

# SNOWLANDS

## BULLETIN

SPRING 2008

IN THIS ISSUE: Intern Report • SPOT Review • Polaris Trail • Snow Tour

WE ARE HUMAN POWER IN ACTION • WE PROMOTE WILDERNESS VALUES • WE PRESERVE AND PROTECT OUR PUBLIC LANDS

### YOU HELPED US MEET THE CHALLENGE!

Last Fall the Morgan Family Foundation of Los Altos, founded by Jim and Becky Morgan, gave us a challenge – raise \$25,000 and we will match it. I am pleased to report to you, our members and friends, that you helped us not only meet the challenge, but also to go way over the top!

I'd like to give special continued on back page ➡



### JOIN SNOWLANDS AT THESE SPRING EVENTS!

March 14,15

Banff Mountain Film Festival, Los Altos High, Los Altos CA

April 19

Earth Day, Mont Bleu Resort, Stateline NV

April 20

Earth Day, Idlewild Park, Reno NV

April 26

Earth Day, Olympic Village, CA

Check our WEBSITE [www.snowlands.org](http://www.snowlands.org) for details and ticket info plus more event listings.

### GOOD NEWS

(Ed: Volunteers made this happen!)

Jan. 10, 2008. I wanted to quickly pass on some news. The Van Vleck Bunkhouse started winter rental Jan 2nd with 2 men going in on snowshoes that Wednesday and coming out Saturday. Upon picking up their permit, they were briefed on the predicted storm. They made the decision to go in. In the storm Saturday they attempted the trip out. After a grueling trudge, they made it to the Van Vleck Storm Shelter where they spent Saturday night. It took them 5 hours on Sunday to make it the remainder of the way out to the trailhead at Loon Lake.

They said two things saved their lives. One was that the trail was so well marked with blue diamonds that they could find their way, and, second, that the Van Vleck Storm Shelter was there as a safety refuge. They also wanted to pass on that they felt it was a stroke of brilliance having the Shelter out there.

A big thank you to all of you who donated to the shelter project and a big thank you to John Stroud for being Eldorado Nordic Ski Patrol trail steward for this important route. Great job and please share this with others.

Monte Hendricks ❄️

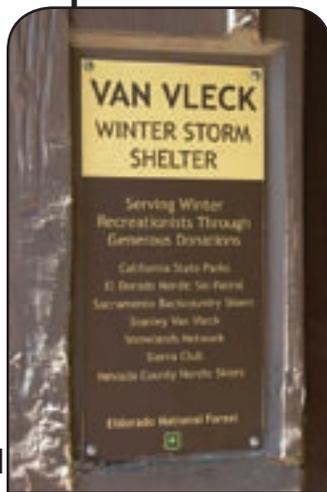
### CAMPAIGN UPDATES

**NV TAHOE MEADOWS BELOW MOUNT ROSE:** Snowlands initiated a drive to protect all the Meadows - 4000 acres - so close to Reno and Tahoe communities, for non-motorized individual and family winter recreation. We are waiting for the Incline Lake purchase to be completed so we can make a concrete proposal to the Forest Service and regional allies. ❄️

**NV/CA LAKE TAHOE BASIN 20 YEAR PLAN:** We introduced and got agreement from the TRPA planners on a first-time ever noise limit and test protocol for snowmobiles operating the Basin. Based on a procedure developed by SAE, the State of Wisconsin and major snowmobile manufacturers, it gives public agencies a field-proven, cost effective, industry vetted means to set and enforce noise limits. This is especially important in the Basin where public lands abut private residences and the terrain can amplify annoying sounds. We are expecting that this could be implemented in the 2008/2009-winter season. ❄️

**CA HOPE VALLEY:** After many, many years we got agreement on an Alpine County Winter Recreation plan. We still face increased pressure regionally to expand motorized access. The deal requires the Forest Service to invest in new, costly staging areas for

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The Van Vleck Winter Storm Shelter saved two men this winter

# PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

**Ellen Lapham**



**WINTER – QUESTIONS OF SURVIVAL**

We skiers and snowshoers tread lightly on the winter landscape. Yet when I'm traveling to a beautiful outlook or a remote canyon on accumulated snowfall, I wonder if I'm causing even a subtle change in a winter ecosystem. With January's weird weather (a blizzard today at 2400' in Nevada City; winds gusting a few days ago to 158 mph on the Sierra Crest), I wondered about the effects of weather variability on the survival of a species in our Sierra.

To get some answers, I resorted to an old-fashioned technique – research in books (rather than on the internet). Well, from my armchair reading so far, I've been overwhelmed and delighted by the hidden ecosystem that thrives underneath that beautiful blanket of white. Check out "sub-nivean" (the interface between the ground and the snow) on Google.

Last weekend friends and I skied up into Coldstream Canyon for some ice climbing. Sitting in our floorless tent, our shelter in a non-stop snowstorm, we noticed a small insect – a type of spider? - making its deliberate way across our booted feet. That prompted a classic "6-guys in a tent in the wilderness" discussion about winter survival. Seems that some insects can freeze whole and then thaw out, intact and ready to fly (try this in your home freezer!) How did our subject insect fare after the hanging stove warmed our tent? Was its cold adaptation compromised?

Back home I opened "Winter: An Ecological Handbook" (Halfpenny & Ozanne, 1989). This dense engineer's approach to winter (chapter 3 includes "Energy and Mass Balance" equations) educated me to insect cold adaptations, cryoprotectants and supercooling. I realized I needed more information about our tent environment, a positive ID on the subject insect, and a way to connect field observations with the science.

Bottom line? The winter playground we value is more complex, and sensitive, than I would have imagined.

I hope that when you read this that you too will want to learn more about our fragile Sierra Nevada. That you'll help educate your friends, family, and anyone who will listen about the wonders of winter. That you will press for a winter ecology course – with field work – at your local schools and urge your local National Forest (or Parks, BLM, or other land management agency) to support it.

**Help us preserve our winter wildlands!**

# CHAIRMAN'S OVERLOOK

**Marcus Libkind**



We are pleased to announce here that the Forest Service approved the Alpine Winter Recreation Project which, if implemented, will make the Forestdale Creek drainage (east of Carson Pass) non-motorized most of the winter. I have worked toward that one goal for 17 years. Initially I never thought that the quest would

eventually take me through two lawsuits, one appeal and a million meetings, letters, emails, phone calls, alerts and more. Surprisingly, I look back and realize that I would have set out on the journey even if I had known what it would cost me in terms of time, energy and emotional strain.

I feel good about what I have been a part of here. Looking through Snowlands' member list I recognize the names of those who have supported us financially and with their letters for many, many years. You know who you are. A special thanks to you and to those who are new to our Snowlands community. You were are a part of our successes because you see the need for a unified voice and wrote that second, third - or was it your tenth letter? - to the Forest Service.

In this issue we also announce that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Forest Service thus opening to snowmobiles the Leavitt Bowl area in the Proposed Hoover Wilderness Addition on Humboldt-Toiyabe NF. We had a strong legal team led by NRDC and the Sierra Club. The defeat here is greater than just the loss of 7,000 acres to motorized users; the precedents may be devastating in the future.

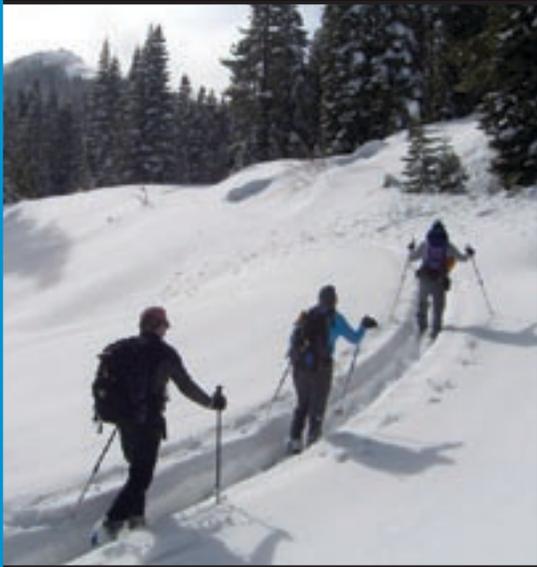
We will certainly need to work harder and smarter in the future. That will take more resources, which are spread so thin today that it's amazing that we keep our head above snow. Snowlands Network is a small organization doing great work. But there are more than 200,000 backcountry skiers and snowshoers in California and Nevada and we need all of them to join us in protecting our beautiful winter wildlands.

You, our members, are our best public relations. Please help spread the word about the important work Snowlands is doing to protect the winter recreation lands we love. Tell all your friends who love being in the backcountry about our work. Invite them to join us today.

**Together we can make a difference!**

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## SOS TOURS A SUCCESS

### New "Snowlands on Snow" Winter Program

This winter we planned a full schedule of great one-day ski and snowshoe trips. Mother Nature had her own ideas – too little snow in early December, and too much in early January! Then a blizzard. However, once the flurries settled we got some gorgeous days to get out on snow and share with you our passion for serene backcountry slopes, towering forests, and stunning views.



Bradley Hut powder - awesome

Our volunteer leaders were Rich, Charley, Marcus, Bill, Gail, Cathy, Gino, Nick, Holly. Thank you all!

#### BRADLEY HUT:

Snowlands director Rich Steele led an energetic group to the Bradley Hut near Squaw Valley on a weekend predicted

to have whiteout driving conditions that would likely close Interstate 80. "The Jan 26 ski tour was both a bust and a huge success. A bust because we only had two participants in addition to volunteer Charley White and me. A huge success because we had 3 feet of fresh powder and a break in the weather with wonderfully sunny skies. I broke trail for the five miles to the hut. Pretty exhausting. We lunched at the hut, then I led us up through a low angled glade on an avy safe route I know to the ridge above Deep Creek. Fab views of Tahoe, Desolation, Mt. Rose, etc. etc. were enjoyed, then a great downhill run back to the hut. When we got there, a group had just arrived (thanks to our trail!). We chatted for a bit, then skied the 5 miles back to the car on a freshly groomed luge course with 3 foot high powder walls on each side. Back to the car by 4 for a very full day with a strong and small group."

#### CASTLE PEAK:

On Feb 9, noted outdoors and snowshoe leader Cathy Anderson-Meyers (CathyWorks of Grass Valley) donated her time and led 17 snowshoers on a tour of the Castle Peak area. One long time downhill skier said, "I was new to



Peak 7620, we continued on to the top

hiking on snowshoes. Cathy's enthusiasm was infectious – we learned about animal tracks, compass headings, and we got tips on efficient snowshoeing."

#### PEAK 7620:

Marcus Libkind (Snowlands chairman) led two mid-January tours on Highway 88 trails. On Saturday, a cool cloudy day that made for great photos, eleven of us skied out from Tragedy Spring on Highway 88 near Silver Lake. Our goal was Peak 7620, at the end of a spectacular ridge filled with small ups and downs. Four determined skiers summited. On Sunday we were a group of seven



Peak 7620, snowshoers enjoy an open meadow

who snowshoed to Peak 7620. Instead of retracing our steps, we explored a wooded route. Our one-way, almost entirely downhill tour, passed some small meadows and ended at Silver Lake.

Check our website for more "SOS" outings. ❄️

# INTERN REPORT: FORESTDALE STEWARDSHIP STORIES

By Josh Cameron

In winter 2007 I was a student in the Outdoor Education Certificate program at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe. For my work experience I monitored snowmobile activity – both legal and illegal – along Forestdale Road, a few miles east of Carson Pass. I had just moved to the Tahoe area last summer and I'd never experienced a true Sierra winter; plus, I'm just a surfer boy from San Diego. Of course I said 'yes!'

Needless to say, I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into. I had visions of sneaking through the wilderness as part of a covert operation with only my map and compass to guide me, ferreting out scofflaws. Of course, this was only my over-active imagination. In reality, it was an experience that not only helped me to become more proficient on my MSR snowshoes and adept at field observation, but also gave me a much greater appreciation for winter wilderness.

Typically, I snowshoed from the Red Lake parking area off Highway 89 and up Forestdale Road where I would often come across several snowmobilers heading out for a day of motoring. Most of the time they would wave at me. Most of the time I would wave back. When I reached Forestdale Divide at the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), I would have a commanding eagle's eye view of Forestdale Bowl. Sometimes there were snowmobilers illegally driving around the Bowl in circles and sometimes not. Since my job was to observe and note snowmobile trespass within the wilderness boundaries, I was always excited to see none. This meant that I could enjoy a quiet and peaceful lunch at the divide.

When I began to shiver from sitting still too long, I would head down into the Forestdale Bowl towards the creek, the place of my most fond experiences. I recall one day when snow had just fallen and the air was so quiet that I felt as if I was in another world. The soft winter light glistened off of the snow crystals. The crunch of my snowshoes in the snow seemed to be the loudest sound I would hear all day as I tracked beneath grand lodgepoles and stately firs. Then, there was the day I half ran, half slid down a frozen-over drainage as I followed a pair of ski tracks into the main branch of the Forestdale Creek. Once there, the snowscape seemed to stretch before me into infinity with not a track in sight. I pretended I was Amundsen trekking across Antarctica towards the remote South Pole, in a past time long gone.

My memories are not all such fanciful antics, however.

I recall the day I came across old snowmobile tracks at Forestdale Divide along the PCT. Apparently, the driver had deliberately run over a white bark pine and a mountain hemlock, nearly severing the juvenile trees in half. I stood there in silence, mourning such senseless destruction.

Then there was the time I spied snowmobile tracks

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# BACKCOUNTRY TOOL REVIEW: THE SPOT "SATELLITE PERSONAL TRACKER"

By Jeff Erdoes

(Ed note: We thought this device was so useful that we are publishing Jeff's evaluation. Of course, you need to check out any safety or rescue device for yourself before purchase and use.)

You're in the backcountry or a canyon with no cell phone service and you need to get word out. You're OK. You need help. Or, you want to transmit an accurate time-stamped location. What tool do you use?

As of November 2007 we winter recreationists have an affordable option: "SPOT", a Satellite Personal Tracker system. It is a hand-held one-way signal device that tracks its location via GPS and relays those coordinates via satellite to designated recipients along with a short message.

SPOT is simpler, lighter and more affordable than a two-way satellite phone. The device can only send messages out, not receive them. No room for chat, (thank goodness). SPOT is straightforward and easy to use: it makes no sound, has no screen and is pared down to four buttons and four status lights (LEDs). Loaded with two AA 1.5V lithium batteries, it weighs 210 grams (just over seven ounces), making it easy to carry to places poorly served by cell phones. The sealed unit even floats.

Below is an "all's well" message I sent from upper Forestdale Creek (Mokelumne Wilderness) one Sunday morning during a January ski trip. I pushed the 'on' button, waited a couple of seconds, then pushed the Check/OK button. I positioned SPOT under open sky (away from boulders and big trees) and watched about one minute for the 5-second green light to tell me that my 'OK' signal plus my GPS coordinates was broadcast to the GEOS network. In fact, my message recipients were informed of my exact whereabouts within a minute or two of my SPOT signal. The message was received at pre-set email addresses and text-messaged to pre-set cell phone numbers (see text on page 5).

Once back home at my computer, I zoomed-in to the linked Google satellite dry-season image. It visibly showed my immediate surroundings when I sent the message: my location was about 35 feet east of the Pacific Crest Trail and about 60 meters east of Forestdale Creek. (Definitely NO cell phone service there).

SPOT has only three discrete signals, each with its own push-button:

1) Emergency/911 distress, 2) Check/OK, 3) Help/Other. (The fourth button toggles on/off). Text for the two non-emergency signals must be brief, and has to be pre-set or re-set (user customized) for each unit in advance of deployment. This is done by logging onto the SPOT website, so you'll need an internet connection. These limitations seem small compared to the basic power, almost anywhere, anytime, to tell family or other contacts of your precise whereabouts and status.

The 911 button issues an emergency call for help/rescue, a distress signal monitored and relayed for a \$99 annual subscription fee. Rescue/aid dispatch is coordinated by location. The sender's pre-set personal contacts

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The rimed trees were sentinels, standing up to winter

Backcountry Tool Review  
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are also notified of the distress signal and location (notified directly by telephone, as well as through email and/or cell phone text message, via the GEOS Emergency Response Center in Houston, Texas). I tested SPOT from several remote Sierra locations in early winter 2008 and the system performed reliably. From now on, whenever I visit wild places, SPOT will be in my pack.

SPOT is much more versatile than an emergency call/locator: the no-frills \$99 annual subscription includes the unit's two other informational signals. Since (pre-set) messages and message recipients can be user-customized, SPOT can be used for any task you can imagine, from running a river to trying to coordinate a remote food drop on the Tenth Mountain Trail in Colorado.

Closer to home in our Sierra, SPOT can be a useful tool for photographers, field biologists, and naturalists to get an accurate location fix. It would also be invaluable for Federal agencies charged with documenting local snow depth, watershed damage, resource damage, and real time wildlife movements. It also could be used for law enforcement – see the book Nature Noir for examples.

Other features & details:

**Spotcasting:** A costlier annual subscription (\$150) enables "Spotcasting," that is, your location tracking through a signal every 10 minutes. Nifty if you want an automatic GPS track of your outing displayed on Google maps. But as it is, the \$99 annual subscription supports unlimited manual transmissions. Spotcasting also draws on batteries which would I rather save for discretionary signals or an emergency.

**Battery life:** It appears that the lithium batteries should last for perhaps a year if the device is powered-up only for occasional transmissions. According to the manufacturer, a fresh pair of batteries has power enough to sustain a repeating emergency signal for up to 7 continuous days, or up to 1900 ordinary SPOT signals, in which case battery draw is hardly worth mentioning. Status lights alert you once battery charge drops below 30%.

**Service provider:** Globalstar, the satellite phone maker, makes SPOT. The GEOS network underlying the service is an international alliance of communication and travel security corporations. At time of purchase you are offered (through GEOS) additional fee-based security "resources" including a "membership benefit" (not insurance) providing – under certain circumstances – up to \$50,000 if you need a heli rescue in, say, Tanzania.

**Purchase:** The SPOT device retails for \$149.95 and is sold by some local outdoor retailers and nationally by REI. You sign up and pay for the annual service subscription online – each SPOT has a unique ID.

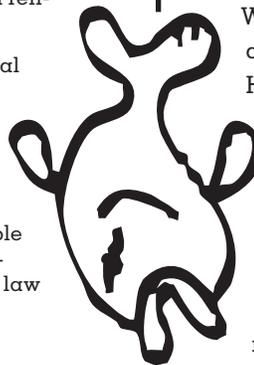
**More info on the web:**

<http://www.findmespot.com/explorespot/spotmessenger.aspx>

<http://www.geosalliance.com/faqs.html> ❄️

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From: noreply@findmespot.com
Subject: OK Unit Number: 0-7XXXXXX
Date: January 13, 2008 4:21:24 PM PST [actually GMT, as below, aka 8:22 am local time]
SPOT Check OK. Hi! I am fine. Here is my present location. Jeff
Unit Number: 0-7XXXXXX
Latitude: 38.6681
Longitude: -119.9751
Nearest Town from unit Location: Kirkwood, United States
Distance to the nearest town: 9 km(s)
Time in GMT the message was sent: 01/13/2008 16:22:57
http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=38.6681,-119.9751&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1
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## Do you Fish? Bike?

When you are next out fishing, consider the person next to you. He or she could be your best ally in saving our Sierra snowlands!

The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) publishes data on activities that we enjoy in winter – shoeshoeing, skiing (telemark, nordic, XC). The latest report (2005)

has some data we thought you could use.

In the USA there are 3.5 million telemark skiers, average age is 30, and 5.5 million snowshoers, average age is 36. Very few snowshoers also telemark – just 14%.



What is interesting is what we ALSO do! For instance:

- Telemark skiers - 60% bike (of all types) and 40% mountain bike, 54% fish, 40% do paddle sports, and 40% trail run.
- Snowshoers - 65% bike (of all types) and 52% mountain bike, 51% fish, 40% do paddle sports, and 18% are birdwatchers. ❄️

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winding in and out of heavy trees along Forestdale Creek. My wilderness mentor told me, "If you ever have the opportunity to follow snowmobile tracks that head into the forest, do it! You'll be surprised at what you find." Naturally, I followed the tracks as they wound their way around trees and through dense undergrowth that even I, on snowshoes, had trouble navigating. Coming into a clearing I stopped dead in my tracks. The snowmobiler had run in and out of the creek bed several times, destroying willows and digging ruts on the creek's edge. No doubt his two-stroke machine deposited a toxic concoction of oil and gas into the stream waters as he gunned it to ride up onto the opposite bank. I had seen instances of harmful machine-powered "recreation" before, but none so blatant and disrespectful. At that moment, I can't explain why, I felt very alone in the world. For the first time that day I noticed the sky was gray. When I reached the parking area, there was an empty cardboard case of beer with several cans strewn about.

Yes, my spirit was deflated from what I saw that gray winter day. My work is testimony to our need to better steward this land that gives us such rich recreation. I couldn't wait for this winter to get back up to Forestdale again! Josh.

### The LTCC 2007 Winter Stewardship program intern goals:

- Gain understanding and appreciation for the conflicts confronting human-powered winter recreation and snowmobiles
- Collect data for purpose of documenting snowmobile use in legal and illegal areas in the Forestdale area
- Obtain the new skill of snowshoeing in order to perform environmental work
- Obtain and develop the skill of reading signs of resource damage created by snowmobiles on public lands
- Become an advocate for human-powered winter recreation ❄️

# THE RUBICON TRAIL: OIL AND WATER DON'T MIX

Monte Hendrix

**CA** Environmentalists and traditional jeepers are allies in the urgent call to end abuse by high impact, extreme users.

Arguably the most famous four-wheel-drive (4x4) trail in the world, this Eldorado County road – the Rubicon Trail – is the source of a million cubic yards of eroded soil that contaminates Eldorado National Forest. Oil and transmission fluids also make their way into the environment when damage to oil pans, differentials, and transmissions takes place as ‘rock crawlers’ negotiate granite boulder-strewn Trail sections.

In winter the Trail is a popular ski and snowshoe route called the Polaris. A paved road to Loon Lake is plowed only to the first dam. The next mile of unplowed pavement up to a second dam, where the Ellis Creek Trail actually begins, is routinely rutted by 4x4 users in winter.

After six years of preparation, Eldorado County has issued a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) and Rubicon Trail Master Plan (RTMP). Snowlands Network and the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation are leading the effort to ensure that the Master Plan contains adequate measures to ensure

needed Rubicon Trail restoration and halting motorized use during the wet season (fall through spring), when most erosion occurs.

**We - recreationists and environmentalists - through Alerts and newspaper coverage, went all out to counter the letter-writing blitz that came from the OHV community promoting Alternative B.**

The Rubicon Trail that winds through spectacular Sierra terrain and dates back to the 1800s, when it its 22 miles stretched from Georgetown to Lake Tahoe. Today the Trail runs from near Wentworth Springs – 50 miles from Placerville off highway 50 – to near Homewood/Tahoma on Lake Tahoe’s northwest shore. Trail elevation ranges from 5400 to 6700 feet. Most 4x4 users start the Trail from Loon Lake via the Ellis Creek Trail. Historically, the Rubicon Trail was traveled using street-

legal 4x4s, either stock or slightly modified. These ‘traditional’ users are now shut out by non-street-legal 4x4s –vehicles customized to navigate the increasingly difficult terrain created by erosion and purposeful changes. These vehicles, often called ‘rock crawlers’ for their ability to crawl up a rock face, are turning the trail into an extreme-off-road-vehicle park. The “Devil’s Playground” is a current favorite.

At the Sept. 20, 2007 meeting of the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission, environmentalists

were joined by traditional jeepers in speaking out against the madness of rock crawlers who have taken over the Trail. This unusual alliance underscores the seriousness of the damage being done by those who abuse the Trail and shut out low impact users.

The DEIR and RTMP present three alternatives.

- **Alternative A** would go a long way toward halting the damage. It provides the most management, maintenance, and monitoring, and includes mitigation measures to eliminate all “significant impacts”.
- **Alternative B** is unacceptable because its limited management and monitoring would leave 29 “significant and unavoidable” user impacts. It is aggressively promoted by the OHV users.
- The **No Action** alternative would perpetuate the current situation.

Positive aspects of Alternative A include the following:

**SAFETY:** In winter, the unplowed section of paved road between the Loon Lake Chalet and the second dam will be closed to motor vehicles. The Polaris ski-and-snowshoe trail will again be safe for muscle-powered recreationists.

**DAMAGE CONTROL:** During wet conditions from Nov. 1 through April 30 the county is required to close the Rubicon Trail “if erosion could occur”. We prefer a clear mandate for closure for the entire time period.

**RESTORATION:** The Little Sluice Box section of the Trail would be restored to early 1990s conditions. This will facilitate the use of slightly modified stock 4x4s on the Trail. Any tampering with trail conditions, e.g. the rolling of boulders into the road to make the route more challenging, would result in Trail closure until the changes are reversed.



(Original image from Eldorado County web site)

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## Why Loon Lake and the Polaris Trail are so important to muscle powered winter recreationists

By Monte Hendricks

The Loon Lake Non-motorized Winter Recreation Area offers a variety of winter recreational opportunities, including backcountry skiing, snow play, snowshoeing and ski mountaineering. Convenient to Sacramento, Loon Lake is 45 miles northeast of Placerville on the Pacific Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest.

**Its greatest asset? Many miles of marked and unmarked cross-country ski touring to a wide variety of winter destinations.** Good-to-excellent snow conditions exist from December to May and offer a range of ski touring from easiest to most difficult. The Van Vleck Trailhead parking gives access to many easy trails near the south shore of Loon Lake.

The trail into the Van Vleck Bunkhouse, a wonderful overnight rental opportunity, also provides a crossing

on the **South Fork of the Rubicon River**. This crossing provides an incredible opportunity for almost unlimited excursions into the high country of **Desolation Wilderness**.

Because the Polaris Trail crosses the dams that impound **Loon Lake**, it provides the main access to the northern half of the Loon Lake area. The trail is heavily used by skiers and snowshoers of all abilities. Many large groups use the trail for their first winter camping experiences making use of the wonderful vistas on the south facing aspects north of Loon Lake. For the more adventuresome, the Polaris Trail leads to **north facing powder slopes** for turns and opens up the whole area north of Loon for exploration.

The anchor point in the area is the incredible **Loon Lake Chalet**. The upstairs is open each winter weekend day as a warming hut and is staffed with a USFS

winter ranger. The upstairs is also available for public overnight rental year round. The volunteer El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol has played a key role in helping with public safety, backcountry patrols, layout and maintenance of the marked trails, and facilities upkeep.

The Loon Lake area is a winter treasure we cannot afford to lose!

For more information of the Loon Lake Non-motorized Winter Recreation Area please visit: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/documents/rogs/rog\\_xc\\_loon.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/documents/rogs/rog_xc_loon.pdf)

A trail map is at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/recreation/winter/xcski/loon/index.shtml#Loon\\_Lake\\_trail\\_map](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/recreation/winter/xcski/loon/index.shtml#Loon_Lake_trail_map)

For more information on the El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol, please visit: [www.ednsp.org](http://www.ednsp.org) ❄️

## NATURE OVERRUN

On January 8, 2008 the New York Times printed a tough editorial entitled "Nature Overrun". They judged the ORV/OHV issue had sufficient scope and importance to bring it to a national audience. Although the focus was on off-road vehicles in summer, the points made are apt for our wintry Sierra. Our winter stewardship must extend from late Fall through Spring.

"There are now nine million off-road vehicles, meaning all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes (snowmobiles are a separate category). And their owners, with little resistance from the authorities that ought to be policing them, are transforming some of America's most sensitive public lands into their personal playgrounds.

"The threat ... (to our public lands) stems partly from the Bush administration's philosophical inclinations: its aversion to federal stewardship and its relentless drive to open public lands to commercial and recreational use even when nature is the clear loser. It also stems from an insidious belief inside the federal bureaucracy that the problem is insoluble — that there are too many off-road vehicles and not enough federal agents to police them.

"Washington has a duty to do better."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/opinion/08tuel.html?th&emc=th> ❄️

Campaign Updates front page

snowmobiles, e.g. at Monitor Pass, to effect a balance as they close another area, e.g.

Forestdale. Funding is a critical path to make the agreement work. We continue to push for active management of acres designated non-motorized to conserve a true wilderness experience. ❄️

**NV HELPED THWART THE 2007 INTRODUCTION IN NEVADA'S LEGISLATURE** of an OHV lobby-supported bill (replacing SB400) that did not provide adequate vehicle ID and other key protections. We, and other local and regional environmental organizations, deemed these critical to an effective snowmobile registration, enforcement and safety program. ❄️

**CA HOOVER WILDERNESS ADDITION (SONORA PASS):** We supported a bill (HR 5149/S 2567) designating 40,000 Forest Service managed acres as Federal Wilderness (not signed as of 2/1/08). We fought opening of 7,000 watershed acres to motorized use and filed an amicus brief last summer in support of an NRDC-led lawsuit. To our dismay we lost the procedure-based argument in Federal Court - thus permitting the Humboldt-Toiyabe's Bridgeport Ranger District to open Levitt Bowl and its drainage to snowmobiles. This is an exception as these acres are closed to all other motorized recreation. We project this area will become a motorized magnet and suffer inadequate oversight, adversely affecting sensitive drainages, wildlife, and of course, all other winter recreationists. ❄️

**STEWARDSHIP:** Expanded our volunteer winter stewardship and monitoring program for the Sierra to include aerial observation with the volunteer pilot organization, Lightflight. We also had more active on the snow volunteers, a new monitoring intern, and increased use of technology (digital photography, GPS, and video) to support actionable data collection. ❄️❄️❄️

## MISSION

We promote opportunities for quality human-powered winter recreation and to protect winter wildlands. We will educate the public and government agencies about winter recreation and environmental issues.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marcus Libkind, Chairman  
Ellen Lapham, President  
Jim Gibson, Secretary  
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Rich Steele

&

Annette Glabe, Membership Coordinator  
Janet Hoffman, Treasurer

### REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Gail Ferrell, Lake Tahoe/Reno  
Monte Hendricks, Highway 50 Corridor

## SNOWLANDS BULLETIN

The Snowlands Bulletin is published by volunteer-led Snowlands Network, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit California Corporation. Our mailing address is: PO Box 2570, Nevada City, CA 95959. Phone: 530-265-6424.

### PHOTO CREDITS:

Jim Gibson  
Annette Glabe  
Monte Hendricks  
Ellen Lapham  
Marcus Libkind  
Rich Steele

## IN MEMORIAM

We wish to acknowledge the loss of our fellow travelers in the backcountry.

John Hill of Nevada City who enjoyed building, backpacking, cross-country skiing, and mountain climbing.

and

Don Aumann of Davis who greatly enjoyed extended back-country ski trips in the Sierra.

### MEMORIAL GIFTS:

Gifts in memory of Don Aumann, thank you to:

Bruce Donalds  
E. Source Companies LLC  
Full Spectrum Solutions  
Erik Kolderup

## GOT BUMPER STICKER?

Help support Snowlands and share our **WILD ABOUT SNOWLANDS** message with friends! Our bold sticker is popular with the snowboard set and is a standout on a school notebook cover. It measures 7½" x 3¾" and has a bright blue mountain slope with black lettering.

One for \$5, five for \$15.

I have enclosed a check for \$\_\_\_\_\_, made out to Snowlands.

Mail orders to:  
Snowlands Network, P. O. Box 2570,  
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SNOW  TOUR

# VAN VLECK BUNKHOUSE – A SIERRA HUT TRIP OFF HIGHWAY 50

The tour to this cozy Bunkhouse is a very rewarding experience for intermediate and advanced skiers alike. The terrain is varied with idyllic sections along tree lined roads, wide open areas and vistas of the Crystal Range.

*The following tour description is provided courtesy of [www.backcountryskitours.com](http://www.backcountryskitours.com).*

The Van Vleck Bunkhouse, built in 1957, is nestled in a red fir forest on the edge of a meadow. The bunkhouse is all that remains of the Van Vleck Ranch site, which from the 1860's to the 1960's operated as a cattle ranch.



The Bunkhouse, a facility operated by the Forest Service, sleeps eight people and can be reserved through [www.ReserveUSA.com](http://www.ReserveUSA.com) both winter and summer. Additional information is available at [www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/recreation/cabins/vanvleck](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/recreation/cabins/vanvleck).

Unlike many huts in the Sierra, the Bunkhouse is outfitted with a propane oven and cook-top, propane heat and lights, and basic pots, pans and utensils. To top it off, there is running water and a flush toilet inside.

The tour to the Bunkhouse is a very rewarding experience for intermediate and advanced skiers alike. The terrain is varied with idyllic sections along tree lined roads, wide open areas and vistas of the Crystal Range. It can also offer navigational challenges if the visibility is poor.

The route, partly on snow-covered roads and partly cross-country, is well marked with blue diamonds and ribbons. However, don't let this lull you into a sense of ease! For example, under poor weather conditions the flat area near the landing strip is difficult to navigate, sending more than one experienced skier off in the wrong direction for an unexpected overnight bivouac.

A round trip requires stamina and speed to complete in a single day. Be aware that the hut is locked and day visitors will not have access to the inside. Speed is less important if you stay overnight at the Bunkhouse, but then you must carry a heavier pack.

The Van Vleck Storm Shelter is located on route to the Bunkhouse at the 2.5-mile point. The shelter is essentially that — a place to get indoors in bad weather or spend the night in an emergency. Snowlands Network is proud to have contributed to its construction.

From the trailhead (1) [numbers in parentheses correspond to numbers on map] ski northeast on the snow-covered road for 0.4 mile until you reach the sign marking the Van Vleck turnout (2). This tour follows the trail that heads east from the sign to the Van Vleck Bunkhouse. Ski east and then southeast for a total of 0.9 mile until you reach a bridge (3) across the Rubicon River. The bridge is an old railroad flat car.

Ascend the slope to the southeast for 0.5 mile until you reach a landing (4). This is an obvious cleared, flat place.

From the landing ski east and then southwest on a snow-covered road for a total of 0.7 mile until you reach the Van Vleck Storm Shelter (5) at a road junction. The road to the east leads toward Shadow Lake and the road continuing south leads to the Van Vleck Bunkhouse.

Now ski south on the snow-covered road for 0.9 mile, over the high point of the route, until you reach a small aspen grove (6). A landing strip is located a 100 yards to the southeast over a very small rise. This section contours through corridors of trees and through flat, open areas. It can be difficult to follow the road in the open areas.

Descend gently along the road and through a corridor of trees for 0.6 mile until you reach Milkhouse Meadow (7). Then ski south on the road for 0.4 mile until you reach the weather station (8) located on the east (left) side of the road.

Continue south on the road for 0.3 mile until you reach the northeast end of Timothy Meadow (9). Ski west on the road, initially along the north side of Timothy Meadow, for 0.4 mile until you reach the east end of a meadow (10).

Finally ski southwest through the meadow for 0.5 mile until you reach the Van Vleck Bunkhouse (11). The route through the meadow does not follow the road that loops around the northern arm of the meadow. Instead it crosses the north arm. Blue mega-diamonds are located on both sides to the arm. ❄️

**Difficulty**

Intermediate for two-day round trip  
Intermediate-advanced for one-day-round trip

**Length**

11 miles round trip

**Starting Elevation**

6500 feet

**Cumulative Elevation Change**

+1300, -1300 feet

**Navigation**

Road, marked trail, map and compass

**Time**

Very long day or most of each of two days if staying overnight at the Bunkhouse

**Season**

Late December through early April

**Snowmobiles**

Not permitted

**USGS Topo**

7.5' series, Loon Lake

**Start**

Junction of Ice House Road and snow-covered road to Loon Lake Campground. From Highway 50 turn north onto Ice House Road. Drive 24 miles to the intersection where you must turn right to stay on Ice House Road. Turn right and continue for 4.4 miles until you reach the snow-covered road to the Loon Lake Campground. This location is 0.9 mile before reaching the Loon Lake Chalet.



**THANK YOU!**

Snowlands Network's 2007 business and organization supporters are vital to our success. Please thank and patronize them!

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- Western Mountaineering
- Wild Cherries
- Wolf Creek Wilderness

**MATCHING GIFTS**

- Adobe Systems
- REI
- Sun Microsystems Foundation

**SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Senator Harry Reid  
for a flag that flew over the Capitol

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

**BACKCOUNTRY INFO**

- [www.backcountryskitours.com/](http://www.backcountryskitours.com/)
- [www.thebackcountry.net/guidebook\\_sport.php](http://www.thebackcountry.net/guidebook_sport.php)
- [pweb.jps.net/~prichins/backcountry\\_resource\\_center.htm](http://pweb.jps.net/~prichins/backcountry_resource_center.htm)

**AVALANCHE INFO**

- [www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/general/avalanche.htm](http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/general/avalanche.htm)

◀ The Rubicon Trail page 6      The DEIR and RTMP have shortcomings, however.

**SCOPE:** They do not include restoration as a goal. The plan does not include actions to repair erosion. The Trail needs extensive engineering, design, and reconstruction that may cost millions. In particular, to reduce the threat of vehicle damage and hazardous materials release, the Rubicon Trail must be returned to a condition that allows the slightly modified stock 4x4s to travel.

**CONFLICT:** The documents allude to an existing informal agreement between off-highway-vehicle and non-motorized groups including skiers and snowshoers aimed at reducing conflicts. As presented it appears that the agreement worked, but in fact the OHV community purposely violated the agreement, repeatedly trashing the Polaris trail. This is why the area needs to be formally closed to OHVs in winter.

**USER IMPACT:** A quota system is needed for preventing over-use of the Trail, including camping in non-designated areas. All human waste must also be removed to end unsanitary conditions.

**VEHICLES:** Non-street legal vehicles should be prohibited from the Trail. The trail is a county road where all motor-vehicle regulations should be met.

**RESOURCES:**

- You can see photos of the Rubicon Trail and video clips by Googling "Rubicon Trail" or going to YouTube.
- A good overview of the terrain is at the Eldorado County web site, <http://www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/Rubicon/Terrain.htm>
- The Eldorado County plan is online at: [www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/projects/route/deis/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/projects/route/deis/index.shtml)

**CONTACT:**

Airport, Parks, and Grounds Division  
 Eldorado County  
 Attn: Jordan Postlewait, ASLA  
 Manager Airport, Parks, and Grounds  
 3000 Fairlane Court, #1  
 Placerville, CA 95667  
[jordan.postlewait@edcgov.us](mailto:jordan.postlewait@edcgov.us) ❄️

## JOIN US!

Our success depends on you! Join and support us today – and help us tell your friends about Snowlands Network.

Together we can save and protect our snowlands.

Sign up [HERE](#) or join online at: [www.SaveOurSnowlands.org](http://www.SaveOurSnowlands.org)

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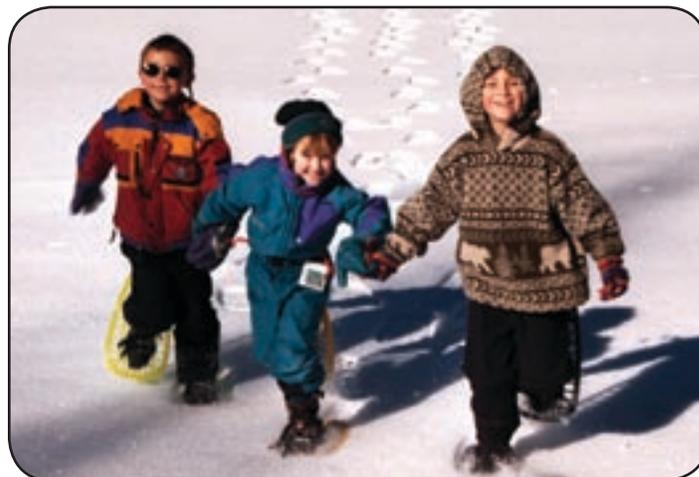
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◀ You Have Helped front page

thanks to The Halls and Altmann's who hosted photographer Tony Rowell last Fall in their homes to launch the campaign. To benefit Snowlands Network, these events helped us tell about our advocacy programs, and, with Tony's photographs and stories, impart some of the love we have for our Sierra Nevada.



Thank you all again! The funds raised are

critical to our ongoing work in the Tahoe Basin, on Martis Peak, on Forestdale Road, in Hope Valley, in the Hoover Wilderness Addition, and across Alpine County. These funds help us persevere to preserve and protect our special, beautiful winter landscapes for the silent recreationist – for you! ❄️



Spring 2008

[www.SaveOurSnowlands.org](http://www.SaveOurSnowlands.org)

## TWO BAY AREA FILM FESTIVALS BENEFIT SNOWLANDS NETWORK

Snowlands is co-hosting two nights of the Banff Mountain Film Festival Tour with REI on March 14 and 15. Each night is a different show and last year we sold out. Advance tickets (\$18 and \$15 for REI members) are available at REI stores in Saratoga, Mountain View, and San Carlos.



This is the premiere international film competition featuring the world's best footage on mountain subjects. The festival began in 1976 and is held annually in Banff, Alberta, Canada. The World Tour offers you the opportunity to see the best of the films entered in the festival. To get a taste of the festival go to: <http://www.youtube.com/v/4gV6ThtY25Q>

For Film details, check our website at: <http://snowlands.org/activities/banff.html>

THANK YOU to the Cal Hiking and Outdoor Society (CHAOS) plus the Cal Ski and Snowboard Club (CSSC) and the Geological Association at Berkeley (GAB), and Marmot Mountain Works! You supported us with the Backcountry Film Festival at UC Berkeley in February. The exciting lineup of indie ski films covered global warming, the backcountry skiing lifestyle, sustainability, and the history of telemarking in China. Kudos to Winter Wildlands Alliance for organizing the films.



Films: *Sublimation Experiment*, *Weather We Change*, *Skiing in the Shadow of Ghengis Khan*, *Winter in the Woods*, and *Alsek*. ❄️

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