March 17, 2016

OSV Use Project Manager

Inyo National Forest

Bishop, CA 93514

Re: OSV Use on San Joaquin Ridge and Minaret Vista

Dear Erin,

I would like to propose, unpopular as it may be with the OSV users, that the San Joaquin ridge and west of it, be closed to OSV use. The San Joaquin ridge and the Mammoth Pass are the two lowest passes in the Sierra Nevada. Because they are low, a much higher number of animals can cross over it and down into the middle fork of the San Joaquin river canyon. It is a major migration corridor for deer to move into the Sierra meadows on the west side in the spring and for other species to pass through, even in winter.

The San Joaquin ridge is also where the Great Basin species meet the Sierra Nevada species providing a richer bio-diversity and making it a more valuable ecosystem. The middle fork of the San Joaquin valley is one of the few north-south trending canyons and because of that, and the volcanic rock of the ridge, it is cooler and retains more moisture making it one of the most resilient Sierra ecosystems for facing Climate Change, i.e. drought. It is also a splendid riparian habitat that is accessible to species in the nearby forest and sagebrush habitats.

The state sponsored the California Essential Habitat and Connectivity Project (CEHP) which is on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s website: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/conservation/planning/connectivity/CEHC> , maps natural landscape blocks and needed connectivity corridors. The Inyo National Forest has been identified as a natural landscape block, a natural migration path for animals. The report assumes that the natural landscape blocks will not be degraded to the point that connectivity corridors need to be added back in. On the contrary, it is assumed these ecosystems will be preserved by public agencies whose job it is to manage them.

The map on page 100 of the CEHC project shows a missing linkage from the Bald Mountain area to the Sierra Nevada via the San Joaquin ridge. This project asks that the managing and local agencies help create these missing linkages when opportunity knocks. To that end, the whole area from the backside of the Glass Mountains, across Bald Mountain and across to the San Joaquin ridge be preserved and protected as a wildlife corridor. To me, this would preclude OSVs for the entire length of that corridor. With Global Warming and Climate Change, wildlife will be on the move, as drought forces animals to find new habitat and new water sources in the Eastern Sierra. Radio collared predators e.g. bears, wolves, bobcats, often travel great distances—hundreds of miles--on walkabouts, looking for mates, looking for new territory, or just exploring. They need these linkages. It is extremely important that we understand the role the Inyo National Forest will play in helping wildlife survive Climate Change. On the macro scale, the Eastern Sierra serves as a huge migration corridor between the Mojave and the Modoc Plateau.

OSV use is incompatible with wildlife for many reasons. When there isn’t sufficient depth of snow, the vehicles crush subnivean tunnels and compact the snow making it colder under the snow for mice, rabbits, and hibernating chipmunks. What might seem like sufficient depth to the public may not be enough to prevent compaction affecting the subnivean animal world. The lower survival rate of these smaller animals impacts those that prey on them, rippling up the food chain.

OSVs are also very noisy masking bird communication, predator footfalls, and underground rustling of prey, which are some of the impacts of noise on wildlife that have been studied. The noise also keeps wildlife in its hiding places which means animals are not able to travel or hunt for food, while snowmobiles are near. Restricting OSV use to say 10 am – 2pm and only allowing 4-stroke vehicles can mitigate this, but OSVs still stress wildlife. OSV use in March and April, the breeding and birthing months for most species, just adds more stress. While not all OSV users do this, some do find it fun to harass wildlife and some do cross into the Devil’s Postpile and nearby wilderness areas.

OSVs don’t need to be everywhere and anywhere. There are many other places other than the San Joaquin ridge where OSVs would have less impact on wildlife.

Sincerely,

Lynn Boulton

Lee Vining, CA