that was a challenge to slog through when not falling through weak layers over vegetation. Nevertheless, totally beautiful.

The future winter weather is a bit iffy, however. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicts that La Niña will return this winter, making for wetter than average conditions for the northern portion of the country and warmer than average temperatures for the southern US. We might see, at least in the Tahoe Region of the Sierra Nevada, more wet and heavy snow. But it could also result in high pressure system, resulting in sunny dry days.

So now onto the bad news. Snowpack is below normal⁴. Hot and dry conditions in both California and Nevada brought snowpack levels to an historical low in 2015⁵. The *snow water equivalent*, the measure of water contained in the snowpack, is dropping on the average each year.

More bad news is that some of the area hit by the Caldor fire are, and will remain, off limits to backcountry skiing. This is a necessary precaution on several levels, and one that may portend further restrictions of other fire-devasted areas.

As for the prediction...well...keep your fingers crossed.

— Gail Ferrell



Snowshoers at Tahoe Meadows off the Mt. Rose Highway Oct 27, 2021.

1 <https://www.sfgate.com/renotahoe/article/tahoe-air-quality-worst-north-america-16406644.php>

2 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/drought-western-united-states-modern-history/>

3 <https://www.sfgate.com/renotahoe/article/second-snowiest-october-in-Tahoe-16565871.php>

4 <https://www.dri.edu/drought-conditions-intensify-across-california-and-nevada/>

5 <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/world-of-change/SierraNevada>

'Tis the Season of Giving



On November 3, 2011, Snowlands Network filed a lawsuit against the US Forest Service alleging that they failed to perform the necessary review of the environmental impacts of the California Over Snow Vehicle Program prior to the issuance of permits to groom lands under their jurisdiction. Little did we suspect that the lawsuit would expand in an agreed settlement that included winter travel management on five forests in California and eventually winter travel management on all forests in the U.S. that support winter recreation.

Ten years later we are now seeing the first plans for winter travel management. But that does not mean the work is done. In the coming years we will be reviewing the plans and determining if they are adequate and meet the letter of the law. In addition, Snowlands continues its efforts to ensure that commercial development of our

public lands is not done at the expense of the public's right to free access to lands and recreational opportunities.

To keep going, we need your financial support. Please step up and do your part to support our organization so that we can continue to represent your interests. Most of our advocacy work is done on a volunteer basis, but there is outreach, fundraising, legal, and administrative functions that need funding to enable us to continue to work on your behalf.

Many of you have been loyal supporters for many years and will be receiving mailed requests for your continued support, which we greatly appreciate. For those of you who have yet to give, please consider making as generous a contribution as you can afford by going to our website now at www.snowlands.org/donate.

Thank you and best wishes for a fantastic snow season!

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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.