

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/8/2018 7:00:00 AM

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Comments: As a Stakeholder and with much thought on the Over the Snow Travel Management Plan, these are my comments about where I snowmobile and why what we currently ride needs to remain open.

I have been riding snowmobiles for over 30 years here in the Stanislaus National Forest on Hwy 108 and Hwy 4. I have also ridden in Oregon and Idaho and I have to say that we have some great riding right here on our forest. Why drive to other states when we have such a beautiful area to ride.

I enjoy riding in the Stanislaus because of the multiple challenges and our scenery. Snowmobiling is how we access our cabin in the Long Valley area. This is one of the main reasons the cabin was built where it was. We snowmobile out with friends and stay the weekend or longer and are able to visit and ride with other cabin owners.

We have been asked to tell the USFS where we ride. We ride all the meadows, drainages, and up to ridgelines that are legal from the snow park to the top of Sonora pass on Hwy 108. We ride in the Cascade Creek, Herring Creek, Hamel Canyon Loop, Bloomer Lake drainage, McCormick pocket, Niagra Creek drainage, lower and upper Eagle Meadows, Long Valley drainage and meadow, Windy Ridge, Sardine Meadows, Red Rock Meadow, Haypress Lake area, out toward Relief Reservoir, East Flange Rock and the overlook area. In the Herring Creek/Cascade area, there are old logging roads that connect these areas. On Hwy 108 from the Chipmunk Flat area up to the open areas of Sonora Pass, St. Mary's trailhead to the Bridgeport Recreation Area to Leavitt Lake area. The Sonora Pass area is accessed by the more advanced over-snow vehicles for a premium quality OSV recreation experience. This is one of the only areas that captures a higher level of recreational riding, as opposed to the riding strictly on the groomed Highway. Because the area is so vast, it is hard to name every drainage, ridgeline, valley, and meadow.

We do not ride only groomed trails. We enjoy being off trail and riding through the forest. During our 30 plus years of snowmobiling we rarely see any wildlife. We actually have seen squirrels most often, a few rabbits, and two coyotes during our years of riding. We are not interested in [ldquo]harassing[rdquo] wildlife. I have seen arguments for closure of Sonora to protect habitat for the Sierra Nevada Red Fox and I did some research on this subject. I found this US Fish and Wildlife Environmental Conservation Online System Candidate Species Profile for the Sierra Nevada Red Fox: https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/candidate/assessments/2016/r8/A0AY_V02.pdf This is a quote from the document: "Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes: We are not aware of any stressors of this type that constitute a population-level threat to the DPS (Distinct Population Segment) individual level. My wife also spoke to Steve Holdeman from your office at one of the meetings in 2015 and when asked he stated there are no studies regarding snowmobiles and how they affect the endangered frog species. If there are no studies, how is this an issue?

Travel management is easy when you look at Map 4 Alternative. We are within the already existing boundaries of the established wilderness area designated by Congress years ago and can be easily managed by the USFS and users. Ridgelines and wilderness boundaries make up the legal areas to ride. On some of the Alternative maps both the USFS and users would have a hard time figuring out if they are in or out of bounds.

Near Natural as per definitions we have heard was for OHV to not make their own trails cross country and that was what it was intended for. OSV has minimal impact, if any, going cross country when there is adequate snow on the ground. Whatever the perception, I am not interested in [ldquo]tearing[rdquo] up the forest or my sled. Sled[rsquo]s are too expensive to fix.

We occasionally see a cross country skier. The furthest from the Snow Park we have seen a skier is Mill Creek. I have never heard of any confrontations between snowmobilers and skiers and as far as we know no reports filed with the USFS of such confrontations. Snowmobilers pay for green stickers to license their sleds. A portion of this money is what goes towards grooming both highways. What are the skiers paying towards this?

Most of the current area on Hwy 4 we love to ride is in Stanislaus Meadow, Pacific Valley, Highland Lakes, Mattly Ridge area and Bear Trap area, the meadows and drainages, ridgeline, East and West sides on Hwy 4 and support the Near Natural Motorized areas on both Hwy 4 and Hwy 108.

Over the years of snowmobiling with family, friends and the new friends you make are the memories that we have. I have watched my wife turn into one of the best female snowmobilers here in our forest, watched my sister and her kids grow into great snowmobilers and now her grandkids are snowmobiling. It just doesn't get any better, does it.

So, think of these memories that have been created with these adventures and what it will mean to restrict riding in these areas. It would be like taking all the snowmobiles and putting them in an area the size of Pinecrest. Some people make think that camping in Pinecrest is fun (not so much anymore). Talk about conflict. This is all for an elite few that want a Wilderness experience as your most average cross-country skier can ski between 6 to 12 miles. This is per the Cross-Country skiers that my wife spoke to at the meetings in 2015. Most of these areas that you want to close off i.e. Long Valley area, is approximately 17 miles from the snow park. The near natural designation should not apply to OSV as we are not touching the ground. Consider that the Cross-Country skiers already have a "Wilderness" like experience on their 14 trails in the Dodge Ridge, Crabtree and Gooseberry area. By closing off these areas I have mentioned before, you will be denying others the same time to make memories.

Most of the studies being referenced in your documents are 20, 30 and 40 years old. Please base your decision on current science, with regard to frogs, foxes and any other endangered species or otherwise.

Comments from a study on sound:

"Sound levels for snowmobiles have been reduced 94% since inception. Pre-1969 snowmobiles were noisy. At full throttle, these machines emitted sound levels as high as 102 dB(A) from a distance of 50 feet. Snowmobiles produced since February 1, 1975 and certified by the Snowmobile Safety and Certification Committee's independent testing company emit no more than 78 dB(A) from a distance of 50 feet while traveling at full throttle when tested under the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) J-192 test procedure. Additionally, those produced after June 30, 1976 and certified by the Snowmobile Safety and Certification Committee's independent testing company emit no more than 73 dB(A) at 50 feet while traveling at 15 mph when tested under the SAE J-1161 test procedure. For comparison purposes, normal conversation at three feet produces approximately 70 dB(A). It would take 256 -78 dB(A) snowmobiles operating together at wide open throttle to equal the noise level of just one of the pre-1969 snowmobiles. Problems with excessive noise levels do occur when irresponsible snowmobilers modify the snowmobile exhaust system or substitute the factory system with an after-market racing exhaust. In most states and provinces, this practice is illegal and grossly misrepresents the sport."

Why not have a non-motorized snow park for the human powered folks? Maybe the Pinecrest area? Maybe Leland Snow Play in Leland Meadows? A snow park with fees so there can be a tracked trail. Educating the public (by Summit Ranger District Office) as to the snow play and skiing areas. Sending them to the Gooseberry, Crabtree and Dodge Ridge area trails instead of to the motorized snow park. Or letting them know that this is a motorized snow park.

I am submitting maps directly to the USFS Supervisor's office in Sonora. I have drawn where my wife and I, friends and family ride and still hope to do so.

Thank you for considering my comments

Rourke Hembree

Sierra Service