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Legal Challenge Holds the Line on Winter Motorized Travel

In response to legal challenge, three Intermountain forests withdraw outdated snowmobile maps

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Boise, ID — A legal challenge has been successful in holding the line against unbridled winter motorized travel on three Intermountain national forests. Due to increasing use and associated disruption to winter landscapes and wildlife, in 2015 the Forest Service published a rule requiring national forests to manage over-snow vehicles to protect natural resources, imperiled wildlife, and a growing constituency of quiet winter recreationists. The three forests targeted in the lawsuit—the Boise and Payette National Forests in Idaho and the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming—had disregarded the new rule and published winter motorized travel maps showing where snowmobiles and other “over-snow” motorized vehicles are allowed on the forests without the required planning or public process.

Winter Wildlands Alliance and WildEarth Guardians, represented by Advocates for the West, [challenged](#) the Forest Service’s publication of maps based on outdated decisions – some more than fifteen years old. The lawsuit highlighted over-snow vehicle impacts to lynx and wolverine, degradation of recommended wilderness, and growing and unmanaged conflicts between winter recreational uses on the forests. The Wilderness Society joined the lawsuit challenging the Boise and Payette National Forests’ maps.

In response to the lawsuit, in March of 2018 the Forest Service withdrew its winter travel maps and committed to conduct winter travel planning on each of the three forests. The conservation and recreation groups agreed to dismiss the case based on the agency’s commitments and on July 3, 2018, the court officially dismissed and closed the case.

“These forests were the only three in the country to default to outdated decisions as the basis for publishing winter travel management maps,” said Hilary Eisen, Policy Director at Winter Wildlands Alliance. “We sought to establish a level playing field and so that there is an opportunity to protect areas for human-powered recreation, unique wild places, and threatened wildlife on these forests. These forests, like all others across the system, must comply with current regulations requiring thoughtful and meaningful winter travel planning.”

“We are excited to see the Forest Service reverse its ill-advised course,” said Marla Fox, Rewilding Attorney at WildEarth Guardians. “Our fight is not over. We will continue to ensure the public’s voice in forest management. And we will continue to defend bedrock environmental laws like the Endangered Species Act.”

“Our goal was to head off bad precedent, re-iterate the importance of proper planning, and bring consistency to over-snow vehicle management across public lands,” said Alison Flint, Litigation Manager and Senior Policy Analyst at The Wilderness Society. “The 2015 rule presents an important opportunity to enhance quality recreation opportunities for everybody, protect wildlife during the

vulnerable winter season, and prevent avoidable damage to wild places. But not if forests short-circuit the process required by the rule.”

“The Forest Service’s decision to withdraw the maps is an important first step to resolve the lawsuit,” said Laurie Rule, senior attorney with Advocates for the West representing the conservation groups. “However, full compliance with the law will not occur until the agency conducts a transparent and up-to-date winter travel planning process for each forest.”

Links to Additional Information:

Sixty-day notice of intent letters under the Endangered Species Act submitted to the [Payette](#), [Boise](#), and [Bridger-Teton](#) National Forests

[Amended complaint](#) challenging the Forest Service’s publication of maps based on outdated decisions

Press Releases from the [Payette](#), [Boise](#), and [Bridger-Teton](#) National Forests

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