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First name: Buffy

Last name: Lloyd

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Stanislaus Forest Service Directors,

I am a snowmobiler who rides both in the Ebbets, Highway 4 area, and the Sonora, Highway 108 area. I have been enjoying the backcountry and our public lands on my snowmobile and my splitboard for close to 15 years. Spending time in the mountains in the winter time is the thing that I am most passionate about in life. The inspiring beauty and peacefulness that I find out there is unrivaled

I am very concerned about the alternatives proposed for the Stanislaus OSV Management plan. It seems that every alternative, but the current management plan significantly reduces the riding area to the point it is barely even feasible to ride in either of these areas. I was of the impression that the purpose of the re-mapping and changes to the OSV management were to create a balance taking into consideration the welfare of wildlife, forest resources, and other forest users.

In my experience, I have never seen a non-motorized user anywhere when we were riding around Sonora pass and I have only seen on one occasion a skier on Highway 4. I have not experienced any user conflicts in either area. The one skier that we saw on Highway 4 waived to us and we waived back. Both areas feature very long approaches for people who would use the area for downhill skiing and snowboarding. For that reason I do not think it is a very desirable location for those user groups, who are not using sleds for access.

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).

There was a small population of these fox found by researchers in the Sonora Pass area and the Northern portion of Yosemite national Park. The area the animals were found was both north and south of Hwy 108, roughly 32,124 acres, within 3 kilometers or roughly 1.86 miles of the Sierra Crest. I suspect that this area is not a part of the open OSV travel management area currently. I know that Leavit Peak and the surrounding area south of the pass and PCT trail is closed to OSV travel currently. I am not opposed to closing some OSV area to protect the Sierra Nevada Red Fox habitat to help ensure their survival, but I suspect there is not much overlap in open OSV riding areas and where researchers have had sightings.

I feel that OSV use and winter access should be allowed in near natural areas and I honestly believe that OSV use will have no impact to soils or vegetation in these areas. I am an avid hiker, runner, and biker in the summer and I often frequent the areas that I snowmobile in the winter. I have never once observed any sign that a snowmobile ever traveled in that area. I know that snowmobile travel is not impactful to soil and vegetation when the snow depth is sufficient for travel in an area. I am not opposed to minimum snow depth rules, as I personally would not travel over snow that is shallower than what is required out of fear of damage to my machine. I think all other sledders feel the same way about shallow snow. It is just too risky to your safety and to your machine.

I fell in love with sledding the first time I went riding on a borrowed sled in the spring at Red Lakes. There is not a more moving experience in this world than driving over snow to the top of a mountain, surrounded by spectacular views and a crew of some of the best humans I know. There are so few areas open to snowmobiling in California currently that closing the majority of the Stanislaus Forest Service area to OSV's seems discriminatory.

I plead with you to adopt an OSV management plan that considers the snowmobile user group. The Sonora Pass area is world class and offers some of the most awe inspiring terrain available and to lose a majority of this area would be devastating to the sledding community. I hope that the current management plan will be considered with maybe slight modifications if protections for the Sierra Nevada Red Fox are needed or other forest resources, but I urge you to not close the 300,000 plus acres that are proposed to be closed.

I thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts on the subject and I hope that the new management plan

allows for opportunities to continue enjoying the winters in the Stanislaus National Forest on a snowmobile!

Sincerely,
Buffy Lloyd