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Inyo National Forest

351 Pacu Lane

Suite 200

Bishop, CA 93514

Re: INF Over Snow Vehicle Use Designation

Dear Sir/Madam,

I attended the Over Snow Vehicle Workshop in Mammoth Lakes on February 23, 2016. I am pleased that Inyo National Forest is seeking comments from local users of the Forest, but felt the workshop would have benefitted from more structure. It was a pleasant surprise that the snowmobile community and the “quiet recreators” treated each other cordially. Hopefully, the groups even learned a little from each other.

I’m an avid cross-country skier and sometime snowshoer. My preference is to ski “off-piste” in ungroomed areas – most frequently in the Mammoth Meadow at the base of the Sherwins, the Mammoth Scenic Loop area, across Highway 203 from Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (including Minaret Summit) and at Obsidian Dome. In the twenty years that I’ve lived in the Eastern Sierra, I’ve watched the degradation of the cross-country ski experience by the proliferation of snowmobile use. Breathing gas fumes and hearing the roar of two-stroke engines is not my idea of a quality Forest experience. Some areas (particularly near Inyo Craters) become so marked with snowmobile tracks that there is no way for a skier to accomplish an efficient kick and glide. While most snowmobilers I encounter are courteous and slow down near skiers, the OSV community includes some renegades who speed recklessly through the forest and ignore snowmobile closure areas. Also, access to trailheads can be difficult when the parking areas are occupied by large trucks and trailers needed by OSV users.

While designating areas that are best for each user group and helping define new boundaries is a worthy challenge, it’s a futile effort (and a waste of time) if there are no resources available for enforcement. That’s the situation we have today. Some snowmobilers refuse to respect wilderness boundaries or stay out of areas that are off-limits to OSVs. Last week while skiing near Obsidian Dome, not only were there sled tracks in the ski-only area, but the tracks went right over groomed ski trails, ruining them. I’ve often seen snowmobile tracks along Blue Diamond routes, creating a safety hazard for non-motorized users.

My preference is for an expansion of areas that limit OSV use:

* The Sherwins area and Mammoth Meadow provide an easy in-town x-country ski/snowshoe opportunity for residents and visitors. I’d like to see at least the western portion restricted to exclude OSVs. Heavy snowmobile use in this area creates noise pollution for nearby neighbors and heavy tracking impairs vistas.
* A better separation of users in the Inyo Craters area would be beneficial to avoid conflict. It would be nice if the x-country ski/snowshoe area could be expanded to include more gently rolling terrain. A non-motorized trailhead along the Scenic Loop Road would enhance safety and aesthetics.
* A new non-motorized area east of Highway 395 would benefit the Nordic community. This would open new vistas and terrain to those seeking quiet recreation.
* Fat bike use should continue to be restricted on groomed x-country ski trails and Blue Diamond routes.

I appreciate the time and effort the USFS is dedicating to this project and look forward to following the process.

Sincerely,

Lesley Bruns