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Comments: I'm writing in support of restricting Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) use in our most congested areas of the Inyo: the north side of the Sherwins (Telebowls, Dempsey Don't, Mammoth Rock Bowl), Earthquake Dome, Convict Lake, & other areas with heavy winter usage. Over the past two decades, backcountry skiing and snowboarding has erupted. According to the Snowsports Industry of America, in 2019, 700,000 skiers considered themselves alpine touring participants. Last year, that number was 2.2M. Anyone consistently spending time in the winter front country (up to a few hours trip from town) will tell you the same. Twenty years ago, I'd rarely see other parties in the Sherwins. Nowadays, trail counter data show hundreds of skiers, snowboarders, and snowshoers in the Sherwins if conditions are good. It's often difficult to park at the end of Old Mammoth Road. As one friend put it, "Something needs to be done there; it's only a matter of time before there's a fight."

The reality of this increase in backcountry usage is that we all have to make compromises to ensure we can continue to enjoy the Inyo, a national treasure. Increasing OSV access in the most congested areas of the Inyo is a step in the wrong direction. I now see snowmobiles regularly highmarking the Telebowls and Dempsey Don't when the trees are buried. There's a YouTube video of a snowmobiler launching off the cliffs by Rock Chute. It is too crowded in these areas for OSV and human powered activities together. On March 20, 2023 I and many others watched from town in awe as Dempsey Don't lived up to its name and ran full path almost to the meadow (attached). This was a skier-triggered avalanche. Soon after, another avalanche was triggered by a different party in the Fingers. There were many other skier-triggered avalanches that day. Amazingly, no one was injured, but there will be in the future, and there have been in the past. Remember in 2005 when George Swiggum broke both femurs in an avalanche in the Fingers?

The current snowmobile use on the north side of the Sherwins is a mass causality event waiting to happen. Read about the 2010 Big Iron Shootout snowmobile highmarking contest that left 2 dead and 31 injured. The speed and power of these machines are not compatible the increased usage of human-powered pursuits we have seen in these areas.

I have nothing against snowmobiles. I've ridden them many times myself in the Sierra and other mountain ranges across the Western US. Among their many appealing features is that they can reach much further than one can on foot. Especially for this reason, snowmobiles should use areas of the Inyo that are more difficult to get to under human power. There's amazing terrain in the Inyo backcountry that is not doable in a day for most people under human power, and I don't understand why OSV need the same access to our increasingly crowded front county areas.

The San Joaquin Ridge is a great example. I've skied off that ridge with and without snowmobile assistance. It's a long way up there and I have no issues with using a snow machine to access that terrain. It's much less crowded than the Sherwins, Convict Lake, or Earthquake Dome. McGee Creek Canyon is another example of a great place for snowmobiles. In fact, I've been happy to travel on snowmobile compacted snow via skis in that canyon many times.

This is a small community and I have friends on both sides of this issue. Let's work together and come up with a solution that acknowledges the strain that we have on our public lands and allows us all to recreate in a responsible manner. Winter Wildlands alliance has some great ideas (<https://winterwildlands.org/inyo-osv-use-oct-2023>).

Ned Bair 10/20/23

