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First name: Nicole

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Organization: Highway 4 Backcountry Skiers Association

Title:

Comments: Dear National Forest Service,

I am a resident of the Highway 4 corridor and a backcountry skier. I mainly ski in Poison Canyon/Round Valley/Underwood and other nearby wilderness areas. Sadly, I have witnessed both snowmobiles and snowmobile tracks in all of these closed areas on multiple occasions. Snowmobiles in closed areas not only rob us of our chance to escape into the wilderness free from all of the motorized vehicles and their noise and fumes that are part of our daily lives but are also very dangerous for us. The bumpy tracks of snowmobiles make a ski descent very difficult and some of the snowmobiles speed and/or are inexperienced and have poor control of their vehicles. There have been many reports of near collisions between vehicles, skiers, snowshoers, and pets and I fear that it will one day result in death or severe injury for those of us who choose to explore the wilderness without machine assistance.

I realize that there are good snowmobile drivers around who obey the rules by staying in permitted areas and pass us very carefully when we are sharing the space. I applaud those people and thank them for caring about others besides themselves. When I approach snowmobilers who are in closed areas they either tell me it doesn't matter because nobody enforces the rules so they can do what they want or that they didn't know that the area was closed to them (which could possibly be true).

It feels like there are no spaces left for human-powered activities on the Highway 4 corridor. While snowmobiles have a right to be in certain areas, which is very fair as they should also be able to recreate, they have to start respecting closed territories or risk losing their privileges. They also need to be accountable for educating each other.

I have frequently backcountry skied in Oregon, Washington, and Utah. I have talked to rangers in the area while on the trails and, while nothing can be perfect, there is pretty good compliance and both the snowmobilers and skiers/snowshoers stay out of each other's way and things are fairly peaceful and safe.

These areas have three major differences from Highway 4:

#1) I almost always see rangers on the trails and they issue tickets for anyone breaking the rules.

#2) There are permanent maps at every trailhead and excellent signage along the route. I have been told by Bear Valley rangers that they have tried to put up signs and they get torn down but, again, this is a matter of enforcement and education for the snowmobile community

#3) There are designated snowmobile areas with a hill for them to play on. If it means the snowmobiles will stay out of our areas I am all for it.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments. The encroachment situation has gotten worse and worse with the declining snowpack as we all fight over the small amount of snow left to us. The human-powered recreationists always lose out in these situations. I sometimes feel like giving up and moving. Hopefully, there is a compromise that can help us move forward and find the balance I see in other states. It starts by all of us learning to respect each other - something that has very much been absent on Highway 4.

Sincerely,

Nicole Gulati

