

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



# Lassen Forest Updates Snowmobile Plan

Lassen was the first of five national forests in California to start working on a plan for designating where over-snow vehicle (OSV) travel was allowed. This process followed a pair of lawsuits seeking to require the Forest Service to perform environmental analysis on the effect of grooming snowmobile trails and to comply with Executive Orders requiring the Forest Service to designate where motor vehicles are allowed to travel.

The original environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Lassen OSV Use Designation plan, which was released in draft form in January, 2016, and in final form in August, 2016, had been withdrawn following objections by Snowlands Network, Winter Wildlands Alliance, and other environmental organizations. On October 2, 2017, Lassen released a revised EIS. The new draft plan addresses several of the objections, but still falls short for nonmotorized recreation in some aspects.

The original Lassen plan would have

closed an additional 63,870 acres, 6.7% of the forest, to snowmobiles. While this would have been a significant improvement for nonmotorized recreation, it would have left 78% of the forest open to OSVs.

Snowlands and Winter Wildlands submitted eight objections to the final plan. The most important objections were that 1) the EIS did not consider a full range of reasonable alternatives, 2) the plan used an “open-unless-designated-closed” model, and 3) the plan designated an open area larger than a ranger district. All of these characteristics are in direct violation of National Environmental Policy Act and Travel Rule regulations (see the Fall 2016 issue of *Snowlands Bulletin* for more detail.)

The newly revised draft EIS addresses these concerns by 1) adding an alternative that closes 45% of the forest to OSV use, 2) specifically designating areas open to OSV use (there are eight of them), and 3) breaking up the one, large open area in the original plan into five smaller areas.

The changes seem to violate the Travel Rule regulation about an open area being smaller than a ranger district, since the five smaller open areas are contiguous to each other and separated only by paved highways 36, 44, and 89. Because the areas are contiguous and the highways were included in the original open area, the status on the ground is exactly the same as it was under the original plan.



Lassen National Forest (photo by bdeleon)

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Snowlands Network and Winter Wildlands Alliance submitted comments on these and other aspects of the revised draft EIS during the public comment period, which ended Nov 20, 2017.

### Stakeholders Group

A public meeting was held in Susanville by Lassen NF following the release of the revised draft EIS. People attending that meeting formed a Lassen OSV stakeholders group, including both motorized and nonmotorized interests. The goal of the group was to try and form a consensus on what the final plan would look like. Lassen NF personnel were not involved in the group meetings.

Motorized stakeholders wanted to allow travel on part of the McGowan National Recreational Trail to complete a “Dream Trail” circumnavigating Lassen National Park. In exchange, local snowmobilers agreed to additional recommended wilderness areas within Lassen NF. However, they had no power to implement such a recommendation.

Snowlands objected to this trade-off, as motorized travel on a National Recreation Trail is prohibited, only Congress can

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# President's Corner

By Marcus Libkind

You can see from reading about winter travel management in this issue of the Snowlands Bulletin that the volunteers at Snowlands Network have been and continue to be very busy. Do you ever wonder who these volunteers are?

Put simply, they are people like you.

Although a few of our volunteers have special skills, most are just average Joes with a desire to help.

The Snowlands Board of Directors is small, a close knit group that is looking for new members. Members of the board of directors are expected to have a love for nonmotorized winter recreation and an interest in growing into a more effective advocate for our cause.

A Snowlands Network volunteer has the opportunity to give to the community of which we are a part. While we are specifically looking for additional directors, there are opportunities to volunteer in a less formal status. Given available leaders, Snowlands could resume trail marking events and possibly pursue high-tech monitoring of our public lands. Maybe you have useful skills in other areas such as social media, advertising, or fundraising. We would love to hear from you and find the perfect fit between you and Snowlands Network.

Please contact Janet Hoffmann at [jhoffmann@snowlands.org](mailto:jhoffmann@snowlands.org) or 530.265.6424 if you are interested in talking about opportunities to promote nonmotorized winter recreation.



## Snowlands Winter Events

Snowlands Network hosted two very successful events on February 22nd and 23rd while we were all waiting for adequate snowfall to enjoy the mountains this season. The Patagonia Outlet in Reno generously donated their space for a Backcountry Film Festival on the evening of February 22nd. Almost three hundred human-powered sports enthusiasts gathered for a fun evening with refreshments, adventure sports films from our sister organization Winter Wildlands Alliance, and a silent auction. Auction items donated included stays at Lost Trail Lodge and Rock Creek Lodge, lift tickets for Mt Rose and Diamond Peak ski areas, various gear from Patagonia, a day pack from REI, and a gift certificate from High Sierra Cycling in Reno. We would like to thank all of those who attended and generously donated to Snowlands.

On February 22nd and 23rd we hosted the Banff Film Festival in Redwood City for the third year in a row. Attendance at the Fox Theatre has been building each year that we have held the festival there. This year we had a respectable crowd on Thursday night and nearly a sold-out theater on Friday night. Both nights had drawings for trips and supplies from REI, who sponsored the film festival as a benefit for Snowlands. We thank REI for sponsoring this event and the volunteers who helped both nights with logistics.

— Janet Hoffmann



Patagonia Outlet, Reno, February 22 (photo by Gail Ferrell)

### *Lassen* (continued from page 1)

designate wilderness areas, and there is no assurance that Congress would do so even if recommended by local snowmobilers.

In the end, the only issues that achieved consensus included better education of users, better signage, a need for the monitoring of snowmobile damage to forest resources, and the formation of a permanent winter stakeholders group. The group did recommend some restrictions for snowmobiles in the Goumaz-Hog Flat area.

### Schedule

Because the original EIS had to be redone after objections to it were received, the Forest Service negotiated additional time to complete OSV plans for the five forests (Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas). Plaintiffs in the snowmobile trail grooming lawsuit agreed to delay the end of the process for an additional 22 months. The Forest Service has committed to releasing all five draft plans by October, 2018, and a “best effort” to publish all final plans by July, 2019.

Lassen NF has stated the intention to issue the final EIS by first quarter of this year. Tahoe NF has announced that they will be releasing a Draft EIS in the same time period. Eldorado is slated

to be the next forest to release a DEIS, with Stanislaus and Plumas expected by October, 2018.

As you can see, the year 2018 will be very significant for winter recreation planning in California. Be sure to sign up for alerts from Snowlands to remain informed about the progress of these projects and when to submit public comments. Sign up for alerts on the Snowlands website at

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

# Can You Make a Difference?

By Gail Ferrell

This may seem like an unusual place for an article that appeals to the Existential need to find Meaning in our lives, but the advocacy I have done for backcountry skiing has brought more meaning to my life!

About 20 years ago I found myself becoming increasingly disturbed at the intrusion of noise, exhaust, rutted snow, and a lack of peace and quiet when I went backcountry skiing. I often would ski at Tahoe Meadows, a popular cross country ski and sledding area, located along a beautiful summit area that links Reno and Lake Tahoe. The increased number of snowmobiles, their speed, and the incessant noise and smell that reverberated in this place of beauty drove off the self-propelled winter recreationists. I found myself not going to Tahoe Meadows to avoid the effects of snowmobiles on the winter environment. That made me sad.

I committed myself to doing something. The problem of displacement of human-powered winter recreationists, including myself, was only going to get worse. It seemed only a matter of time before a snowmobiler would collide with a child on a sled, or a dog, or a skier. And with climate change bringing shorter snow seasons and longer shoulder seasons, there would be more pressure for winter recreation on the valuable snow resource.

## A Little Background

Tahoe Meadows is a popular cross country ski area west of Reno, Nevada. In recent years, the snowmobiling in the area has increased to such an extent that it has driven skiers and snowshoers away from the area. The Tahoe Meadows is only 4 square miles and is most appropriately used as an area for nonmotorized winter play.

## The Process

I began my new work toward advocacy by making an appointment with the district ranger of the National Forest service that had control over Tahoe Meadows. Yes, I was nervous. I did not know what to expect, or even how I would approach this problem. It was during that appointment that I learned that a revision of the Land Management plan was about to begin. That meant that the public would have 60 days to comment on how the Forest Service should manage the land, including where snowmobiles should be allowed and where they would be restricted.

I knew that changing the *status quo* in the Tahoe Meadows would be difficult, so I started collecting email addresses of people I knew that would write letters to the public land managers. I made up flyers about the Tahoe Meadows and passed them out at events like Earth Day. After almost a year, I had hundreds of email addresses. In this process, I met two other advocates: Marcus Libkind and Sarah Michael. They already had experience advocating for quiet outdoor winter recreation. With their help, and the local Sierra Club chapter, we generated 2000 letters to the Forest Service.

## The Plan

Most of the letters to the Forest Service focused on the conflict

between snowmobiles and pedestrian users. However, my comments focused on the requirement of the Forest Service to manage off road vehicles and the conflicts they create with other users, as well as protecting natural resources.

Management of motorized vehicle use, including Over Snow Vehicles (OSVs), is governed by Forest Service regulations found in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 36 CFR 295 relating to the *“Use of Motor Vehicles Off Forest Development Roads.”*

Section 295.2(a) of these regulations provides:

*“On National Forest System lands, the continuing land management planning process will be used to allow, restrict, or prohibit use by specific vehicle types off roads. This process will include coordination with appropriate Federal, State and local agencies. The planning process will analyze and evaluate current and potential impacts arising from operation of specific vehicle types on soil, water, vegetation, fish and wildlife, forest visitors and cultural and historic resources. If the analysis indicates that the use of one or more vehicle types off roads will cause considerable adverse effects on the resources or other forest visitors, use of the affected areas and trails by the vehicle type or types likely to cause such adverse effects will be restricted or prohibited until such time as the adverse effects can be eliminated as provided in 36 CFR Part 261.”*

Such adverse effects have clearly been demonstrated through resource damage and documentation by winter pedestrian users of conflicts and danger with snowmobiles. Section 295.2 of these regulations also provides that:

*“Areas and trails shall be located to minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands, and to ensure the compatibility of such uses with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account noise and other* Continued on page 4



Gail Ferrell at Winnemucca Lake (photo by Bob Rowen)

## Can You Make a Difference? (continued from page 3)

factors.”

Unregulated use of the Meadows clearly does not meet this criterion of the CFR.

Section 295.5 of these regulations states that:

*“The effects of use by specific types of vehicles off roads on National Forest System lands will be monitored. If the results of monitoring, including public input, indicated that the use of one or more vehicle types off roads is causing or will cause considerable adverse effects on the factors and resource values referred to in §295.2, the area or trail suffering adverse effects will be immediately closed to the responsible vehicle type or types until the adverse effects have been eliminated and measures have been implemented to prevent future recurrence as provided in 36 CFR Part 261”* (emphasis added).

It took over two years of generating public comments, meeting with the Forest Service, taking photos, and creating reports of snowmobile violations in the Meadows. But it finally happened.

In 2001, the Forest Service closed approximately 70% of the Tahoe Meadows to snowmobiles.

When I go to the Meadows now, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and peacefulness: *I made a difference. You can too.*

### What You Can Do

Snowlands is an advocacy group for human-powered winter sports enthusiasts. Be part of the letters we are generating on important issues to backcountry skiers and snowshoers. You can help in the upcoming months and years as the Forest Service writes the Winter Travel Management plans for the forests you love to ski and snowshoe: Lake Tahoe Basin, Stanislaus, Plumas, Lassen, Tahoe and Eldorado. Snowlands Network is leading the effort representing you: the human-powered winter lover. Sign up for our email alerts and when you receive and email from Snowlands Network, read it and write a needed letter. Take it up a notch and volunteer for Snowlands Network. Make a difference!

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# Upcoming Ski Mountaineering Races in the Tahoe-Sierra

By Colin Wood

With the recent proliferation of reliable, good-skiing pintech bindings and lightweight alpine touring boots, ski mountaineering—or skimo—racing has been getting more popular in the Sierra and nationwide. Skimo racing involves a combination of uphill and downhill skiing on a defined course. Pro racers usually have light, short, and skinny carbon-constructed skis, simple bindings, and light carbon-based boots. Racers will skin up, transition as quickly as possible, and then ski down to the next gate on the course.

There are two upcoming local skimo events in the Greater Lake Tahoe area.

## Diamond Peak

The first event is part of Diamond Peak's Luggi Foeger Uphill/Downhill Festival, held on March 30-April 1, 2018. This three-day event benefits our local Sierra Avalanche Center and features a variety of activities, including the race itself on Saturday, a movie showing on Friday evening, gear demos, a guided ski tour, a Saturday night party, and child and family events on Sunday, including an Easter egg hunt.

For more information, visit Diamond Peak's website:

<https://www.diamondpeak.com/events/details/luggi-foeger-uphill-downhill-festival>

Snowlands Network is a sponsor, and a collaborative partner for the Luggi Foeger Uphill Downhill SkiMo Race and Festival.

## Sugar Bowl

The second event is Sugar Bowl Resort's Second Annual Quad Crusher event on April 7, 2018. This race takes participants up all four of Sugar Bowl's peaks—Judah, Lincoln, Disney, and Crow's. The course is excellent and varied. Your author happened to be skiing at Sugar Bowl last year while the event was ongoing (though not participating himself), and the Sugar Bowl staff did a fantastic job of directing traffic on the mountain, ensuring a smooth race. It was reminiscent of a well-directed running road race.

For more information about this event, check out the Youtube video of last year's race, here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCEJxmAuifw>

and Sugar Bowl's website here:

<http://www.sugarbowl.com/events>

Both of the events above have multiple divisions to cater to racers new and experienced alike. They also encourage multiple types of gear—alpine touring, telemark, and snowshoes. We at Snowlands Network view these events as great opportunities for the skiing public to have a chance to see folks out touring and maybe become curious enough to try it out and then venture out into the backcountry. Hopefully they inspire more folks to enjoy and experience human powered winter recreation and explore our public lands that we work so diligently to protect.

# Back Country Experience Reports

## Citizen Concerns of Record

By Jeff Erdoes

Forest Service lands are ours to enjoy and to protect. The focus of Snowlands Network is protecting winter recreation on public lands, and we strive to make sure there are quality opportunities for human-powered winter recreation on public lands, which are most often managed by the United States Forest Service.

Therefore we are interested in the various belt-driven vehicles with steering skids (i.e. snowmobiles and snow bikes), which the Forest Service calls Over Snow Vehicles (OSVs). Unfortunately OSVs can be and are misused in various ways on public lands. Forest visitors who witness such misuse or its aftermath are often disturbed by the experience and would like to inform public land managers.

Well aware of this fact, Snowlands Network early in its existence fired up a vital node in our network: In 2003 we provided a simple online method for snow-seekers in California and Nevada to document events and observations on local national forests and ensure that the reported information goes straight to concerned authorities. Voluntary reports from citizens soon reached across popular trailheads throughout the Lake Tahoe region and broadly into our backcountry.

Since its inception, Snowlands' online Back Country Experience Reporting (BCER) system has been updated and streamlined several times. It now accepts photographic evidence and is easier to use than ever. Early-on and from one report to the next (nearly 300 reports so far volunteered by more than 110 citizens), it became apparent that a variety of concerns are frequently noted by human-paced forest visitors throughout snow season.

Here is a brief rundown of concerns commonly reported by skiers, snowshoers, and boarders who visit national forest lands in eastern California and western Nevada:

### **Out-of-bounds OSV:**

Observed and/or track-evident motorist 'bashing' and poaching of mapped and posted protected terrain, from reaches of designated Wilderness to more modest reaches of designated pedestrian areas such as Tahoe Meadows, Nevada. Whether such 'OSV trespass' is deliberate or inadvertent, this issue is at the top of the list. Sometimes it is the only complaint described in citizen reports. More often, reporting witnesses who are moved to complain of OSV trespass recognize other problems associated with specialty motorists who fail to respect limits. Such as:

### **Degraded surroundings:**

Sensory impacts of OSV activity are often described in citizen reports - particularly those occurring off-road, where forest visitors generally hold a greater expectation of wholesome surroundings and pure air. Reporting witnesses have described the bellowing noise of OSVs reverberating between canyon walls as well as the

potent aerobic menace of exhaust fumes at altitude. OSV off-road traffic creates scenic and physical impacts, too. Even after OSVs dice the snow scene, the remnant frozen ruts can hazard routes of ordinary, knee-reliant access, including nominally protected pedestrian routes such as the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.

### **OSV resource damage:**

Beyond gouging an ugly wake, OSV prowling for 'access' through marginal or discontinuous snowscape comes with multiple resource impacts, from turbid stream flows to crushed elfinwood in alpine and sub-alpine habitats. Slow-growing conifers like Whitebark Pines and Western Junipers (either of which, undisturbed, can survive for hundreds of years) are particularly vulnerable. Witnesses have even recorded concentrations of oily OSV combustion products and poisonous antifreeze trapped in snow.

Reports to Snowlands Network eventually grew to concern eight national forests in California and Nevada: Lassen, Plumas, Tahoe, Humboldt-Toiyabe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Inyo National Forests and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. As many of you already know, six of these national forest units (all except Inyo and Humboldt-Toiyabe) are *now* engaged in a major review of OSV management ("Subpart C" of USFS' 2005 Travel Management Rule).

The USFS' final product will be maps of OSV allowances and restrictions, which we expect will reduce OSV impacts on forest resources and recreationists. Throughout this process (still about two years to go!), Snowlands' incontrovertible and ever-growing record of citizen concerns will prove to be extremely influential. BCER reports have never been more important. Wherever in your snow seeking you encounter evidence of OSV misuse, don't just get angry - report it to Snowlands Network!

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



*Snowmobile tracks south of Relay Ridge, NV (photo by Jeff Erdoes)*

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# Community Snow Observations by Jim Gibson

NASA wants your help in tracking snow depths in mountain regions. All you need is an avalanche probe with centimeter depth markings, a smartphone app, and a willingness to record snow depths during your recreational winter outings.

NASA uses remote observations from aircraft and satellites to create snow distribution and runoff models. They are interested in studying avalanche hazards, water resources, and climate change. Snow depth data from on-the-ground measurements would help improve their models significantly. The NASA Community Science Observations project is seeking volunteers to measure and report snow depths (see <http://communitysnowobs.org>).

Avalanche probes with depth markings are available from Black Diamond, BCA, Mammut, and Ortovox. If you already have a probe without markings, you can fashion your own with some adhesive tape and a marking pen.

You can use the Mountain Hub smartphone app to record your observations. See the website <https://www.mountainhub.com> on how to use the app. With a GPS-enabled smartphone, you can enter the snow depth and optionally include other condition data or a picture. Your report will be sent to Mountain Hub immediately or the next time you have connectivity to your cell phone network.

If, like me, you don't have a smartphone, you can use a hand-held GPS unit to record your location. I put the snow depth as a comment in the waypoint record marking my location. Then, later, I enter the data manually in the app on my iPad. You can also submit the data to the Mountain Hub website from a browser.

See the websites listed above for more information and join the winter recreation community in helping NASA scientists improve their mountain snow models. The data you record will also be shared with other members of the winter recreation community.

## **Snowlands Network**

PO Box 321171  
Los Gatos, CA 95032  
[www.snowlands.org](http://www.snowlands.org)  
[info@snowlands.org](mailto:info@snowlands.org)  
530.265.6424

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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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