



WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE

NATIONAL POLICY UPDATE

*Advocating for
human-powered
protections on the
Tahoe National
Forest*

*Photo by Ming Poon,
mingpoonphotogra-
phy.com*

DEFENDING WILDLANDS, DEFENDING ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

*By Hilary Eisen
Policy Director*

First, Whew, The National Budget

Those of us who cherish wild, unroaded, Forest Service lands dodged a bullet this winter. Congress finally passed a budget in March, for the first time in over 2 years. It was no easy process, tied up in partisan bickering and continuously sidetracked by various amendments, deals, and riders that had nothing to do with the budget itself. We're glad to see Congress finally passed a budget, and even happier to see that the spending bill included stable or moderately increased funding for public lands agencies, increased funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, addressed the way in which the Forest Service budgets for wildland fire

fighting, and didn't dismantle any major environmental regulations.

What, you ask, does the budget have to do with the environment?

For years, policy makers, public lands advocates, and others have been working to find a solution to "fire borrowing" — the Forest Service's practice of every summer paying for wildland firefighting by "borrowing" (but never returning) money from all of the agency's other programs when the fire program runs out of money and wildfires are still raging. This has seriously affected the Forest Service's ability to fulfill its mission, **POLICY UPDATE, continued page 3...**

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

WINTER TRAVEL PLANNING UPDATE

By Hilary Eisen
Policy Director

The pace of winter travel planning has picked up this spring — in late March, the Lassen National Forest published a revised draft plan and final environmental impact statement (FEIS) and in April the Tahoe National Forest published its draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). These two forests are early adopters of the Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) Rule, and we're tracking their progress closely to see how the Forest Service will implement this important Rule. What we've seen this spring is encouraging.

Overall, the Lassen's revised draft plan is a vast improvement over the draft plan the Regional office sent back to the drawing board last year. Under the Lassen's new draft plan, approximately 387,100 acres of the forest are not open to OSV use, which nearly doubles the amount of non-motorized acreage as compared to current management. Most of the areas Winter Wildlands Alliance and Snowlands Network specifically identified as important for non-motorized recreation are not designated for OSV use in this draft plan. The draft plan also protects much of the important winter wildlife habitat on the forest and makes common-sense decisions like not designating low elevation areas that don't get snow for OSV use and setting a minimum snow depth for OSV travel.

However, we are disappointed that the draft plan designates two important ski zones for motorized use, doesn't fully recognize or protect a historically non-motorized ski trail, and would allow OSVs right up to the edge of the Pacific Crest Trail, undermining the trail's Congressionally mandated non-motorized status. We're also concerned that the draft plan brushes off Sierra Nevada red fox as a



Tahoe human-powered. Photo by Ming Poon, mingpoonphotography.com

non-issue, despite the fact that the Lassen is an important stronghold for this incredibly rare species. We believe that the plan can be improved and that the Forest Service can better protect quiet recreation and wildlife habitat values while still addressing the OSV community's access concerns. In hopes of helping the Forest Service find this balance, we filed an objection on the draft plan in late April and look forward to continuing to work with the agency and stakeholders through the end of the planning process.

The Tahoe's draft EIS — which laid out 5 different alternatives, or possible management scenarios — gives us hope that we are successfully moving the bar when it comes to winter travel planning. Although we've made good progress with the Lassen in getting the Forest Service to

properly implement the OSV Rule, and to recognize and protect key non-motorized areas, the Tahoe came in a notch above the Lassen. The Tahoe DEIS analyzes a broad range of alternatives and delves into details. It divides the forest into 19 different areas and then goes over what the specific issues are with each area — from rare plants to conflicts with quiet recreation. This type of analysis is a fundamental aspect of the planning process.

Although the Tahoe doesn't have a final draft plan yet (we hope to see in before the end of 2018) they have identified a preferred alternative that protects many of the key non-motorized areas we've advocated for, doesn't designate OSV use in low elevation areas, and protects important wildlife habitat like deer winter range. Two of the other alternatives



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

CALIFORNIA DREAMING: PROTECTING THE SIERRA NEVADA Continued from page 2

in the Tahoe DEIS are more restrictive than the preferred alternative and protect all of the important non-motorized areas we've identified and advocated for, including the Pacific Crest Trail.

Because the draft plan is constructed out of pieces of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS, we are well positioned to advocate for a solid final plan. We're supportive of most of the Forest Service's proposed action/preferred alternative with a

few key changes. Most notably among these, working with Snowlands and Tahoe Backcountry Alliance to find workable compromises, we are advocating for some non-motorized terrain on and around Castle Peak, Sardine Lakes, Sierra Buttes and the Pacific Crest Trail. These areas are incredibly important for backcountry skiers, cross-country skiers and snowshoers, and protecting them is key to bringing balance to the backcountry on the Tahoe National Forest.

Protect the Sierra Nevada Backcountry
winterwildlands.org/winter-travel-planning/sierranevada/



Photo by Ming Poon, mingpoonphotography.com

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turning it from a multiple-use land management agency into a firefighting agency. However, as with many things, although everybody recognized the problem (fire borrowing) and most people agreed on the needed solution (treat catastrophic wildfires like other natural disasters and have FEMA pay the cost of fighting them), action was not forthcoming.

For most of this Congress, extreme conservatives have worked to tie a fire funding fix to "forest management reform" — gutting the NEPA process (environmental review and public comment) and fast-tracking timber harvest. Public lands advocates and conservation organizations, including Winter Wildlands Alliance, however, were not willing to sacrifice NEPA in the name of the fire funding fix. As budget negotiations heated up, public lands advocates stepped up and, when the

dust settled, the omnibus spending bill deal included a provision that will end fire borrowing through 2027. And, because of outcry from public lands advocates, the trade-off for this important fix doesn't gut NEPA. There are some modest changes to analysis requirements for fire-prevention-related logging projects, but overall forest management will continue to include strong environmental and public participation sideboards. Whew!



Alongside NEPA, the budget bill also posed a threat to the Roadless Rule. This 2001 Rule prohibits road construction, timber harvesting and other development on some National Forest lands — so called "inventoried roadless areas." These roadless areas include many of our most accessible winter backcountry areas, cherished by skiers and snowboarders for the recreation opportunities they provide. However, during the budget negotiations Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R, AK) tried to add two "riders" to the bill that would have exempted Alaska's national forests, the Tongass and Chugach, from the Roadless Rule. This would have set precedent for forest-by-forest or state-by-state exemptions to this important conservation rule. Not only that, Murkowski's amendments directly threatened some of the best, most accessible human-powered skiing in Alaska, Turnagain Pass. Thankfully, again thanks to outspoken public lands advocates, Murkowski's riders were not included in the final bill. Whew again. Another bullet dodged.

Other Congressional Shenanigans

We're continuing to weigh in as Congress considers legislation that would impact public lands. Right now we're tracking over a dozen different bills that would remove conservation protections for public lands and/or undermine the public's ownership of public lands. We're also tracking a number of bills that we support, including conservation legislation that would protect important wildlands in Montana, Colorado, and Washington, and legislation that would establish new avenues for protecting land that's not quite Wilderness-worthy but important all the same. We'll continue to let you know when there are key moments to contact your representatives in Congress. You can always find out more about the legislation we're following by going to winterwildlands.org/policy-advocacy/bill-tracker/

KEEP WINTER WILD

WILD WINTER WOMEN ENDURE SUFFERFEST, RAISE BIG FUNDS FOR WWA!



Taylor and Hallie know what it takes to protect the places they love most.

At midnight on Friday, March 23rd, Taylor Schefstrom and Hallie Holland (aka the Wild Winter Women) left Crested Butte on skis to travel 40 miles through the night to Aspen, Colorado as part of the classic backcountry race, the Grand Traverse.

Late in the night, snow safety professionals called for the race route to be reversed due to bad weather and danger over Star pass, and still they finished the race in a little over 12 hours and exceeded their fundraising goal for Winter Wildlands Alliance!

Their all-night sufferfest raised \$5079 for Winter Wildlands Alliance, directly supporting the protection of the wild winter landscapes we all love.

“Access to the winter backcountry is something we all live for,” they wrote, “but keeping those places wild, quiet, and free takes an incredible amount of work.”

Thank you to everyone who supported them along their journey. And congratulations to Hallie and Taylor for all their hard work and dedication in helping to keep our winters wild.

What's it going to take to protect the places we love?

YOU.

\$35 supports public lands, kids on snow, mountain communities and wild winter landscapes! The more of us there are, the stronger we are.

winterwildlands.org/join

KEEP WINTER WILD



Photo by Kt Miller, www.ktmiller.photo/

FIRST ANNUAL KEEP WINTER WILD YURT TRIP GOES DEEP

RESERVE YOUR SPOT NOW FOR NEXT SEASON!

In March 2018, a dozen Winter Wildlands Alliance supporters led by WWA Ambassadors Rich Meyer, Kt Miller, Executive Director Mark Menlove and a stellar guide crew from Sun Valley Trekking ventured deep into Idaho's Smokey Mountains for four days of pristine powder, skintrack conversations and yurt-life camaraderie, all in support of our Keep Winter Wild campaign.

The yurt adventure was such a success that trip organizer Rich Meyer called from the road on his way back to Northern California to book next season's Keep Winter Wild Redux. If you missed the inaugural Keep Winter Wild yurt trip, you won't want to miss the encore. Mark your calendars now: March 4-6, 2019 at Bench Hut in Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains. Go to winterwildlands.org/yurttrip to sign up now—before it sells out!



Photo by Kt Miller, www.ktmiller.photo/

A SEASON IN THE LIFE OF SNOWSCHOOL

MONTHLY SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD

By Kerry McClay,
National SnowSchool Director

We launched a new SnowSchool short film in the Backcountry Film Festival premiere this past November that highlighted the program's emphasis on diversifying our outdoor community. Since then, SnowSchool has hit the snow (or frozen ground) running and introduced tens of thousands of diverse kids to the wonders of winter and the joys of snowshoeing in communities across the country! As the mountain snowpack melts under the spring weather, here's a snapshot of this past season's successes:

In **November**, we kicked off our on-snow efforts by holding the first ever regional SnowSchool science education workshop for educators in the Northern Sierra. Participants learned how to incorporate local weather station data and our Snowpack Prediction Contest into their science curriculum. SnowSchool annually provides such training opportunities to dozens of local educators across the country, and this year we engaged educators in California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho and Utah. The idea is to share and spread new elements of the SnowSchool curriculum to sites that can use them.

"This was the best field trip ever!"

- SnowSchool student

In **December**, we traveled to Bend, Oregon to provide a professional development workshop for 25 staff and volunteer educators focused on WWA's unique middle/

high SnowSchool curriculum that incorporates NASA snow science techniques. A few weeks later we held a workshop for SnowSchool volunteers in the Boise National Forest focused on building a large igloo that would be visited by hundreds of underserved kids throughout the rest of the season!

Early **January** is when most SnowSchool sites across the country spring to life,



THROUGH THE WINTER:

NOVEMBER: First ever regional SnowSchool science education workshop

DECEMBER: Bend, OR professional development workshop

JANUARY: First day of SnowSchool in the Boise National Forest

FEBRUARY: SnowSchool Support weeks kicks off

MARCH: District-wide workshop hosted in central Idaho

APRIL: Created a new outdoor science activity to help students explore the impact of dust on mountain snow

MAY: Snowpack Prediction Contest wraps up

Craters of the Moon SnowSchool Site, Photo by Dawn Kish

bringing the joy of snowshoe exploration to thousands of K-12 students, many of whom are first-time visitors to their local winter wildlands. But winter was a bit unevenly distributed this year, so when the first day of SnowSchool for students visiting the Boise National Forest finally arrived in early January it was accompanied with a mere 15 inches of total snow on the ground and sheets of rain falling from the sky! And how did the 5th-grade SnowSchool students fare that day, you ask? The student quote of the day says it all: "This was the best field trip ever!" The less-than-wintery conditions did nothing to slow the students' snowshoe powered exploration of the wild and slushy landscape. As they romped across public lands they studied snowshoe hare tracks, climbed inside the igloo, conducted a snow/water equivalency experiment, stumbled upon the SnowSchool Weather Station, dug snowpits, and discussed snowpack depth. All with the unyielding enthusiasm of a group of kids granted a much needed break from the normal classroom routine!

In **February**, as part of our annual SnowSchool Support Week, WWA threw two SnowBall benefit concerts in Boulder, CO and Boise, ID. Not only did these fundraisers help support our work of getting thousands of underserved kids across the country outside on public lands in the winter, but they also served as a gathering place for hundreds of supporters to hear testimonials from SnowSchool participants and volunteers. At a time when the future of public lands, science, education and winter itself are threatened, it was both energizing and affirming to witness broad community support for the SnowSchool program. And of course it was good fun for the adults to dress up and do a little dancing in ski boots!

WWA works year-round to establish new SnowSchool sites and grow existing sites in unique communities across the country. In early **March**, we hosted a district-wide workshop for teachers from the rural Basin

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School District in central Idaho, where an emerging traveling SnowSchool site, established in collaboration with the US Forest Service, brings the program to schools in this district that are surrounded by snow-covered public lands. The goal of the workshop was to facilitate the expansion of SnowSchool to students in grade-levels across the district. Elementary teachers, middle/high school teachers, a principal, the district science curriculum director and a USFS hydrologist all participated. Big plans are on the way for next year!

In **April**, WWA collaborated with The University of Colorado's Niwot Ridge Long-Term Ecological Research Site to create a new outdoor science activity to help

SnowSchool students explore the growing impact of dust on mountain snow. To better understand the impacts of dust settling on snow, Niwot Ridge scientists designed an experiment using sand spread over the surface of the snow to reduce its albedo (reflectiveness). Depending on weather, the reduced reflectiveness can lead to early melting of the snowpack by a factor of weeks. This provides scientists with a unique opportunity to study the interaction of dust and climate change on high mountain ecosystems. The modified experiment we created for SnowSchool students provoked rich observations and science-based discussions, and we subsequently shared the activity across all sites in the SnowSchool network.

All through **May**, thousands of SnowSchool students nationwide were tracking mountain snowpack levels via our Snowpack Prediction Contest. Using remote online weather stations accessed from their classrooms, students compared their predictions with actual snowpack levels in their own local watershed. The contest is the culmination of a months-long science exploration and concludes with a discussion about drought-versus-abundance years, local water supply and climate science.

Thanks to all our supporters for helping make this SnowSchool season a huge success! We couldn't do it without you!

GRASSROOTS SPOTLIGHT:

GRANITE BACKCOUNTRY ALLIANCE (GBA) SECURES TWO HISTORIC BACKCOUNTRY GLADE PROJECTS

One of our newest grassroots groups, non-profit Granite Backcountry Alliance, continues to break major trails for backcountry skiing in New Hampshire. In late March, the organization secured official permission from the U.S. Forest Service to develop and steward two new backcountry tree skiing projects in the Granite State, the first ever to be authorized on the densely-forested White Mountain National Forest (WMNF).

According to the Decision Memo: "The purpose of the project is to provide high quality experiences in backcountry ski areas, while protecting wildlife habitat and other resources." GBA and its partners and contractors will develop two distinct zones—on Bartlett Mountain and on Baldface Mountain in Evans Notch, near the Maine border—together providing over 1000 acres of quality, well-stewarded backcountry skiing.

"Today's decision marks a new-normal in how public lands are managed for glade skiing – through a thoughtful, transparent and candid partnership," said Tyler Ray,

GBA's Granite Chief.

On Bartlett, GBA will develop glades on up to fifteen percent of the approved area, removing vegetation, installing signs, and using braided ski lines to protect wildlife habitat. The historic Maple Villa Ski Trail, cut by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, will be revived as a main corridor for traveling uphill. The balance of the zone will remain wild.

Baldface Mountain, will be a big draw for Maine skiers and skiers of all abilities, offering a unique alpine zone and 2,500 feet of vertical. "It has the potential to be a classic glade," said Ray, "a slightly smaller scale yet modern version of Tuckerman Ravine into the John Sherburne Ski Trail."



Granite Backcountry Alliance is a 501(c)(3) based in North Conway, New Hampshire. For more information about GBA, its ski projects, and how you can contribute, visit: www.granitebc.org.

Over the summer GBA will work with glade designers and the WMNF to further develop concept plans and flagging with high anticipation for glade cutting to commence on September 1, 2018.

Meanwhile, in order to permanently preserve access and parking to the Maple Villa Glade on Bartlett, GBA has established a unique partnership with Upper Saco Valley Land Trust and is working to raise \$100,000 to support acquisition and development costs, over half of which is already secured.

GRASSROOTS SPOTLIGHT: SUPERIOR HIGHLANDS BACKCOUNTRY

Superior Highlands Backcountry advocates for backcountry skiing and works to expand and protect human-powered skiing and riding opportunities in Northeastern Minnesota. Small but scrappy, they're working to protect the best backcountry ski terrain in Minnesota from development. Superior Highlands Backcountry's beloved home ground backcountry zone, Moose Mountain, is home to the most skiable vertical in Minnesota. Located on the Superior National Forest, Moose Mountain has long been a hidden gem for local backcountry skiers and riders.



Faelan Coldwater in the Moose Mountain backcountry area

Unfortunately, in a story that's all too familiar, the ski resort that borders Moose Mountain, Lutsen Mountains Ski Resort, is seeking to expand onto Forest Service land. If Moose Mountain were developed, it would be the end of backcountry skiing in the region.

Superior Highlands Backcountry is seeking to preserve their backcountry playground through a unique and unprecedented approach. Rather than fight the resort expansion outright, SHB

has offered the Forest Service an alternative. Over the past year SHB has worked with Winter Wildlands Alliance to develop a proposal and application for a special use permit from the Superior National Forest to lightly glade Moose Mountain and turn it into an official backcountry ski area. Rather than clearcut ski runs and install chairlifts and other resort development, the SHB proposal would leave Moose Mountain essentially as it is today. They've even reached out to Lutsen Mountains with an offer to work together, pitching how the backcountry zone could improve the resort's bottom line.

Given the huge growth in backcountry skiing nationwide, it's safe to assume that the Midwestern ski community is also interested in moving beyond the resort. SHB's proposal would provide a backcountry ski destination to complement and amplify the existing winter recreation opportunities in Northeastern Minnesota. Stay tuned to see how it goes (and how you can support)!

NEW BACKCOUNTRY PARTNER: GUIDES FOR GLACIERS (G4G)

Guides for Glaciers (G4G) is a new movement gaining momentum in the guide community, harnessing the energy of that community and using it to effect positive climate action among all lovers of the mountain world. G4G is driven by the belief that because guides and guide services have regular contact with glacial and winter environments, they serve as credible first-hand reporters, recorders, and communicators of climate change in mountain environments, and also have an imperative to take action in the critical mission of climate stabilization.

A mountain guide's office is often glaciated or winter terrain, and that environment is changing for the worse — with melting permafrost, earlier springtime melt, increased frequency of avalanches and rockfall, as well as diminished annual snowfall and increased temperatures. And yet there exists a gap between the effect of climate change on the profession and the actions taken to address it. There are thousands of guides certified through the American Mountain Guiding Association (AMGA), yet there is no clear path for guides to communicate how a changing climate is affecting their economic and physical livelihoods and how to take broader action.

The efforts of G4G are currently directed toward developing a curriculum to help guides become more effective climate communicators, working with guide services to help them become more

Guides for Glaciers is a platform for mountain guides to engage in public action on climate change, to educate others on how climate is affecting the outdoor industry and to preserve the longevity of the guiding profession and the winter environment.



effective advocates and force multipliers for climate action through their web presence and client outreach, and generating reflection in the guide community regarding how guides can more effectively develop and sustain lifestyles that advance and promote climate-friendly adventure among all those who love the mountain world.

Stay up to date with G4G by joining their Facebook group, Guide for Glaciers (G4G), and following them on Instagram at @guides4glaciers.



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Idaho 12vers Project, Mark Ortiz

BEST SEASON YET FOR THE BACKCOUNTRY FILM FESTIVAL!

Another winter season has come and gone, and as we glide into summer we can't help but reflect on the truly amazing backcountry community that comes together each year all across the country (and beyond) in celebration of the places and the season we love most.

This past season, beginning with its annual premiere at the Egyptian in Boise, the Backcountry Film Festival Tour brought together 30,000 attendees at 98 screenings worldwide and raised over \$240,000 for local community organizations and grassroots partners.

Funds raised went to support SnowSchool sites, mountain safety workshops, local stewardship projects and advocacy efforts for the preservation and sustainable management of our public lands in winter.

This season also saw the grand debut, in collaboration with the Colorado Outdoor Recreation

Industry Office, of the Backcountry Film Festival Night of Stoke at the Winter Outdoor Retailer show in Denver. 1500 people showed up on the last night of the trade show to share the stoke with a collection of short films and in-person presentations by our friends Conrad Anker, Stacy Bare, Tommy Caldwell, Greg Hill, Chris Rubens and Caroline Gleich.

A big thanks to all our sponsors, partners, filmmakers, grassroots groups and volunteers who help bring life to the Backcountry Film Festival and make it such a success each year. If you're interested in submitting a film to be considered for next season's lineup, please visit our website at backcountryfilmfestival.org.

See y'all next year in a mountain town near you. Until then, peace, powder and public lands!



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