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Comments: What is a NATIONAL FOREST? Is it an exclusive playground for an entitled minority? Is it a free-for-all for anyone and everyone? Is it owned by the government? or owned by the PEOPLE of the United States? I think this question was easy to answer back when the IDEA of establishing National Forests was introduced? Today?...it seems as though the managing entities...the USFS & BLM have drastically clouded the idea of "Public Land Access & Recreation"? Throw into the mix the dynamic of entitled users who's main goal is RESTRICT and REMOVE access to the tune of HUNDREDS of THOUSANDS of ACRES....not only statewide but NATIONWIDE...and what are we left with?

We're left with the current situation in the Stanislaus N.F. While we here in California are fighting for our winter access rights to the Sierra Mtns, there is also a comparable action to RESTRICT OVER 170,000+ acres of backcountry access in Alpine County, WY. There are also actions to propose MORE WILDERNESS in Colorado in the Uncompahgre N.F. and more on the agendas in multiple other states...but they all pale in comparison to what we are seeing along the central Sierra in California. The FACT is: ROUGHLY 85% of the Sierra/Nevada Mountain range is ALREADY restricted to motorized access through Wilderness designations. This by FAR too much! To now take actions to ELIMINATE EVEN MORE ACCESS is bordering on criminal?...and I think its safe to say that doing so will create a user vs. management conflict like never seen before? The USDA/USFS Stanislaus NF should consider those conflicts when it looks at what its action plans are as far as its recommendations for backcountry access.

Since 2012, I've been very active among the snowmobile community through out the central Sierra. I've ridden most the entire west slope from as far north as Mount Lola south to Bass Lake and everywhere in between. EVERY one of these regions is FULL of wonderful people looking to enjoy or recreate in the Sierra with friends and family. The Stanislaus is no different...

The top of Highway 108/Sonora Pass is HIGHLY POPULAR as a springtime destination after the highway opens up. This dynamic allows up to sometimes another month or more of riding as the dedicated hold off the advance of the hot summer months. Familys congregate on the pass to camp, bar-b-que and enjoy the day or weekend on the snow. This area is often used by children as a safe play area to ride around on snowmobiles with little risk. Closing the top of the pass when the highways are opened would eliminate these opportunities.

Bear Valley Ski Resort, like Sonora Pass is a VERY POPULAR destination for families after the resort closes and the ground reverts back to Forest/public use. Its a long lived tradition for locales between the 108/4 corridor all the way out into the valley to travel up the resort and play on the hills. Again, children find great enjoyment in a relatively safe environment to drive and ride snowmobiles and learn the skills of the sport. The area allows for camping, bar-b-queing, social gathering which unites the communities and much more. To eliminate this area to public access would end these opportunities!

The "minimum snow depth" rules are a fools errand. These rules cannot be consistently enforced as there is NO SUCH THING as a "consistent" snow depth. You could have 2' on the trail. 3' on a north facing slope and dirt on a south facing slope. This is ESPECIALLY TRUE in the warmer climate of the Sierra. The FACT IS snowmobiles and their owners are generally "self-policed" at 12" of snow under their machine. This is due to the massive damage a machine can sustain when it hits under snow stumps, rocks, etc. When snow depths become an issue...snowmobilers in general know enough to stay on the safe snow depths. A snowmobile can EASILY traverse 12" or less (depending on terrain) without leaving trace of its passing. To establish "snow depth requirements" in a manner in which it will be difficult if not impossible to enforce will only create more conflicts between users and management as the rule becomes one of interpretation.

It's been stated by the USFS that the current "Preferred Alternatives" stem from a 1991 forest plan establishing "NEAR NATURAL" areas and "Recommended Wilderness". How this was implemented raises many questions! But the FACT IT WAS NEVER ENFORCED has given the Forest MUCH VALUABLE FACT. In two and a half DECADES of snowmobile use in these areas: Hgwy 4 Horse Canyon, Hgwy 4 Jelmini Basin/Bear Trap, Hgwy 4 Osborne Hill, Hgwy 4 Pacific Valley/Lookout Peak, Hgwy 4 Mosquito Lake, Hgwy 4 Highland Lakes, Hgwy 108 Mill Creek, Hgwy 108 Herring Loop, Hgwy 108 Eagle/Long Valley, Hgwy 108 Sonora Pass, Hgwy 108 Clarks Fork....and ALL THE AVAILABLE TERRAIN used in between these zones... there has been NO SINGULAR SHOW OF DAMAGING ACTIONS BY SNOWMOBILE USE. That's 27 YEARS OF USE by Snowmobile....and now? all of a sudden the Stanislaus NF sees fit to reduce EVERYTHING down to trail or road riding? IF this is the POSITION of the USFS...HARD EVIDENCE and FACT need to be displayed IN THE OPEN to JUSTIFY these massive, sweeping restrictions! If it CANNOT BE...than the forest needs to adapt a policy of NEAR NATURAL WINTER MOTORIZED ACCESS and ELIMINATE "Recommended Wilderness" designations. These areas should be designated up to existing Wilderness boundaries...which has been the practiced policy of the USFS for those last 27 YEARS,

The Stanislaus NF should issue a forest plan amendment to remove RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS designations like Tryon Peak/Hgwy 4 and the Bald Peak zone between Clarks Fork/108. The Tryon Peak areas widely used as a sled/ski zone by the backcountry community and the Bald Mountain zone has only recently become available for exploration with advances in snowmobile technology.

I also ask that the forest remain open to discussion involving the "Lost Corridor" between Clarks Fork and Highlands Lake? This corridor was a popular link and trail long ago before it was lost (taken) to snowmobilers. Linking these 2 zones would be SO BENEFICIAL to the entire region in uniting the Hgwy 4/Hgwy 108 corridors! This info has been long lost...but if rediscovered, would be an AMAZING ASSET to re-establish to the forest trail network!

The "non-motorized" community has a WEALTH of ground to access AWAY from snowmobiles. These areas all being listed for restrictions are FAR AWAY from SnoPark access by human powered means. Most EVERY region listed under the "Preferred Alternative" is a MINIMUM 10 MILE ROUND TRIP by snowshoe or skis just to REACH the ACCESS POINTS TO THESE MULTIPLE AREAS! To figure into the mix the THOUSANDS of ACRES of Wilderness Designations available to these users only clarifies the nature of those that want to restrict motorized access further? The truth is...by restricting so much backcountry access, snowmobiles will BE FORCED down into the trail/groomed areas and low lying areas where the non-motorized users are likely to be congregated. This will only create a more volatile conflict between motorized/non-motorized users with the USFS stuck trying to contain it?

I ask the Stanislaus NF to strongly re-evaluate its "Preferred Alternative" Plan and consider the wide reaching consequences that will take place should more (basically all that's left?) access is taken from the citizens of California and the out of state visitors who travel into this state to recreate.