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

Snowmobile Plan Update

Faced with a court-imposed deadline, the Forest Service continues to make progress towards finalizing over snow vehicle (OSV) use designation plans for five California national forests. Following completion of the Lassen plan (see the article in the Fall 2018 issue of *Snowlands Bulletin*), three other forests have issued Draft Records of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statements.

Eldorado

Eldorado NF issued an FEIS in October, 2018. Snowlands and Winter Wildlands Alliance filed an objection to the plan because it allowed snowmobiles in several areas popular with skiers and snowshoers: Anderson Ridge, the area on the Carson Spur between Martin Meadow and Castle Point, and the area north of Carson Pass east of Kirkwood Nordic and up to the Lake Tahoe Basin boundary. The Anderson Ridge area is particularly important for non-motorized recreation because it is the location of a system of marked ski trails that were put in place by volunteers many years ago and where the local snowmobile group had agreed to voluntarily avoid in deference to non-motorized recreation. Allowing snowmobiles north of Carson Pass is puzzling since there is no access for snowmobiles from Highway 88, as the Meiss Sno-Park is closed to snowmobiles. Snowlands also objected to allowing snowmobiles in areas adjacent to the Pacific Crest Trail and designating crossing points of the PCT for snowmobiles that are up to 4.5 miles wide, in violation of the Pacific Crest Trail Comprehensive Plan.

Eldorado NF held an objection resolution meeting on March 19 to discuss the issues raised by all of the objectors to the FEIS. No new information came out of that meeting, and there was no consensus among motorized and non-motorized groups on how to resolve their differences on the above issues and also how to implement a minimum snow depth requirement and minimize impacts to wildlife. Objections for the five forests are to be resolved by Region 5 of the Forest Service and could potentially result in instructions to the forest to modify the plan. We are awaiting a final decision from the Reviewing Officer, who has ninety days to respond in writing to any objections.

Tahoe

Tahoe NF issued an FEIS in February, 2019 after asking for and receiving a schedule extension. The preferred plan would create some significant non-motorized areas in the Loch Leven Lakes and Boca Hill areas. However, the plan will do little to improve the conflict on the north side of Castle Peak. This area is highly desirable for both backcountry alpine skiing and high altitude snowmobiling. The plan will restrict snowmobiles to a designated route in the area west of Andesite Peak for the first two miles from the trailhead. The plan will also expand the closure north of Highway 49 at Yuba Pass and prohibit snowmobiles from the Sierra crest between Anderson Peak and Tinker Knob, the location of the PCT.

Snowlands and WWA objected to the plan on the grounds that it will not do enough to minimize conflict between snowmobiles and other users in the area of Castle Peak as required by the 2015 Travel Management Rule. We also objected that the plan will not set aside an area for non-motorized recreation in the Lakes Basin and Sierra Buttes region, that the plan allows snowmobiles along the route to Martis Peak (although most of the route is in the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Area and will be considered when the LTBMU does their own OSV plan.) We also objected to permitting snowmobiling next to the PCT and not having an effective procedure for restricting snowmobiles in areas with insufficient snow cover.

Tahoe held an objection resolution meeting on May 21. Once again, no consensus between motorized and non-motorized groups was reached during the meeting. However, meeting participants

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Conflict Reports

Snowlands' cadre of land monitoring volunteers was active this past season submitting reports about their interactions with snowmobiles. We received a total of 22 reports on our Conflict Reporting form on the Snowlands website, the highest number since 24 were submitted in 2012-13. We would like to thank Brad Johnson, Loren Rupp, Debbie Bulger, S.S., and others for submitting reports.

The reporting system has been in place for the past 20 years to help those wishing to report snowmobile abuse. Our Lands Monitoring Coordinator Jeff Erdoes takes your report, determines from the information who are the responsible agencies, and forwards your report on to them. The system also creates a database of reports that can be used to convince public land managers that the mere presence of motorized vehicles in the backcountry significantly impacts the experiences of non-motorized users who are seeking the quiet and solitude of snow-covered public lands.

Toiyabe

Much of the action this season was focused on the Carson Ranger District of the Toiyabe National Forest, which includes the Hope Valley Sno-Park, popular with snowmobilers, and Forestdale Creek Road, a popular destination for skiers and snowshoers. Thanks in part to a lawsuit filed twenty years ago, Toiyabe agreed to close Forestdale Creek Road to snowmobiles when there is sufficient snow at the Hope Valley Sno-Park for snowmobiles to travel south to the area around Blue Lakes. If there is not enough snow at the Sno-Park, then snowmobiles may use Forestdale Creek Road to travel south, but they must stay on the road until they reach Forestdale Divide, about 3 miles from the Red Lake staging area.

In the past, Carson Ranger District has been good about closing Forestdale Creek Road as soon as snowmobiles could use the Sno-Park. However, this season the ranger district has a new OHV Manager, Cody Nicholes. When asked on December 7 why the road was still open to snowmobiles despite the Sno-Park having received over a foot of snow, Nicholes responded *"We have not put the USFS closure in place as of yet. Snow depth at the Hope Valley SNO-Park is adequate right now, but can quickly change if we do not get a storm. We prefer to not flip in and out of closures, but rather close once we are confident the snow will be adequate at the SNO-Park for the majority of the season."* The road remained open for another two weeks.

Then, on December 22 the federal government shut down, and Forestdale Creek Road remained open for five more weeks because there was nobody on duty at the Forest Service to post the signs. Even worse, rogue snowmobilers and four-wheelers, knowing that there would be no patrols, were free to ransack the backcountry snow fields,

wilderness areas included.

Why Report

We originally created the web form to help people report violations of snowmobile closure areas to the Forest Service and other agencies. For many years, that was the only type of report that might result in action by government agencies.

Now, however, since the adoption in 2015 of the new Travel Management Rule that applies to over snow vehicles, the Forest Service must also consider the *"conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands; ..."* This means that even a legal and safe snowmobile operation that nevertheless impacts the experience of other uses, such as skiing and snowshoeing, must be regulated and minimized to the extent possible.

As a result, Snowlands is now encouraging people to report instances in which their backcountry experience has been impacted by snowmobiles and not limit their reports to illegal incursions into closed areas or damage to forest resources. Snowmobilers claim that there is no conflict occurring in the backcountry, and that they always have pleasant interactions with non-motorized visitors. The Forest Service also claims that there is no conflict, because they do not have any reports of conflict between motorized and non-motorized users. We hope to demonstrate with our growing repository of reports that there is indeed significant conflict occurring in our national forests in California, and more areas need to be set aside for non-motorized recreation.

If you have never used the reporting system, then please consider doing so in the future. It only takes a couple of minutes to fill in the form. It is not too late to report a conflict for the season just ended. All you need to do is remember the location and date where you experienced some impact from snowmobiles on your visit to a national forest or other public land and provide a description of how your visit was affected. Checkboxes for various impacts are provided. Pictures, GPS track logs, maps, or other corroborating data is useful but not required. Provide an email address and Jeff Erdoes, Lands Monitoring Coordinator, will follow up to make sure your report is forwarded on to the proper government agency.

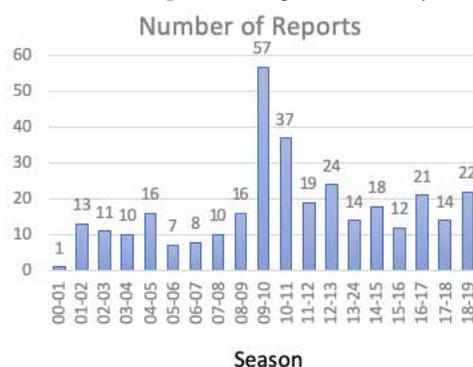
Remember that in order for a report to be considered by the government, you must supply your name and address. Snowlands

will not share this information with anybody except the government agency without your permission.

Report

If you wish to report on one of your experiences, use this link:

<https://www.snowlands.org/report>



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President's Corner

By Marcus Libkind

The last time I wrote that we had a bumper snowfall, followed by a winter drought. Then this past winter it was a bumper snowfall again. Clearly the weather is unpredictable. Whether it is more unpredictable with gyrations between extremes due to climate change I surely don't know. But clearly we don't have any idea what might be in store for us in the future.

However, clear in my mind is what will happen tomorrow and the next day on the human-powered winter recreation advocacy front. The volunteers at Snowlands Network will continue to work together with other organization, clawing their way forward, bit by bit, trying their best to improve the environment for winter backcountry skiers and snowshoers.

I relish in our major victories like stopping the conversion of the Dodge Ridge ski trail system to a pay-for-use system and the establishment of the Forestdale Creek area as non-motorized most

of the winter season.

But there is much more to do, and we are committed to following through with Winter Travel Management Planning on Lassen, Plumas, Tahoe, Eldorado and Stanislaus National Forests as well as on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit that will start soon.

As so often in the past, I must say that we need your support both in letters and financial contributions. You'll hear from us when we need letters; please respond. And be as generous as you can financially.

Please contact us if you want to be a part of the small group of winter enthusiasts that make Snowlands Network successful.



2018-2019 Events a Huge Success

Snowlands Network again hosted the Backcountry Film Festival in Reno, NV and the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour in Redwood City, CA. Both were huge successes.

The Backcountry Film Festival is produced each year by Winter Wildlands Alliance as a celebration of the human-powered experience. Featuring the best ski and snowboard filmmakers, the event drew an audience of 260 to the Patagonia Outlet in Reno in November. The films were shown in conjunction with a raffle and silent auction. As always, there were great eats, beer, and fun.

The Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour was a two-evening event in February featuring the best films from the Banff, Canada, film festival. Included were amazing big-screen stories that took the audience to exotic locations, paddling the wildest waters, and climbing the highest peaks. The films blended adventure with culture. An amazing 2000 people attended with Friday night again selling out the historic Fox Theatre.

Hosting these events is one of the fun things that Snowlands Network does. Please join us in 2019-2020 for two new great shows.



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Sample Reports

Here are some excerpts of reports submitted this year:

This was an early season trespass by a small snowcat! In the area of the Mt Rose campground. The day after the first snowfall we noticed the snowcat tracks entering the campground and assumed that this was the approved access for the utility towers on top of Mt Slide. However these tracks diverted and went all over other areas in quite thin snow cover. -- LR, 11/24/18

I understand that the Red Lake trailhead is closed to snowmobile use while there is sufficient snow at at Blue Lakes. My family, including my 3 year old son, were going to ski the road but had to find another place to go due to snowmobile use.-- BJ, 11/28/18

So, after lunch, I headed for the remaining undisturbed snow on the far (western) reach of the upper ravine of Forestdale Creek. Unfortunately, by 1:30 pm, another pair of non-compliant motorists arrived on the Moke in my vicinity (beside the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail); they immediately set about further plowing the surroundings, relentlessly expanding machine ruts with every successive loop across the ostensibly protected wilderness scene which, just three hours ago, had been utterly smooth, trackless and peaceful. So this was the end of my hopes for the day and I quit the area. -- JE, 12/2/18

Snowmobile Plan Update (continued)

did agree to continue discussions of area and trail designations and PCT crossings. A field trip was made to inspect potential PCT crossings (Snowlands did not participate). A separate meeting to discuss area and trail designations was held on June 21. Tahoe NF personnel were invited and attended. Marcus Libkind and Jim Gibson were there to represent Snowlands, and David Page represented WWA. Snowmobilers were represented by the Sierra Snowmobile Foundation and the Sierra Access Coalition.

Snowmobilers at the meeting objected to the Boca Hill closure, the closure of the Sage Hen Experimental Forest, and closures at Carpenter Ridge, Independence Lake, and the ridge between Anderson Peak and Tinker Knob. They were also adamant that no additional closures be imposed on the north side of Castle Peak and objected to the small closure west of Andesite Ridge even though a designated OSV route would be created there to provide access to open lands to the north.

Snowmobilers were willing to accept a closure on the south slopes of the Sierra Buttes in exchange for 1) not closing the west side of Andesite Ridge, 2) opening the west side of Boca Hill, 3) a smaller closure at Sage Hen, and 4) allowing snowmobiles on the ridge at Tinker Knob. While Snowlands was amenable to shrinking the closure at Boca Hill, we did not feel that giving up the closure west of Andesite Ridge or allowing snowmobiles on the PCT along the ridge at Tinker Knob were acceptable. Since no agreement or consensus was reached, it will be up to Tahoe Supervisor Eli Ilano to achieve some sort of fair, compromise solution for setting aside land for non-motorized recreation.

This discussion of area and trail designations was not part of the official objection resolution process, and it will be up to Tahoe NF to modify their OSV plan based on the interests expressed at the meetings. We are awaiting resolution of the objections to the Tahoe plan by the Region 5 Reviewing Officer.

Stanislaus

Stanislaus NF issued an FEIS in March, 2019. The plan would allow snowmobiles in several areas popular with skiers and snowshoers: Osborne Hill, Mattley Ridge, the area between Cabbage Patch and

Black Spring (all of those in the Bear Valley area off of Highway 4), and Herring Creek Road in the Pinecrest area off Highway 108. The plan would also allow snowmobiles in areas that are classified as Near Natural in the 1991 Forest Plan. Near Natural areas are meant to be semi-primitive, non-motorized, so no motor vehicles are allowed in these areas. However, bowing to pressure from snowmobile interests, no Forest Orders have been issued to legally close these areas, which means that the Forest Service cannot enforce the closures. As a result, snowmobiling has been taking place within these non-motorized areas for the past 28 years. Now, Stanislaus wants to allow snowmobile use in near natural areas permanently by modifying the forest plan.

Snowlands and WWA submitted objections to the plan on the basis that it does not minimize conflicts with non-motorized recreation by allowing snowmobiles in popular skiing locations. We also objected to 1) allowing motorized recreation in near natural areas in violation of the forest plan and 2) allowing snowmobiles along a half-mile section of the PCT near Sonora Pass.

An objection resolution meeting has been scheduled for August 2. Following that meeting, there will be a wait for the Region 5 Reviewing Officer to make a decision on the acceptability of the Stanislaus decision and whether or not modifications are required.

Plumas

Plumas NF issued a draft EIS and Proposed Action on October 25. Snowlands and WWA submitted joint comments generally in support of the Preferred Alternative, which set aside several areas for non-motorized recreation, but we identified some additional areas which should be closed to snowmobiling. We are awaiting a final EIS and draft decision for Plumas, expected by January, 2020.

Learn More

You can learn more about winter travel management in California national forests by going to our website:

<https://www.snowlands.org/wtm>

Sign up for our email alert list from our website to keep informed about the progress of these and other projects affecting backcountry winter recreation in California and Nevada.



Featured Tours: Sugar Pine Point State Park, Richardson Lake, and Ludlow Hut

There are two state parks open in the winter in the Lake Tahoe Basin. One is Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park at Spooner Lake. But California's Sugar Pine Point State Park sets itself apart in winter because of its marked trails, some groomed, and the fact that it is open to winter car camping. While there are relatively easy trails at Sugar Pine Point, it is also the jumping off point for an ambitious tour to Richardson Lake or an overnight stay at Ludlow Hut.

The attraction of the park for skiing and snowshoeing is the serenity in the wooded terrain, where often you will find yourself completely alone. The trails are relatively easy to follow and are perfect for introducing newbies to winter recreation.

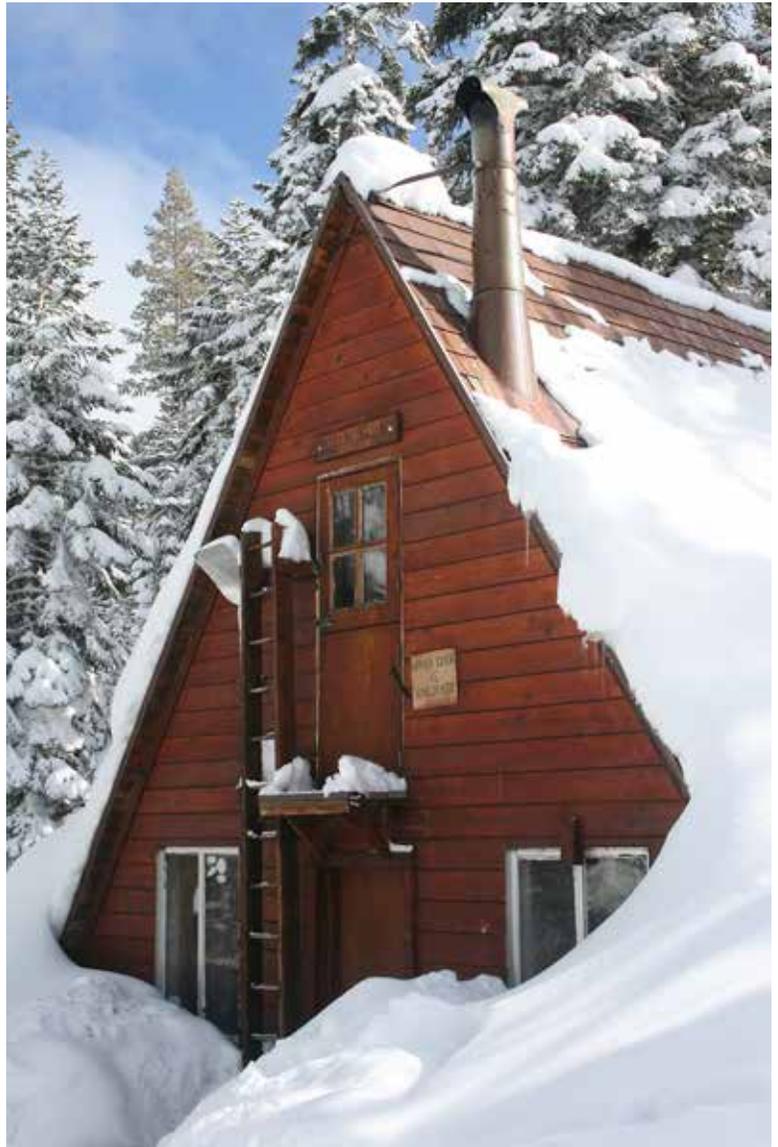
The main trails in the park are the Blue Trail, a beginner 2.2-mile round trip, and the General Creek Loop that combines the Blue and Red trails, a beginner-intermediate 4.8-mile round trip. The Blue and the Red trails on the north side of General Creek are groomed by park personnel.

There is also the Green Trail in the vicinity of the Blue and Red, and Yellow and Orange trails on the lake side of Highway 89. But the lake-side trails are more prone to marginal snow conditions.

Although dogs are allowed in the park on leash, they are not allowed on the winter trails.

Ludlow Hut at Richardson Lake is a 12.6-mile round trip and rated intermediate-advanced. The traditional route to the lake and hut is via McKinney Creek, but the lack of parking has made beginning the tour from there difficult. It is still the easier route to the hut and lake, but snowmobiles will often be found on it.

Beginning and ending the tour from Sugar Point State Park means that the start and end of the round trip are on two miles of groomed trail through the park. If you are spending a night or two at Ludlow Hut, then you only have another four miles off trail. But those are definitely challenging miles either climbing on the way in or descending on the way out.



Ludlow Hut (photo by Roy Lambertson)

Use the following links to learn more

Sugar Pine Point State Park – Blue Trail

http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0500/0507_tour.htm

Sugar Pine Point State Park – General Creek

http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0500/0508_tour.htm

Sugar Pine Point State Park winter map

<http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/510/files/EdZSugarPinePtSkiTrailMapWinter2011.pdf>

Richardson lake and Ludlow Hut Via General Creek

http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0500/0509_tour.htm

Richardson Lake and Ludlow Hut Via McKinney Creek

http://www.backcountryskitours.com/pages/tours_0500/0505_tour.htm

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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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