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First name: Mark

Last name: Jacoby

Organization: Mountain Megabytes

Title:

Comments: Thank you for working so hard on this. I am a 56 year old snowmobiler, back country skier, snowshoer, alpine mountaineer, and a memeber of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Snowmobile team. I have been visiting these Stanislaus areas for the past 2 seasons with some of the locals and the forest is amazing. There is extensive advanced terrain which appeals to Back Country Snowmobilers from all over the world.

I would like to point out that as an advanced mountain rider, we only ride when there is sufficient snow to be safe. That snow depth can be just a few feet at the parking area, but when we get to the mountain tops, ridges and bowls there is usually tens of feet of snow. To claim damage to the forest seems ludicrous to me, when it is 10-20 feet below our tracks. That being said, what I don't understand is with the incredible amount of wilderness, where snowmobiling is banned/prohibited completely surrounding these small remaining areas where we are allowed to ride, why do there need to be even more restrictions? The Lawsuit which prompted this action and timing say to make a plan, and please, open the terrain back up to us and include it in the plan. I think that if it is not congressional mandated wilderness, that it should be open to cross country back country OSV travel, barring any scientific evidence of sensitive species which might be unacceptably disturbed or damaged by OSV travel.

After spending over 40 Winters in the area, I can tell you that it is extremely infrequent to see tracks from most animals during the winter, in the deeper areas desired by advanced back country snowmobilers. Only the late spring do we begin to share the forest floor with the critters, and by the time that happens, it is almost time to end the season anyway.

Encounters with wildlife are extremely rare in the sierra while snowmobiling.

Aside from stated goals of certain groups to eliminate motorized travel completely on public land, I can only address some of the more legitimate complaints, being negative encounters between user groups and the tracking up of the ski terrain favored by some non-motorized users. The problem we all share is access. I believe most of the arguments would not exist if there were better access to the terrain we all want to enjoy. We are forced to park together due to the limited parking and road access. I have not been able to identify USFS/Stanslaus properties which could be plowed and used for winter access, but we are actively discussing with Caltrans and private property owners how to provide more access.

When we all have to park together, we get funneled in drainages, trails, or other forms of terrain where the encounters happen. In my experience, non-motorized travel is limited to just a couple miles from the trailheads. The thinking is most human powered users stay withihn 1/2 day walk of the parking. For us Mountain Snowmobilers, we normally wish to be much further from the crowds and our rides are dictated by a couple factors.

1. snow conditions

2. our desired destination

Deep days we will favor more open terrian and less angle, where as spring days will allow for snowmobile riding almost anywhere there is snow. A rule of thumb regarding the modern mountain sleds may be "If there is snow on it, we can climb it". They are quite capable as are advanced mountain riders of today.

I propose rather than close terrain to OSV, you encourage the use of the extensive wilderness areas in this region, for users who desire the quiet back country experience and untracked wilderness. If you need to improve access or add non-motorized parking/trailheads near the wilderness areas, then please, make that the plan. There is already much terrain available which is already prohibited to motorized use.

Adding access not only reduces the negative encounters, but also reduces the pressure on other trailheads/parking. This is a legitimate idea to bear in mind when looking at restrictions to an already extremely limited resource-plowed parkign fro winter access.

I am deeply concerned for our small community of mountain riders' lifestyle coming under extreme pressure due to public land closures. As I get older and still long to enjoy the winter back country, I am worried I will be shut out of these beautiful public lands for the rest of my life, as I may not be physically able to access the back country via human power alone to the extent I am able on the snowmobile.

Please consider making all of the terrain currently marked Restricted OSV use open for cross country OSV use. There is so little terrain left for us and so much we are not allowed to access already.

Thanks for your time.