



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



# Snowmobile Management Update

The most significant event that occurred in 2024 for Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) management in California was that Tahoe National Forest released its OSV Use Designation plan. Tahoe thus became the third of five California Forests to complete an OSV plan as required by a 2013 settlement of lawsuits concerning snowmobile trail grooming and use designation. The plans for Eldorado and Plumas National Forests have been put on hold for now.

Here is a summary of the current state of snowmobile management on California forests.

## Stanislaus

Stanislaus published an Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM) in January 2022. This year, Snowlands has been working with Winter Wildlands Alliance and Tread Lightly to develop and fund maps, brochures, and trailhead signs to inform the public about the designated areas for motorized and non-motorized recreation. While the signs are ready to be installed at the trailheads, Stanislaus NF has encountered delays in the installation. We don't know when the signs will appear, but hopefully sometime this season.

Snowmobile organizations filed a lawsuit in opposition to the Stanislaus plan. There was no movement in this lawsuit this past year.

## Lassen

Lassen issued an OSVUM in the summer of 2023. Winter Wildlands Alliance is working with Lassen to develop maps, brochures, and signs for the public.

## Tahoe

Tahoe issued its final decision on an OSV plan in May 2024 and published an OSVUM in December. With the release of the OSVUM, the OSV use designations go into effect immediately. See the article "Tahoe Snowmobile Plan Released" on page 6 in this issue for more details about the plan and its implementation.

## Eldorado

Work on the Eldorado OSV plan has been temporarily discontinued due to the lack of personnel and the priority given to recovery from the Caldor Fire. In addition, the Forest Service currently has

budgetary problems and has announced a hiring freeze for this fiscal year. Therefore, we do not expect to see any final decision on OSV management plans or an OSVUM published for a year or more.

## Plumas

Similarly to the Eldorado, Plumas NF has placed its OSV plan on hold while it recovers from recent wildfires.

## Lake Tahoe Basin

The LTBMU started work on an OSV designation plan in 2021. They are planning on publishing a draft environmental impact statement in early 2025 with an opportunity for public comments at that time.

## Inyo

Inyo has issued a Scoping Phase document with a Proposed Action. They held a public meeting in September, 2023 to discuss the plan. Snowlands submitted comments along with Winter Wildlands Alliance, Friends of Inyo, Calwild, and the Sierra Club.

## Stay Involved

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

[www.snowlands.org/alert](http://www.snowlands.org/alert)

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.

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# President's Corner

By Marcus Libkind



My daughter Sophie was born just about the time Snowlands Network got off the ground. I was a backcountry ski addict, and so it was inevitable that she would be introduced to backcountry skiing. At a very early age our trips to the Sierra would go something like this: Friday downhill ski, Saturday backcountry ski, and Sunday sledding. But the day I remember vividly was skiing out with her from Peter Grubb Hut. At Castle Pass we paused for a snack as we gazed out on the downhill ski areas to the south. Then, out of the blue she said, "daddy, I like backcountry skiing better than downhill skiing." What a joy to hear.

To celebrate the occasion, I purchased child downhill skis and modified them so that they became no-wax skis. With her new skis in hand, at the ripe old age of 11 years old, she learned to telemark, and the next weekend skied into

Ostrander Hut in very deep powder snow. To top that off, the next day she telemarked off the back side of Horse Ridge down a slope that was too steep for me to tackle. From that point forward, I have always been trying to catch-up with her.

Now she has a two-year daughter. I know that baby Havah will be introduced to hiking and backpacking. I'm not sure about backcountry skiing because my daughter has never gone without me. My dream is for the three of us to ski together while I am still able.

Happy Holidays from a proud father and grandfather. I hope that you will take the extra energy to take your children to the mountains and cater to their needs, so they will learn to love nature.

## Banff Is Coming to Redwood City in March

Join us in our 20<sup>th</sup> year of screenings of the The Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City on March 7th and 8th, 2025.

Traveling to remote vistas, analyzing topical environmental issues, and bringing audiences up-close and personal with adrenaline-packed action sports the 2024/2025 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 to the Festival each year, award-winners and audience favorites are among the films that are carefully selected in the two programs that we will be showing.

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 at:

[www.snowlands.org/banff](http://www.snowlands.org/banff)

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram for previews. Join us for a night of exhilarating films and benefit Snowlands ongoing work!



Dates:	Friday, March 7 and Saturday, March 8, 2025
Where:	Fox Theatre 221 Broadway St Redwood City
Time:	7PM (Doors open at 6:00 PM)
Tickets:	\$25 Available now at <a href="http://foxrwc.com/event-schedule">foxrwc.com/event-schedule</a>

# Forestdale In Legal Limbo

Skiers and snowshoers visiting the Forestdale Creek area last season were alarmed to see snowmobiles on Forestdale Creek Road, which in past seasons was closed to motorized travel when there was sufficient snow at Hope Valley Sno-Park to allow motorized recreation. This unfortunate situation occurred last season because of a legal interpretation of an agreement between the Forest Service and Alpine County that has been in place since 2007. That agreement includes a seasonal closure of Forestdale Creek Road.

The Forestdale Creek area is located just east of Carson Pass in Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (HTNF). There is a small staging area at Red Lake at the west end of Hope Valley at 7800 feet elevation. Forestdale Creek Road runs south from the staging area for two miles to a bridge crossing Forestdale Creek and then rising to Forestdale Divide, where it crosses the Pacific Crest Trail and continues on to the heavily-used snowmobile touring area around Upper and Lower Blue Lakes. The land immediately around Red Lake and two parcels farther south belong to the State of California and form the Red Lake Wildlife Area. The Mokelumne Wilderness area is located nearby, west of the road. The land east of the road includes some private land parcels. All of the wilderness areas, the state land, and much of the private land are closed to off-road motor vehicle travel.

Hope Valley Sno-Park, located four miles north along Highway 88 from Red Lake, is a popular staging area for snowmobiles, providing access to the Blue Lakes area along Blue Lakes Road. Situated at 7200 feet, there are often periods at the beginning and end of the winter season with insufficient snow cover at the Sno-Park to allow over-snow vehicle (OSV) travel, while Forestdale Creek Road, 600 feet higher, is still usable by snowmobiles.

For many years, the area around Forestdale Creek Road was the scene of conflict between motorized and non-motorized uses. Following administrative appeals and two lawsuits against the Forest Service for not mitigating the conflict, the Forest Service agreed to improve the management of the area in conjunction with Alpine County, which controls the road, as part of an Alpine Winter Recreation Project. The county and forest service agreed

to the following conditions:

- National forest lands west of the road between Red Lake staging area and Forestdale Divide would be permanently closed to motor vehicles.
- Forestdale Creek Road would be closed to snowmobiles whenever there is sufficient snow at the Hope Valley Sno-Park. The agreement gave the Forest Service the right to determine the timing of the road closure, but gave Alpine County the authority to implement the closure in conjunction with the Forest Service.

At the beginning of last season (2023-2024), a review of the forest order intended to close Forestdale Creek Road (and the nearby Burnside Road) led the Forest Service to decide that it does not have the legal authority to close county roads. Therefore, HTNF did not issue the closure order and did not post any closure signs for OSV use at the Red Lake staging area. Neither did Alpine County, so the roads stayed open all season.

Over the summer, HTNF was in discussion with Alpine County on how to manage the closures of Forestdale Creek and Burnside Roads in accordance with the terms of the agreement, which is still in effect. When advised by the Forest Service, Alpine County will issue the closure order, and the Forest Service will be responsible for posting closure signs at the trailhead.

Even when Forestdale Creek Road is open, the land west of the road is closed to motorized vehicles, which must stay on the road between the Red Lake staging area and Forestdale Divide. A permanent informational sign on the road a short distance from the parking lot explaining the conditions under which the road is open was installed years ago and remains there.

Despite the new plan, the road remained open to snowmobiles throughout the Christmas and New Year weekends. Although there was enough snow at the Hope Valley Sno-Park for snowmobiling in the nearby meadow, there were bare patches farther south on Blue Lakes Road, leading the Forest Service to keep Forestdale Creek Road open.

If you would like to comment on this situation, you may write Matt Zumstein, District Ranger, Carson Ranger District, 1536 South Carson St., Carson City, NV 89701.

## We Can Use Your Help in 2025!

With the new year and a new administration we are reaching out to you now to help us continue our work as things change in the coming year.

As you can see from this newsletter, Snowlands Network is still working with other like-minded organizations to protect our snow-covered public recreational lands for the use of all.

We are a small organization operating mostly with dedicated volunteers. We have funded several efforts over the past year, including signage for Stanislaus Winter Recreation and monitoring winter use in the Tahoe area. We also will need funds for the legal battles ahead. Please contribute what you can by mail or via our website at

[www.snowlands.org/join](http://www.snowlands.org/join)

## Hut to Hut: Benson and Bradley Huts

There was a time when there was a plan to build a hut system in the Sierra Nevada that would include a hut near White Rock Lake west of Independence Lake, Peter Grubb Hut, Clair Tappaan Lodge (much more than a hut), Benson Hut, Bradley Hut (has been moved) and Ludlow Hut. Over the years, the huts have become single destinations.

One of the difficulties with the original route was getting around Anderson Peak. Wind often makes the snow conditions on the traverse to the west of the peak very hazardous with the possibility of a 500-foot fall. It was on one of those occasions, when I was held up in Benson Hut, that I noticed a map on the wall with an "emergency escape route" drawn. Years later, after Bradley Hut had been moved to its current location at the headwaters of Pole Creek, the escape route became a crucial part of an amazing two-hut, three-day tour from Sugar Bowl to Pole Creek via Benson and Bradley huts.

The route described in this tour includes miles on the Sierra Crest adorned with sweeping vistas, ever-changing terrain, and navigational challenges. The total distance is only 14 miles one-way and could be skied in one day in the spring. But why rush when the area has so much to offer the visitor.

Day 1 includes the climb to the ridge between

Mt. Lincoln and Anderson Peak. Once on the ridge, it is a rolling traverse of the windswept ridge top with cornices ever present. Benson Hut is located at the base of the north spur of the peak. Actually, finding the hut can pose a problem in a heavy winter when snow can crest over the roof.

Benson Hut is a minimalistic shelter, but the wood stove and bunks make it more than sufficient and cozy for a small group.

Day 2 is by far the most interesting in terms of navigation. From near Benson Hut you descend the emergency escape route until you reach the South Fork of Coldstream Creek. From here the route follows a ridge before traversing open and wooded terrain to the east of Tinker Knob until you arrive at the head of Deep Creek. From here it is an easy climb to a saddle from which you descend into Pole Creek with Bradley Hut not far away. When the snow conditions are right, the descent from the saddle offers amazing terrain for linking turns, and it is worth dropping your pack and yoyo-ing.

Bradley Hut, the newest of the Sierra Club's huts, is relatively spacious.

After the first two days, you will find Day 3 an easy, gradual descent on a road for 5 miles to the terminus of the tour on Highway 89.

**For a map and detailed description of this tour, and many more photos, see:**

**[https://tours.snowlands.org/tours/03/0333\\_tour.htm](https://tours.snowlands.org/tours/03/0333_tour.htm)**



*Skiing the Sierra Crest*

# Castle Valley Parking Lot Design Published

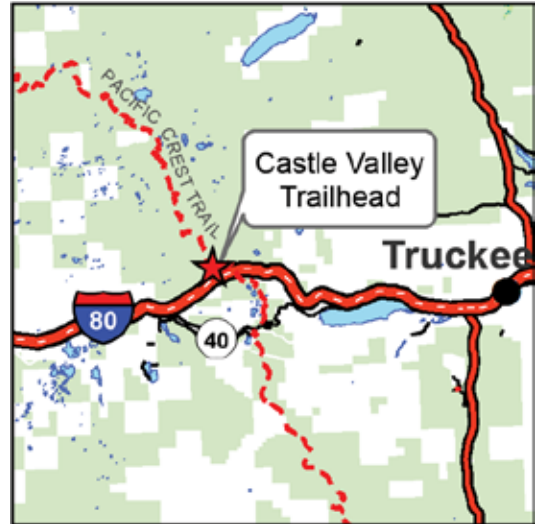
Tahoe National Forest has completed a preliminary design for a new parking lot at the Castle Valley Trailhead located just off Interstate 80 at Donner Summit. A public meeting was held on June 13, 2024 to present the plan to the public and to solicit comments on the design.

The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) was contracted by the Forest Service to do the design work. Their website contains information about the project and a diagram of the proposed design, which they characterize as a “65% design”.

Funding for the design phase was provided by the California State Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (Green Sticker funds). The funds to build the facility have not yet been secured.

The design provides 75 single-vehicle parking spots, 10 trailer spaces, 4 ADA-accessible spots, and restrooms. Natural features such as boulders and trees are preserved as much as possible. The access road will be graded and filled so as not to exceed a 10% slope. Because the area is located on top of numerous granite slabs, the area will be leveled using fill rather than excavation. The design also addresses the presence of wetlands, steep slopes, and the need for drainage of rain water and snow melt.

Site management issues such as snow-plowing and whether to

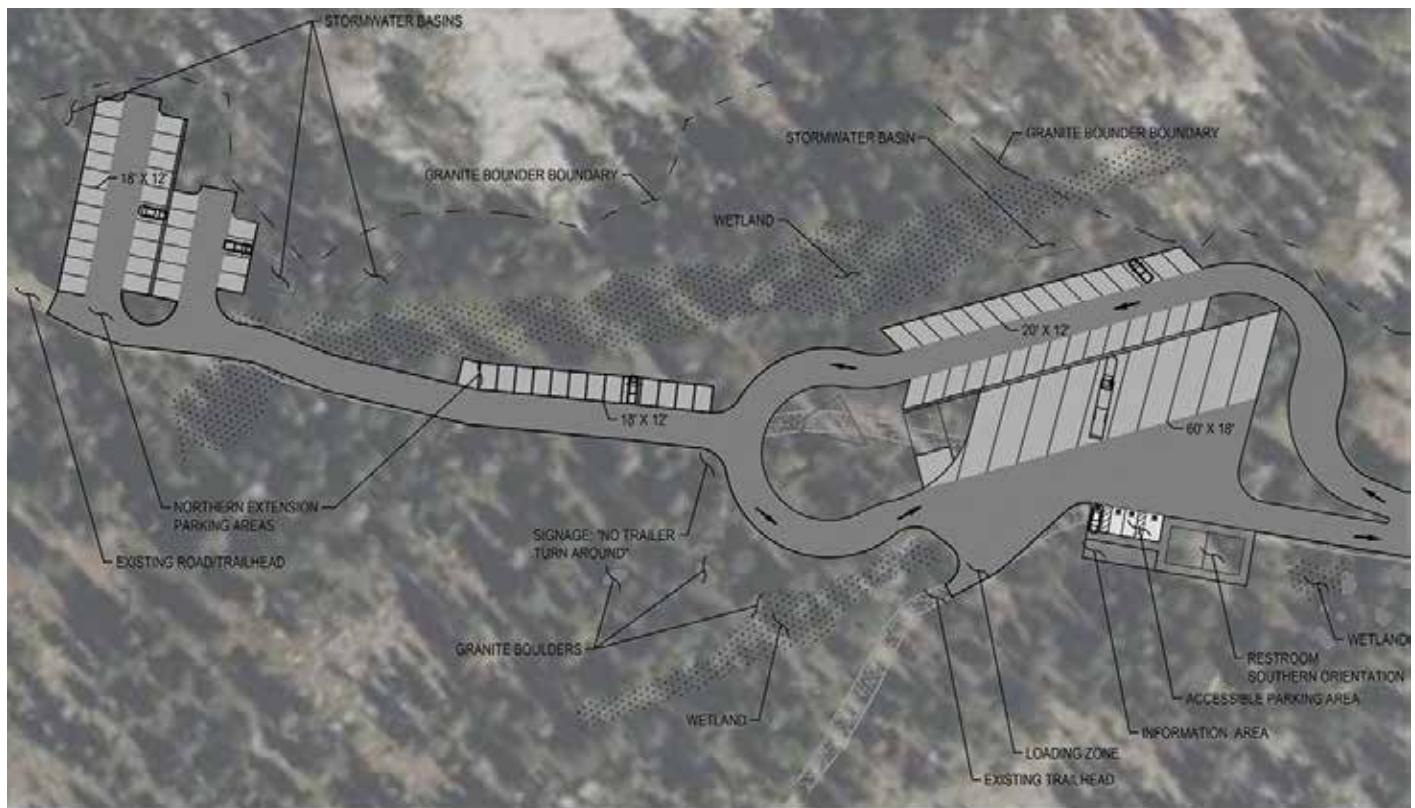


Project Location Map

allow overnight parking were mentioned but not discussed in depth at the meeting. It was emphasized that only the physical design of the site was being presented at this point, and discussion of management issues will occur later.

Information about the design is available from the SYRCL website:

<https://yubariver.org/projects/castle-valley-trailhead-and-parking-area-project>



Preliminary design for the proposed parking lot at Castle Valley Trailhead

# Tahoe Snowmobile Plan Released

Tahoe National Forest issued a final decision on an Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) Use Designation project in May 2024. The plan designates 414,721 acres as open to OSV travel, representing 47.6% of the forest. This is less than the 86.3% of the forest previously open to snowmobiles. However, most of the reduction is due to the plan not designating as open all forest land below 5,000 feet in elevation.

In addition to the cross-country travel areas, the new plan includes 373 miles of designated OSV routes, of which 247 miles are available for grooming. The number of miles actually groomed will depend upon available funds, which are usually limited to those provided by the State of California as part of the Green Sticker program for off-highway vehicle recreation.

Tahoe NF has now released an Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM), which shows where on the forest snowmobiles are allowed to go. With the publication of the OSVUM, the new plan goes into effect immediately. Currently, the OSVUM is only available on the Forest Service website or in the Avenza smart phone app. There are no signs at trailheads or paper copies of the map to distribute. While those are coming, until they are available most visitors will not know there is a new plan in effect, so do not expect every snowmobiler to immediately comply with all of the closures imposed by the new plan.

There were no surprises in the final OSV map, as it was similar to Alternative 2 of the Preliminary Final Environmental Impact Statement that was issued in February 2019.

## Existing Closed Areas

Areas that were closed to snowmobiles before the new plan was adopted continue to be closed, although some have been modified as described below.

### Castle Valley

Castle Valley and Round Valley at Donner Summit will remain closed to OSV use. In addition, the closed area west of Andesite Peak has been expanded and now extends about one and a half miles to the north, just past the peak. The designated OSV route running north from the trailhead through the otherwise closed area remains, giving vehicles access to the open areas to the north. Also, the chutes above Coon Canyon located in the north slope of the ridge between Castle Peak and Frog Lake are now closed to motor vehicles. This is a small, isolated area, but its closure is intended to prevent serious encounters between downhill skiers and high-marking machines.

### Pole Creek

The area around Pole Creek will remain closed to OSV use. The closed area has been extended to include Tinker Knob and Anderson Peak. There is an area designated for OSV use just to the east of the ridge containing those two peaks, but snowmobiles must stay off of the top of the ridge to avoid trespassing onto the Pacific Crest Trail.

### Stepphollow

All of the national forest land north of Highway 20 west of Interstate 80 at Emigrant Gap remains closed to OSV use.

### Yuba Pass

The closed area north of Highway 49 at Yuba Pass has been extended slightly to the east. The designated OSV route running from Yuba Pass through Beartrap Meadow and leading to the large OSV area between Haskell Peak and Gold Lake and Plumas National Forest to the north remains open. Snowmobiles are restricted to the groomed trail in this area.

### Sagehen Experimental Forest

About one third of the Sagehen Experimental Forest will now be open to OSV use. A designated OSV route was created through a small part of the closed area. The Forest Service hopes that by having part of the experimental forest open and part closed, the potential for performing studies on the impact of OSV use may be carried out.

### Independence Lake

The area around the west end of Independence Lake is closed to OSV use because of wildlife habitat protection.

### Kyburz Flat

The small closed area at Kyburz Flat remains closed. The area contains sensitive waterfowl nesting areas. Skiers are asked to stay on the trail system to avoid the nesting sites.

## New Closure Areas

In addition to all land below 5,000 feet elevation, a number of small areas are now closed to snowmobiles.

### Loch Leven Lakes

The area around Loch Leven Lakes is closed to snowmobiles. Unfortunately, this area is practically off-limits to the public as there is a strip of private land between Interstate 80 and the national forest land south of the railroad tracks. For the past several years the landowner at Troy Crossing has prohibited anyone from crossing his land, making it difficult to access this area.

### Boca Reservoir

Boca Reservoir and land adjacent to the southern part of the reservoir are closed. This includes the area between Boca Reservoir and Boca Hill, about one mile southwest of the reservoir. A snowmobile route is designated on Forest Road 73 that connects County Road 894 and County Road 890. Snowmobiling is allowed on the county roads and is not controlled by the Forest Service. The designated route allows snowmobiles to stage at the reservoir and travel to County Road 890 on the west side of the reservoir and access the open OSV area to the north. Snowmobiles are restricted to the road when traveling through this area. The closure of this area is in response to the need for non-motorized areas close to public access.

*(continued on next page)*

# Tahoe Snowmobile Plan *(continued)*

## Hybrid Areas

Two areas are now closed to snowmobile travel but contain one or more designated OSV routes. Neither area gets much non-motorized recreation traffic.

## Calpine

The area between Calpine and Beckwourth Peak is now closed to cross-country OSV travel but contains about 15 miles of designated, ungroomed OSV routes on Forest Road 71 and Money Road. This area is fairly low in elevation, just above 5,000 feet at its lowest.

## Bear Valley

A large area east of Sierraville that contains the Babbitt Peak Research Natural Area and the Smithneck Creek State Wildlife Area is now closed to OSV use except for the designated OSV route on Bear Valley Road (Forest Road 04). The area ranges from 5,400 to 6,800 feet in elevation.

## Pacific Crest Trail

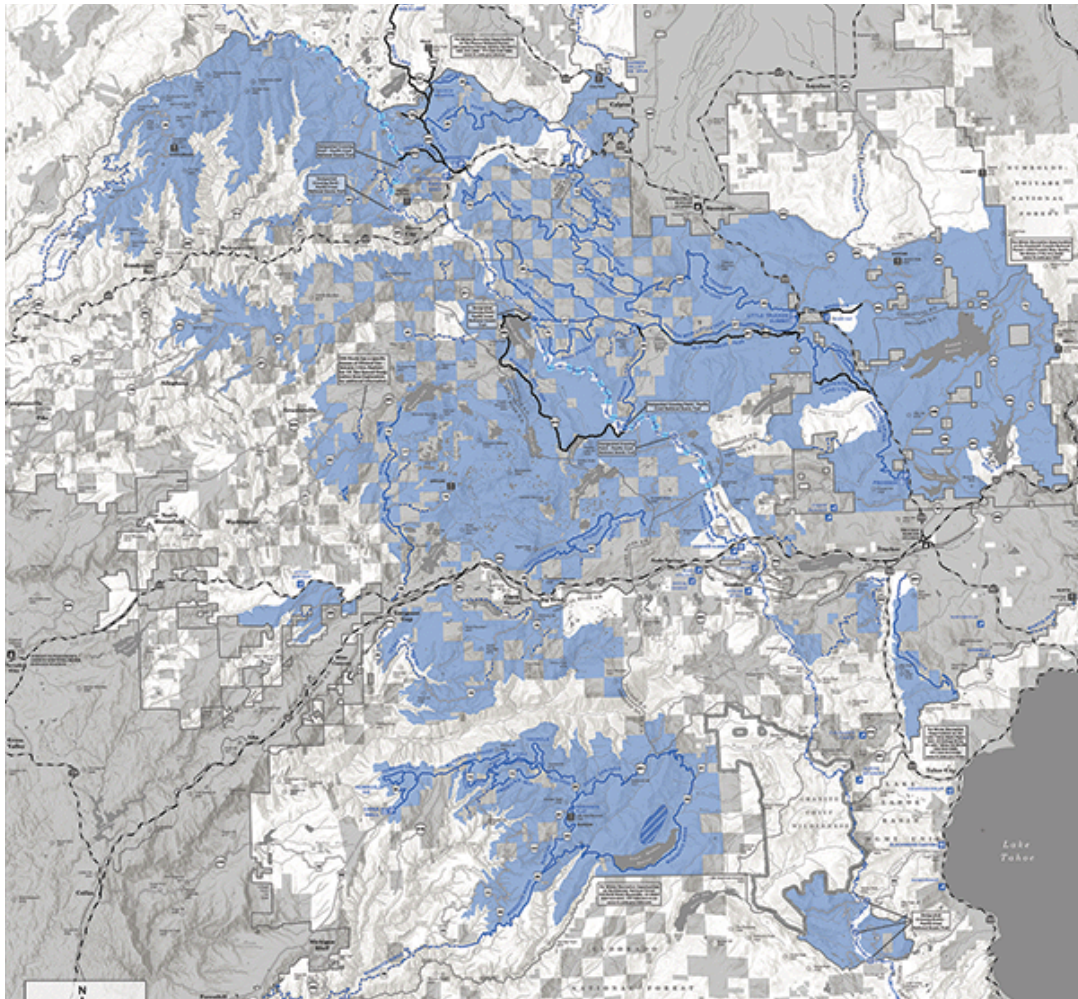
The new plan creates a buffer zone of variable width around the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) for much of its length within the Tahoe NF. As allowed by the PCT regulations, 41 crossings of the PCT are

identified, and snowmobiles will only be allowed to cross the PCT at these points. Nine crossings are on existing roads, and the width of the crossing is the road width or about 14 feet. Thirty-two OSV crossings are not on roads and will be up to 0.25 miles in width, with the exception of three of the crossings that are up to 0.34 miles in width. The crossings are generally farther apart than 0.5 miles, with two exceptions. Snowmobiles are required to cross the PCT at 90 degrees whenever it is safe to do so.

## Implementation

Tahoe NF is printing large paper maps laminated in plastic to post at trailheads. While they have ordered a large number of paper copies of the map to distribute, those maps will not be available until later in this season.

Tahoe is meeting with stakeholders, both motorized and non-motorized, to discuss how to best implement the plan and educate the public on the new plan. Snowlands is participating in those discussions. One of the topics is where to locate signs and what the signs should contain. The signs and brochures that were developed for the Stanislaus NF have been offered as templates. Funding sources to pay for signs and brochures are being sought.



The Tahoe OSVUM is available here: [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1218296.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1218296.pdf)

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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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