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Comments: My name is Mike Souther, I have lived in Tuolumne County for 25 years. I'm currently living in Michigan and moving back to California in June. I've been a long time snowmobiler and snowboarder who uses my snowmobile for motorized recreation and to access hard to reach places in the forest with my snowboard. In regards to the over snow vehicle use designation # 46311 in the Stanislaus National Forest below are my comments.

The first thing I would like to address is the need for a motorized designation for near natural and proposed wilderness areas. Near natural as i understand it was a designation to keep OHVs from developing new trails and roads, not to restrict OSV use. These areas have long been open to snowmobiles and there is no need to change this. This area blends into its surrounding with no obvious border or change in terrain. The boundary between Herring Creek and this area would be confusing and easily missed. The wilderness boundary that runs from Pinecrest Peak, to Coopers Peak to Castle Rock, to Three Chimneys and further into Long Valley works as an easy to map, recognizable, and enforceable boundary that snowmobiler's and law enforcement are already familiar with. This also presents the best opportunity for signage notifying people of the boundary.

Next I would like to talk about Eagle Meadows. It is so sad to see how much terrain is being taken from an amazing OSV destination. It is a snowmobile centric community. Literally the only way to access the the place all winter is by snowmobile. I as with many others cherish this area as it was where we first learned how to ride. I have also done plenty of backcountry snowboarding all over Eagle Meadows and it was my snowmobile that got me there. Long Valley is one of the best and most loved riding areas around and should not be restricted. The current boundaries are sufficient. The wilderness boundary is easily recognized, and enforceable. The proposed boundary would be so hard to mark by signs and enforce. OSV users would have a tough time figuring out where they could and could not go.

My third point takes off from there. By closing off these proposed areas you are not keeping snowmobilers from them, you are keeping EVERYONE from them. Essentially closing the forest. My understanding of the the Forest Service essential job is to to help us manage our public lands, not to make it inaccessible. 80 percent of the terrain in question is only accessible by snowmobile. These areas would take multiple days of travel on skis or snowshoes and are therefore never used in this manner alone. In all my years of snowmobiling and snowboarding I have never seen another skier or boarder in the Castle Rock area, Eagle Meadows, and top of Sonora Pass mid winter that didn't use a snowmobile to get there. Mixed use of snowmobile and snowboard/ski is very popular currently. Think about it, if there is no way for people to access areas how can it still be considered public land?

Moving on to Sonora Pass, please don't close it all off to snowmobiling! This to has historically been a staple of Hwy 108 snowmobiling and is the easiest access for users new and veterans alike. Much of the local snowmobile tourism is from people traveling up the highway to the top of the pass. The top of the pass area is very popular with riders from the East side of Sonora Pass too. Many ski films are shot in this amazing area and OSV's are used to access. When my wife and I head up there in the spring, after the highway reopens, we use our snowmobile to access so many amazing lines to ski and snowboard. Without the snowmobile we could get one run a day. With the snowmobile we can explore so much of that amazing terrain and get 10 to 20 runs each in a day. Myself and friends often give rides to skiers/snowboarders to get them further up the hill. Most often it is us offering them a ride, not them asking.

The Herring Creek area boundaries like others above don't seem to follow terrain, and would be hard to follow. Herring Creek area should remain open and be shared by snowmobiles and non-motorized. The crabtree trail

system, which is already established and non-motorized, is a short drive away if that is what the user desires. Herring Creek offers easy snow access to cabin owners and the public for all uses and should be kept that way.

The terrain in between Mill Creek, Herring Creek area, and Eagle Meadows needs to remain open for safety. These routes give sledders second chance options to make it out or access a different zone in a bad storm or after an accident. This area connects Herring Creek with the Sno-Park, Mill Creek and Eagle Meadows. These routes make rescues and getting injured riders out easier.

Long Barn, This is a perfect area for non motorized use. This area often has enough snow for non motorized use but would rarely be rideable by OSV with the 12" minimum.

A few extra thoughts, I understand the need for a 12" minimum in the forest. However on the roads of Hwy 108 and Hwy 4 corridors, so many areas are South facing and don't hold snow very well in small patches. Generally in California it is unreasonable to think the whole road will ever hold 12" depth all winter. Riding a snowmobile on a road without snow does no damage to the forest, just the snowmobile.

Many of the areas on Preferred Play Areas Map considered low use may not get a ton of recreational riding but are thoroughfares connecting high use play areas, roads, and or cabins making travel safer and more direct.

Snowmobiling at Bear Valley Ski Resort after they close is a great thing for the local community. Easy access OSV like this is safer, fun, and opens up access to many people who would not feel comfortable going deep in the forest. The same should be done with the land Dodge Ridge sits on. Allowing OSV there after season would give OSV users easy access to a large snow pack without damaging resources to reach the snow. Great for the time in between when the highway melts and the top of the pass opens.

Lastly I would like to mention the economic impact of the proposed action. I know the Forest Service is not a financial institution but you guys live in Tuolumne County and everyone feels the effect in this small community. So many cabins would lose value and be sold or abandoned. Local business like The Steam Donkey where I used to work would take a huge hit as would many hotels, restaurants and shops up and down Highways 4, and 108. Tourism is what drives Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties economies, please keep this in mind.

In closing I would like to thank you for your time reading my comments and your work on this project. I would like to add that in 15 years in the backcountry of Hwy 108 I have never seen a conflict between non-motorized users and OSV users. I'm sure it's happened but I know there is more of a mutual respect between users than this process would lead you to believe.