

# TRAIL BREAK

*your report for silent snowsports*

Volume 2014, Summer Issue



*Photo by Jim Harris*

## Long-Awaited Winter Rule is Out

*WWA Seeking 1,000 Comments in 45 Days*

Last April Winter Wildlands Alliance won a historic victory when a Federal Court agreed with our claim that the Forest Service has an obligation to manage snowmobiles under the same guidelines used for all other off-road vehicles in other seasons. The court ruled that the exemption of over-snow vehicles (OSVs) in the 2005 Travel Management Rule was unlawful and it directed the Agency to develop a new rule outlining the process under which each national forest will create a winter travel plan to complement their existing summer travel management plans. This new Over-Snow Vehicle Travel Rule (OSV Rule) is a huge opportunity to protect winter ecosystems and bring balance to the backcountry.

But, the proposed rule released June 18 falls short of its potential, and engagement by WWA members will be crucial if the Forest Service is going to get it right. Stakeholders have just 45 days – until August 4 -- to comment on the draft. WWA has an ambitious goal to rally at least 1,000 backcountry and Nordic skiers, snowboarders, snowshoers and winter mountaineers to weigh in with unique comments to ensure the Forest Service finalizes a rule that meets its obligation to minimize the impacts of winter motorized use, and finally brings balance to the backcountry.

The draft says each national forest must now take a proactive approach to designating appropriate trails and areas for winter motorized use as either open or closed, or with certain restrictions like dates or a minimum snow depth). Forests that have previously completed comprehensive winter travel plans would not have to redo them. Both of these aspects of the rule are great, but when we dig a little deeper the draft is problematic.

- The draft would allow individual national forest units to choose either an 'open unless designated closed' approach or the opposite 'closed unless designated open' approach, as is the case with all other off-road vehicles in all other seasons. This element of the draft is inconsistent, and would be confusing on the ground.
- The draft also appears to grandfather in past decisions about over-snow vehicle use, regardless of whether they were comprehensive, minimized conflict and resource damage, or involved the public. Administrative decisions that did not allow stakeholder involvement, or that apply to only part of a forest, should not be allowed to pass for proper planning.

- Also, the rule proposes to change the definition of an “area” to include landscapes even broader than a Ranger District, with groomed trails in that area not subject to analysis. Groomed trails concentrate use, and cross-country snowmobile travel, while certainly appropriate in some places, also has impacts. Both of these deserve a harder look than is possible when designating areas that could be hundreds of thousands of acres as the draft proposes.

The Forest Service needs to hear from skiers and snowshoers about how management of the backcountry has the potential to improve your experience on national forest lands — or how a lack of management has degraded your experience. This is a chance for WWA members to share your story.

The Take Action page at [winterwildlands.org/take-action/](http://winterwildlands.org/take-action/) provides everything you need to comment. Personal comments are proven to make the biggest difference to decision-makers — so please take 10 minutes to weigh in on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to impact how the backcountry is managed.

Once the public comment period closes the Forest Service will analyze all comments and will issue a final rule no later than September 9, 2014 as directed by the court. After the final rule is released the Forest Service will issue guidance for developing individual winter travel plans on national forests.

Hilary Eisen, Recreation Planning Coordinator, [heisen@winterwildlands.org](mailto:heisen@winterwildlands.org)



## SnowSchool Celebrates a Banner Season

*“Dear SnowSchool- Thank you so much for letting us come and have a great time, which I did. I learned all about the outdoors and even more about snow.*

*I also learned how to put on snowshoes but am still working on it! I had an awesome time and will remember it forever.”* Bryn, 4th Grade Student

Another successful SnowSchool season has drawn to a close. And while Bryn’s words pretty much sum up the important stuff, we’ve compiled our season survey results here to provide an overview of SnowSchool’s national impact. With surveys from most of our major sites in, we estimate that **SnowSchool engaged about 28,500 participants across 45 active sites**, with 50 percent of the students qualifying as underserved and 60 percent of the kids never having been on snowshoes before! This winter SnowSchool engaged approximately 4,000 parent chaperones and teachers, and utilized nearly 400 volunteer educators.

Working in collaboration with partner organizations Winter Wildlands Alliance successfully **added 6 new sites** to the national SnowSchool network. To keep up with national education reforms WWA composed **two innovative K-12 activity/curriculum guides** that align SnowSchool with the new Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards. This included a new focus on middle/high school science teachers, a program emphasis that WWA has carefully piloted over the last two winters. These important resources were dispersed across the SnowSchool network and implemented by local site coordinators.

Here’s what teachers and education leaders had to say about SnowSchool in 2014:

*“Winter Wildlands Alliance was a key partner for Mt Baker as we launched our new SnowSchool program. By providing us with a proven program model, curriculum materials and lots of sound advice, their mentoring helped us successfully develop and implement a new curriculum-based winter learning experience that serves local students of a variety of backgrounds in our community.”*

Gwyn Howat, Operations Manager, Mt Baker Ski Area

*“Great program, we will plan on doing this again. The experience of snowshoeing is not to be underestimated!”*



*I loved one kid who apologized that he enjoyed science at SnowSchool more than in my classroom.”* Helen Fischer, 8th Grade Earth Science Teacher

*“The new activity guides are extremely thorough and allow us to build from and use as they fit our work. They are science focused and user friendly.”* Tammy Coleman, Education Coordinator, Crater Lake National Park

The continuing support of WWA members and program sponsors makes this experience possible for thousands of students each year. Much thanks to all of you!

**Kerry McClay**, National SnowSchool Director, [kmcclay@winterwildlands.org](mailto:kmcclay@winterwildlands.org)

## New Board Members Guide WWA Efforts

Winter Wildlands Alliance is led by a dynamic Board of Directors who volunteer their time, resources and expertise to ensure WWA achieves its mission of promoting and preserving winter wildlands and a quality human-powered snowsports experience on public lands. We are pleased to welcome new board members Erik Lambert and Emily Nuchols.



### **Erik Lambert, Boulder, CO**

Erik started skiing at age 1, when his father pushed him around the sleepy woods of Poughkeepsie on some homemade planks. It wasn't long before he was skiing and climbing obsessively among the hills of

Maine and New Hampshire. He graduated from Dartmouth with a master's in writing and moved to the Tetons, where he became Online Editor for *Alpinist* and *Backcountry* magazines. Erik believes that the outdoor community has an unparalleled passion that can be organized to protect the unique places we play. Today he is Marketing Director for the American Alpine Club, a community non-profit for climbers based in Golden, Colorado.



### **Emily Nuchols, Portland, OR**

Emily is the senior communications manager for Wild Salmon Center, an organization working to protect the last, best salmon ecosystems across the Pacific Rim. Emily is also the founder and senior advisor of Under

Solen Media, a Portland-based communications firm with a cause. With a decade of experience working on the frontlines of conserva-

tion efforts and developing creative communications campaigns, she brings an energy and passion to battles worth winning. She also firmly believes that it is possible to change the world, one party at a time. When she's unplugged, Emily is known to seek out wild places where she can get in a good afternoon yoga session or trail run with her dingo-of-a-dog named Woody.

**Brittany Jones**, Program Administrator, [bjones@winterwildlands.org](mailto:bjones@winterwildlands.org)

## Backcountry Film Festival Hits 90 Tour Stops

With a few showings left in the Southern Hemisphere, Winter Wildlands Alliance's Backcountry Film Festival Tour is wrapping up a stellar year. Celebrating the human-powered experience, the festival promotes the work of grassroots filmmakers who tell entertaining and compelling stories of the backcountry, non-motorized outdoor recreation and environmental preservation.

The Ninth Annual Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival toured 90 cities, 4 continents, 6 countries, 16 states and was enjoyed by over 13,000 outdoor enthusiasts! Collectively, the Backcountry Film Festival raised over \$140,000 dollars for our Grassroots Members, SnowSchool sites and University Outdoor Education Programs during the 2013-14 tour. The dollars raised benefit local communities by funding outdoor education programs, avalanche centers and local advocacy programs.

The Backcountry Film Festival is made possible with generous support from our like-minded friends in the outdoor industry including Mountain Khakis, Clif Bar, New Belgium, Osprey, DynaFit, Backcountry Magazine, Yak-Trax, Trew, Elemental Herbs, Outdoor Research, Point 6, Ambler, Endurance Conspiracy, TrailSpace, Goal Zero, Atlas and Black Diamond.

The 10th Annual Winter Wildlands Backcountry Film Festival is already starting to take shape and we are looking forward to another amazing season full of adventures. Please consider submitting your human powered winter film to us and help celebrate the stoke of winter!

**Shelley Pursell**, Events and Outreach Director, [spursell@winterwildlands.org](mailto:spursell@winterwildlands.org)

### Hilary Eisen Joins WWA as Recreation Planning Coordinator



Hilary Eisen joined the WWA team in April as Recreation Planning Coordinator. Hilary is an avid backcountry skier and climber with a passion for wild landscapes. As the WWA Recreation Planning Coordinator, Hilary focuses on national forest winter travel management policy across the West. She previously worked on public lands conservation in Wyoming and Montana for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and Wilderness Society. She holds a Masters of Science degree in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana and a B.A. degree in Biology and Environmental Studies from Middlebury College. Hilary works for Winter Wildlands Alliance from her home in Bozeman, MT.

### WWA Partners with Forest Service through New Memorandum of Understanding

In March of this year Winter Wildlands Alliance and the USDA, Forest Service took an important step in our framework of cooperation through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Initially signed in 2004, the renewed and expanded MOU is an important example of our long-standing partnership with the Forest Service, detailing common interests and how we can work together to better achieve common goals. The MOU recognizes mutual interest in the public's use, enjoyment and understanding of our National Forest System lands. It also recognizes a joint interest in public-private partnerships for information sharing, educational programs, and stewardship opportunities related to non-motorized winter education. The MOU extends to affiliated partners as well, for example encouraging the establishment of SnowSchool sites on our national forests. The MOU can be viewed on our website.

**Cailin O'Brien-Feeney**, Policy Director, [cobrienfeeney@winterwildlands.org](mailto:cobrienfeeney@winterwildlands.org)

### Behind the Ambler Hat

Ambler is a hat and accessory company based in the small mountain town of Nelson, British Columbia. The company was founded in 1995 by Peter Ambler, who was sewing fleece hats in his basement and selling them at craft fairs and out of the back of his car throughout western Canada. Today, Ambler is owned and operated by the husband and wife team of Christian Rawles and Jackie Brown. Though Ambler has changed owners and grown its customer base beyond local craft fairs, they are still very much committed to unique, hand made hats. The majority of Ambler's winter products are made by women working in their homes in Nepal. The cottage industry production model creates a livelihood that supports and empowers women in a country where few safe and sustainable employment opportunities exist for them. WWA is honored to partner with this fantastic company.

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### Forrest Shearer Brings Knowledge and Passion as WWA Ambassador

Winter Wildlands is honored to welcome athlete and advocate Forrest Shearer as a Winter Wildlands Ambassador. Having decided early on in his career to take a more environmentally conscious approach to big mountain riding by spreading awareness and knowledge through his snowboarding feats, Forrest embodies the passion and enthusiasm for WWA's mission.

Forrest believes the turns you have to work for offer a more lasting reward and his splitboard adventures reflect that attitude. "The winter season is a magical time, my favorite of the year," he says. Through films and publication you can find Forrest leading the charge in big mountain snowboarding and bringing awareness to preserve our winter wildlands in the snow sports community. We welcome Forrest's knowledge and ability to share his adventures of wild places with the Winter Wildlands community.

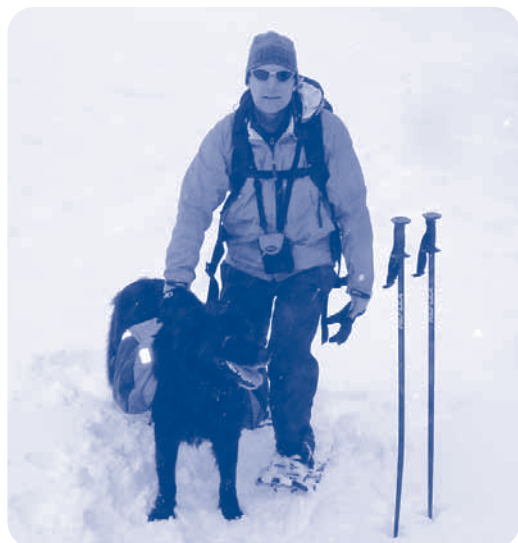
### El Sendero Backcountry Ski & Snowshoe Club, WA

Gus Bekker is like many of our grassroots group leaders in that he wears many hats. He is the President, Founder, Trip Leader and Lead Advocate for El Sendero Backcountry Ski & Snowshoe club. What started with flyers and a radio announcement for outdoor enthusiasts and the outdoor curious, the group now counts 300 members and organizes multiple outings each winter to get people of all abilities outside into the winter backcountry around Wenatchee, Washington. The group runs on volunteer power, and has made a real difference in just a few years since its inception.

El Sendero plays a critical role as the main voice for human powered winter recreation on the Okanagan-Wenatchee National Forest, as well as surrounding public lands. Specifically, El Sendero represents the interests of skiers, snowshoers and other human-powered winter recreationists by advocating the creation, preservation, and management of non-motorized winter recreation areas on public lands. To achieve this mission, El Sendero is involved in forest planning, a new local outdoor coalition, and advisory committees at the state and regional level. In short, Gus is a busy guy and El Sendero has gotten some reinforcements through a newly formed Board of Directors

Perhaps the most exciting thing on the horizon for El Sendero (other than next winter's trips) is a proposal to designate a new non-motorized winter recreation area. The nearly five square mile area offers easy access to high quality terrain and is on state land adjacent to Mission Ridge Ski Area, and includes the Clara Lake and Stemilt Basin areas. The proposal grew out of a committee that includes both motorized and non-motorized representatives, and could be finalized in time for next winter.

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## Our Mission

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

### Join WWA's Efforts

*Want to support Winter Wildlands Alliance?*

You can join WWA as a member or donate to a specific cause such as Snow School or our advocacy work. No amount is too large or small. Your contribution makes a difference and we wouldn't be here without you!

Join online at [winterwildlands.org/join](http://winterwildlands.org/join) or give us a call at 208-336-4203.

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Photo by Jim Harris

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