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Comments: attached is my letter in a word document form... I am a PRO RMSHA racer... age 19

ATTACHED COMMENT BELOW

Time for Change in an Ever Changing World

Thoughts on Multi-Use Public Lands

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I was very excited when I heard there was another opportunity to have my voice heard in this subject[hellip] as a professional snowmobile athlete, who has been robbed of my race season due to the recent Coronavirus scare, I was more than happy to be able to invest my time in the bigger picture[hellip] I began to write a very detailed letter and then realized I already wrote the perfect letter[hellip] This is a final paper for a Natural Resources and Society class I took at the university of Idaho before it was also shut down due to the Corona Virus[hellip] I hope my opinions are considered when making the decision whether thousands of riders and pro athletes like myself are [lsquo]homeless[rsquo] forever, in terms of the status of our favorite riding zones.

Background

My entire life has been spent recreating in the backcountry on motorized vehicles. I have ridden endless zones scattered about the northwest on my snowmobile. It is a big sport that continues to grow consistently. Obviously, as the sport has grown and technology has evolved, I have found myself moving deeper and deeper into the backcountry. Now, you can find snowmobilers riding in zones nobody has ever been to in the winter. It is a true gift to be able to see the world frozen in time from the peaks of the highest mountains. There is really nothing like getting out there with a good group and recreating in the places we love most, and right outside our back doors.

Snowmobiling is a dynamic and rapidly growing sport. There are so many different levels of riding that many people have begun to ride, and learn. Many people simply ride groomed trails and seek fast paced exploration. Then there are those who have ventured into the unknown, riding in steep and rugged terrain pushing each other into absolute edgework situations. The journal Snow Machines in the Gardens by Michael J. Yochim dives into the beginning of snowmobiles and explains the rapid growth of the sport.

[ldquo]Although snowmobile prototypes had been around since the 1940s, in the early 1960s design improvements lead to the first mass marketing of the machines in the upper Midwest[hellip] They were the winter equivalent of the automobile, the machine that embodied the Americans[rsquo] infatuation with freedom and independence.[rdquo] (Yochim, 3-4)

Since snowmobiles were released, they have been a hit item in the Northwest and upper Midwest. They instantly became a big part of winter recreation and are a major part of it today. People truly are able to take exploration to another level and push themselves in a whole new way. Snowmobiles allow people to recreate year long, the dead months of winter suddenly became the ideal season for recreation. When looking at the past and present snowmobiling, it is obvious that this sport is here to stay, and with it, many passionate recreationalists.

The Issue

Over time, there has arisen a serious push against snowmobiling in most public land areas. Certain zones have been designated as wilderness, and the people behind these designations are willing to stop at nothing to see these designations go through. It seems to be a big case of social conflict, blocking people[rsquo]s minds from a

middle ground. There has been snowmobile riding in very deep backcountry areas for a long time, areas that nobody can access throughout the winter unless aided by the use of a snowmobile. One problem arises when in some zones, snowmobilers must pass through skiing zones to access popular snowmobile zones, this sometimes-causing recreational conflict between users. The primary issue however, remains the push to create more wilderness, often recommended by people and organizations who seldom recreate in those zones of designation. Massive organizations such as the Sierra Club have a [lsquo]no budging policy[rsquo] when it comes to pushing for wilderness. This has incriminated many snowmobilers and has threatened a large bulk of the nation[rsquo]s most popular riding zones.

In order to be politically correct, the organizations and people fighting to close these lands have worked up a handful of reasons they feel snowmobilers should not be in these areas for. There has been quite a bit of sound pollution talk, snowmobiles can be a bit loud and disrupt fellow recreationalists, however, in the winter mainly snowmobilers are recreating in these deep backcountry zones. It has also been mentioned that animals such as mountain goats dwell in these areas and are disrupted by snowmobile use. I have never once seen a single animal track while riding in many of these zones let alone a goat track. They have also brought to the table the environmental impact of motorized use. Yes, a dirt bike or four-wheeler can cause stress to the land in the summer, but they also outline snowmobiles as an environmental threat, even though a snowmobile glides smoothly on the snow 10 or more feet above the ground and vegetation. As stated in the Missoulian by a leader of a local activist group working to keep the Great Burn area open: [ldquo]The Forest Service could not point to any ecological harm from snowmobile activity (tracks are gone in the spring), nor could it determine any winter user or wildlife conflict[rdquo] (Stan Spencer, 2017). This was even debated in court leading to an interim pending settlement reached by all parties.

Designation Consequences

As with everything comes some negative consequences, and in many cases, they have failed to be considered appropriately. With a recreation group as large as snowmobiling and expensive as snowmobiling, there is quite the potential boost for local economies. In an area like the Great Burn, there are multiple entry zones spanning over a fairly large geographical area, and including multiple small towns and resorts. In the deep months of winter these places seldom see any use and tourism outside of snowmobiling. Ever since the movement of snowmobile clinics with pro riders, the idea of travel riding has become massive. Every weekend there are more recreationalists traveling nationwide and even worldwide to ride in new zones. Therefore, during these slow months snowmobile recreation keeps countless gas stations, restaurants, resorts, hotels, dealerships, and other small businesses afloat. According to a study performed by Clemson University: [ldquo]OHV riders have been reported to have a consumer surplus ranging from US\$ 24.51 to US\$ 131.58 for recreational day trips, creating a potential lucrative market for rural communities wishing to diversify their economies[rdquo] (Hughes, Beeco, Hallo, Norman, 2014). Considering the number of recreationalists cycling through these community[rsquo]s winter-long, there is very high potential for an economic boost that nourishes local economies. With the growth of snowmobiling as a sport, has also come the growth of many racing circuits and a chain of high performance athletes and film stars. These backcountry athletes, including myself, have flocked to these deep backcountry zones seeking new challenging terrain that allows us to grow as riders and train for our careers. The consequences in these cases can be quite substantial, and affect a large amount of people and businesses.

An Alternative Option For All

The current public lands are meant to be used by the public. In these specific cases where there is a threat to stop motorized use all together in popular riding zones, it seems as if the public minorities and this growing sport are not receiving the attention they deserve. Although, wilderness designation is the highest level of land preservation available and there is a growing need for more of it, there needs to be areas set aside for motorized winter recreation. According to David N. Cole- a highly respected expert in wilderness research: [ldquo]The initial agenda for in-house work included studies designed to (1) better measure wilderness use; (2) understand wilderness visitors, their experiences, their attitudes, and their preferences; and (3) explore ways to manage wilderness within its carrying capacity[rdquo] (Cole, 9).

This is referring to the original focus areas of wilderness research when wilderness designation was first introduced. The point of wilderness is not completely focused on the environment, recreation actually plays a huge role in the wilderness. This was back in 1967 when snowmobiles hadn't even come close to reaching these deep backcountry areas. Today these zones are the desired places for advanced riders. With the evolution of snowmobiling must come evolution in land management in order to satisfy user groups.

Special management designation would be a likely alternative to wilderness designation in these scattered cases. There are legislative options that would allow a special recreation based land designation with rules and regulation flexibility that can allow winter motorized use but also land conservation at a premium level.

[Idquo][hellip]one perceived advantage of special management designation is that it curtails a land management agency's discretion by prohibiting some uses of federal public lands that are normally allowed under the multiple use management system. For example, the Montana Wilderness Bill of 1984 proposed that large portions of land be designated national recreation areas. Proponents of the bill asserted such a designation would open these areas to all types of recreation, including motorized recreation, but would also provide the areas with Congressional protection against mineral entry and commercial development such as timber sales.[rdquo] (McKnight, 66).

There is the ability to zone these areas as special management areas with a snowmobile shoulder season, allowing the use of motorized off highway vehicles in the winter only, and off-season management that caters to a completely primitive recreational experience. This way, maximizing user satisfaction as much as possible, and protecting the local economies.

Conclusion

Currently, a common ground agreement is unlikely, as the push to make these areas wilderness for good is far stronger than the power of the people who actually use it. However, there is hope in the future for an agreement that could be a step towards a new age of land management. The sport of snowmobiling has proved to be a powerful group and will never stop growing as time goes on. There is no doubt that it is time to try new things in search of positive change and growth. Our nation has a limited supply of land, and a whole slew of people with ideas pertaining to how it should be managed, the demand for action has never been higher. People deserve to enjoy this land, so why not manage it rather than restrict it.

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