

Stopping Snowmobile Trespass In Its Tracks

Native Forest Network's Last Refuge Campaign 2003 Report

By Phil Knight and Adam Rissien



Illegal use found inside Yellowstone National Park/ Photo by Lighthawk.



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Introduction

The Native Forest Network's Last Refuge Campaign has successfully completed its third year of monitoring Wilderness and unprotected areas for snowmobile use and violations. Building on our accomplishments from past years, we have finally achieved significant results. Since we released last year's report, "Tracking Snowmobile Trespass", we have enjoyed a tremendous outpouring of support from other organizations as well as the Forest Service and Park Service. No longer is illegal snowmobile use a side issue.

This year we have enjoyed the financial support of Musicians United to Sustain the Environment (MUSE), as well as generous individual donors, enabling us to continue our monitoring program. From our Bozeman office, Phil Knight focused on the Gallatin and Targhee National Forests and the backcountry of Yellowstone National Park. Monitoring from our Missoula office by Adam Rissien concentrated on the Lolo, Clearwater, Nez Perce and Bitterroot National Forests.

Last season's focus areas now have the much-needed attention of Forest Service law enforcement and policy makers. This is evidenced by an increase in patrols and citations issued along with the release of enforcement plans, resulting in a decrease in snowmobile activity for some areas of concern. However, despite these efforts, we continue to document illegal activity and see persistent use in other unprotected areas.

This year we once again concentrated our work on the Great Burn Proposed Wilderness in Montana, the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in Idaho, the Jeddiah Smith Wilderness in Wyoming, the Gospel Hump Wilderness in Idaho, the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and in closed areas of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area in Montana. We also expanded our efforts to include some of Yellowstone National Park's backcountry.

As we predicted, the impacts of snowmobiling on wildlife and critical habitat have become one of the most crucial wintertime issues. The political climate surrounding this problem has turned in favor of snowmobilers. Whether it is the Bush Administration's attack on Yellowstone National Park or the Forest Service's attempts to open areas next to Wilderness for snowmobiling, it is clear that those of us who care about the wild backcountry need to be louder and more effective.

Our efforts are not aimed at banning snowmobiles from public lands as has been suggested by some user groups; rather we aim to assure the integrity of wildlife habitat and traditional recreation values. In this season's report we detail instances of snowmobile use and explain what efforts are being made to both protect and harm our public lands.

We could not do this work alone, and it is through the help of individual citizens (some of whom even snowmobile) and local groups that we have succeeded in our goals this year. LightHawk, the "wings of conservation" (www.lighthawk.org), once again provided immense support via their Lander, Wyoming office with their volunteer pilot network. Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers (www.wildrockies.org/cmcr) helped to provide crucial photography through their media and video services, and special recognition needs to be given to the Swan View Coalition (www.swanview.org) for their contribution to this report and their hard work.



Pyramid Peak in the Gospel Hump Wilderness, Idaho.
Photo by Chuck Pezeshki, (<http://users.moscow.com/pezeshki/>).

"We appreciate the work you have done in monitoring and documenting snowmobile trespass in the Madison Range. Thanks to your efforts, we were made aware of incursions into the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in the Shedhorn Mountain area and took steps to discourage and monitor this illegal activity. In 1999 we clearly marked the wilderness boundary by North Bear Creek, and in 2000 improved posting of the boundary in the Middle Bear and McAtee drainages. We would be very interested in any information you have derived from your monitoring efforts this winter."

-Mark Petroni, Madison District Ranger, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana, March 17, 2003

The Problem with Snowmobiles

One of our toughest challenges is convincing people of the environmental impacts from snowmobiles. User groups complain that the damage is exaggerated, and claim that since the snow melts, there isn't a problem. This view illustrates the lack of value these critics place on solitude and their unswerving rejection of credible science. We often hear of the air pollution at Yellowstone, with images of park employees wearing gas masks amidst the distinctive blue haze hanging in the air. However, with the new cleaner-

running four-stroke snowmobiles being introduced to the park, we are supposed to believe that these machines are now harmless. This is far from the truth.

The document that allowed the National Park Service to ignore the overwhelming support for the protection of Yellowstone, titled Winter Use Plans: Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, explains the impacts on wildlife: “Road kill mortality caused by oversnow vehicles would be greater (the occurrence is historically related to snowmobile use only), risks associated with harassment and displacement would increase, and physiological stress responses would rise due to higher traffic volumes.”

Outside Yellowstone the impacts of snowmobiles manifest in different ways. The two-stroke engine is still dominant, and the Forest Service has studied its effects in the more remote areas on Forest Service land. Montana’s Lolo National Forest released, in 1997, the Stateline Snowmobile Environmental Assessment, which concluded that wolverine dens could be severely impacted, causing stress and jeopardizing the survival of the young. It also explains that increased winter recreation within the Stateline analysis area could degrade air, soil and water quality, damage vegetation, and result in a lack of areas devoid of human noise. Snowmobiles can damage tree stems, break trunks and remove bark. They also may negatively impact aquatic life. The exhaust contains ammonium, nitrate and sulfate ions which, when mixed with water, create acids. These acids may stress tree seedlings and can impact germination, growth and survival.

In a more recent analysis, the Lolo National Forest further explained the impacts of snowmobiling on wildlife. Unfortunately, this study was done in a draft environmental impact statement titled MA11 Analysis, which is a proposal to remove mandated protections. This scheme is discussed later in the report. The impacts listed include effects on the threatened grizzly bear and Canada lynx as well as wolverine.

The analysis states, “Both Craighead and Craighead (1972) and Schoen and others (1987) indicated that grizzly bears selected den sites away from human activity. Consequently, it’s logical to assume that designating snowmobile use near suitable den habitat may preclude those den areas from being used. Grizzly bears are not ‘true hibernators’ but can be readily roused after which they can react quickly and energetically to disturbance (Craighead and Craighead 1972). For this reason, disturbance from snowmobiling is a potential risk to denning bears. To date, little research provides information on the effects of snowmobile use on denning grizzly bears. Based on the literature, any winter activities in the vicinity of active dens may have potentially significant adverse effects on denning bears.” It further hypothesizes that grizzlies may have become used to snowmobiles and therefore the impacts are minimized, which is a clear attempt by the Lolo National Forest to find excuses to ignore threats as it admits, “Little scientific research exists to support or refute this hypothesis.” Finding reasons to disregard potential negative impacts is again illustrated with regards to Canada lynx. The DEIS explains that “According to Ruediger and others (2000), snowmobile activity imposes two potential risks on lynx: 1) improved winter access which increases trapping mortality, and 2) increased competition by bobcats and coyotes facilitated by compacted snowmobile trails.” In the document titled the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy it “recommends against additional ‘snowmobile play areas’ within lynx habitat and no net increase in groomed over the snow routes.” The message is clear in regards to both grizzly bear and lynx; snowmobiles have a large potential to cause negative impact, so it is better to err on the side of caution when proposing human activities.

Last season’s report detailed how snowmobiles affect wolverines and can be viewed at www.nativeforest.org/campaigns/last_refuge/snowmobile_report/index.htm The wolverine is described as a sensitive species and it is expected that they will soon be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Montana is the only state in the lower 48 that still allows wolverines to be trapped.

The MA11 Analysis DEIS recognizes that “snowmobile activity poses two risks to wolverine: 1) disturbance at the natal den and subsequent loss of recruitment, and 2) improved access that facilitates increased take of legally trapped wolverines.” Much more research is under way on other forests and the impacts from snowmobiles are becoming clearer.



Grizzly bears by Chris Servheen/USFWS.



Canada lynx by Bauer, Erwin and Peggy/USFWS.

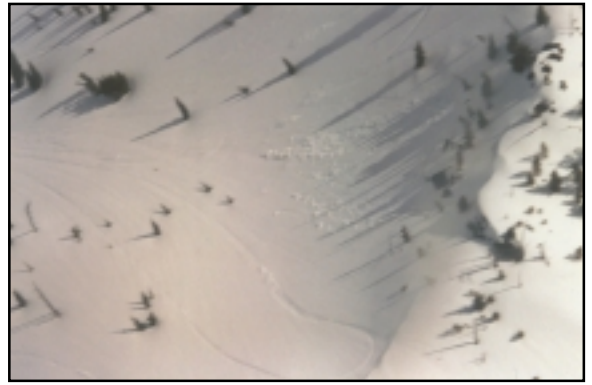
The Great Burn Proposed Wilderness, Montana/Idaho

The Great Burn proposed wilderness, located in the Bitterroot Mountains on the Idaho/Montana border, was named after the huge fires of 1910. The area remains as one of the most spectacular and wild places in the region. Only 25 miles west of Missoula, MT., local citizens have tried to ensure that the wilderness characteristics endure and through their efforts the Lolo and Clearwater National Forests designated over 224,000 acres to be managed as proposed wilderness. However, the Clearwater Forest Plan leaves their side completely open to cross-country snowmobile travel while the Lolo National Forest does not and it is for this reason we see violations

within the protected areas of the Great Burn. The Lolo and Clearwater Forest Plans are up for revision and due to the rise in motorized use along with an agency willing to offer new play areas in the backcountry, portions of the Great Burn risk being excluded from their current protected status. It will be absolutely crucial to make our voices heard if we want to see the proposed wilderness managed as one unified area.

Since last season huge steps have been taken by the Forest Service to curtail illegal use. The Lolo National Forest has changed their approach from education of the closed areas to active enforcement. New signs have been posted and the Superior District Ranger Rob Harper issued an enforcement plan detailing the steps that would be taken to patrol the area.

On the Clearwater National Forest the attitude toward snowmobile violations seems to have done a complete one-eighty, at least on the Powell District. With the addition of a new law enforcement officer, more attempts have been made to curtail trespass. Signs have been posted and at least seven



Tracks up Boulder Creek in the unrestricted area of the Great Burn/ Photo by Dan Brister, CMCR.



Tracks at Heart Lake in the closed area of the Great Burn/ Photo by Adam Rissien.

patrols were conducted at the Crooked Fork trailhead resulting in documentation of vandalism and illegal use. To the credit of the new officer, six tickets were written for the trespass and the sign was replaced. Plans were also made to conduct fly-overs supplemented by coordinated ground support.

Though the Forest Service has taken significant steps to stop trespass, our monitoring program has still found plenty evidence of illegal use. On January 11th, our volunteers documented a violation past the closure sign at the Heart Lake Trailhead and February 15th at Heart Lake after following a snowmobile trail so compacted that we were able to walk the entire way to the lake where we found numerous tracks and could hear machines all around, seeming at one point ready to appear right in front of us.

On April 12th with the help of a volunteer pilot, guide and a Cold Mountain Cold River's photographer we were able to document violations and spot heavy use in key areas along the Idaho/Montana border. The trespass found by law enforcement in the Crooked Fork Basin was confirmed, and more use was seen adjacent to it up Boulder Creek, which is a completely legal and trail-less route

snowmobilers can take to trespass into Montana. Following along the border, we once again saw hundreds of tracks on and around Kid Lake in Idaho. This play area is the result of an unrestricted path named the Schley Mountain corridor, and leads from Surveyor Creek Rd. in Montana to the lake; it is the sole exception to the Lolo National Forests closure. Our trip ended along the northern portion of the Great Burn where Hoodoo Pass is located. Like last year we documented trespass on the Stateline Trail leading from the pass to Dalton, Pearl and Heart Lakes; one of the most popular illegal riding destinations.

The only way to make enforcement easier, safer and more effective is to have the Clearwater National Forest safeguard their proposed wilderness with an area closure. We will continue to see violations until concrete steps are taken to change management conflicts, and citations are issued with heavy fines. Soon everyone will have the opportunity to influence these policies by participating in forest plan revisions beginning this fall on the Lolo National Forest and next year on the Clearwater National Forest.

We need everyone to send a clear and strong message to the Forest Service. **Keep the Great Burn Wild! One proposed wilderness, one unified plan!**

The Seeley Lake Give Away, Montana

For years folks have been asking the Lolo National Forest to close the Schley Mountain Corridor in the Great Burn and they have continually been told to wait until the forest plan revision because that is the time to make management area and policy changes. So while we ask for protections and are told to wait, the Lolo National Forest has issued a proposal to amend their forest plan and open up 2,694 acres to snowmobiles in the Seeley Lake District. Their hypocrisy is galling. Since 1986, places with the management area (MA) designation MA 11 have been protected from snowmobiles. For thirteen years the Forest Service ignored this regulation and allowed illegal use and only with the threat of litigation, in 1999, did they finally begin to enforce their policy. Now, instead of honoring their own guidelines or even waiting until the revision process starts this fall, the Lolo National Forest wants to reward the lawbreakers by changing the rules. The precedent being established is that if you



Picture of Pyramid Peak, the proposed MA11 forest plan amendment would open the south bowl to snowmobilers/ Photo by MWA on a LightHawk flight.

consistently break the law the Forest Service will just make the action legal. This is why we work to ensure that protections from motorized use are enforced.

The Lolo National Forest conducted an environmental impact statement titled the MA 11 Analysis that details the purpose and need for this giveaway, describes the areas it affects and notes the impacts. In explaining why they intend to giveaway protected areas, the report cites the need to provide diverse snowmobiling opportunities. Right now there are 250 miles of groomed snowmobile trails in the Seeley Lake area, but the argument is made that this is not good enough because they do not offer the right experience. The expert rider is left out of extreme snowmobile opportunities and the Forest Service claims it is their responsibility to provide them. As ridiculous as this sounds lets assume for a moment that this is valid. Nowhere in the analysis does it quantify or describe the available off-trail acres; all it says is that it is "limited." In the next excuse, the Forest Service has fallen back on the good old jobs vs. environment farce. The report details many things related to economics, including the history of snowmobile business, the number of visitors from out of state, hotel rentals and so on. The implication is made that local business would suffer if they don't remove the MA 11 protections. This is unlikely for reasons described in the analysis: "These impact estimates are based on the assumption that actual historical use on areas that would be closed to future snowmobile use would not merely transfer to adjoining areas still open to snowmobiles. If snowmobilers actually continue to come to Seeley Lake and ride in open areas, then the impact estimates will be overestimates." In other words, business would only be affected if people quit coming to ride on the 250 miles of groomed trails and on the unknown amount of off-trail opportunities. Since the closure has been enacted, the report acknowledges that, "preliminary discussions with resort operators in Seeley Lake indicate little change in snowmobile related overnight motel use."

Of the 2,694 acres to be opened, 1,387 acres are in the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan and the Marshall Peak Roadless Areas. The preferred alternative will impact 2,538 acres of grizzly bear denning habitat and the report states that, "Motorized activity would occur adjacent to critical spring range in Marshall, Pyramid, and Morrell Mountain areas. This would likely displace bears from those desired areas and deprive them of critical forage at a crucial time of the year. There may be other *unknown* effects on spring habitat." Lynx would also be affected due to an increase in compacted snowmobile trails and wolverine natal denning habitat would be reduced by 618 acres. All these negative impacts are described in the analysis as not significant.

This forest plan amendment has been tailored to serve illegal snowmobiling at the expense of wildlife and under false pretenses of purpose and need. I urge that you contact Tim Love at the Seeley District office and ask that the MA 11 protections be left in tact and that you be given the opportunity to comment on the final environmental impact statement.

Seeley Lake Monitoring

Even with the expectation that protections will be removed in the Seeley Lake District, the area still needs to be monitored and the current laws enforced. Last season we were alerted by skiers of violations into the Bob Marshall Wilderness from Pyramid Pass. Unfortunately, the pass is located below one of the areas that the Forest Service wants to open called Pyramid Bowl. On March 17th, working in conjunction with the Montana Wilderness Association and LighHawk, we conducted an over-flight. Tracks were seen below a series of avalanche chutes between Crescent and Matt Mountains on Morell Falls National Recreation Trail #30T. This popular route is outside the closure designation, though if any attempts were made to climb the chutes then the Wilderness boundary could be reached thereby gaining access to another area, named Marshall Bowl, that is slated to be opened along the Wilderness border. Fortunately, no trespass was seen due to high avalanche danger, but local efforts to curtail violations cannot be downplayed as many patrols were conducted. This still didn't prevent violations from the Morell Mountain lookout. Backcountry skiers reported illegal use on February 23rd north and east of their camp and there was an actual confrontation with a snowmobiler who complained that the skiers were camped on the trail and blocking access. When informed that he was violating the closure, an argument ensued. Again this is one of the areas that the Forest Service wants to open and conflicts like this ensure that skiers will stay away.



Tracks between Crescent and Matt Mountains just below the closure area/ Photo by MWA on a LighHawk flight.

Snowmobile Trespass in Jewel Basin, Flathead National Forest by Keith Hammer

Swan View Coalition has been monitoring and reporting snowmobile trespass in Jewel Basin, a wild area in the Swan Range of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, for 20 years. On February 23, another SVC volunteer and I saw the usual tracks of trespass on Wildcat Lake.

Our monitoring has resulted in the ticketing of about a half-dozen snowmobilers over the years, mostly on the illegal snowmobile trail we got closed under a court order in Krause Basin (which was used as a shortcut to Jewel Basin). One of our members once saw snowmobiles up-close near Black Lake, skied out the Jewel Basin Road on the west slope of the Swan Range, drove all the way around

to Hungry Horse Dam on the east slope where the snowmobiles are unloaded at the end of the plowed road, waited for the culprits to return to their pickups and load their sleds, recorded their pickup license plates and turned them in to law enforcement authorities. As I recall the culprits were only fined \$50-\$75 - barely the price of bragging rights.

In April 1998, the Forest Service allowed Flathead Search and Rescue to use snowmobiles in Jewel Basin to search for a downed plane. We hired a plane the next day to help look for the downed plane and to document on video what I suspected: the S/R snowmobilers had been "high-marking" and "playing hill climb" near Wildcat, Black, and Picnic Lakes, among others, and had set a track straight up a couloir and over the crest next to the microwave building above Picnic Lakes (if someone tries to convince you there are slopes too steep for today's snowmobiles, don't believe it). The culprits the following week were bragging and showing off photos of their Jewel Basin adventure in sporting goods stores in the Flathead. Hardly a professional S/R operation. We and others filed complaints with the Forest Service and they did nothing.

The Forest Service has to take snowmobile trespass more seriously. Letters to the editors emphasizing the importance of keeping non-motorized areas non-motorized are absolutely essential. Please take a few moments to write a few paragraphs about the importance of respecting quiet places, quiet recreation, essential winter wildlife habitat, and the law.



Picture of Jewel Basin on the Flathead National Forest/ Photo taken from their website.

The Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, Montana/Idaho

Last season's focus was on the violations occurring from the Elk Summit proposed wilderness area and also from Tom Beal Park. Both places are in Idaho on the Clearwater National Forest and lay on the northern edge of the Wilderness border. Elk Summit has been known to provide access to Diablo Lookout inside the protected area and this season we urged the Forest Service to actively patrol the boundary. Whether due to snow conditions or law enforcement, officers did not see any use in the area. Early in the season a snowmobiler who likes to ski into the Wilderness from Tom Beal Park did report violations on January 3rd and 11th. He noted that there were no boundary markers or signs explaining the closure and when the violators were approached they did not know that they had crossed into the protected areas. We contacted the Powell District about the incident and they had assured us that signs would be posted. No other violations were seen from the park the rest of the season.

However, the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness still needs active patrols and we urge the Bitterroot National Forest to take action and stop illegal use. Starting in April, Friends of the Bitterroot began to monitor key areas for evidence of grizzly bear. Since snowmobiling occurs at the same time as bears emerge from their dens, it is no surprise that they will see signs of trespass. Such was the case on April 19th when they were flying over Lost Horse Pass. Forest Service Rd. 5605 leads to Twin Lakes just under the pass and tracks were seen on the ridge west of the lakes, skirting along the Wilderness boundary. This area has a history of providing opportunities for trespass following near trails #430 or #421. The LightHawk pilot who flew this day also observed that the Elk Summit area did not have any use.



This cherry-stem road #444 provides access into the Gospel-Hump Wilderness/ Photo by Chuck Pezeshki, (<http://users.moscow.com/pezeshki/>).

The Gospel-Hump Wilderness, Idaho

This Wilderness made the front cover of last year's report displaying tracks deep into the closed area. Located on the Nez Perce National Forest, the Gospel Hump Wilderness, named after Gospel Peak and Buffalo Hump, covers over 200,000 acres. Road #444 is a cherry-stem leading to a lookout that facilitates snowmobile trespass and it is along this route where we saw previous violations. To the credit of the Nez Perce National Forest's Salmon District Ranger Jack Carlson and John Fantini of the Clearwater Ranger District, regular patrols were conducted. Due to the attention from last year, violations were taken seriously and law enforcement informed several parties of the boundaries. During the whole season there were no violations seen by the Forest Service. On March 24th we flew over the area and confirmed that no trespass had occurred. Renown photogrpaher and guide Chuck Pezeshki, once again donated his skills and services in documenting the trip. Admittedly, tracks may have been snowed over and late season violations could have occurred, but we can expect the Forest Service to continue monitoring for trespass next year.

The Lee Metcalf Wilderness, Montana

Flight Report, February 25, 2003

We took to the skies on a flawless, cold February day, thanks again to LightHawk and its dedicated volunteer pilots. We had planned to fly over the western part of Yellowstone, but the pilot made a pass over that area on his way to Bozeman and reported no signs of activity. This was mainly due to recent heavy snowfall, which covered old tracks, and the coldest weather of the winter, which slowed all outdoor activity.

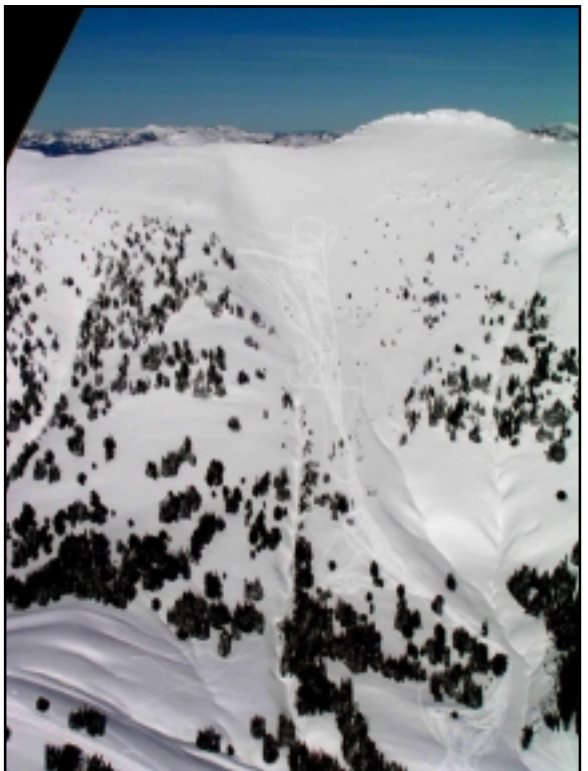
Thanks either to this cold snap and the deep, soft snow, or to increased responsibility on the part of snowmobilers and higher vigilance by the Forest Service, we found no signs of trespass on this flight. Our route took us over portions of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness where we have found extensive trespass before, and over closed areas of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area as well.

The Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area

The Cabin Creek WMA was created by Public Law 98-140, the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and Management Act of 1983. The Lee Metcalf Wilderness, located in the spectacular Madison Range, second-highest in Montana, was originally proposed as one contiguous Wilderness but, mainly due to lobbying by snowmobilers and their allies in Congress, was divided into three units. Cabin Creek WMA connects the two southern units. PL 98-140 states "The Secretary (of Agriculture) shall permit continued use of the area by motorized equipment only for activities associated with existing levels of livestock grazing, administrative purposes and for snowmobiling during periods of adequate snow cover but only where such uses are compatible with the protection and propagation of wildlife within the area."

Snowmobiling is permitted in Cabin Creek insofar as it does not impact wildlife and as long as there is "sufficient" snow cover. Elk and grizzly bears are specifically mentioned in the Act as species of concern. However, the impacts of snowmobiles on wildlife such as grizzly bears and wolverine are poorly understood. The WMA lies entirely within grizzly bear recovery habitat. A very popular portion of the Big Sky Snowmobile Trail goes right through the heart of the WMA. Much of this route is groomed for snowmobile use, and is marked with road signs and huge posts topped with reflectors.

According to the PL 98-140, "The area shall be further administered by the Secretary of Agriculture to maintain presently existing wilderness character" It is hard to understand how intense snowmobile use, trail grooming and trail development contributes to maintaining the wilderness character of Cabin Creek.



High-marking snowmobilers have ridden far up onto the side of Sage Peak, the highest peak in the Cabin Creek area. The Lee Metcalf Wilderness boundary is on the top of the ridge.



We did note and record the extensive snowmobile traffic in the Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area. The 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan permits only vehicles under 40 inches wide in the entire area during summer. Yet this fragile 38,000 region of vast subalpine and alpine basins is open to unrestricted snowmobile use. In addition, the Forest Service allows ORVs far wider than 40 inches to use many trails here.

Cabin Creek Divide tracks: This shows the intensity of snowmobile use Cabin Creek Divide, in the heart of the Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area, Gallatin National Forest. This was taken about 18 hours after a major snowstorm/ Photo by Phil Knight on a LightHawk over-flight.



The Oil Well road is used by ORV's traveling into the Cabin Creek WMA. Snowmobiles and 4-wheelers have denuded the meadows along the trail and led to this erosion, documented in April 2003/ Photo by Phil Knight.



Traffic sign on the Big Sky Snowmobile Trail, near Yellowstone National Park. Also pictured are illegal ORV tracks (this trail is only open to snowmobile use)/ Photo by Phil Knight.



Severe soil loss in the Brackett Creek area of the Bridger Range, Montana. Snowmobiles have worn away all of the soil right down to bedrock/ Photo by Phil Knight.

Trespass Out of Control in the Jedediah Smith Wilderness, Wyoming

In March 2002, a LightHawk pilot flew a mission for us over the Jedediah Smith Wilderness in Wyoming and reported many snowmobile tracks deep in the Wilderness. The Jedediah Smith is on the west slope of the famous Teton mountain range and is critical habitat for bighorn sheep, wolverine and other elusive critters. This winter the rampant trespass continued, and the Targhee National Forest, as far as we know, made no attempt to stop it. A Bozeman resident and businessman wrote the following:

“In January, my brother, sister-in-law and I carefully planned a snowmobile and ski vacation to the Targhee National Forest and the adjacent Jedediah Smith Wilderness. We carefully plotted the Wilderness boundary into our GPS units and planned on snowmobiling to there, then skiing into the Wilderness to enjoy the solitude and quiet. To our amazement, the Wilderness was overrun with snowmobile traffic. The boundaries were almost totally unmarked, the trailheads had no information about Wilderness restrictions, and the snowmobiles ran throughout the Wilderness with impunity! One young rider actually buzzed us on his machine. Numerous others were roaring around in adjacent cirques and drainages.

Specifically, snowmobiles were all over Rammel Mountain nearly to the peak; they went right by the only Wilderness sign we encountered, on the trail to Green Mountain, and from the top of Green Mountain we watched them going up Badger Creek, past the Crow's Nest all the way to the Grand Teton National Park boundary near Maidenform Peak. The photo was taken of a ridge off Rammel Mountain at N43E 53.778' W 110E 54.531'.

There is obviously no enforcement of the Wilderness rules in the Targhee/Jedediah Smith. Our vacation was literally ruined after careful planning and traveling hundreds of miles to enjoy what is supposed to be Wilderness. Obviously, we are not opposed to use of snowmobiles, and enjoy their use as transportation and recreation. But they have their place, and we expect the officials in charge of enforcement of the law to do their jobs.”

At the insistence of the public, these lands were wisely set aside as Wilderness by our lawmakers. We now insist that lawmakers and government officials enforce the laws they have made.



Tracks inside the Jedediah Smith Wilderness/Photo by Dana Huschle.

NPS Cracks Down on Yellowstone Park Snowmobile Trespass

Snowmobile trespass into the backcountry of Yellowstone National Park, a major problem for years, has received increased attention this year. A LightHawk pilot reported extensive tracks on overflights in January and February (see photos).

Twelve people were arrested and nine more were issued tickets in February and March for riding snowmobiles out of bounds in Yellowstone National Park. The violations involved snowmobilers who illegally entered the park across the western border about eight miles south of West Yellowstone. In some cases, rangers found snowmobile tracks next to signs notifying riders of the park boundary. One group was found riding more than five miles inside the park. Some of those arrested may face additional charges for damaging the park's natural resources. "The snowmobiles are breaking off the tops of the (small) trees," NPS spokesperson Marcia Karle said. "That's the new growth each year."

The Park Service has increased ranger patrols along the western edge of Yellowstone in recent years after repeated problems with

illegal snowmobiling in that area. Last year, twelve people were ticketed for riding illegally on the western boundary. Rangers logged at least four thousand miles on patrol this year while looking for illegal snowmobiling. The area has also been patrolled by aircraft.

Jack Welch, president of the Blue Ribbon Coalition, a motorized-vehicle access group, said the organization doesn't condone any snowmobiling that violates the law. The group supports strong punishment for violators, he said. "We've got people in our country that run stop signs, that hunt without licenses. In a free society, you're going to have people that do this," Welch said. "We tell land managers that if you catch somebody, throw the book at them. That's the only way they're going to get the message."

Snowmobiling on park roads, which was to be phased out by next winter, has also seen an increase in illegal activity and in law enforcement. According to the Great Falls Tribune, by March 14 officials at Yellowstone National Park had reported a record number of violations by snowmobile riders this winter. The 358 violations for such things as underage driving and speeding compare with 2001-02, there were 338 violations the previous year, and 176 the year before. Yellowstone officials attribute the increased violations to stepped-up enforcement of traffic rules.

The Bush Administration recently overturned a Park Service plan to remove snowmobiles from Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Conservationists and individuals, including Phil Knight, have sued to reinstate the ban on snowmobiling.

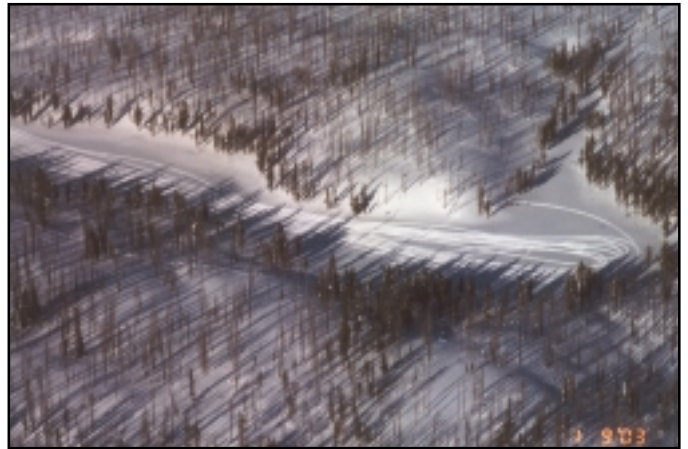
The Culprits

Part of this season's monitoring has taken place on-line. Combing through snowmobile forums has proved quite educational as we have seen from the snowmobilers' perspective what the season was like. Snow conditions were very bad early this year, and late season opportunities dominated the riding. An industry powerhouse called SnoWest moderates the most informative forum. It is through their web site that we were able to read about planned trips into protected areas and witness the blatant disregard riders have for the law. These folk even provide their own photos; they almost do our work for us.

With regards to the Great Burn proposed wilderness, snowmobilers regularly described riding on the ridge above Dalton Lake and at one point mention going to Siamese Lakes, a place we saw trespass last year. One group of riders bragged about a trip that began at Hoodoo Pass and went all the way to the Schley Mt. Corridor, riding through Steep Lakes, which is a Forest Service Natural Research Area. One snowmobiler talked about traveling on the ridge above Trio Lakes where we documented trespass the week before. Another thread mentioned trying to make it up to Admiral Peak inside the closure area and an additional rider described how he rode to Leo Lake, just below the Stateline Trail, and then went on to trespass in Cache Saddle. Even more, at one point a forum member described how to illegally travel to Mud Lake from Kid Lake and even provided a map detailing how to get there. This industry-sponsored forum is rampant with examples of riders either learning how to break the law or boasting about it.

The Forest Service needs to look at this website (<http://www.snowest.com/fusetalk3/index.cfm>) as a tool to educate themselves in order to direct law enforcement and issue citations. If the Forest Service monitored this site they would know that, despite their efforts, people are still using the Stateline Trail #738 and #46 to further trespass in the Great Burn.

Often times we hear that this kind of illegal activity is the work of a few rogue elements and not representative of official groups. On February 14, the Missoula Snowgoers illegally groomed five miles in preparation for their President's Day fun run with full knowledge that this activity was against the law. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) administers the grooming program and provides the equipment. No fines were issued. In a telephone conversation with a representative of MTFWP, it was explained that this flagrant disregard of the law is very infrequent and as such the only consequence warranted is an invitation to the group to come and review the rules. Admittedly, this is a rare instance. However, the club president was fully aware of the situation and demonstrated complete indifference to the guidelines. This kind of contempt for the law should at least warrant some kind of punishment, even if slight. Certainly it deserves more than an invitation.



Violations into the Big Horn area of Yellowstone National Park/ Photo by LightHawk.



"For a couple of hours while I was scouting, I realized why I snowmobile. The freedom to roam, to climb, to explore; this is what our sport is all about. I was one with my machine and nature. That's a feeling that we long for. That's what gets us through life. Sadly, though, it's that very feeling that the environmentalists are trying to strip from us. This is snowmobiling. This is life. It rejuvenates the soul and lifts the spirit. It makes me forget about golf."

-Steve Janes, Publisher, SnoWest Magazine, March 2000

Time to Take Action

This season we saw a decline in illegal use compared to last year. However, we are still seeing violations in the Great Burn and the Lolo National Forest's plan to remove protections along the Bob Marshall Wilderness is disheartening. As individual citizens we urge you to take the time and write to the Forest Service voicing your support for keeping these areas free from motorized use. We also urge you to write to the National Park Service to thank them for their efforts to protect the backcountry of Yellowstone Park from illegal snowmobiling. Below you will find contact information for each Forest and a small description of the action we all need to take.

Lolo National Forest, Montana

- The Lolo NF needs to close Surveyor Creek Rd. to motorized use and issue citations to violators through increased patrols. *Contact Lolo NF Supervisor Deborah Austin at Lolo NF, Fort Missoula Bldg. 24, Missoula, MT 59804 or (406) 329-3750.*
- Urge the Lolo NF to keep their MA 11 protections in tact. *Contact the Seeley District Ranger, Tim Love at (406) 677-2233 or write to HC-31, Box 3200, Seeley Lake, MT. 59868.*

Clearwater National Forest, Idaho

- The Clearwater NF needs to revise their forest plan and adopt a policy that discontinues motorized use in its proposed wilderness. *Contact Clearwater NF Supervisor Larry Dawson at 12730 Hwy. 12, Orofino, ID 83544 or (208) 476-4541.*
- Thank the Powell District law enforcement for their great work and urge that they continue it next season. Call District Ranger Joni Packard at (208) 942-3113 or write to Powell Ranger District, Lolo, Montana 59847.

Bitterroot National Forest, Idaho

- Tell the Bitterroot NF to make an effort to patrol the Wilderness boundary by conducting regular patrols and issuing citations. *Contact the Forest Supervisor David Bull at (406) 363-7117 or mail to 1801 North First St., Hamilton, Mt. 59840.*

Nez Perce National Forest, Idaho

- Tell the Nez Perce NF thank you for the work they have done this season and urge them to continue their efforts next year.
- *Contact Jack Carlson, Salmon River District Ranger, HC 01, Box 70, White Bird Id. 83554 (208) 839-2211.*

Gallatin National Forest, Montana

- Tell the Gallatin NF that unless the Big Sky Snowmobile Trail can be effectively patrolled, it should be closed.
- Urge them to beef up law enforcement patrols along the border of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, and to arrest violators. *Contact Becki Heath, Forest Supervisor or Rich Inman, Deputy Forest Supervisor at P.O. Box 130, 10 East Babcock Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59771 or (406) 587-6701.*

Targhee National Forest, Wyoming

- The Targhee needs to more effectively enforce the boundaries of the Jedediah Smith Wilderness.
- Law enforcement needs to be increased in areas known to have illegal use and violators held accountable to the fullest penalty. *Contact Targhee NF Supervisor Jerry Reese at 1405 Hollipark Drive, Idaho Falls, Idaho 83403 or (208) 524-7500.*

Yellowstone National Park

Yellowstone has done an exemplary job of enforcing the regulations. Send your thanks to Suzanne Lewis, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, PO Box 168, Mammoth, WY 82190-0168. CC your letter to Bob Seibert, West District Ranger, PO Box 640, West Yellowstone, MT 59758.

The Native Forest Network would like to give a special thanks to:

LightHawk: www.lighthawk.org

Friends of the Clearwater: www.wildrockies.org/foc

Cold Mountain Cold Rivers: www.wildrockies.org

Swan View Coalition: www.wildswan.org

Chuck Pezeshki: <http://users.moscow.com/pezeshki>

Montana Wilderness Association: www.wildmontana.org

Friends of the Bitterroot: www.friendsofthebitterroot.org