Another Round for Yellowstone Winter Use

In a public policy world that often feels like a merry-go-round where plans and processes revolve themselves over and over and final results seem always just out of reach, no issue is more mired with the go-around-again syndrome than winter use in Yellowstone National Park.

In the last issue of Trail Break we urged Winter Wildlands Alliance supporters to take action one last time in the “final push to protect Yellowstone’s magical winter season.” After more than a decade of advocacy involving four major studies, $10 million in taxpayer dollars, nearly a million public comments and seemingly endless political wrangling, all of us involved in Yellowstone winter use were thrilled to use the words “final” and “Yellowstone” in the same sentence. Not so fast on the final part, it turns out.

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As eager as WWA and our members are to have this issue put to bed, we support the Park Service in their commitment to produce a sustainable plan that protects Yellowstone’s unique winter ecosystem and improves the visitor experience. WWA also supports the Park’s decision to continue under the interim plan, put in place two years ago as the result of legal action by WWA and four coalition partners, until a new long-term plan is produced. The interim plan allows up to 318 commercially guided, Best Available Technology snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day.

We will continue to work with Park officials through this process to ensure that Yellowstone’s winter recovery continues and to safeguard against the return of over-snow vehicle traffic levels that disturbed wildlife, made noise and haze a constant companion and diminished the visitor experience. We can’t give up on our nation’s first national park and most iconic winter sanctuary.

Mark Menlove, Executive Director
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Protecting Winter Recreation Opportunities on National Forest Lands

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Planning Team has proposed new wilderness designations as well as backcountry management areas. The proposal, unfortunately, leaves these areas open to winter motorized use and as a result traditional forms of quiet human-powered winter recreation would continue to be displaced. WWA is advocating for a revised plan that creates the wilderness character of recommended wilderness areas typical of backcountry skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. The result has been multilateral support for addressing winter recreation during Forest Plan Revision.

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest’s Peak 6

Wildlife Wildlands Alliance (WWA) is raising awareness of the need to protect areas for traditional winter recreation activities such as backcountry skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling. The result has been multilateral support for addressing winter recreation during Forest Plan Revision.

Viva La Nina! Viva The Backcountry Film Festival!

Yes! It’s back and bigger than ever. The Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival made its world premiere 11-11-11 and the tour follows with more than 70 stops worldwide, including Kyrgyzstan and Antarctica. Whether you are a fan of the ski, you won’t want to miss the celebration of the winter experience.

The seventh annual Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival featured programs include:

• Best of Fest: “Solitaire” (stitial cut from Sweetgrass Productions. Two years in the making, this film from the wildness of South America is worth the wait.

• The Best Short: “Chalk and Sky” produced by Chris Dickson and Purple Orange. It’s a chalk-in-hand daydream about the wilderness of South America is worth the wait.

Celebrating the Human-Powered Experience

My Backcountry Film Festival t-shirt is well-worn and well-loved. The design asks for a simple message: “Winter Wildlands Backcountry Film Festival – Celebrating the Human-Powered Experience.”

The hoot for me in celebrating is understanding, of course, that celebration is not sufficient. It doesn't accomplish our mission of protecting winter wildlands. Celebrating doesn't replace the need for strategic advocacy or for engaging in controversies after discouraging public processes. Indeed, without the get-out-the-vote we have precious little to celebrate. But celebrating helps us of all remember why we do this work.

At WWA we try to infect all of this with a sense of celebration. Nowhere is this more evident than in our National Snowmobile program where, last winter, we took more than 27,000 grade school students out for a day of winter fun on snowmobiles. Along the way we taught them some snow safety lessons and worked to instill a sense of stewardship but we never forget... those kids don’t let us forget... that the main objective is winter fun.

Even in the midst of long, drawn out policy work my fond cause for celebration. At Yellowstone National Park officials delay, yet again, a final winter use plan for the park. WWA and our supporters celebrate the remarkable recovery the park has undergone as a direct result of our decade-long effort to reduce motorized vehicle traffic in the park. We hope, soon, to be able to celebrate new national guidelines for managing motorized-use on national forest lands (more on that front). The fact that WWA continues to thrive, not just survive, in this difficult economic climate is certainly cause for celebration.

And celebration, as the shirt says, is the whole reason we created the Backcountry Film Festival seven years ago. This winter the Festival will provide a venue to over 70 communities throughout the winter world for Nordic and backcountry skiers, snowboarders, snowshoers and others to gather in celebration of their shared love of winter.

If you, our members, supporters and partners, I offer heartfelt thanks for making this celebration possible.

Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival!

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank You!

WWA thanks its supporters, volunteers and board members for their commitment and dedication to our work preserving the human-powered backcountry experience. Without your support, none of our fiscal-year 2011 accomplishments would have been possible. WWA is grateful to the more than 130 members who support our mission. We are proud to list the individuals, foundations and partners who contributed $100 or more during fiscal-year 2011.

Individual Donors, Partners and Foundations
Make Your Gift Count Today

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Summit Winterlands and Trails

Friends of Red Mountain Pass

Colorado Mountain Club

Snowlands Network

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition

Alaska

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2010, February 12-13, 2011 and June 18, 2011

met three times during the fiscal year: October 9,

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Montana Backcountry Alliance

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