



# Winter 2023-2024

## California Recreation Data Collection Program

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### Program Overview

Trained Winter Wildlands Alliance (WWA) volunteers and nonprofit partners across the Sierra Nevada collect data through on-the-ground winter visitor use assessments to help inform Forest Service winter recreation planning and implementation.

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## What Data is Collected?

Visitor Totals · Recreation Use Type · Vehicles & Trailers · Dogs · Notes & Recommendations  
· Photos · Conflicts & Violations · Signage & Facilities

The following data is not based on a predetermined random sample and therefore should not be used for statistical purposes. In some cases more data was collected on busier days or weekends due to volunteer and staff availability. However, this report still provides good broad-scale data and highlights major issues.

## National Forests Included

During this third season of winter recreation data collection, a similar number of data entries was maintained across the Lassen (88), Plumas (41), LTBMU (6), El Dorado (35), Stanislaus (100), and Inyo (34) National Forests. The Stanislaus and Lassen have completed winter travel planning, and data collection informs monitoring of these plans. The Tahoe NF will also become a data focus in the 2024-25 season as it became the third National Forest to complete winter travel planning.

## Contributors

Friends of the Inyo (FOI), Friends of the Plumas Wilderness (FoPW), Snowlands Network, students from Feather River College, and one Lassen National Forest Volunteer, and one seasonal contractor (Stanislaus National Forest), as well as WWA's California Stewardship Manager (based in South Lake Tahoe) all contributed to winter recreation monitoring during the 2023-24 season. Our seasonal contractors, known as Backcountry Ambassadors, also recruited volunteers to collect winter use data, cultivated relationships with Forest Service staff, and made recommendations on how to improve winter trailheads and Sno-Parks on each Forest.

In partnership with National Forest units that have completed winter travel planning (Stanislaus, Lassen, Tahoe) and Region 5, WWA will expand the Backcountry Ambassador program next winter to produce an even more robust RIMS dataset, which should result in improved strategies for managing winter visitor use and a reduction in use impacts.

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## Collection Method

The Colorado Mountain Club's Recreation Impact Monitoring System (RIMS) mobile application provides a template for collecting data in a similar format to that seen in preliminary USFS winter data collection efforts. Visitor use assessments are visible on the RIMS app, and datasets for each forest are available upon request. For more information on the CMC RIMS app, please visit: <https://winterwildlands.org/announcing-the-rims-app>.



*Image 1. Backcountry Ambassadors promote positive interactions between winter recreationists and advance winter etiquette, safety, and conservation education in the areas where over-snow activities are concentrated.*

## 2023-2024 Winter RIMS Assessments

A total of 293 RIMS assessments were collected by 17 people at 55 locations (Figure 1). Total observation time was over 400 hours. Some of these assessments were collected at trailheads, while others included on-trail and off-trail data. In the following summary we



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provide both an overview of R5 data and analyze the locations forest by forest, highlighting areas where RIMS data collection was most robust.

A slow start to this winter led to initial data collection providing insight into low snow usage, though the season ended up achieving a relatively average snowpack as time went on, providing a snapshot of how recreation looks during an average snow year.

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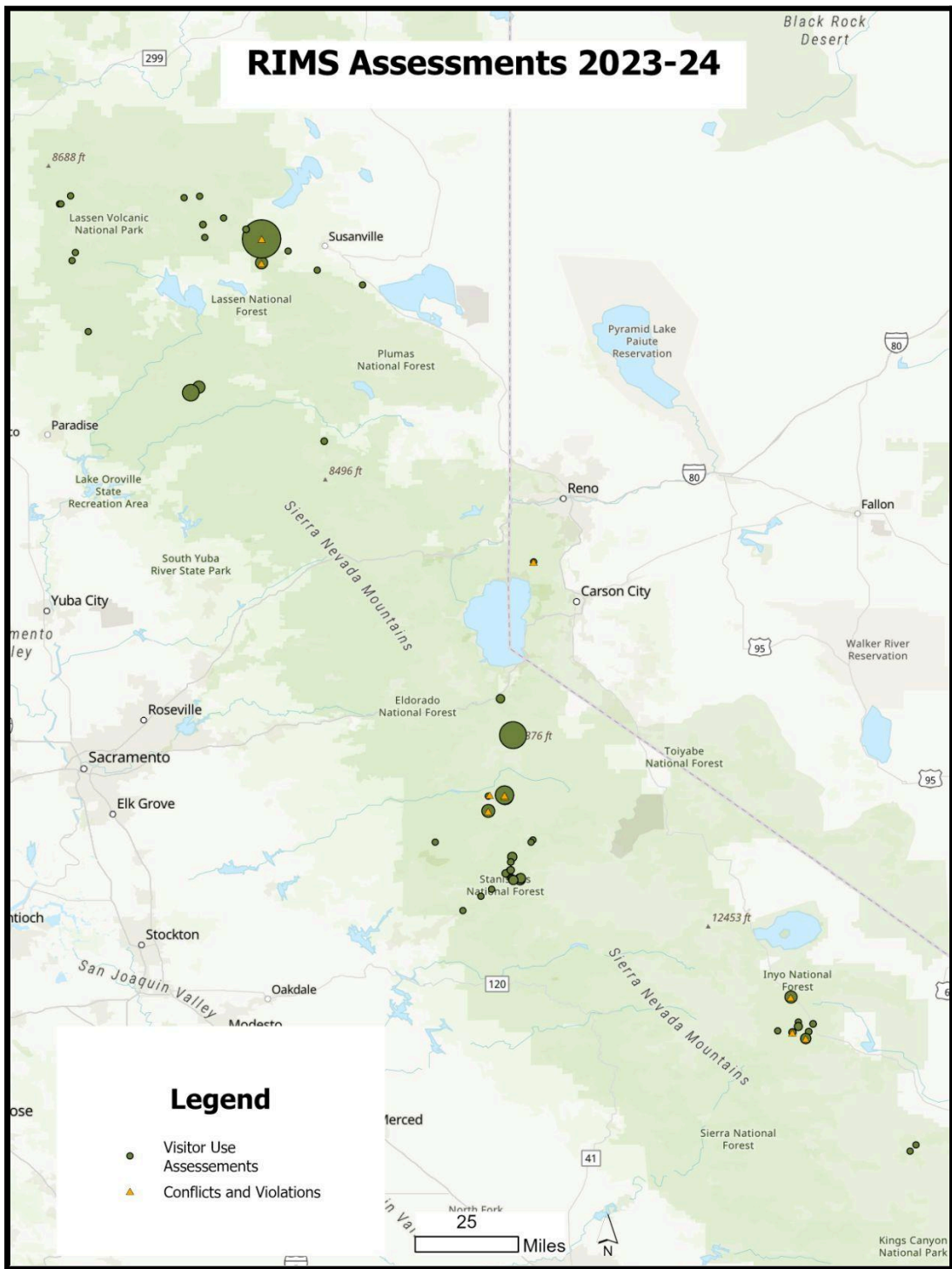
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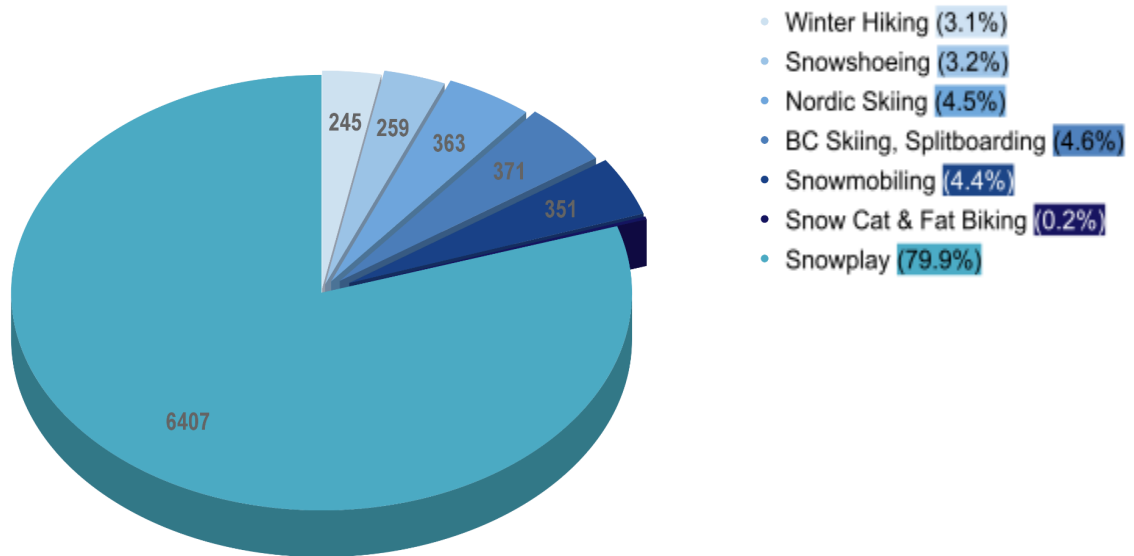
*Image 2. Winter human powered recreation and motorized recreation overlap in many places throughout the Stanislaus National Forest*





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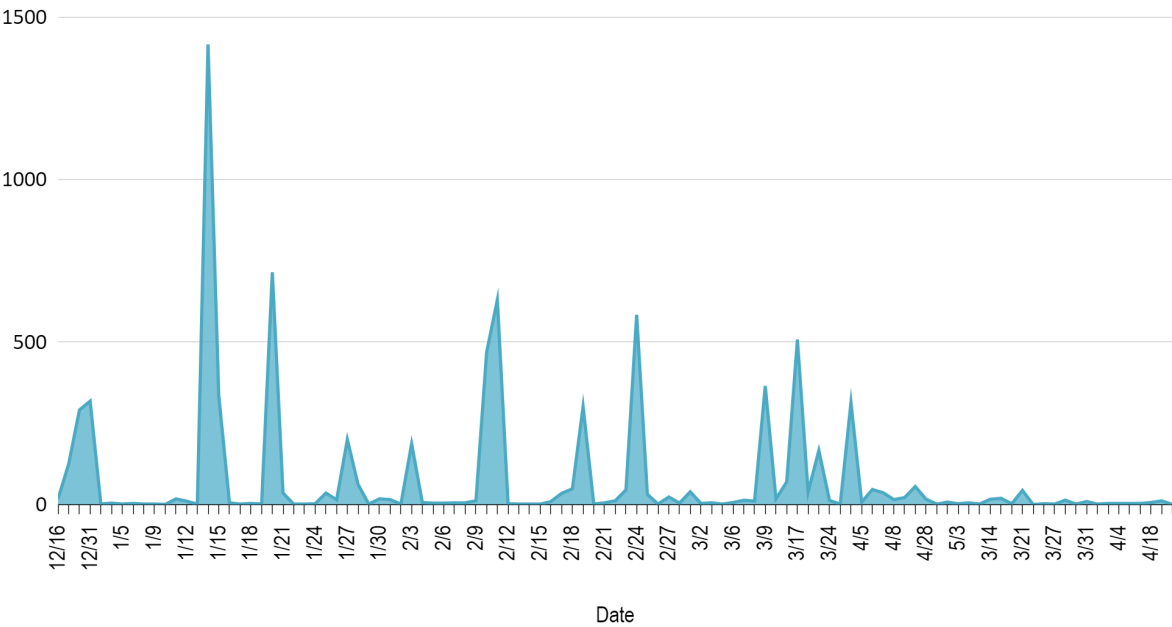
## Winter Visitor Use by Type



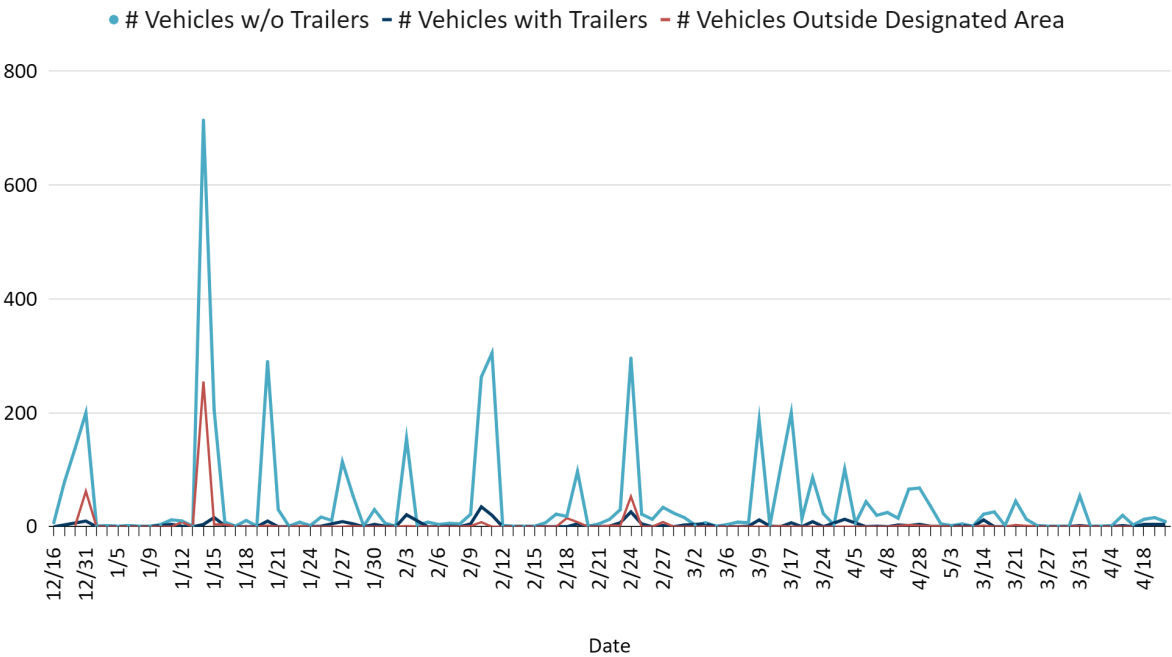
95.4% of winter USFS users captured by RIMS visitor use assessments were human-powered visitors, with 79.9% engaging in some form of snow play.



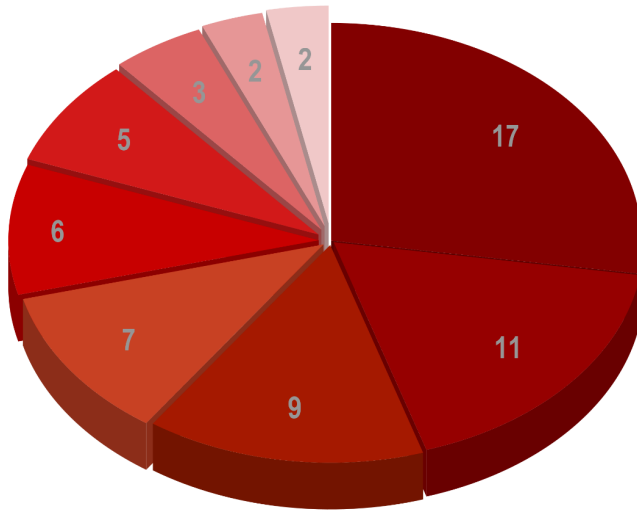
## Total Number of Visitors Over Time



## Total Number of Parked Vehicles Over Time



## Conflict & Violations Reports



- Inappropriate Parking (27.4%)
- Vehicles in No Parking Area (17.7%)
- Incompatible Trail Use (Conflict) (14.5%)
- Wheeled Vehicle on Groomed Trail (11.3%)
- Dog Poop (9.7%)
- Resource Damage/Inadequate Snow Depth (8.1%)
- OSV Use Outside Designated Zone (4.8%)
- OSV Use on Non-Motorized Trail (3.2%)
- Plastic Sled Trash (3.2%)

Reasons reported for violations and conflicts are:

- Lack of signage or inadequate signage at non-motorized and parking areas
- Parking areas without guidance (e.g. white lines)
- Ability for motorized vehicles to breach snow berms on non-motorized groomed trails
- No etiquette signage at areas where multiple uses occur, or a lack of signage indicating safe places to pull over (e.g. sledding or snowplay occurring into a dangerous area of roadway)
- Inadequate trash, dog poop bag receptacles, and etiquette information at areas with frequent dog visits
- Lack of recognition and signage related to snow depth requirements for motorized vehicles

These common issues across public lands have relatively straightforward solutions, if resources are available. Details of each violation or conflict can be found within Forest-specific report sections.



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# STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST

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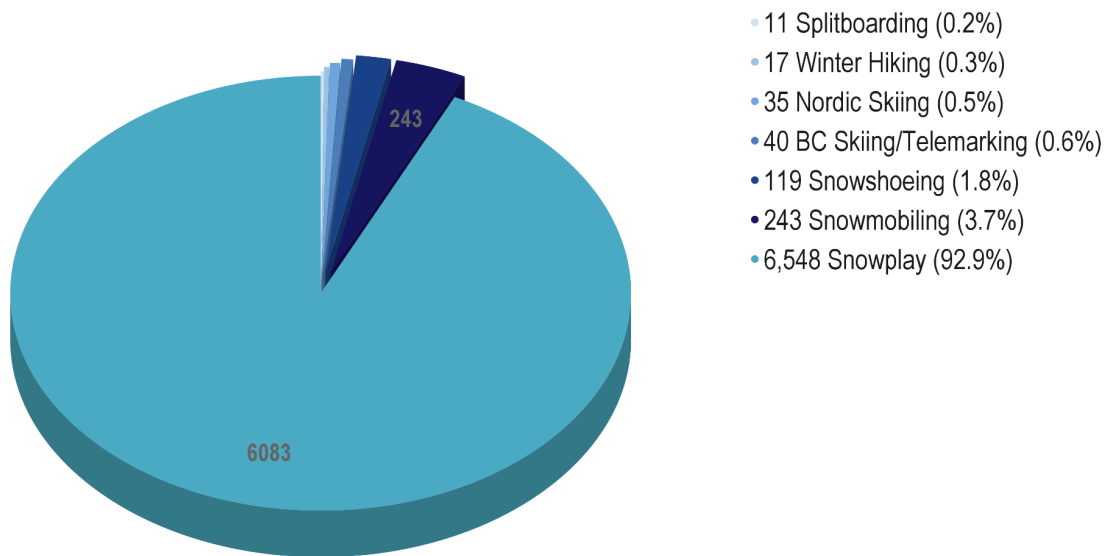


*Image 3. Opportunities for, and education about, safe snowplay are needed on the Stanislaus National Forest.*

## Backcountry Ambassador

This was the third season that WWA has hosted a Backcountry Ambassador on the Stanislaus. The backcountry ambassador supports the Forest Service through supporting interpretive events, consistent monitoring, and any other support that Forest Service staff identify, such as helping place boundary signs. An end of season report from the Stanislaus Backcountry Ambassador is included as an appendix to this report.

## Stanislaus Winter Visitor Use by Type



96.3% Stanislaus visitors human-powered users: 92.9% snowplay and 3.4% all others.

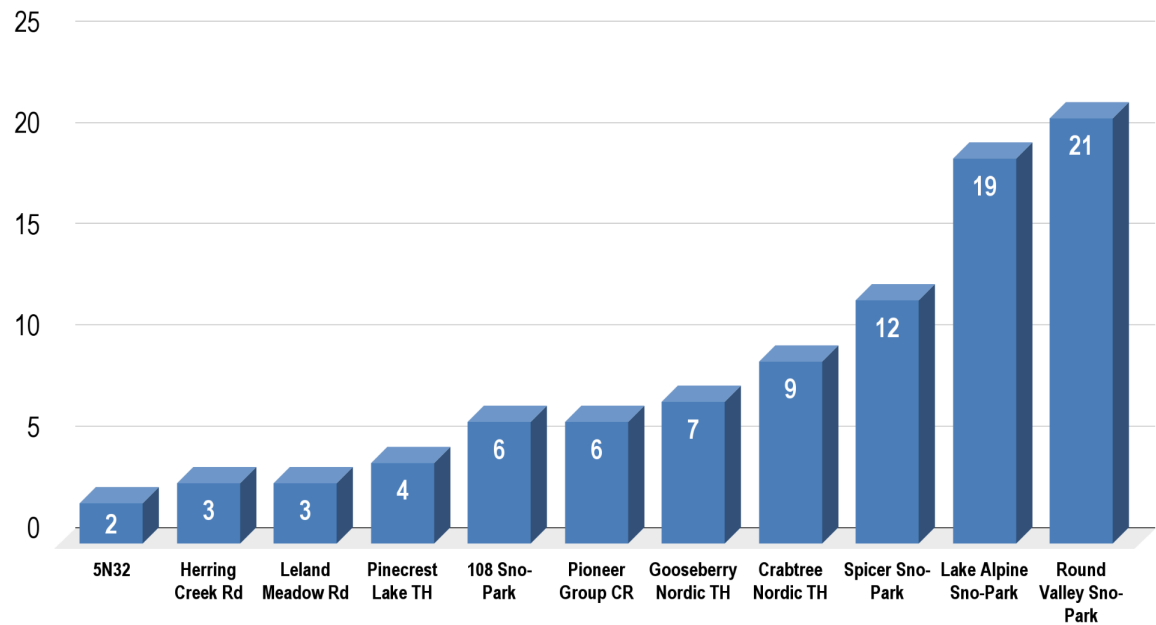
Sites with 1 visit from this season include: Beardsley Rd, Cascade Creek, Dorrington Stn, Eagle Meadow Rd, Fraser Flat Rd, Grouse Valley, Little Sweden, Lyons Dam Rd.



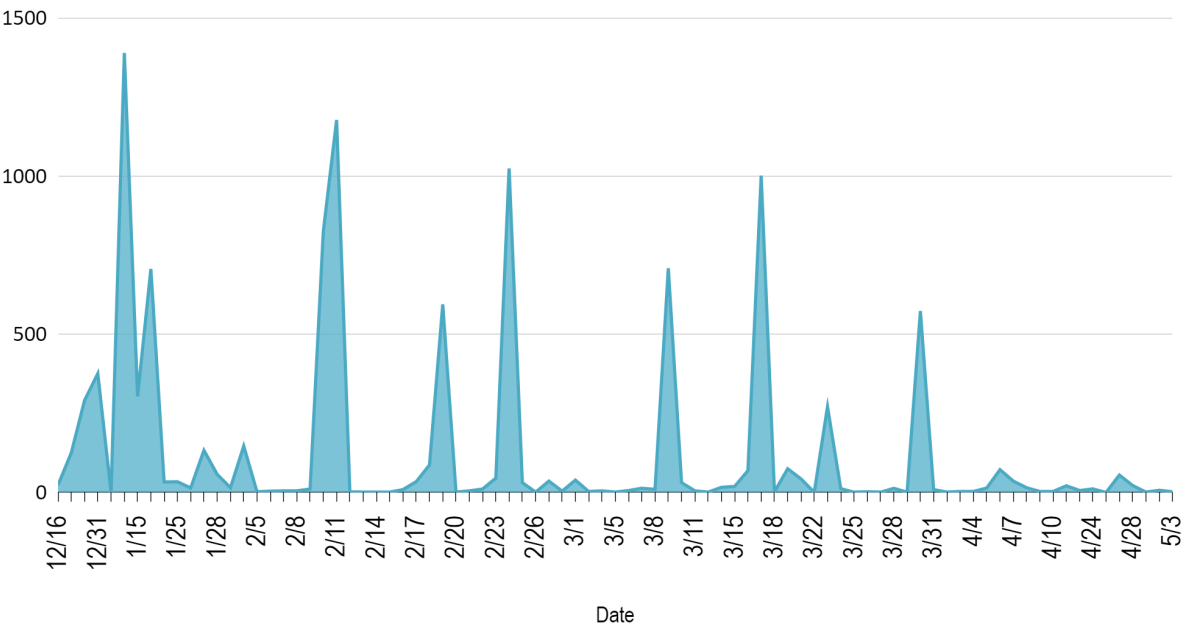
Image 4. Stanislaus NF guided snowshoe outings offer educational opportunities and help create equitable access to public lands.



Total Site Visits by Location



Total Number of Visitors Over Time



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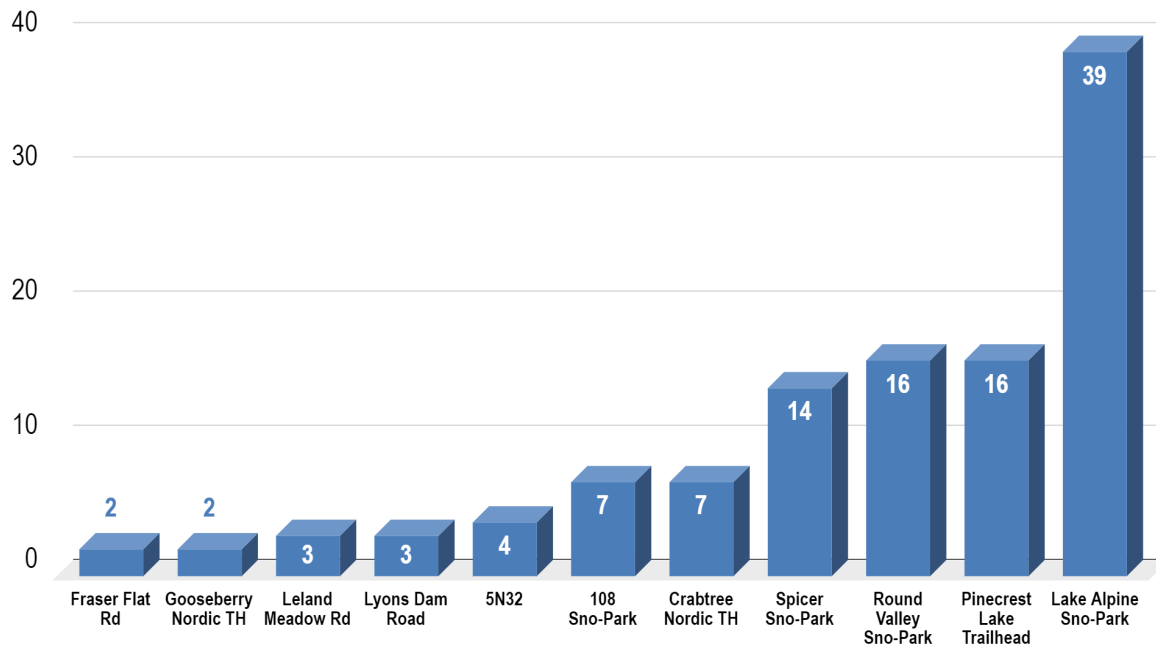
Sno-Parks and other known winter trailheads saw large spikes in visitors during the weekends in January, February, and March, with the highest use recorded on January 14th.



*Image 5. Large crowds of people at Pinecrest Lake Recreation Area for snowplay activities.*



### Total Dogs by Trailhead



Out of 113 dogs observed, almost all were on-leash (108).



Image 6. Visitors walk their dogs at Round Valley Sno-Park.

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# Signs & Facilities

Bathrooms · Trash · Parking/Plowing · Sign Damage



## Lake Alpine Sno-Park

- Needs signage for parking & snow depth



## Round Valley Sno-Park

- Signage starting to fall off bathroom walls
- Garbage overflowing
- Could use sled trash collection receptacle
- Summer road not adequately blocked
- Log decks from summer logging blocking parts of snowplay area



## 108 Sno-Park

- Could use snow depth signage

*Image 7. Trash left at a Forest Service outhouse at Round Valley Snow Park*

## Others

- Could use signage in areas unsafe for snowplay, either simply stating the danger and/or directing visitors to Sno-Parks or other safe parking areas (e.g. Leland Meadows, Cascade Creek Turnout, etc.)
- Additional signage to prevent Dodge Ridge users from blocking USFS access points

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# Conflicts & Violations

Parking · Etiquette · Snow Depth · Non-Motorized Areas



## Lake Alpine Sno-Park

- Cars parking illegally along road to sno-park
- OSVs parking in traffic lane; on a separate occasion an OSV was in the road overnight
- <6 snow depth on the highway when 6 snowmobilers were recreating (12/31/23)
- Snowmobiles strayed into closed area north of Hwy 4 at Woodchuck Basin (12/31/23)



## Round Valley Sno-Park

- Broken sled trash; sledding towards Hwy 4
- No way to know how to park in an empty lot: need an established system with lines. Cars typically parked incorrectly and inefficiently leaving less room than there could be; parking in chain installation area

*Image 8. Trucks and snowmobile trailers at the Lake Alpine Sno-Park*

## Spicer Sno-Park

- Two cars parked in handicapped spots without placards
- Sled and snowshoe trash left behind

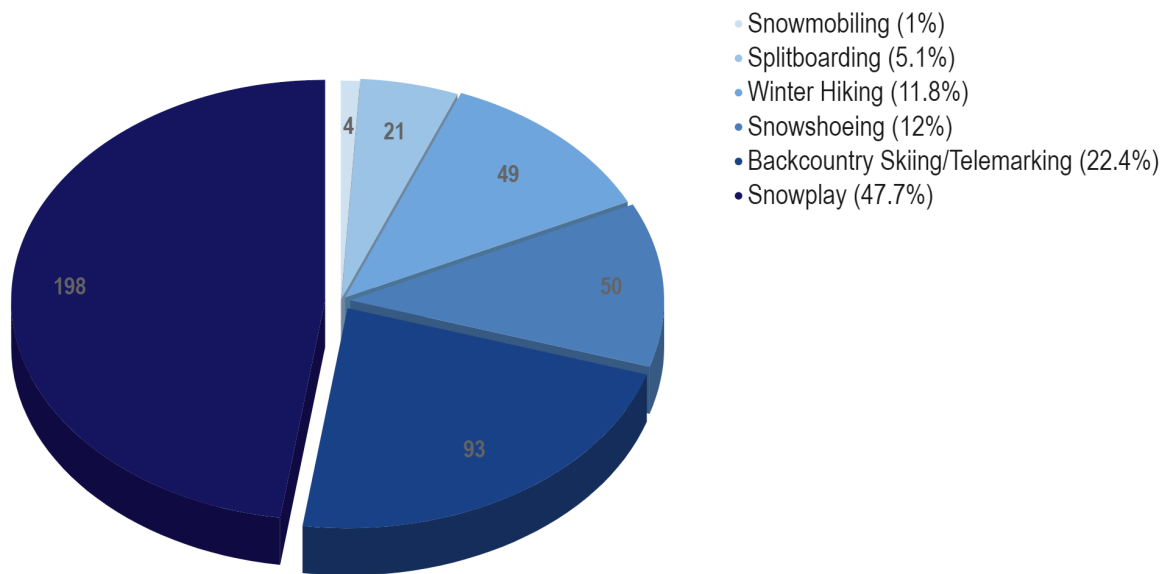


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# EL DORADO NATIONAL FOREST

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## El Dorado Winter Visitor Use by Type



All El Dorado RIMS data was collected at Carson Pass Sno-Parks (including Meiss); additional Carson Pass data and recreation type data was extracted from the El Dorado Backcountry Ski Patrol (EBSP) reports. RIMS data at Carson Pass was typically taken as a random snapshot over a few minutes, rather than over a period of time. Frequent overnight use was observed, including 3 tents pitched near the parking lot. Over 45 visits, overnight parking violations or snow removal obstructions were observed aside from the 3 tents near the lot. It is recommended to install signage clarifying overnight parking etiquette in this important Sno-Park area.

Snowmobile activity outside of a designated zone was observed on two occasions, in the Mokelumne Wilderness Area and west of Foresthill Road.

## Total Number of Visitors Over Time

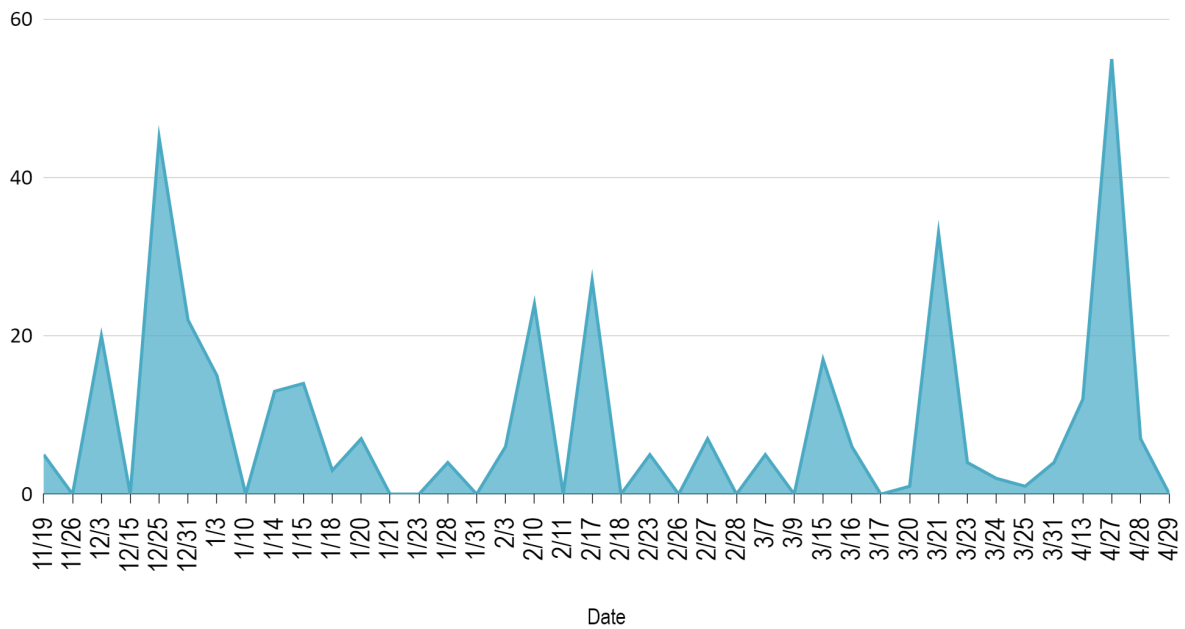


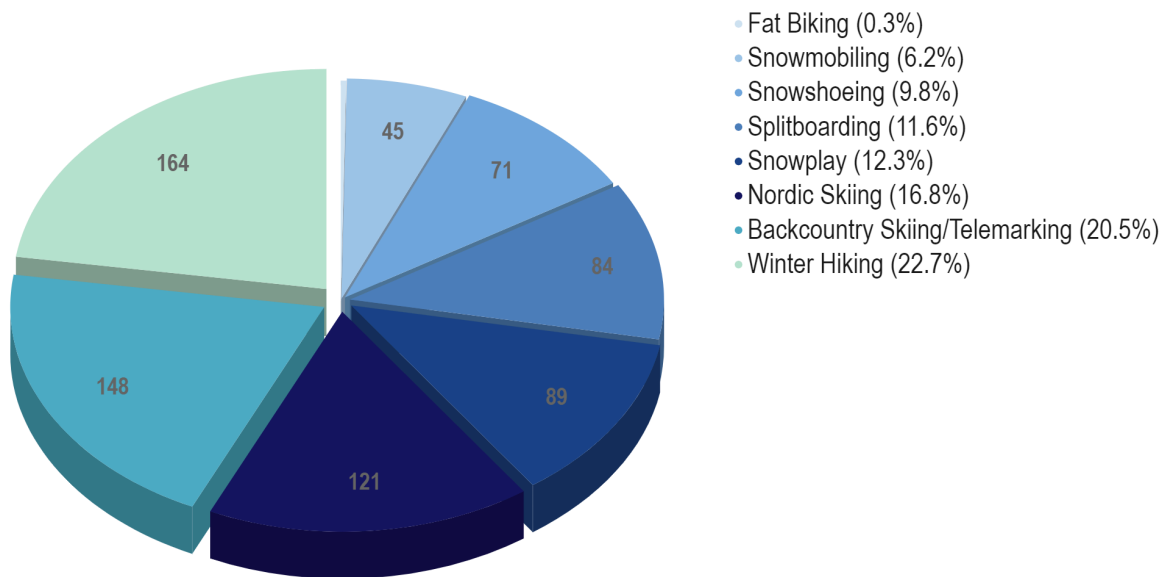
Image 9. Bluebird day at Carson Pass, Meiss Sno-Park.

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# INYO NATIONAL FOREST

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**Inyo Winter Visitor Use by Type**

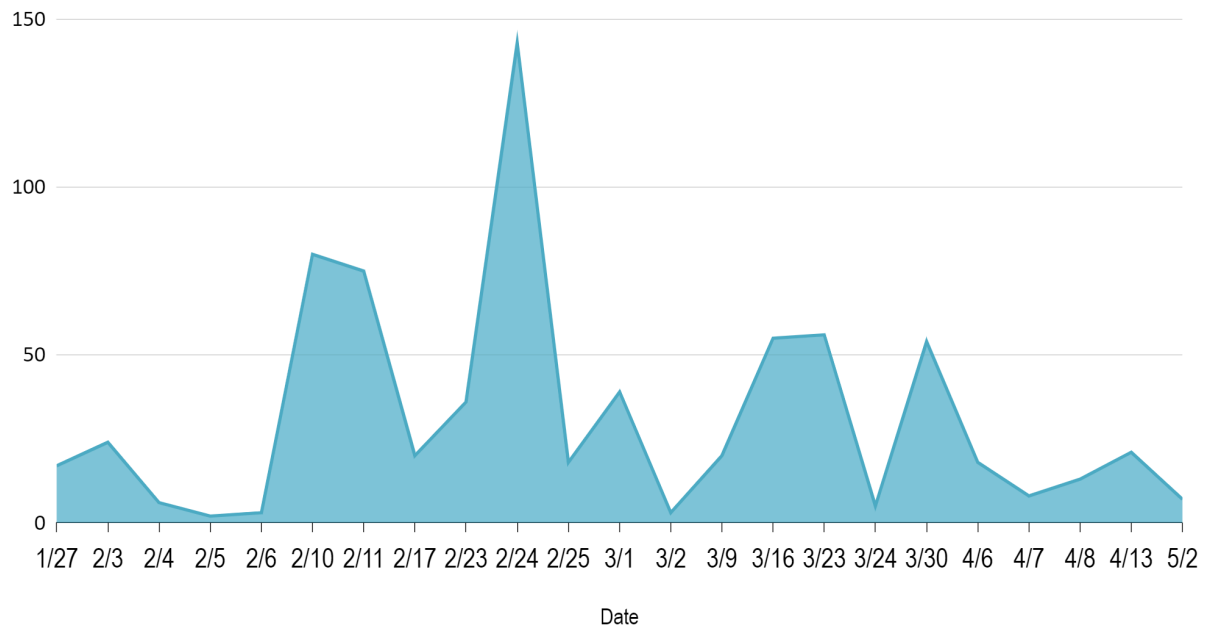


Most Inyo RIMS data was collected at the Sherwin Tanks trailhead and the Bald Mountain Staging area. Fewer than 4 visits were made to the other trailheads on the Inyo. There is a clear need for better management of dogs and their waste, and room for improvements in signage to clarify non motorized boundaries.

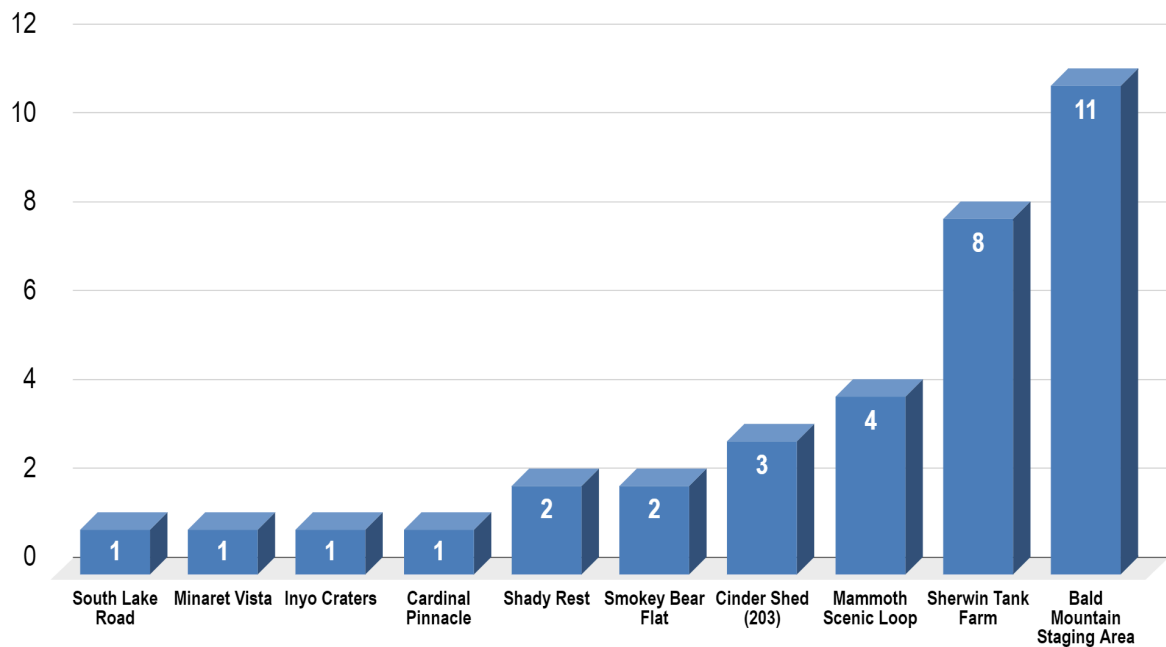
Snowmobile activity outside of a designated zone was observed in the Bald Mountain area, where issues with dog waste and insufficient parking were also problems.



## Total Number of Visitors Over Time



## Total Site Visits by Location



### Total Dogs by Trailhead

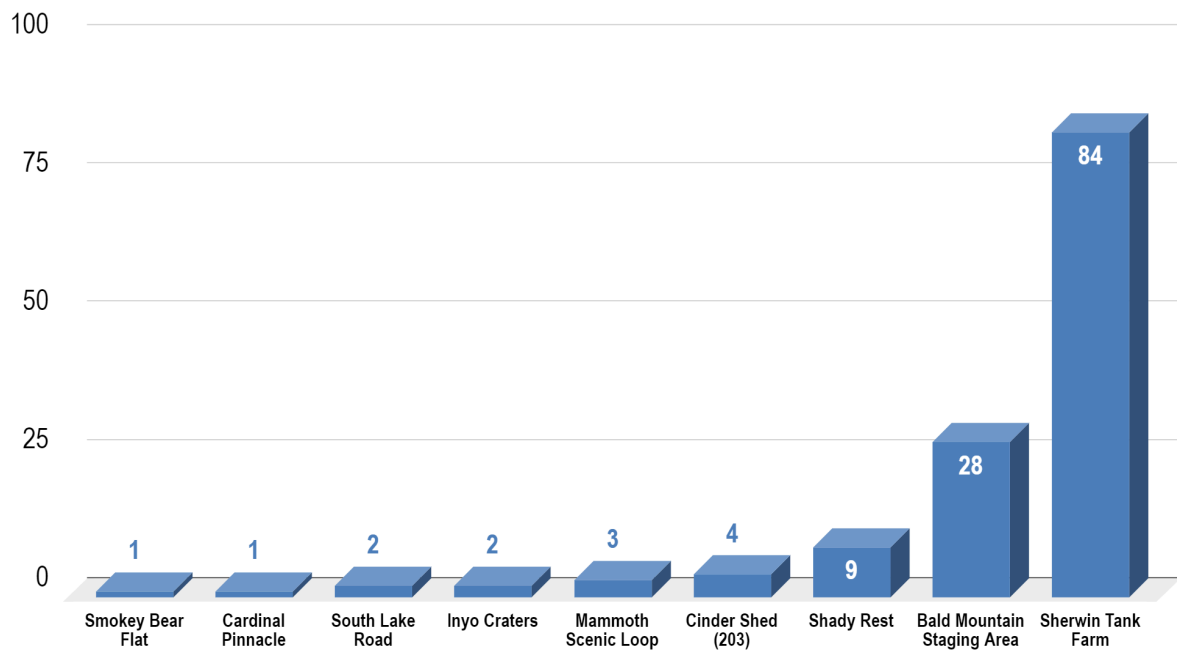


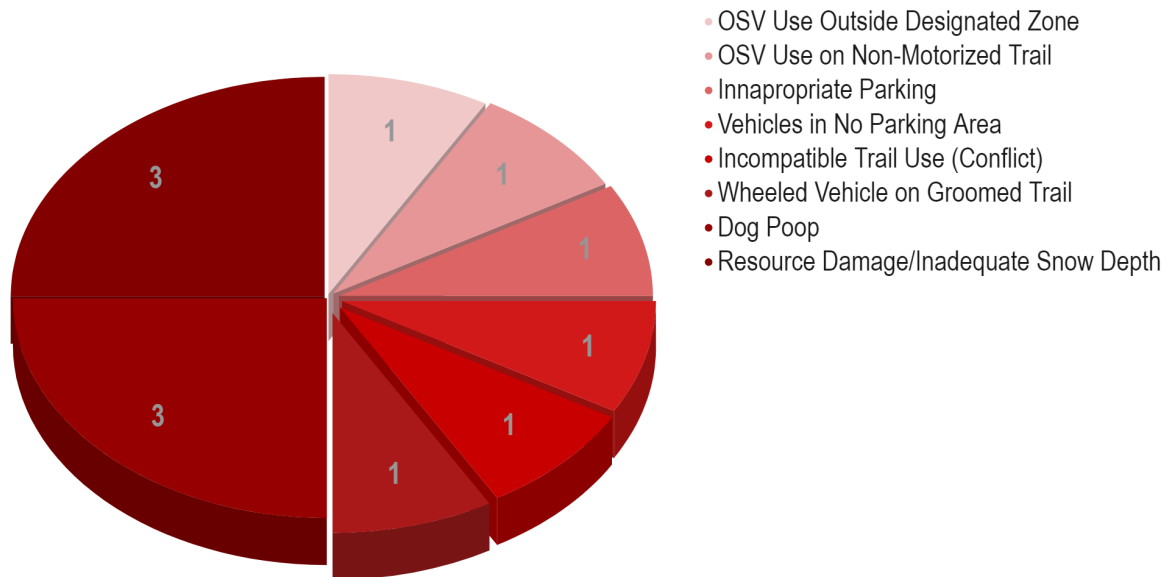
Image 10. Backcountry Ambassadors while out collecting winter recreation data on the Inyo National Forest.

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# Conflicts & Violations

Parking · Etiquette · Snow Depth · Non-Motorized Areas

## Conflict & Violations Reports



### Bald Mountain Staging Area and Sherwin Tank Farm

- People aren't picking up after their dogs
- Snowmobile use on non-motorized trails
- Inadequate snow coverage for snowmobile use

Image 11. Snowmobile tracks over dirt when snow coverage was insufficient

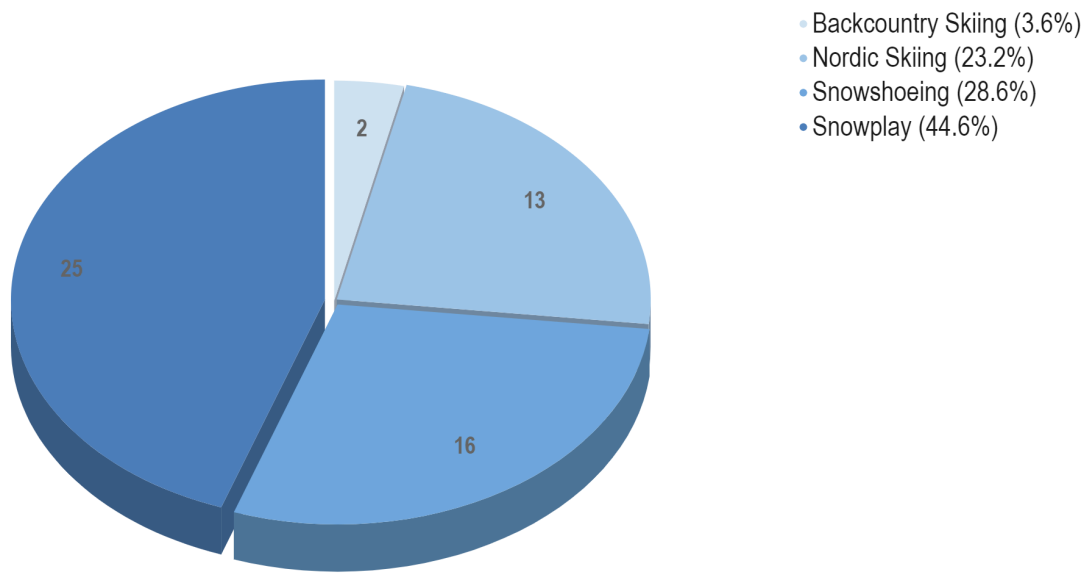


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# LAKE TAHOE BASIN MANAGEMENT UNIT

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## LTBMU Winter Visitor Use by Type



Recommendations for Mt Rose Hwy 431: post etiquette signage about recreating a safe distance away from the highway and increase dog waste receptacles.

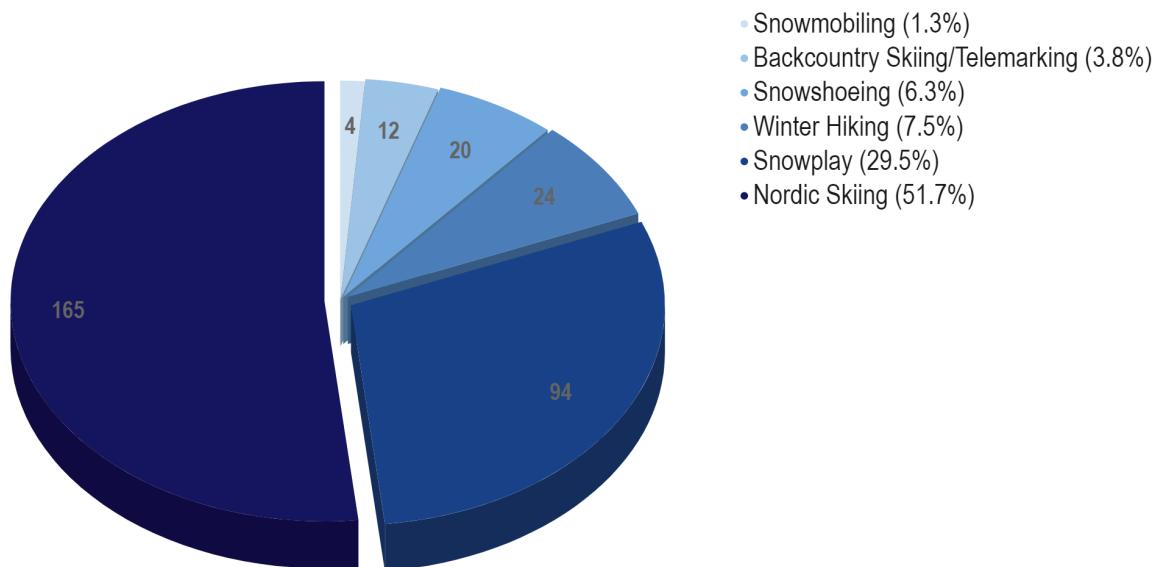
The sample size for LTBMU data this winter was small, with only 6 assessments. Winter trailheads visited included Echo Sno-Park and Mt Rose Hwy, traveling towards Chickadee Ridge, which are largely human-powered trailheads. As winter travel planning progresses here, there will be a goal to incorporate Tahoe Backcountry Alliance trailhead counter data for the LTBMU and Tahoe National Forests as well as to expand WWA's volunteer presence to help provide a better picture into winter recreation on the LTBMU.

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# LASSEN NATIONAL FOREST

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## Lassen Winter Visitor Use by Type

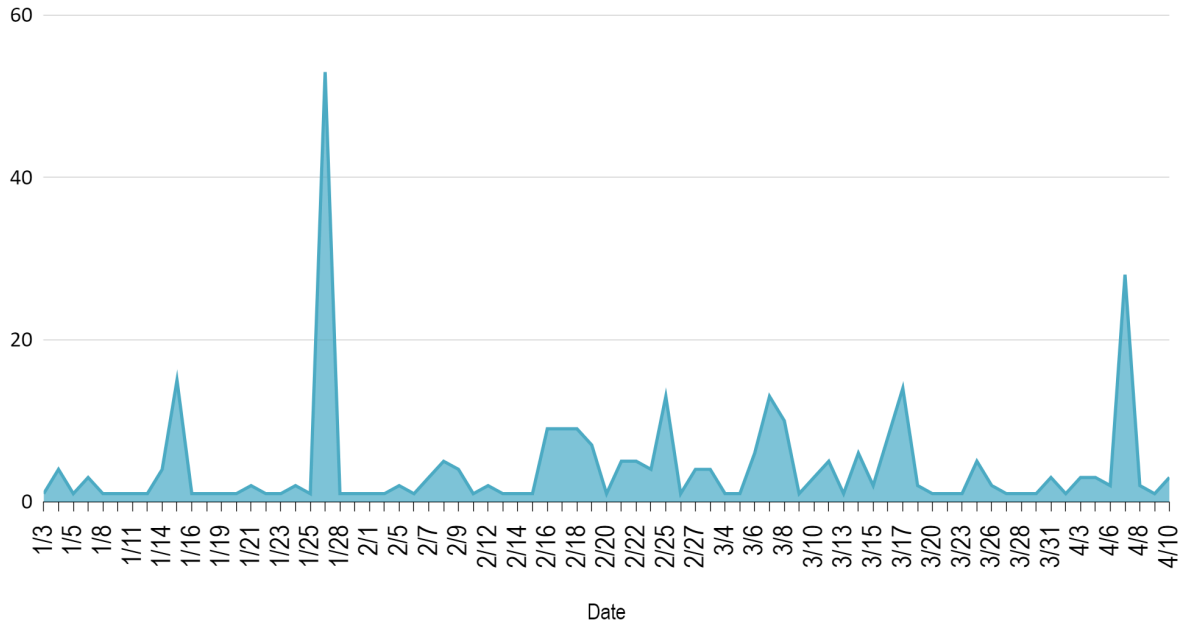


Most (54) Lassen visitor use assessments were collected at Hog Flat, a non-motorized area. As a result, the majority of assessments (98.7%) recorded on the Lassen National Forest documented human-powered visitors.

This was the third season that WWA has supported a volunteer Backcountry Ambassador on the Lassen. The backcountry ambassador monitors visitor use and collects monitoring data relevant to the Lassen OSV plan. An end of season report from the Lassen Backcountry Ambassador is included as an appendix to this report.

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## Total Number of Visitors Over Time





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# Signs & Facilities

Bathrooms · Trash · Parking/Plowing · Sign Damage



and maps

## Hog Flat

- “No wheeled vehicles” signs need to be maintained
- Occasional trash dumping occurring here

## Fredonyer Pass

- Needs “no wheeled vehicles” signs
- Kiosk needs more information, only one sign
- Would benefit from winter etiquette signs

- **Bogard East/West, Willard**

## Hill

- Kiosks need more information

Image 12. The sign kiosk at Lake Almanor Snowmobile Park could use maintenance, more information and maps.

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# Conflicts & Violations

Parking · Etiquette · Snow Depth · Non-Motorized Areas



## Hog Flat/Goumaz Road

- Hog Flat has consistent issues with wheeled vehicles accessing Goumaz road, for up to a mile in some cases, especially when snow levels are low. Efforts were made to maintain “no wheeled vehicles” signs and those efforts should continue. It was helpful when CalTrans was able to use their plows to create large berms to prevent vehicular access
- Snowmobiles also were documented accessing this non-motorized area at least twice this season

## Other

- More dog waste receptacles and winter etiquette signs to prevent snowshoers and winter hikers from using the Nordic ski track would benefit many trailheads on the Lassen.

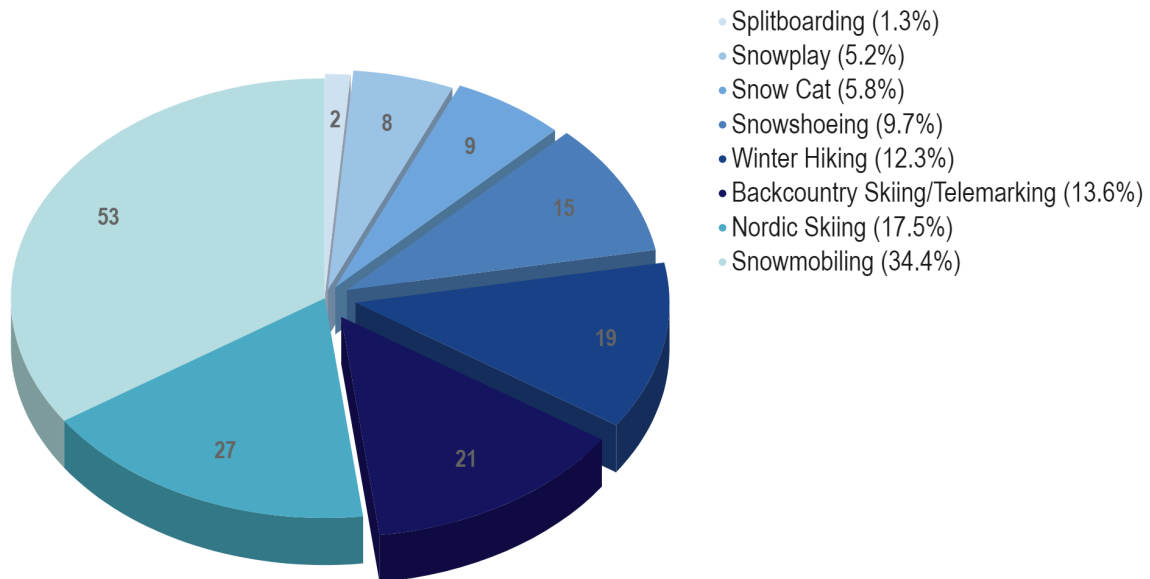
*Image 13. Snowmobile tracks on Hog Flat Reservoir, within the non motorized Hog Flat area*

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# PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST

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## Plumas Winter Visitor Use by Type



On the Plumas NF there is a wide variety of winter recreation, with 60% of recorded users being human-powered and 40% being motorized. There were also presumably more experienced users recreating than the rest of the California forests since snowplay was recorded at only 5.2%, versus the 79.9% California average.

21.3% of vehicles parked at the Forest Service trailheads surveyed had snowmobile trailers.

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# Signs & Facilities



*Image 13. Vehicles were left longer than the stated overnight limit at Bucks Summit Staging area*

## Big Creek Staging Area

- On multiple occasions throughout the season, poorly parked vehicles limited the amount of parking available



## Bucks Summit Staging Area

- Multiple vehicles were observed in the parking area exceeding the overnight limits there
- At least one vehicle was parked all season



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# Conflicts & Violations



## Bucks Summit

- Vehicles parked longer than the limit was the only conflict or violation reported on the Plumas this season

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## Conclusion

Winter recreation monitoring and data collection helps to provide information for land management and winter travel planning. After just 3 seasons, WWA's data collection and Backcountry Ambassador program has allowed for winter recreation patterns to be identified in many key areas. Backcountry Ambassadors have also assisted with posting signage and visitor education in areas where needs were observed. End of season reports written by Ambassadors provide recommendations and possible future solutions.

WWA is committed to improving these programs each year, in order to provide a useful resource for National Forests and also enhance on-the-ground capacity for visitor interaction and winter recreation management.

## For More Information

*Full datasheets with photos available upon request. Contact Megan Fiske:  
[mfiske@winterwildlands.org](mailto:mfiske@winterwildlands.org)*

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# Appendix - Backcountry Ambassador Reports

## *Winter Wildlands Alliance "Backcountry Ambassador" Report Stanislaus National Forest Winter 2023/2024*

Megan Fiske

### *Thoughts on the Backcountry Ambassador Role*

This season was much more manageable in terms of snow levels and breaks between storms which allowed for more plowing and fewer safety concerns compared to the 22/23 season.

### **Highway 108 - Summit/Mi-Wok Ranger District**

The two biggest access issues I witnessed this season were trailhead parking being blocked on busy days at Dodge Ridge ski resort, and insufficient snow coverage from the 108 SNO Park. Busy weekends brought stop and go traffic on Dodge Ridge Road. Even non-holiday weekends saw parking full by 9 AM at times. Opportunities to resolve this issue are limited. However, some public education and signage in collaboration with Dodge Ridge could result in successful attempts to deter ski resort patrons from taking up nordic trailhead parking. At the beginning of the season and during a break in the storm cycle, dirt and pavement started to show at the 108 SNO Park (photo 1). While it is less of a concern when snowmobiles travel over pavement with little to no snow, eventually there is access to unpaved riding at similar elevations to the SNO Park due to the topography of the highway. Enforcement of minimum snow depths seems to be limited and may warrant further discussion.

There were many days this season when parking at places like Herring Creek Road, and Leland Meadows Road were full, yet there were still ample parking places in the 108 SNO Park. An outreach and education campaign could help direct people towards the appropriate locations for their desired winter recreation activities, and away from areas that cause conflict. An approach similar to how the USFS educates the public during fire events could be impactful. This would include sandwich board signs outside appropriate businesses along the highway as well as frequently updated information to display in the businesses. Gas stations and any other businesses which sell sleds, gloves, SNO Park permits etc. would be good candidates to distribute information.

There may be an opportunity to create/promote a safe snow play area along Beardsley Road. The road is maintained by Tri-Dam and PG&E through the winter so they can access their critical facilities. There is a gate about ¼ mile down Beardsley Road restricting public access in the winter. The area between the highway and the gate is wide and would allow ample parking

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and opportunities to sled safely away from the highway. Concerns about vehicles parking irresponsibly and blocking access for Tri-Dam and PG&E would need to be addressed.

This season I spent more time collaborating with the Summit staff interacting with the public at various interpretive events. Guided snowshoe hikes with Summit staff and the Pinecrest Nordic Ski Patrol provided opportunities to talk about our Winter Wildlands Alliance efforts with the public. Tabling in the lodge allowed me to hand out trail maps and promote the nearby trail system, as well as talk to the public about wildlife in winter and our impacts. The ski with a ranger program was met with poor weather but is a great concept that should continue. Because the ski resort is frequently used as backcountry access, it is a reasonable place to connect with existing backcountry users, and potentially inspire new ones.

On the 108 corridor, the backcountry ambassador offers the most value in supporting interpretive events, consistent monitoring, and any other support the Summit staff identifies, such as helping place boundary signs.

### **Pinecrest Winter Recreation Area**

- Not backcountry skiing access but when it isn't open and accessible it displaces snow players to adjacent areas where they do interfere with backcountry access
- Great signage, well maintained for the most part this season
- End of season trash cleanup needed (and already scheduled, thank you Genie Moore)
- Busy weekends still result in illegal parking and related safety concerns (Photo 3)
- **Recommendation:** Support the USFS efforts to maintain access to this area throughout the winter, including ensuring regular trash service on weekends, and **promoting the area for safe snow play to alleviate pressure on backcountry access areas. Find funding to support winter recreation at Pinecrest.**

### **Dodge Ridge**

- Primary backcountry access on 108 corridor
- **Recommendation:** Sponsor a beacon search day at the resort
- **Recommendation:** Build relationship with Dodge Ridge to collaborate on more events appropriate to WWA efforts
- **Recommendation:** Build relationship with Dodge Ridge to manage parking at adjacent nordic trailheads that are impacted on busy days

### **Crabtree Nordic Trailhead**

- Moderate consistent use from snowplay, xc skiers and snowshoers
- New XC maps are fantastic
- Parking utilized by ski resort patrons many times during season
- **Recommendation:** Consider providing trash receptacle inside restroom facility (once installed)
- **Recommendation:** Consider management approaches to deter ski resort patrons from taking up trailhead parking



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- **Recommendation:** If trash receptacle is provided, also provide pet waste station
  - **Recommendation:** Signage about trail etiquette would improve the backcountry users experience by encouraging creation and maintenance of a separate skin track vs. snowshoe trail

### **Gooseberry Road Trailhead**

- Mostly a xc ski access, eventually enters the ski resort
- Parking is heavily affected here when the ski resort is busy as patrons take up the limited parking for the trailhead (Photo 2)
- The parking at the base of the road itself is usually only enough for 2-3 cars
- **Recommendation:** Consider management approaches to deter ski resort patrons from taking up trailhead parking

### **108 Sno Park**

- Tremendous amounts of snowmobile use here
- Great signage
- Snowplay occurs around the parking lots
- Too low elevation and too far away from higher elevations to be utilized for backcountry ski access
- Issues with minimum snow depth throughout the season (Photo 1)

### **Leland Meadows x Beardsley Road**

- County plows the road to provide access to private condos and privately owned Leland High Sierra Snow Play
- Snow players park at the intersection with the highway and sled towards the highway
- Beardsley Road is opposite the highway, has wide shoulders and is maintained in winter for Tri-Dam access. There is a gate restricting public access about ¼ mile from the highway, creating an opportunity for people to park off the highway and sled away from traffic
- **Recommendation:** Work with Tri-Dam, PG&E to explore developing Beardsley Road as a safe snow play alternative to Leland Meadows

## **Highway 4 (Calaveras Ranger District)**

There are significantly more staff on the Calaveras RD, so I spent more time on the Summit RD this season. The Calaveras RD benefits most from monitoring efforts beyond the trailheads. Calaveras RD keeps the SNO-Parks well staffed, and have been consistently documenting visitor use numbers. The main access points are at a higher elevation than the Summit district, so minimum snow depth poses less of a concern.

The biggest concerns on the Calaveras RD are the SledFest event and the demand for more parking. We were grateful to see a considerable number of WWA's concerns and suggestions

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successfully implemented at this year's SledFest event. There were well-placed signs prohibiting snowmobile access at all the potential access points. The Sheriff and others in the town of Bear Valley also stepped up their education and enforcement efforts. As the event continues to grow, it may become even more important to consider whether environmental review is needed. The addition of the RMSHA uphill races to the event brings higher powered machines that can access different terrain. It also brings the potential impacts associated with the creation of the course itself. The issue of minimum snow depth could become a problem in certain seasons.

Three well used Sno Parks exist on the Calaveras Ranger District, and Bear Valley Village and the cross country ski center draw significant winter recreation to the area. Spicer Sno Park is only 6 miles from Lake Alpine Sno Park, and Lake Alpine and Round Valley Sno Parks are less than half a mile apart.

#### **Corral Hollow/Access from Bear Valley Village**

- Minor but consistent boundary violation occurring north of Corral Hollow hill into Grouse Valley (Photo 4, Map)
- Snowmobile users access this area from the Corral Hollow trailhead along Highway 4, or from the town of Bear Valley
- The boundary follows the ridgeline, but a subridge draws snowmobilers down into Grouse Valley and across the boundary. There are no signs on the ridgeline indicating boundaries
- The Mokelumne Wilderness boundary is also adjacent, unsigned and could be vulnerable to trespass
- Backcountry users frequently tour this "side country" area, with many named areas including Kings Realm and Boys stuff
- **Recommendation:** Place strategic signs indicating boundaries, potentially utilizing the Backcountry ambassador to place and maintain the signs

#### **Round Valley Sno Park (non-motorized)**

- Significant conflicts with snow players taking up parking and creating hazardous conditions at entry/exit point for bc users; not an ideal location for snow play as it rolls into a creek but it is easily accessible; the terrain provides essentially one path into and out of the parking lot so when there are 50-100 people sledding, building snowmen etc. it creates a dangerous and difficult return to the parking lot for backcountry users
- USFS did a good job maintaining the restrooms and shoveling out the entrances
- No motorized violations were observed
- The area is used for overnight trips as well
- **Recommendation:** Increase monitoring and enforcement for at minimum the first two weeks after CalTrans starts clearing the highway in spring
- **Recommendation:** Signage is badly needed here. There are no lines in the parking lot to show people how to park, which can lead to significantly reduced capacity

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## Lake Alpine Sno Park

- Most heavily used motorized access; receives traffic from Bear Valley village as well
- Bear Valley snowmobile rentals uses this access for customers who can show up and park at the sno park and the snowmobiles are waiting for them on the snow
- Snow play occurs here
- Conflict exists from motorized and non motorized users sharing the groomed road which even in summer is less than two lanes wide
- The first few miles from the sno park, motorized use is prohibited immediately north of the highway but there are no boundary signs and there is no map at the sno park
- **Recommendation:** Support USFS Evan Watson's efforts to re-establish a previously existing non motorized winter trail that parallels the highway on the south side (the north side of the highway is probably not a good candidate for a new trail based on terrain, heavy forest, cabins etc)
- **Recommendation:** Better signage, particularly in the immediate area of the sno parks
- **Recommendation:** Work with the USFS and Bear Valley Snowmobile Rentals to do more education and provide more maps and information

## Spicer Sno Park

- Lowest elevation SNO park on 4 corridor, mostly used for snow play and snowshoeing
- Strong USFS presence on weekends
- Often fills to capacity with snow play folks on weekends
- Not much skiable terrain accessed from here either
- Resource and safety concerns exist from the pond immediately adjacent to the parking lot
- **Recommendation:** When the lot is full and the sign is posted at the highway, include a map or more information about alternative locations

## SledFest

- Occurs the weekend after Bear Valley ski resort closes, starting around 2018
- After the resort closes it becomes open to motorized use regardless of the event
- USFS issues a special use permit for the event - needs to be a much more robust permit if the event is allowed to continue due to many conflicts
  - Round valley non-motorized area, as well as the Mokelumne wilderness is immediately adjacent to the ski resort
  - **Recommendation:** Consideration of whether the event and special use permit warrants technical environmental review
    - An event like SledFest does not occur at any ski resort anywhere else in the Country, according to the organizers of the event itself
    - Clearly there are significant and different impacts than normal ski resort operations
    - 2023 was the first year they had a sanctioned hill climb event

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- Much different impact on the snow as they built jumps and a hill climb course that resulted in incredibly deep trenches and other impacts that would not occur with normal ski resort use
  - Higher powered machines, potentially more impactful
  - Many images of sleds stuck in tree wells, lodged against trees, hard to argue that is not an impact

The snowmobile noise from the event is audible from locations in the Mokelumne Wilderness, and the Round Valley non-motorized area, which may warrant further consideration, especially for species of concern in the spring.

## Supporting Photos

Photo 1 - January 20, 2024 - Highway 108 SNO Park - Photo shows bare soil, pavement at the snowmobile access point/gate closure at the SNO Park





Photo 2 - January 14, 2024 - Gooseberry Nordic Trailhead - Parking is full so cars are double parking





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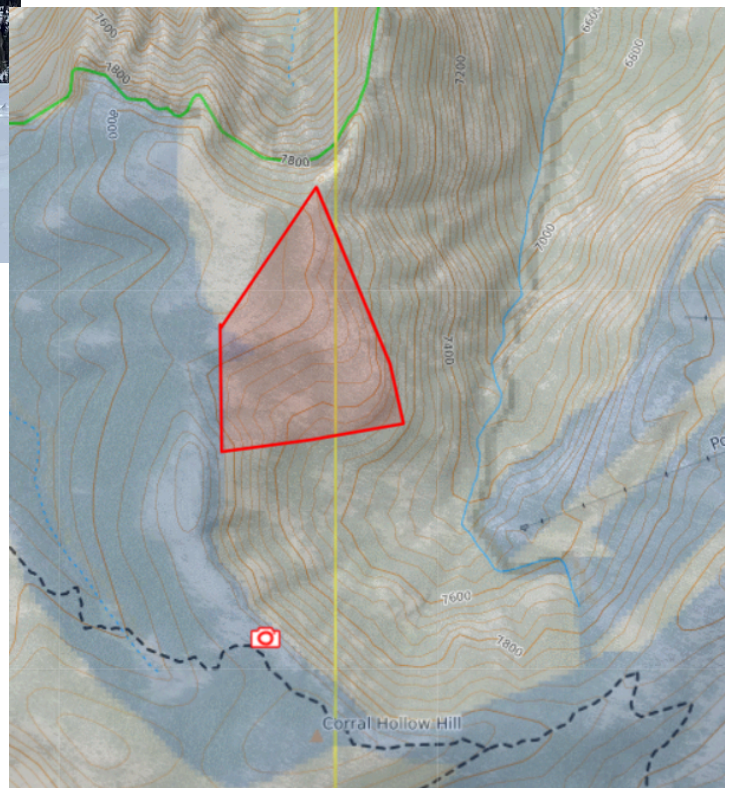
Photo 3 - February 18, 2024 - Pinecrest Winter Recreation Area - Despite there being hundreds of parking spaces, cars regularly park illegally on busy weekends and holidays, including parking in the lane of traffic





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Photo 4 - March 10, 2024 - Corral Hollow Hill - The red circle in the image shows tracks from snowmobiles (present but not visible in the photo) violating the boundary along Corral Hollow and entering Grouse Valley. The map shows the same area, with the OSVUM overlaid. Blue is where snowmobiles are allowed. The red camera indicates where the photo was taken from. Signage is needed along the ridgeline to indicate the motorized use boundary. This area is a popular “side-country” tour from Bear Valley Ski Resort for backcountry skiers.





*WWA Backcountry Ambassador Report  
Inyo National Forest Winter 2024*

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## **Overview**

This season was slow to start, without sufficient snow levels for winter recreation until mid/late January. Observations at Obsidian Dome began January 27th, as soon as the loop was first posted as being groomed by the forest service. This week and the following week both saw patchy amounts of snow across the trailheads, with snow levels being at around a foot at most and down to the ground in other places. Cinder Shed, Smokey Bear Flat, and Shady Rest did not receive enough snow until the first week of February.

Trailheads were generally clean except for the ongoing problem of unpicked up dog poop and left behind bags of dog poop. Litter was not a common issue.

Recreators encountered were generally pleased with the trailheads visited, with the one persistent complaint being a lack of grooming of the trails, especially during or after storms.

## **Obsidian Dome Trailhead**

The Obsidian Dome Trailhead continues to be a popular winter recreation site, with the parking lot often overflowing across US 395 and into the parking lot used by snowmobilers, often leading to overflow with trucks with trailers parked on the side of the US 395.

Snowmobile tracks were observed twice on the main loop at Obsidian Dome, but did not appear to go off the trail/no resource damage was exhibited. Neither incursion into the non-motorized area occurred while a backcountry ambassador was on-site.

## **Sherwin Meadows/Propane Tank Trailhead**

As spring progressed, snow levels in the Sherwin Meadows/Propane tank area fluctuated greatly, with levels consistently over a foot on the main trail area, but under a foot on the surrounding slopes. These slopes exhibited snowmobile tracks and resource damage to



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smaller meadow shrubs. These did not occur while a backcountry ambassador was on-site, and no snowmobilers/trucks with trailers were observed at the site while backcountry ambassadors were out, though tracks were evident. Largely the area was observed as a backcountry skiing/splitboarding site, snowplay area, and dog walking spot. It would benefit this site to add some sort of dog walking/dog park activity to the CRC RIMS app to best account for uses.

### **Smokey Flats**

This OSV access point was identified as a potential low-tide, or low snow level area seeing snowmobile use at the end of January. Use was not observed when the snow was under a foot by our backcountry ambassadors after the beginning of February.

### **Cinder Shed**

This OSV access point was identified as a high pedestrian traffic area considering Woolly's Tube park is just down the road. While snowmobile use was observed here, no resource damage was observed. Only one active snowmobile was observed running here while a backcountry ambassador was on site. Many cars with trailers park along the road shoulder on busy days.

### **203 Corridor/Inyo Craters**

The entire scenic loop is a mixed use area. Evidence of prolific snowmobile use persisted throughout the season, although backcountry ambassadors saw few active riders while on site. Tracks crossed the road in multiple locations. Most recreationists observed were pedestrians: AERIE course participants, families sledding or snowshoeing, or backcountry skiers/boarders. The pullouts plowed were not sufficient parking for busier days, cars pulled over to the shoulder to park when full.

### **Shady Rest Park**

The groomed trails of Shady Rest continue to be a popular winter recreation site, with the parking lot often crammed with vehicles and trailers. Snowmobile tracks were pervasive. In addition to OSVs, the backcountry ambassador observed: fat tire cyclists, nordic skiers, snowshoers, families sledding, and pedestrians. Resource damage seemed minimal, considering the snow level here started to deteriorate earlier making OSVs move to higher tides.

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## Winter Wildlands Alliance ~ Backcountry Ambassador Summary Winter 2023-24 Lassen National Forest

Phil Finkel

This winter's snowpack for winter recreation came in much later than normal. In my 34 years of living in the Susanville, CA area, this was the latest start to my daily XC skiing.

Between January 3, 2024 and May 3, 2024, I made 79 assessments on the Lassen National Forest using the RIMS app. I mostly XC skied, with some backcountry skiing tours when conditions warranted. I took photos at the trailheads, on trails and cross country routes, and of any resource concerns. I tabulated the number of other winter recreational users, and the number of vehicles at the trailheads.

I had also met with the Lassen National Forest staff three times over the winter regarding the sorely-needed update of the 2022/2023 LNF Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM). The previous Winter Recreation Guide for the Lassen National Forest (2005) provided lots of text explaining ski touring and snowmobiling opportunities, while the new OSVUM map has no text. The LNF staff admits that the existing OSVUM map was poorly produced. The concern is that the LNF has only \$8,000 in its budget to update and replace the map. WWA and Tread Lightly have stepped forward to help with the cost and layout of the new and improved map. I also sent in my suggestions for updating the text for XC and backcountry skiing opportunities for the new map.

### Winter Recreation on the Lassen

The LNF consists of three separate ranger districts: Eagle Lake, Almanor, and Hat Creek. The Eagle Lake and Almanor ranger districts host multiple snowmobile trailheads, and the Hat Creek ranger district hosts the Ashpan Snowmobile area. The snowmobilers' OHV fees allow the LNF to maintain the parking areas, restrooms, warming huts, and trailhead & trail signage. When good snow conditions exist, the LNF has a few Piston Bully groomers that LNF staff and trained volunteers use to groom up to 400 miles of designated snowmobile trails. Non-motorized winter recreation is also encouraged at these trailheads with courtesy signs generally displayed to help minimize user conflicts. This winter, I observed three separate grooming operations, and the LNF has recently adapted an ATV for tracks pulling a Ginzu XC tracked device to set diagonal tracks on Goumaz Road and the Bizz Johnson Trail. Though the Lassen has multiple non-motorized trails and designated areas for skiing and snowshoeing, the McGowan Trailhead (on the way to the Lassen National Park SW entrance) is the only non-motorized trailhead that has signage with trails depicted for XC skiers and snowshoers. The Lassen has one dedicated Snowplay area, Eskimo Hill, off Highway 44, and just an hour east of the Redding metro area, and sees a lot of

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winter use at the sled hill; and the area also offers warming fire-rings for bring-your-own-firewood, as well as multiple restrooms. Willard Hill east of Fredonyer Pass is an undeveloped and unmaintained for plowing, snowplow area used mostly by folks from the Susanville area.

Due to northeast California's relatively low population, and an equally small population of winter recreation users, the issue of user conflict is minimal compared to more heavily used California national forests: e.g. Tahoe, Stanislaus, El Dorado, etc.

Most of the issues I have observed this past winter (and my 34 years of winter recreation use on the Lassen), revolve around lack of informational signage, and educating winter recreational users on resource protection and appropriate use.

For instance, I have observed numerous vehicle trespass on "closed" winter roads/trails, but no signage was posted to inform drivers to stay out. Hog Flat, recently designated "non-motorized," has not had any signage indicating as such; and I have reported to the LNF personal of motorized trespass the past two winters on Hog Flat.

The majority of my RIMS observations occurred at the Goumaz Road parking area to Hog Flat. This area is only 12 miles from Susanville, and sees the most non-motorized winter recreation use on the Eagle Lake Ranger District. XC skiers, snowshoers, and dog walkers enjoy the flat and scenic views along Goumaz Road and Hog Flat. The parking area is along Highway 44, and is maintained by CalTrans. The snow plow drivers usually carve a turnout on the east side of the highway, and another turnout on the opposite west side at Goumaz Road (USFS 30N03). When time permits, Caltrans will return and plow into Goumaz Road about 50 yards west to the cattle guard, creating more parking area. My understanding is that this extra plowing is an informal agreement with CalTrans and the LNF, as CalTrans has no duty to provide this extra plowed space (hush, hush). When the LNF uses the Fredonyer Pass groomer, they will groom out to this Goumaz Road parking area, and berm up the snow at the cattle guard to prevent wheeled vehicle access. I lobbied strongly during the LNF OSV stakeholder meetings for Hog Flat to be designated non-motorized considering the multiple winter recreation users.

### **User Conflicts / Resource Concerns**

1. Wheeled vehicle trespass on LNF closed trails/roads (LNF winter closure is from December 26th through March 31st).
2. Snowmobile trespass on non-motorized designated areas.
3. Lack of signage at Hog Flat/Goumaz Road indicating non-motorized areas, and

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trails/roads closed to wheeled vehicles. Lack of winter user courtesy signs.

4. Minimal informational signage at winter trailhead kiosks.
5. Snowshoers and winter hikers walking in existing XC tracks and/or Ginzu groomed tracks.
6. Unsanitary winter recreation trailhead restrooms.

### **Recommendations**

1. Establish a partnership with the Winter Wildlands Alliance and the LNF for the Backcountry Ambassador program. Volunteers like me can be very useful to under-staffed LNF by agreeing to post and maintain signage, update LNF staff with concerns, and report resource violations to the LNF LEO.
2. LNF needs to be pro-active and immediately post the “Stop - No Wheeled Vehicles” signs the day after Christmas. I have notified the LNF many times over the years of wheeled vehicle trespass, but the signs were not posted in a timely manner.
3. Post a kiosk at the Goumaz Road / Hog Flat parking area with courtesy signs (snowshoers / winter hikers stay out of skier tracks), detailed map, and a notice that Hog Flat is designated non/motorized. Post non-motorized designated signs at the three access points to Hog Flat.
4. Update informational signage at existing trailhead kiosks. Post a detailed map at the kiosks, as well as courtesy signs. Update snowmobile club information (one contact listed has been deceased for over 25 years!).
5. More frequent monitoring of restroom facilities at snowmobile parks. This can also be done by existing LNF staff driving along on their winter rounds. I understand that the Fredonyer Pass Snowmobile Park is a difficult one to keep constant maintenance as it's open year-round on Highway 36, and I'd venture to guess that over 95% of the restroom users are highway travelers using it as a rest stop between Susanville and Westwood.
6. Publish an updated LNF OSVUM map before Winter 2024-25.
7. LNF to circulate a seasonal memo to the Lassen County Sheriff's Office and the Susanville, Chester, and Burney Chp offices regarding the prohibition of wheeled vehicle access to closed LNF roads/trailheads.
8. LNF to furnish Backcountry Ambassadors with the contact information of the LNF LEO so as to inform them of resource violations.



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9. The LNF website needs to be frequently checked for updated/outdated information. For instance, the Ashpan Snowpark is listed as “closed” when information below gives the latest snow-grooming information.

10. LNF to better use their social media sites to share its winter recreation activity programs, winter restrictions, and updates on trail usage.

11. LNF to send out a press-release to the Lassen News, Susanville Stuff, and the Sierra Daily News on the seasonal closure of winter trails/roads.