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

Forest Service Releases New Proposed Snowmobile Management Rule

Submit your own comments by August 4, 2014.

In 2013 Winter Wildlands Alliance successfully sued the Forest Service regarding its failure to manage snowmobiles. In response to this suit, the Forest Service recently released a new proposed snowmobile management rule. This is an opportunity to bring balance to the backcountry, address user conflict and minimize resource damage on our National Forests. But the Forest Service mostly missed the point with their proposed rule.

The draft says each national forest must designate appropriate trails and areas for winter motorized use, but does little to promote consistency across seasons or different National Forests.

Now it's up to you to tell the Forest Service how to improve their proposed rule and finally bring balance to the backcountry. As someone who loves the backcountry, it's essential that the Forest Service hears your voice.

We believe it is most important for your



comments to convey how snowmobile use impacts your own recreation experience. However, there are many other aspects of snowmobiles on which you may wish to comment, including their hugely disproportionate impact on global warming. (In 2002, the EPA found that a 2-stroke snowmobile emits nearly as much carbon as 100 cars! Think what the comparison would be with today's even cleaner automobiles.)

This is a rare opportunity to help shape Forest Service policy. We don't have a lot of time – only until August 4 – but it's critical that the Forest Service hear from the backcountry ski community. A strong rule today means balanced management of winter recreation tomorrow.

Personal comments from people who regularly use public lands are proven to make the biggest difference to decision-makers — so please take 10 minutes to weigh in on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to impact how the backcountry is managed.

Please submit your comments electronically to the Forest Service. Follow a link from www.snowlands.org

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Upcoming Events

Banff Mountain Film Festival

“Radical Reels Tour”

- September 21**
Chico – Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.
- September 25**
Berkeley – California Theatre
- September 26**
Los Altos – Los Altos High School

Tickets on sale August 1!
www.snowlands.org

or by mail to:
U.S. Forest Service
Attn: Joseph Adamson
Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources Staff
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Stop 1125
Washington D.C. 20250

LTBMU Winter Collaboration

By Bob Rowen, Vice President for Advocacy

For the last several years, Snowlands Network has been demanding that the Forest Service address OSV recreation in its Lake Tahoe plan revision. Towards the end of this process, the LTBMU began facilitating a collaborative effort to resolve snowmobile issues in the basin, putting Snowlands Network and other interested parties into dialogues with snowmobile groups. While always accepting offers for constructive dialogue, we have repeatedly expressed concern that collaborative efforts between ski and snowmobile groups have only succeeded when the Forest Service land manager was a real force in the process, not just a facilitator. The dynamics are such that we – the skier community – have little to offer the snowmobile community in exchange for greater snowmobile restrictions. Most environmental restrictions need to be imposed by the greater community for the greater good, recognizing that they restrict someone's activity.

By definition, a purely collaborative effort requires unanimity, and unanimity is hard to achieve. In the collaborative process, we tried to create a constructive structure for dialogue and have had cooperation from some snowmobile advocates, but there has also always been someone or some group who wants to do it a different way. And we are well aware that delay, including delay caused by never-ending discussions over procedure, only works to benefit the OSV community, because it is we who are advocating for change, not them. So we labor on, continuing both to pressure the Forest Service to force change and to engage in constructive dialogue with anyone

in the snowmobile community who is interested in serious discussion.

One group of snowmobile advocates set up an online forum to facilitate discussion. This was a creative and constructive step, but unfortunately the forum discussions have not gone far. The forum is located at forum.jeepwhisperer.com/intro/. Anyone is welcome to join in. As we said, it has not gone far.

We also continue to engage in a constructive dialogue with another group of snowmobile advocates. That dialogue appears to be making process, but again moves slowly.

Later this year, we intend to propose a set of new snowmobile restrictions for the Lake Tahoe basin. For years, our priority demand has been closure to snowmobiles of the Quiet Quadrant, the northeast corner of the basin between Brockway and Spooner summits. Our proposal this fall will be a comprehensive plan for the entire basin. It will also include compromises. We believe that at this stage in the process, our interests are best served by developing a proposal that is very detail-oriented and intended to be a fair resolution that some, if not many, in the OSV community can reluctantly accept. We believe a strong case can be made for complete prohibition of snowmobiles from the basin, but we have never demanded that, and our detailed proposal will continue Snowlands Network's tradition of recognizing political as well as environmental realities.

Backcountry Experience Reporting

By Jeff Erdoes, Lands Monitoring

Started in 2009, Snowlands Network's Backcountry Experience Reporting (BCER) system enables recreationists to record information about events and environmental conditions encountered during snow season on national forests and other public lands in California and Nevada. The BCER on-line form is accessed from our website, and our BCER system is free – and freely available – to all forest users.

www.snowlands.org/report

Citizens locally are using Snowlands Network's BCER facility to document winter and springtime forest impacts, such as those resulting from snowmobile wilderness trespass, recklessness, OSV off-snow driving, excessive noise, odor, and other impacts of motor vehicle misuse and excess.

Snowlands Network investigates incoming citizen reports and

conveys substantiated information to concerned authorities, such as local managers of impacted national forest ranger districts, and to local and county law enforcement authorities as appropriate.

To date, Snowlands Network has conveyed to land managers 131 substantiated reports from concerned citizens. These reports, tabulated seasonally, are part of Snowlands Network's growing database identifying times, places, and circumstances where snowmobile misuse and excess impair ordinary enjoyment of the snowbound forest.

Snowlands' BCER database is an important tool for us to understand where and how snowmobile management is effective and where it needs improvement. For instance, the management plan for the area surrounding Forestdale Creek south of Carson Pass (managed by the Carson Ranger *(Continued next page)*

(From previous page) District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest) offers an example. The Forestdale arrangement is somewhat complex in that it requires Forestdale Road (origin ~ 7,800') and its surroundings to be closed to snowmobile traffic whenever there is enough snow to allow OSVs to stage from the (alternative) lower-elevation Hope Valley SnoPark (origin ~ 7,200'). One of our main concerns in agreeing to the plan was whether the forest service had the resources and commitment to implement the agreement.

As you'll no doubt recall, last snow season was very stingy and even included a long mid-season dry spell. The thin and inconsistent snow pack required the HTNF Carson Ranger District to repeatedly close and reopen the Forestdale venue for snowmobile staging. Monitoring information derived last season from Snowlands Network BCER system revealed that the forest

service was very attentive and diligent in managing the OSV restrictions and allowances at the Forestdale venue as dictated by the weather. And we recognized and thanked the Carson District for their effort.

But the snow-season challenge of managing Forestdale and other venues on national forests in California and Nevada is ongoing and, with your attentiveness and input as citizen observers on the forest, Snowlands Network's BCER system is ongoing, too. Whenever you encounter disturbing impacts of snowmobile misuse or excess on our local forests, please remember that you can help Snowlands Network promote better OSV management by taking a few minutes to record your observations online with a BackCountry Experience Report.

Steephollow Trail System

The Steephollow Trail System offers an assemblage of interconnected, marked trails that almost entirely follow roads. We are all indebted to the Nordic Skiers of Nevada County for their diligence in maintaining these trails, which offer an opportunity to ski many miles without significant elevation gain or difficulty. See

nordic-skiers.org/cfm/NSNCHome.cfm

for information about this group.

The Steephollow area is conveniently located on Highway 20 not far from Nevada City, but off the beaten path. The only

drawback to the area is that it is located entirely between 5150 and 5800 feet elevation. This low elevation means that snow-cover can be iffy early and late in the season in anything but a good year. But snow permitting, this is a wonderful place to spend a day skiing. Locals rave about the area when it is hit by a very cold storm. Consider stopping here on your way to or from the Lake Tahoe area.

For information on how to reach Steephollow and a map of the trail system, see the Backcountry Ski Tours website:

www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0300/0334_tour.htm



Winter view from overlook. Signal Peak is at far left, Devils Peak is very small on the horizon about the 1/4 point from the right, and Cisco Butte is the dark blob to the left of Devils Peak. Courtesy of A. Clark.

Snowlands Network

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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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