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We promote wilderness values.
We preserve and protect our public lands.*



Snowmobile Management Plan Update

If reading this article gives you a feeling of *déjà vu*, it is understandable. Little has happened this past year in the context of snowmobile management plans for Northern California, and this article may appear to be a reprint of a similar article in last year’s newsletter. In the past year two Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) plans have been finalized with the issuance of an Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM), one forest has published a Proposed Action for a new management plan, another unit has a plan in the works, while three near-finalized plans languish in bureaucratic limbo. However, none of these developments have made much of a difference on the ground, and the regulatory environment this upcoming season will be very similar to that of last year. Nevertheless, it is worth knowing what has changed, what has not, and what may be on the horizon affecting your experience in the backcountry of California national forests.

Stanislaus

Stanislaus NF issued their decision on a snowmobile management plan in July 2021. Not until January 2022 did they publish an OSVUM, the map that makes it official where snowmobiles may go and where they are prohibited. At that point the motor vehicle closures specified by the decision were legally in effect, and snowmobilers that strayed into closed areas could be cited.

The Stanislaus decision closed much of the Eagle/Night Near-Natural areas in Pacific Valley east of Lake Alpine that had previously been used by snowmobiles without fear of citation despite being designated closed to motor vehicles in the Forest’s land management plan. However, these areas are too far from the nearest parking at the Lake Alpine Sno-Park to benefit most backcountry skiers. Smaller, more accessible areas were closed at Big Meadow, Lake Alpine, and at Herring Creek Road along Highway 108 north of Pinecrest.

Last season (2022-2023) it was apparent that the new regulations were mostly being ignored and little was being done for public education or enforcement of the closures. This year, however, Snowlands Network is working with Stanislaus Forest along with Winter Wildlands Alliance and Tread Lightly to install

informational signs at trailheads and Sno-Parks and to distribute a map of the marked trails in the Pinecrest area at the Gooseberry and Crabtree trailheads. (Snowlands created a map of this area years ago, but the Forest declined to distribute it. The map is still available on the Snowlands website www.snowlands.org).

Snowmobile organizations filed a lawsuit in opposition to the Stanislaus plan, claiming that the Forest Service was acting arbitrarily in closing areas that had been used by snowmobiles for decades and for imposing an arbitrary minimum snow depth requirement. There has been no progress in this lawsuit since it was filed in April 2023, but we expect some movement in the first part of 2024. Issues such as wildfires and pandemics always take precedence over recreation conflicts.

Lassen

Lassen issued a final decision on its OSV plan in July, 2022, but did not issue an OSVUM, so the travel restrictions for OSVs were not in effect during the 2022-2023 season. Sometime this summer Lassen put an OSVUM on their website with little fanfare or publicity. Since the decision has been signed by the Forest Supervisor and the map is now publicly available, the regulations go into effect immediately for the 2023-2024 season. However, with the lack of publicity, snowmobilers will justifiably be able to claim ignorance of new rules. It remains to be seen how much public education and plan enforcement Lassen will do this season.

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President's Corner

There is a lot to be thankful for as we enter another winter. Most people are not as worried about Covid as in the past due to the effectiveness of vaccinations. We are freer to travel, and you are probably looking forward to a banner snow year. And that's the other good news. With a prediction of an El Niño year, we are looking at the possibility of a hearty snowfall. That's good for all winter sports and also for California's water supply.

Snowlands Network and its predecessor the Nordic Voice date back to the mid-1980s when a group of concerned skiers banded together to create an organization that would advocate for the interests of the non-motorized winter recreation community. Four of the original organizers are still guiding its efforts. But after 40 years, it is clear to all that younger players are needed to carry the organization into the future. With every year the need becomes more urgent.

By Marcus Libkind

Please contact Snowlands at contact@snowlands.org if you want to learn more about the opportunities to steward us into the future. We are also open to your thoughts on where we can improve. Maybe you are interested in adding an additional focus to our work.

I am also the author of *Ski Tours in the Sierra Nevada*. Once a printed guidebook, it is now in its second incarnation on the internet. A great deal of effort by Jim Gibson and myself has gone into the latest version. We are interested in your thoughts about it – good, bad or where it can use improvement. You can find the tours on the web here:

tours.snowlands.org

Best wishes for the holidays and the New Year.



Banff Returns to Redwood City in March

Join us in our 19th year of hosting the The Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour, which will again take place at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City on March 8th and 9th, 2024.

Traveling to remote vistas, analyzing topical environmental issues, and bringing audiences up-close and personal with adrenaline-packed action sports, the 2023/2024 World Tour is an exhilarating and provocative exploration of the mountain world. Join fellow outdoor enthusiasts for entirely different programs on Friday and Saturday nights.

Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival is one of the largest and most prestigious mountain festivals in the world! Hot on the heels of the Festival that is held every fall in beautiful Banff,

Alberta, the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour hits the road. The Banff World Tour celebrates amazing achievements in outdoor storytelling and filmmaking worldwide.

From the over 400 entries submitted into the Festival each year, award-winners and audience favorites are among the films that are carefully selected in the 2 programs that we will show.

Snowlands Network is sponsoring the event, and all proceeds will help support Snowlands' advocacy work. We will be working with local sponsors to bring you some great prizes along with those provided by the World Tour sponsoring organizations.

More information including film lists, when available, may be found at:

www.snowlands.org/events

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram for previews and film clips. All current COVID regulations will be observed.



Dates:	Friday, March 8 and Saturday, March 9, 2024
Where:	Fox Theatre 221 Broadway St Redwood City
Time:	7PM (Doors open at 6:30 PM)
Tickets:	\$25 Available after Jan 5 at foxrwc.com/event-schedule

Virtual Backcountry Film Festival

Snowlands Network is bringing you the opportunity to see the Backcountry Film Festival over the holidays for only \$20



An affordable gift for yourself or your family and friends!

You can purchase your private viewing and watch in the comfort of your home, on your phone or at your friend's place. You can also gift a showing to your remote friends or relatives so that they enjoy it too.

The films, all independently produced, range from outrageous to wild to scientific to personal. There is a film to touch every heart.

Purchase your \$20 passes now at www.snowlands.org/bcff

Watch the film festival any time between Dec 15th and Jan 15th, 2024.

Make it a quiet evening or bring in the whole gang!

This year's films include backcountry skiing in California, British Columbia, Utah and New Hampshire. There are also films of current topical interest on protection of whitebark pines and a positive effect from wildfires on backcountry skiing. For more information and film lists, visit our website: www.snowlands.org/events

Your purchase helps to support the work of Snowlands Network and the Winter Wildlands Alliance.

Featured Tours

Rock Creek and More

Unless you live on the eastside of the Sierra, the trek to the Mammoth Lakes area is rather long. But it is worth it. Plan on spending a bunch of days in the Mammoth area and enjoy the many opportunities to backcountry ski and maybe a day or two of mid-week alpine skiing. There is also a pay-for-use groomed track system in the Mammoth Lakes area.

South of Mammoth Lakes and southwest of Tom's Place is the gateway to Little Lakes Valley. This is a very popular area, and rightly so. The snow-covered Rock Creek Road climbs gradually up a glacial valley beyond the Rock Creek Sno-Park for 4.7 miles to its terminus at Mosquito Flat. But the best lies just beyond.

Not far south of Mosquito Flat, Little Lakes Valley opens up before you. The massive Sierra Crest looms before you rising to more than 13,000 feet. It is very easy skiing up the valley and the terrain is wide-open.

In the 2.0 miles from Mosquito Flat to Long Lake you will cross or pass Mac, Marsh, Heart and Box lakes. All the time,

up the valley and to the sides, looms the Sierra Crest. The online tour ends at Long Lake (see links below), but you can easily continue beyond though the terrain begins to climb. An interesting destination is Morgan Pass from which you will have an impressive view of your route up Little Lakes Valley.

Rock Creek may not keep you busy for an extended stay in the area. A historically popular area for cross-country and backcountry skiing along Highway 395 and north of Mammoth Lakes is west of Deadman Summit. Here the Snowlands Network's online tour guide describes 12 tours of varied difficulty. You can explore Obsidian Dome and Wilson Butte. Making the loop around Obsidian Dome is a particularly rewarding experience. Some of the trails are marked by the Forest Service and groomed intermittently.

Those seeking more adventure can head farther into the backcountry with destinations such as June Mountain, Glass Creek Meadow and Deadman Creek.

Use the following links to learn more

Deadman Summit Area Tours

tours.snowlands.org/find_tours/find_deadman_summit.htm

Rock Creek Tour

tours.snowlands.org/tours/20/2004_tour.htm

Obsidian Dome Loop Tour

tours.snowlands.org/tours/19/1908_tour.htm

Glass Creek to Deadman Creek Tour

tours.snowlands.org/tours/19/1909_tour.htm

June Mountain – Glass Creek

tours.snowlands.org/tours/19/1905_tour.htm

Meadow Loop Tour



Little Lakes Valley and the Sierra Crest

Castle Valley Trailhead Parking Planned

On June 8th of this year, Tahoe National Forest held a public meeting to discuss their plans to address the parking situation at the Castle Valley trailhead located just north of Interstate 80 at Donner Summit. The State of California maintains a state-funded Sno-Park there, but the parking is on the south side of the freeway along a narrow frontage road, and getting to the Castle Valley trailhead involves a risky walk past two freeway off-ramps. This area is extremely popular with skiers and snowshoers and suffers severe congestion on weekends and holidays.

To improve the situation, Tahoe NF would like to construct a parking lot on the north side of the freeway and has undertaken a design of the proposed facility.

The planning phase of the project is being funded by the California State Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (OHMVRD). Tahoe NF has contracted with the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) to perform the design phase for the site. Once the design is complete, Tahoe NF may apply to the OHMVRD for funds to build the facility. SYRCL hopes to have the design phase finished by Winter 2024.

Due to geographical and economic constraints, the lot will be located along the existing unpaved road between Interstate 80 and Castle Valley. This is the current location of a green gate and user signage dividing motorized and non-motorized routes. The lot will be limited in size to 80 vehicles or fewer. The access road to the site,



Aerial photo of the site with a graphic showing the footprint of the proposed parking lot at Castle Valley Trailhead



Project Location Map

which is a Cal-Trans right-of-way, will need to be widened to allow vehicles to pass.

The new parking lot will not replace the current Sno-Park, which is expected to remain. The Forest Service cannot say at this point if the new parking area will become a Sno-Park.

The facility will be designed for both summer and winter use. Separate winter trailheads will be provided for motorized and non-motorized recreational users. Skiers and snowshoers will exit the lot to the north towards Castle Valley, while snowmobiles will travel to the west on a trail leading to the west side of Andesite Ridge.

Because the funding is being provided by the OHMVRD, the plan must include provision for motorized recreation. One of the questions to be answered in the design phase is what percentage of the available parking space will be allocated to motor vehicle trailers.

Another issue under consideration is whether to leave as many natural features such as trees and rocks as possible at the site and plan the parking spaces around them, or remove those features to increase the amount of available parking.

Public input for both of these issues was sought at the public meeting and also through an online survey. The survey closed on June 19.

There is more information about this project on the SYRCL website:

yubariver.org/post-tags/castle-valley

To be kept informed of the progress of this much-needed upgrade to the parking situation at Donner Summit, sign up for our email alert list:

www.snowlands.org/alerts

Snowmobile Management Plan Update (continued from page 1)

Tahoe

The Tahoe decision is still delayed while unspecified issues are being worked out. They do not plan to issue anything this season, but hope to have an OSV Use Designation plan in place for the 2024-2025 season (*Editor's note: exact same paragraph as last year with the dates updated!*)

Eldorado

The Eldorado decision is still unannounced, just as last year. The forest has a new Supervisor, which may account for some of the delay. When contacted, a Forest Service spokesperson said “critical fire recovery NEPA for the Caldor Fire and Mosquito Fire as well as, sustained vacancies with key specialists” as causes for the delay. No estimate of the completion date for the plan was offered.

Plumas

Plumas NF has placed its OSV plan “on hold.” When contacted, a spokesperson for the Forest explained that forest treatment and fire prevention measures were occupying most the Forest’s personnel resources, and they do not have the people available to make any progress on completing the OSV plan. They will not have their new regulations in place this upcoming season, and seemed doubtful about 2024-2025 as well.

Lake Tahoe Basin

The LTBMU started work on an OSV designation plan in 2021. They had hoped to issue a Draft Environmental Impact Statement out by October of this year, but did not meet that schedule.

Inyo

Inyo NF has issued a Scoping Phase document with a Proposed Action. They held a public meeting on September 21, 2023 to discuss the plan. The proposal was taken largely from the current condition on the forest with a few additional OSV closures. As such, the plan does not benefit the nonmotorized community as much as was hoped. Snowlands Network signed onto comments on the plan as submitted by Winter Wildlands Alliance, whose director, David Page, lives in the area and is knowledgeable about the issues and familiar with many of the stakeholders.

Stay Involved

To learn more about these snowmobile management plans as they develop, sign up for the Snowlands Alert List at

www.snowlands.org/alerts

When finalized these plans, will be the rule for snowmobile recreation for the next 20-30 years. If you are affected by the presence of snowmobiles in the backcountry, please get involved.

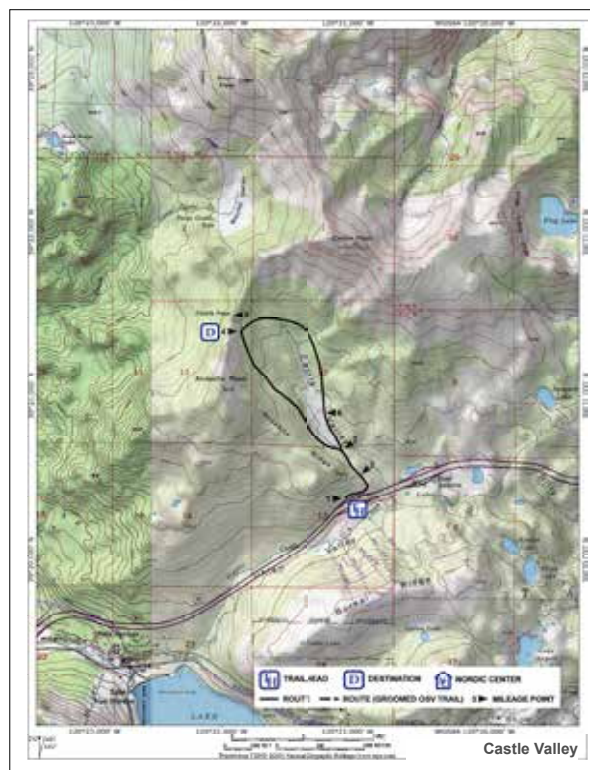
GPS-Ready Maps Available Online

Marcus Libkind has been adding tours to his online backcountry ski guide collection for many years. There are now almost 300 tours available for free at tours.snowlands.org. Originally formatted to be viewed on computer screens, the tours have been reformatted for the smaller screens of smartphones and mobile devices.

Now, the tour maps have been converted to a geotagged PDF format. When imported into the appropriate GPS-enabled smartphone app, the maps may be used to track one’s progress along a tour route.

The maps for all 291 tours now on the site have been converted and are ready to be used. Each tour web page has a download link that will send a PDF version of the full tour map to your computer or mobile device. This map can be loaded into smartphone apps such as Avenza (www.avenza.com). Your position on the tour map will then be shown, and you can track your progress along the route.

If you would like to use this feature of the tour guides, you should be aware that the maps are new this year and have not been checked for errors in the field. Please do not follow the maps blindly without assessing the risks and the terrain. If you do encounter any problems using the maps, or have any suggestions for how they might be improved, please let us know by email to tours@snowlands.org.



Castle Valley tour map now available for download at tours.snowlands.org

Smartphone Apps for Ski Touring

By Jim Gibson

With the advent of GPS-enabled smartphones, it is now possible to use a mobile device app to navigate in the backcountry. For many years, I have used a hand-held GPS device to follow routes, mark locations, and keep a log of my travels. This involves purchasing maps, creating waypoints and routes, and downloading them to the device from a computer configured with the right software. I still do that, but now I have started using my iPhone on occasion instead. With the right phone app, the whole process becomes much easier. Now that GPS-enabled ski tour maps are available on the Snowlands website, I will be using my phone more for ski trips.

While there are many such smartphone apps available, one that lets me download and use my own maps is the Avenza app, available on Apple and Android app stores. Other apps require you to use only their maps available through the app. Avenza does have maps available through their Map Store, accessible from within the app. However, it also allows you to import maps from a variety of sources: file sharing from a computer using iTunes, downloading from a cloud service such as iCloud or Dropbox, importing from a map stored on the phone, or directly by entering a URL.

The easiest way to get the map of a ski tour in Avenza on an iPhone is to bring up a tour on the Backcountry Ski Tours website tours.snowlands.org using the Safari browser. Tap on the download icon (down arrow over bar) shown on the screen in the menu bar. The PDF map will be downloaded by your browser and displayed on the screen. Tap on the share icon at the bottom of the screen (square with up arrow), and look for the Avenza app icon in the list of apps that appears. If it is not in the list, scroll the list of apps all the way to the right where you will see a More option. Tap on that, and you will get a longer list of apps that should include Avenza. Tap on the Avenza app icon. The tour map will be sent to the Avenza app and shown in the list of imported maps. Tap on the map in the list and it will be shown on the screen and ready to be used for navigation.

The procedure on an Android-based smartphone is similar, but with some differences that vary depending upon which browser you are using. For example, in the Chrome browser, tapping

on the download icon in the tour description will bring up a list of apps to which the PDF file may be dispatched. Tap on the Avenza app in that list and proceed as above. In Firefox, the downloaded map will be shown on the screen, and you can tap the Open In App icon to send the map to Avenza.

The free version of Avenza allows you a maximum of three maps imported in this way. The paid "Plus" version, at \$33/year, allows an unlimited number of imported maps.

Here are some more tips for using your phone for navigating while skiing:

- Import all of the maps you will need on your trip, as there may not be cell service where you are going.
- Once you have imported all the maps you need, put your phone into airplane mode to maximize battery life.
- Carry an auxiliary battery (power bank) to extend battery life.
- Pause the app when you are not traveling to save power.

There are several other smartphone apps that can be used for

traveling in the backcountry. Here is a partial list (the ones I have heard about). Most of them have free versions with payments required to unlock additional functionality:

- Gaia GPS (www.gaiagps.com)
Useful for tracking distance and elevation gained on a hike or ski. Can display map overlays in layers for geology, wildfires, etc. Offers many specialized maps in its map store.
- OnX Backcountry (www.onxmaps.com)
Started as hunting platform with a land ownership display function. Now has a ski module for planning backcountry ski routes.
- CalTopo (www.caltopo.com)
A powerful mapping tool used by recreationists and wilderness professionals alike. Popular with SAR teams, it allows for all sorts of slope shading, selectable terrain mapping, and layering. The subscription version provides satellite imagery overlays, county assessor information, and other additional features.
- Fat Map (www.fatmap.com)
Provides three-dimensional views of terrain similar to Google Earth. Selectable summer and winter views. Excellent for visualizing avalanche runs and helping steer clear of suspect terrain. Now owned by fitness company Strava. Paid version included with Strava subscription.



Avenza tour map of Castle Valley ski tour on 5.4" iPhone screen

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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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