



May 2, 2016

Jeff Marsolais
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
35 College Drive
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Submitted via email to comments-pacificsouthwest-ltbmu@fs.fed.us

Re: Pre-Scoping Comments on Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Winter Travel Management

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide pre-scoping comments on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's Winter Travel Plan.

The LTBMU manages nearly 80% of the land in Tahoe. The public has an interest and right to enjoy these lands all year long but the LTBMU has not provided the same level of access to winter users as it has for summer users. This issue has grown worse as winter access has been dramatically reduced over the last decade, while interest in winter recreation has exploded.

As one of the primary stated purposes of the 2005 Travel Planning Rule is to "*address needs for access to National Forest System lands... for non-motorized users in a manner that is environmentally sustainable over the long term*,"¹ the LTBMU should reverse the significant amount of lost access since 2005 and provide for winter access in future planning.

Backcountry winter recreation has surged in popularity over the last decade while the quantity and quality of access in Tahoe has shrunk dramatically. In addition to the dozens of summer parking lots locked every winter, backcountry skiers and riders have lost hundreds of additional prime spots during this time. Many locations in Tahoe see winter use that is equivalent to or higher than summer use, but the LTBMU provides extremely limited access to winter users and has been reducing access.

Closed gates that block easily accessible roads and lots should be opened and allowed to permit safe access to popular backcountry ski spots Basin wide. Specific examples include: Spring Creek Rd (accessing Mt. Tallac), Fallen Leaf Rd (accessing Desolation Wilderness), and the trailhead at the end of Highview Ct. (accessing Rubicon Peak), Bayview Trailhead, and Vista Point.

The West Shore of Lake Tahoe from Emerald Bay to Meeks Bay is one of the most beautiful places in the world and it is arguably even more special when blanketed in snow. Approximately a hundred winter parking spots were lost during the summer of 2015. Around Emerald Bay perhaps another hundred parking spaces are either closed behind a gate or unplowed. This results in a degraded experience for locals and tourists visiting this area during winter months.

¹ USFS November 9, 2005. 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295; RIN 0596-AC11. *Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use*, emphasis added. Also: "Provision of recreational opportunities and access needs are two of several criteria the responsible official must consider under § 212.55 of the final rule in designating routes for motor vehicle use." Available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/final.pdf>



Additionally, closing gates to paved parking pushes visitors to park on dirt which has negative consequences for Lake Tahoe's clarity.

Rubicon Peak sees traffic nearly every day of the year, and for good reason. This is an access point to one of the most beautiful summits in the world. Users of the trailhead at the end of Highview Court has experienced ticketing for years, when there is plenty of room to park behind the locked gate.

Spring Creek Rd is the long standing historical access point for skiing Mt. Tallac in the winter. Approximately 100 high quality parking spots were lost when the LTBMU locked the gate in the winter shutting out backcountry skiers but still allowing just a few USFS cabin owners to park on the paved and plowed road. This massive change in winter management did not occur via a comprehensive Winter Travel Management planning process and appears to favor a very small number of leasees over the thousands of backcountry skiers who love Mt. Tallac. Currently skiers walk over a mile on plowed asphalt just to access the point where people started climbing in the past.

Fallen Leaf Rd, like Spring Creek Rd, is plowed and paved but the general public is prevented from using it to access public lands, even though a small number of cabin leasees, businesses owners enjoy access. Blocking access to these roads by backcountry skiers, while allowing it for some, effectively privatizes these public roads and contradicts the Forest Service's mission.

The Tahoe Backcountry Alliance encourages the LTBMU to explore creative public/private/non-profit partnerships to improve access that addresses these problems. While the LTBMU deserves credit for leveraging these types of relationship in the summer, we are not aware of similar winter efforts.

Because the Forest Service manages nearly 80 percent of all land surrounding Lake Tahoe, these decisions can make it or break it for backcountry ski access at Tahoe. The LTBMU has closed significant winter access to our public lands and added nothing in the last few decades, while participation in human powered winter recreation has exploded. This is not serving backcountry skiers and snowboarders, the businesses that rely on these activities, and people who love our snow covered mountains.

We very much look forward to working with you to create an improved winter travel management plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin. If there's anything we can do as an organization to help facilitate the planning process, please let us know.

Sincerely,

David Reichel
Tahoe Backcountry Alliance