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Comments: There is so much at stake here regarding these Travel Management Plan alternatives. So much for individuals not invested FULLY into whats at stake as most aren't. People have lives to live, families to spend time with...but to FULLY grasp what is going on with the Stanislaus Winter Travel for most is a fools errand. What it will ALL COME DOWN TO is the Forest Service and its managers to DO THE RIGHT THING!! Im VERY ACTIVE as a backcountry sledder throughout the west and have been for more than 20yrs. Ive resided part time in California for the last 7yrs in Oakdale making Hgwy 108/Hgwy 4 my backcountry playground. Before I identify PRECISELY what sledding here in this forest means to me and SO MANY, let me share my VERY FIRST impression of this region on my VERY FIRST visit as a sledder back in 2012. I rode the very top of Sonora Pass May 29 of that year. It was the very small section of bowls at the top barely accessible to ride as pockets of snow lay in the shaded exposures...BUT there was enough to enjoy the day away from humanity. I rode to the top of the ridgeline because one thing we enjoy is a vantage point to see the beauty of our vast sweeping mountains. I could almost see as far south as Yosemite to the south. and as far north as Highland Peak up Hgwy 4. Basically the ENTIRE Stanislaus highcountry. Coming from the mountains of Nevada and Idaho, the sight was not awe inspiring, I know the mountain backcountry. My first emotion was sadness. As far as the eye could see in both directions of mountain backcountry with YEARS of exploring and adventure to be had.....and I knew it was ALL OFF LIMITS due to WILDERNESS designations, something im used to seeing in my home country of the Ruby Mountains in Elko, NV. Its disheartening to want to enjoy our nations powerful backcountry...but being shut out more and more at EVERY TURN! Because of this, snowmobiling in the Sierras, the Stanislaus has never yielded that free flowing feeling of freedom. Its a challenge to find ways to play here, to escape the crowds of people we come to the mountains to escape. Its repetitive as one can cover ALL THE GROUND in just a few days worth of riding making the entire forest area open to sledders repetitive....but its all there is, isnt it?

But now the forest is pushing for alternatives to remove what precious little ground is left. Never have I seen anything THIS BAD before in my travels to so many other western states. This is my observation of the Stanislaus National Forest in its current state. Now, what is sledding the Stan REALLY ABOUT to those who KNOW IT?...

Highway 108 already has one factor that makes riding the preferred maps difficult. Weather and snowpack. The gates close very low at the first hint of snows, There may be incredible snow back at higher elevations, but with locked gates at 6,000 elev, no one can access it anyway. So we wait. Throughout the season, the south facing exposure of the highway above Kennedy Meadows going to the top of Sonora is burned off to pavement. Many sledders brave this section and the damage it inflicts on sleds just to reach the pass because there may not be sufficient base yet at lower elevations. So sledding already is controlled by gates, which usually means no riding except for the adventurous from after christmas until mid-April when the ground around the gates has begun to burn off. Thats when we wait for up to 3-4 weeks for the road to open so we can access the top of the pass for the last of our season. That roughly leaves Jan-mid April as our season, then May-June/July as top of the pass spring riding on a few hundred available acres at most.

Top of Sonora Pass SHOULD REMAIN OPEN until its reaches the 12" Minimum requirement after the highway is opened. Files 1-4 show what I experience in this time. The spring time up on top of 108 is a popular time to gather friends and kids to escape the valley heat. We take the kids up for play days, we campout and bar-b-que, the kids have a great safe environment to drive the sleds themselves and to learn in a safe area. Spring time isnt about the quality of snow...its about an aspect of our sport we enjoy just as much as those deep powder days! PLEASE DO NOT CLOSE THE TOP OF HIGHWAY 108 WHEN THE HIGHWAYS ARE OPENED IN MID-APRIL!

ATTACHMENTS: Photographs

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