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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Deborah Wittman and I live in Tuolumne County. I grew up in Strawberry California and attended Pinecrest Elementary. My mother worked for the Forest Service in Pinecrest so I am familiar with the area and the history. I am an avid downhill skier, cross country skier and snowmobiler. I love winter sports and I have diverse interests and feel I can speak to the issue intelligently. I also am a property owner in Eagle Meadows (specifically in Long Valley). I also currently have a cabin with a forest service lease in the Cowcreek tract. This background is provided to demonstrate that I am a local stakeholder in the area in question and that I understand the area and know the history as well as current uses/practices.

I am opposed to the preferred alternate 5 for the following reasons:

1. The boundary lines are nearly impossible for a snowmobiler to identify in actual riding conditions and thus encourage the accidental infraction to the riding area boundaries.
2. The designation severely limits motorized OSV use and even concentrates it into tight areas that I fear would lead to safety issues putting too many riders in too tight an area. In addition, one might argue this could actually increase the potential environmental impacts (if there actually are any).
3. Twenty five percent (25%) of the forest is already Wilderness designation. This is more than adequate for cross country skiers to find solitude and untouched snow. To provide additional area limitations is not providing equal access to all citizens to public land. Opponents (primarily Snowlands) claim they need more area to prevent conflicts between snowmobilers and cross country skiers. I find this argument ludicrous. In 30 plus years of winter forest use I have rarely ever seen a skier more than two miles from snowpark. The areas that you are considering to be restricted (i.e. Eagle meadows, long valley, east flange - by relief reservoir and sonora pass) I have never seen a skier! There is no conflict and to assert such is intellectually dishonest and supports an ulterior motive. Most skiers access trails from areas around pinecrest and the pack station. Currently, conflict is non-existent.
4. The current "near natural" designation that is unique to this forest was proposed in 1991 as an OHV plan for summer use (during its original presentation). The current application to winter OSV is illogical and nonsensical. The current designation can be changed by a forest order and should be since the summer use of these area's is dramatically different than winter use as well as the impacts.

To understand the oppositions mind set. All one has to do is go to their webpage. I take the following quotes directly from this page from the same paragraph. They state "However, Stanislaus NF has declined to issue forest orders to close these areas to snowmobiles, meaning the Forest does not have the legal authority to enforce the closures." This statement is followed by "Snowmobilers should not be rewarded for violating the restrictions in the 1991 Forest Plan by having their dubious practices made permanently legal." This obviously shows their animus towards snowmobilers. In one hand they are stating the USFS has essentially declined to issue orders to make it illegal, but on the other hand they are stating that snowmobilers are violating the law. How can that be? To then state that our legal use is a "dubious practice" shows their hatred to motorized OSV use. This is relevant to the issue because it goes to the issue of state of mind. All one had to do is go to their own webpage and one quickly comes acutely aware of their vitriol towards snowmobilers. They have plenty of wilderness area they can access to avoid snowmobilers, and as I mentioned earlier the area's in question are area's they cannot access due to distance from snowpark. So where is the conflict? They have tried to

weaponize 20-30 year old environmental studies to support their desired ban on snowmobilers. This is public use land - I am sure we would all love to have our own private forest. We must accept the other uses even if they bother us. I personally do not like hunters when I am in the forest and hate the noise of gun fire. However, I realize they have a right to use the forest for this purpose even if I don't like it. Unfortunately, Snowlands has a very selfish attitude about the use of OUR public land.

5. The current proposed plan (Alternative 5) was explained at one of the public meetings to try and be reflective of where snowmobilers currently actively ride. I would suggest that you make the boundaries obvious by using ridge lines, etc. (like they currently are). Let the riders determine what area's to ride based on one's own ability. There are many times I have had to go down a hill based on deep snow conditions that I would normally not have chosen. Off trail snowmobiling is a very dynamic sport and one needs the flexibility to make route choices based on safety. There are some steep rocky area's that few riders would ride but there are some who love the challenge, why restrict them. Likewise some of the large meadows are where kids learn to ride and how to turn the machine.

6. Environmental impact of snowmobiles is negligible at best. I am not aware of any legitimate research that has been done with sampling in the area's in question to show any such damage. I agree with minimum snow depths and I believe there are few snowmobilers who want to take a machine which often costs \$14,000-15,000 on such shallow depths. Most snowmobilers know that shallow snow is dangerous to the rider and expensive to the machine where one can easily hit a stump and nearly total the machine. This issue solves itself.

Snowlands has a few pictures of small trees that have been run over by snowmobiler's trying to show the damage that is caused to conifers. These are rare exceptions and are absolutely NOT the rule. Most riders appreciate the environment for the same reason as the skiers. We appreciate the forest. I just witnessed many campsites during hunting season. I saw one campsite in long valley with probably 30-40 cars parking in all areas of the forest around it. I also witnessed probably 80-100 toilet wipes with human waste in plain site. I find this behavior abhorrent. You want to talk about environment impact! Lets focus on where the true issues are and where enforcement needs to happen.

7. Restricting the forest further to only human powered access actually discriminates against americans with disabilities. I know of many people who have medical conditions whose only means of accessing the winter forest is by the use of snowmobiles. I know of amputees, people with COPD, severe osteoarthritis, heart conditions, etc who access the forest routinely on snowmobile. Why should they not be allowed to see the beauty of a winter mountain top or meadow? Snowlands mission statement promotes human-powered access to the winter wildlands. This is fine for the healthy and physically fit. They have little compassion or concern for those who have disabilities. The forest should be accessible for all! Your forest signs state "the land of many uses", lets keep it that way!

8. I do want to praise the Forest Service for the two creek crossing in the plan. These crossing make sense. They support use for all users. They protect the creek environmentally from the creation of silt from users driving through the creeks. Most importantly, they provide significant safety to users. Many riders have fallen into the creek and there are numerous cases of riders sustaining broken bones, etc. Search and rescue has also requested these bridges for years. Transporting a victim out on a sled is very dangerous through a creek. I applaud this decision.

In conclusion, in the absence of selecting Alternative 2 (no action) the only plausible and logical map is Alternative 4. I strongly recommend that the superintendent select Alternative 4. It is the only map that balances all the current uses by legitimate parties who use this forest.

I appreciate your time in reading my comments.