

August 9, 2015

Phyllis Ashmead
USFS- Stanislaus National Forest

RE: OSV Comments:

Dear Phyllis:

Thank you in advance for reviewing our comments for the proposed OSV project in the Stanislaus National Forest. As you know from my email correspondence, I was unable to comment on the interactive map offered online, I would greatly encourage the Forest Supervisor to provide an opportunity to allow folks to discuss and comment on the maps directly. This opportunity would allow a more realistic approach to discuss the topography and forest roads, the landmarks that have come to be familiar markers in the forest.

Charlie and I own and operate Heidi's Ski and Paddle Shop in Cold Springs, CA. We provide both summer (stand up paddleboards) and winter (skis, snowboards and shoes) rental equipment. This year will mark our 33rd season. As a business owners we have to encourage the effective and responsible management of tourist driven activities. Winter recreation, including snowmobiling, is a sizeable contributor to the economics of this small and struggling area. The last few years have been difficult for all area businesses, from the severe drought to the Rim fire many issues have plagued us; honestly every dollar derived from area businesses is VERY crucial to our survival. The proposed map for OSV causes great worry for myself as I feel strongly it will greatly diminish the snowmobiling in our area, causing a severe loss of revenue for area businesses.

We would like to commend the Forest for taking into consideration and moderate approach to allow riding in some Near Natural Areas with a minimum riding depth. Many of these areas offer popular for riding for many local and advanced riders; many are isolated or great distances from parking areas making it very difficult to access on snowshoes or skis. These areas have now been ridden for numerous years since there was non-enforcement of the existing Near Natural areas designated in the 1991 Forest Plan. Due to the non-enforcement riders had no knowledge of restriction and these areas have now become 'historical' riding areas in a conversational sense. Moreover, we would encourage the Forest to extend the Near Natural Area with a minimum riding depth to include the following: Eagle Meadow, Barn Meadow, Groundhog Meadow, McCormick Pocket, Cooper Peak, Coyote Meadows, Castle Meadow and extending towards Pinecrest Peak. Additionally, the areas of Red rock meadow towards the Wilderness boundary should also be included, we would be happy to discuss the specific areas with you in further detail while using a map, as the interactive feature is currently unavailable.

We would also recommend that the area of Herring Creek Road be evaluated, there is a great opportunity to make the closure gate on Herring Creek Road more flexible. In drier years it would be wonderful if folks could drive to the Gargoyles area and park vehicles. The area of Hammill Canyon

including the Gargoyles and area around Herring Creek Reservoir is a prime opportunity for skiing and snowshoeing. This area is better for non-motorized use and provides easier access for people looking for an area to park and explore.

As we look at the map and try our best to evaluate the details without topography, it would seem logical to provide a more visible and realistic boundary for legal riding. Using the existing Forest Roads could accomplish this. For instance the area of Herring Creek Road towards Strawberry and Pinecrest Peak (the right hand side of the road if traveling up) should be made legal to ride (with minimum depths if needed) while the left hand side of the road (if traveling up) could be for non-motorized use until you reach a specific point. As homeowners in Strawberry we would greatly appreciate the area from Herring Creek Road to Georges Drive, which is legal to ride in the Summer with ATVs and dirt bikes, be made legal to ride with snowmobiles. This would allow homeowners to access riding terrain without transporting vehicles greater distances up the hill, decreasing the carbon footprint in the Forest.

It's disappointing to see the ski areas, of Bear Valley and Dodge Ridge closed to riding. Traditionally Bear Valley has been open in the late spring (when conditions permit) after the close of ski season. This allows for good riding in an open and groomed environment catering to multiple skill levels. The closure seems unjust considering Mountain Operations of both facilities utilize snow cats and snowmobiles throughout the season. I would encourage you to reevaluate this proposal and extend to allow riding at Dodge Ridge after the season end as well.

Having read through many of the other comments we would like to highlight a few. We would commend the accuracy of the comments and technical data provided from Kim and Rourke Hembree. The compaction data and other relevant references to wildlife especially that of our fragile and beloved Yellowstone and wonderful examples. Additionally, the letters from Mr. Buckley of CSERC and Keri Green paint snowmobilers in an unfair light. As multi-sport participants (including non-motorized winter recreation) I can assure you that snowmobiling causes very minimal resource damage and allows the user to explore areas of terrain otherwise hidden. The language of extreme snowmobiling is harsh and paints the picture that everyone is seeking and adrenaline driven, destructive sport. This is not true. We would invite and Forest Personnel to ride with us and evaluate on their own perspective. I feel it's important to reiterate the importance of open and accessible OSV riding areas in the Forest. The income derived from this endeavors is of vital importance to our areas and a I shudder to think of the loss if it becomes too limited. In my mind it seems realistic to work together to achieve a minimum snow depth in Near Natural Areas and allow a positive riding environment in our Forest. We appreciate that this process is ongoing and continues to allow for public comments in the future. Please feel free to reach out to us at any time to further discuss and of the details highlighted in this comment.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best,

Heidi Lupo and Charlie Hard