

WINTER TRAVEL PLANNING MOVES FORWARD

Over the summer Winter Wildlands Alliance met with Forest Service leadership in Washington, D.C. to check in on what the Agency is doing to implement the Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) Rule that was finalized in January 2015. While some forests have started winter travel planning under the new rule, many are waiting for additional direction from the Washington office before moving forward. Among the details that still need to be ironed out, WWA and our grassroots groups are most interested in how the Forest Service determines which existing decisions can be grandfathered in to a new plan under the OSV Rule. Our meeting gave us insights into this question as well as what else the Agency is doing, and what we need to do, to ensure the Rule is properly implemented.



The Forest Service's Washington Office is currently revising their Travel Management directives and designing a standard format for Over-Snow Vehicle Use Maps. Once finalized, these directives will give National Forests more guidance on how to implement the new OSV Rule. However, it will be up to individual Forest Supervisors and District Rangers to determine whether their existing management complies with the new rule or if they need to undertake an in-depth winter travel planning process. You can help to ensure that your local forest chooses to do comprehensive winter travel planning, rather than trying to slide by with the status quo, by speaking up early and often. If you're excited to see winter travel planning happen on your local forest reach out to your local District Ranger and the Forest Supervisor. Ask them how they plan to implement the OSV Rule and share why you believe winter travel planning should be a priority for the Forest.

In most cases winter travel planning under the OSV Rule will follow the steps required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This means the process begins with a "scoping period" during which the Forest Service solicits public input on issues relevant to winter travel planning. After scoping the Agency develops and analyzes a set of Alternatives, which are a spectrum of possible management plans. This analysis is published in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), at which point the public can review and comment on the analysis and Alternatives. After

this comment period ends the Forest Service incorporates the feedback they receive into a final EIS and draft plan. Once the draft plan is ready the public has one more opportunity to review it and give support or objections before the plan is finalized. Throughout the process there are additional opportunities to get involved but this varies from forest to forest.

So far five forests in California have begun winter travel planning. The Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas National Forests have completed scoping and are working on Alternative development. We have worked with our California grassroots group, Snowlands Network, to develop a Skiers Alternative for each of these winter travel plans. Our Skiers Alternatives strive to balance non-motorized and motorized recreation by setting aside accessible terrain for skiers and protecting important wild lands while also outlining large areas where we feel snowmobile use is appropriate. It is our hope that the Forest Service will seriously consider the proposals we have brought to the table. We have posted each of our Skiers Alternatives, and more information about winter travel planning in California, on our website at <http://winterwildlands.org/california-travel-planning/>.

Travel planning is getting started in other parts of the country as well. Wyoming's Shoshone National Forest has initiated a travel planning process where they will look at both summer and winter use. While the formal NEPA process has not yet begun on this

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NEWS FROM WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE

forest, the Shoshone hosted public meetings in June to gather preliminary information. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Montana’s Bitterroot and Helena National Forests recently released final travel management plans. These planning processes were initiated prior to the OSV Rule but finalized under the new rule and provide excellent examples of balanced winter (and summer) travel management.

Throughout the West we are working with our partners to gather information on existing winter travel management, compare this management with the requirements of the OSV Rule, and advocate that the Forest Service prioritize winter travel planning. If you are interested in learning more about how your favorite National Forest is implementing the OSV Rule please contact WWA’s Recreation Planning and Policy Coordinator, Hilary Eisen, at heisen@winterwildlands.org or 208-629-1986.

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“LONG, STRANGE TRIP” ENDS WITH WILDERNESS PROTECTION FOR IDAHO’S BOULDER-WHITE CLOUDS

While the final act in Congress for the “Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act” which designated three new wilderness areas encompassing 275,665 acres in Idaho’s Boulder and White Clouds Mountains was fast, in fact, lightning fast by today’s politically-gridlocked standards, the path to get there was indeed long and strange.

In a campaign that wound between multiple stalled attempts at wilderness designation through Congress to a national monument campaign that brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to, in the end, a blitzkrieg passage through the same body that had rejected it so many times before, Winter Wildlands Alliance worked alongside our Idaho partners, recreation groups and outdoor industry supporters for more than a decade to protect the world-renowned backcountry terrain and the fragile winter ecosystem of the Boulder-White Clouds. After watching Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson’s legislative efforts thwarted year after year by a dysfunctional congressional system, WWA joined three years ago with a broad coalition of partners advocating for a Boulder-White Clouds National Monument which would have protected more than double the area eventually included in the wilderness bill and allowed more flexible management including

continued mountain bike access to two iconic trails.

As sometimes happens in world of advocacy through coalition, the passage of the wilderness bill put WWA in a difficult position as an organization. First, we offer heartfelt thanks and congratulations to Congressman Simpson and his staff for their tireless efforts to permanently protect this wild piece of Idaho for generations to come. At the same time, we acknowledge the disappointment some of our national monument coalition partners – especially those in the mountain bike world – have in losing access to the very trails they worked so hard to protect. In the end, we hope we can all come together in celebrating the years of effort from so many to protect this iconic landscape and the soul-replenishing experiences it offers.

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WINTER WILDLANDS WELCOMES KEILI BELL AS EVENTS AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Winter Wildlands Alliance is delighted to welcome Keili Bell as the newest member of our team. Keili, also known as Bub, replaces former Events and Outreach Coordinator Shelley Pursell who, after five years promoting WWA’s mission through the Backcountry Film Festival and other events, left us to pursue her bliss along the Northern California coast. While Keili shares her predecessor’s love of waves, she is happy to call the wide-open West her home. Before joining Winter Wildlands Alliance, Keili served as program developer and coordinator with the Center for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning at Utah State University. With a B.S. in Middle Eastern Community and Environmental Health from Boise State University, and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management Excellence from University of Utah, Keili is already hitting her stride bringing the outdoor community and WWA members together through the Backcountry Film Festival.



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Winter Wildlands Alliance is a national nonprofit organization promoting and preserving winter wildlands and a quality human-powered snowsports experience on public lands.

Trail Break is published three times a year by Winter Wildlands Alliance.

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SNOWSCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

BLIZZARD OF SUCCESS

Every year Winter Wildlands Alliance introduces tens of thousands of kids to the wonders of winter and the joys of snowshoeing in communities across the country. Last year SnowSchool engaged more than 29,000 participants, with 55 percent of students qualifying as underserved and 60 percent never having been on snowshoes before! As we storm towards the snowy season WWA has high aspirations to create an expanded and newly improved SnowSchool program. Here's a synopsis of some of our efforts:

More Kids Outside: By partnering with existing organizations to establish new SnowSchool sites, WWA provides the science curriculum, training and mentoring required to quickly launch a new program to serve new populations of youth. Our recently added sites include Montezuma Audubon Center in Savannah New York, Cottonwood Canyons Foundation in Salt Lake City Utah, Montana Outdoor Science School in Bozeman Montana and Mt Ashland in southwestern Oregon. Working with these organizations and others like them WWA is expanding SnowSchool's national impact and getting more kids outside in the winter.

Science learning innovations: In western states and communities mountain snow provides approximately 80 percent of the water supply. SnowSchool is uniquely situated to help kids explore connections between mountain snow, climate change and water. WWA has designed an exciting new program that turns the initial curiosity and enthusiasm from the snowshoe fieldtrip into a four-month, winter-long science project that sparks further exploration and science learning. WWA is collaborating with the US Forest Service to install an on-site snowpack monitoring weather station at the flagship SnowSchool site in Boise Idaho and will be implementing similar programs across the SnowSchool network in the future. Online data about snowpack and water content will be available to teachers and students and allow them to make predictions and analyze snowpack trends over the course of the winter. Extending students' learning experience and connecting it back to the classroom in this way ensures that SnowSchool makes good on its aspiration to foster ecological literacy among our youngest generation. This new weather station and accompanying science curriculum will serve as a strong national program model.

Enhancing existing SnowSchool programs: To help keep our current programs growing, WWA provides key resources such as snowshoes, educational equipment, fundraising opportunities, science curricula and free on-snow science education training to SnowSchool sites across the country. As winter approaches we are working hard to coordinate these efforts and maximize SnowSchool's national presence.

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GRASSROOTS SPOTLIGHT

TWO NEW GRASSROOTS GROUPS JOIN WWA

Based in Crested Butte, Colorado, Silent Tracks is working to protect and promote human-powered winter recreation in the backcountry of the Gunnison Valley. Silent Tracks was founded earlier this year by a group of Crested Butte



Brian Mohr/Ember Photo

skiers who see the need and opportunity to update the Gunnison National Forest's 20-year-old winter travel plan to better address the needs of the booming population of backcountry recreationists in the area. Silent Tracks provides a voice for skiers and snowshoers who want the Forest Service to zone the backcountry into motorized and non-motorized areas to improve the recreational experience for all users

Silent Tracks is currently working on building their membership, collecting information about recreational use in the Gunnison Valley, and building relationships with other winter stakeholders, Forest Service staff and local elected officials. Learn more at silenttracks.org

Our other new group is the Tahoe Backcountry Alliance, a newly organized voice for backcountry skiers and snowboarders in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Working at the local level to compliment the efforts of the statewide group, Snowlands Network, and the national voice of Winter Wildlands Alliance, the Tahoe Backcountry Alliance is providing a voice for Tahoe-area skiers and snowboarders on issues such as impacts of an on-going road improvement project on backcountry access.

This summer Tahoe-area skiers and snowboarders realized that a road improvement project along Lake Tahoe's west shore was eliminating many of the pullouts where backcountry users park in the winter. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has a mandate to reduce or eliminate unpaved areas along the West Shore to reduce sediment entering the lake. Unfortunately, they were unaware of how the project would impact recreational access. Likewise, the backcountry community was unaware of the project until people started to notice pullouts disappearing. While nobody argues with the importance of protecting Lake Tahoe's water quality, the Tahoe Backcountry Alliance wants to see more skier input into decisions that affect backcountry access.

Thanks to skier engagement led by the Tahoe Backcountry Alliance, the agencies in charge of the road improvement project have agreed to pave an expanded pullout near one important backcountry area and plow a parking area to access another. These are steps in the right direction and there is ongoing communication between the agencies and skiers to find additional solutions to access concerns. Follow Tahoe Backcountry Alliance on Facebook for updates. **-HE**



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WWA AMBASSADOR KT MILLER



As a ski mountaineer, photographer and professional athlete, Kt Miller strives to inspire others to spend more time outside. She believes that time spent in wild places fosters people who appreciate the environment and are more likely to protect it. Kt's enthusiasm for adventure and love of wild

places can be felt in her imagery, as seen on her instagram feed (@ktmillerphoto), or her work with Backcountry, National Geographic, Powder, Patagonia, and more. She has traveled around the world skiing both in front of and behind the lens.

Representing Dynafit as a human powered ski athlete, Kt has first ski descents in Greenland, Romania, Alaska, and Montana. Each fall she leaves her skis behind to work as a media specialist for Polar Bears International, sharing the plight of the polar bear and solutions to the climate crisis. -KB

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JOIN US

Join WWA's efforts and become a member today! You can do your part to help protect the places we play. Visit winterwildlands.org/join or call Brittany Jones at 1.208.336.4203 ext. 2.



BACKCOUNTRY FILM FESTIVAL HITS THE ROAD

With the festival premiere on tap for November 19 and 20 at the Egyptian Theater in Boise, Idaho, the 11th annual Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival will hit the road with more than 100 showings around the world this year.

Created in 2005 to highlight WWA's efforts to preserve and promote winter landscapes for human-powered users, the festival includes showings throughout the United States and Canada and now in Antarctica, Europe, Australia and Asia. Funds raised stay in local communities to support like-minded, human-powered recreation and conservation efforts and to raise awareness of winter management issues, avalanche training/safety and winter education programs.

This year's program includes:

- Winner of Best of Festival Award, Japan by Van A Sweetgrass Productions film
- Winner of Best of Grassroots Award, Shared Lines a film by T-Bar Films
- Winner of Best Environmental Message Award, Shifting Ice, a film by Kt Miller
- The Weight of Winter by filmmaker Ben Sturgulewski
- I Love Splitboarding, a film by Right on Brother
- 55 Hours in Mexico, a film by Joey Schusler
- Always Above Us, by Sherpas Cinema
- Connections, by Dynafit
- The Forecaster, From Spindle Productions

To find a tour stop in your community go to www.backcountry-filmfestival.org

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