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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to provide feedback on the OSV management plan for Stanislaus National Forest.

I am a backcountry snowshoer, snowmobiler, and backpacker who frequents the Stanislaus, Eldorado, and Tahoe National Forests over two decades. I have carefully considered how the plan would impact the activities of wildlife, motorized backcountry users, non-motorized backcountry users. During many visits to US Forest service lands in Stanislaus Forests, I have never seen any conflicts between motorized and non-motorized backcountry users. Rather, I have witnessed the two communities harmoniously enjoying our public lands. Specially, I have seen an amazing community in the Bear Valley area along highway 4. Everyone I have encountered there has been friendly and welcoming, specially in the unique way that Snowmobilers and cross country skiers can enjoy the Bear Valley ski area after the ski resort closes. I strongly urge the USFS to formally designate the ski area as open to snowmobilers after the resort closes for the season so that friends and family can enjoy the area for many years to come.

As a backpacker and backcountry skier, I understand the desire to experience quietness and desolation. However, the designated wilderness areas throughout the Sierra Nevada forests already exist for exactly this purpose. Expanding snowmobile closures beyond the designated wilderness areas is unnecessary, unfair, and in some cases even dangerous. I urge the USFS to continue the decades-long enforcement practices for the near-natural areas. The Eagle Meadows and Pacific Valley areas are very popular and cherished by our community, so I hope the forest service writes into the OSV plan the current land management practices as they are enforced currently, where snowmobilers are able to enjoy these beautiful areas. From the statements made at the open houses, I understand that some representatives from Stanislaus National Forest believe the near natural, non motorized designation is important for summer management of off road vehicles. Clearly there is a need for summer management of off road vehicles, however snowmobilers do not require trails, roads, and cause little to no impact to surface dirt or vegetation. Therefore, I urge the Forest Service to create a separate winter OSV management plan for these areas that allows for the current enforcement practices, where we can ride in the Eagle Meadows and Pacific Valley areas to remain in effect.

Furthermore, I am quite concerned with the closures Alternative 5 proposes along the ridge lines. In the backcountry all users, regardless of travel method, are forced to constantly evaluate and choose routes that avoid dangerous avalanche conditions. Since snow conditions are in constant flux, the safest path of travel often changes. Forcing snowmobilers to use a small, limited number of ridge lines that may have a much higher avalanche rather than allowing them to evaluate and choose the safest riding areas for the current conditions poses a safety risk to the snowmobilers as well as all the other skiers, hikers, and snowshoers in the surrounding area.

Sincerely,
Doug Kniveton