



Left: Eric Balken Right: Noah Howell skiing in the Wasatch. Photos by Jay Beyer

POLICY:

PUBLIC LANDS HEIST CONTINUES

By Hilary Eisen

Recreation Planning and Policy Manager

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY IN 2017 and with this change we have seen new energy and interest from people wanting to get involved and have their voices heard in national and state policymaking. People who love winter recreation on public lands have reason to worry – Congress and the Trump Administration have been hard at work systematically undoing environmental protections and efforts to address climate change. And the public lands heist is alive and well in a range of different forms.

Public lands opponents in Congress started 2017 at a brisk pace. On their first day of work this year, our Congressional representatives passed a rules package intended to pave the way for transferring or selling public lands by making these transactions budget-neutral – essentially saying that public lands have no value. Next, Congress eliminated the BLM's new planning regulations, Planning 2.0, which were finalized in late 2016. These regulations represented a long-overdue modernization of BLM land management planning that gave recreation interests a seat at the table early in the process and allowed the agency to better utilize data and modern tools like GIS and online databases.

Unfortunately, the BLM is now required to go back to their 1983 planning regulations, easing the need to seek public comment and hamstringing the agency's ability to meet modern demands.

Around the same time that Congress was busy overturning Planning 2.0, Utah Congressman Jason Chaffetz introduced HR 621. This bill would have "disposed of" 3.3 million acres of public land. However, after thousands of people called and emailed their representatives, attended rallies, and otherwise pushed back, Congressman Chaffetz withdrew HR 621. This was a huge win for public lands advocates. After the defeat of HR 621, public lands opponents began to realize that pushing for the outright transfer or sale of public lands is a non-starter with the public.

Now, these anti-public lands forces have shifted their focus to defunding the agencies that manage public lands and to undermining bedrock environmental and conservation laws instead. President Trump's proposed budget, released in March, would cut the Department of Interior budget by \$1.5 billion dollars, or 12 percent, and funding for the Department of Agriculture (which includes the Forest Service) by \$4.7

DEFEND

billion dollars, or 21 percent. This despite well-documented infrastructure backlogs of \$12.5 billion and \$6 billion respectively. In terms of percentage, the Environmental Protection Agency would be the hardest hit, with a 31 percent reduction in funding.

Meanwhile, back in Congress, we've seen a number of bills introduced but not yet passed that would undermine management of or outright dispose of public lands. Chaffetz's HR 622 proposes to eliminate the Forest Service and BLM's law enforcement ability and instead put local sheriffs in charge of protecting public lands—despite the fact that most local sheriffs across the west are opposed to such a move. This is not quite as blatant an anti-public lands bill as HR 621, but would be just as damaging. Local sheriffs departments are already maxed out financially, and there's no guarantee that they will be familiar with, or choose to enforce, the rules and regulations that have been put in place to protect our public lands. Without the ability to enforce their own rules, the Forest Service and BLM will have to stand by and watch as illegal roads proliferate, priceless artifacts are looted, and the safety of everybody seeking to enjoy our public lands is compromised. Winter Wildlands Alliance focuses a lot of attention on winter travel planning but these plans are meaningless if the Forest Service can't enforce them. Other bills that we're tracking seek to make it easier for oil and gas companies to drill in National Parks, curtail the Antiquities Act, and weaken historic Wilderness Act protections.

In late May, the Department of the Interior, under Trump-appointed Ryan Zinke, announced that it would be reviewing millions of acres of public land protected as National Monuments under the Antiquities Act. Sign up now to receive e-alerts from us on how you can help us ensure these precious lands continue to be protected. And stay tuned to our social channels as this process unfolds.

AT THE SAME TIME, THERE HAS BEEN SOME GOOD NEWS. A bipartisan Senate declared the week of April 16 "National Park Week" in recognition of the value of our National Parks, and there are bills in Congress that would establish new Wilderness areas in Montana and Washington, protect important backcountry ski terrain in Washington from industrial mine development, and permanently re-authorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). At the state level, thousands have turned out for public lands rallies in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, and both California and Oregon are considering establishing Offices of Outdoor Recreation.

On the climate change front, there isn't much good news coming out of DC these days. The Trump Administration seems to be dead-set on accelerating the pace of climate change. The President, Interior Secretary Zinke, and EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt have issued numerous orders and directives streamlining and accelerating the pace of fossil fuel development and rolling back regulations intended to combat climate change, and as of this printing President Trump seems poised to pull the U S out of the historic Paris Climate Agreement. These actions do not bode well for those who care about the future of our planet or those who enjoy long cold winters.

Right now it's more critical than ever for all of us who care about public lands, our environment, and our future under a changing climate to speak out. Calling and emailing your elected officials is important and effective. You can reach your elected representatives in DC by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 or you can email them with the easy-to-use form on our website: winterwildlands.org/take-action.

WE DEFEND PUBLIC LANDS AT THE LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL TO ENSURE THAT PUBLIC LANDS STAY IN PUBLIC HANDS.

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



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PROTECT



Bonanza Flats, courtesy Utah Open Lands Photo by G. Brad Lewis

BACKCOUNTRY COMMUNITY STEPS UP TO PURCHASE WASATCH GEM

By Mark Menlove, Executive Director

With Winter Wildlands Alliance grassroots partner Wasatch Backcountry Alliance serving as the focal point, the backcountry ski community is playing a major role in a public/private effort to purchase and preserve Bonanza Flats, a spectacular 1,350-acre parcel tucked between Park City and Brighton ski resorts that has long been eyed for an exclusive ski and golf resort development.

Contrary to the “Flats” in the name, Bonanza Flats encompasses a section of the Park City ridgeline including 10,420 and Clayton’s Peaks, well known and loved by the Wasatch backcountry ski community. The parcel is also a key component in proposed resort interconnect schemes.

A remnant of mining claim consolidation under United Park City Mines, the Bonanza Flats parcel has been privately owned for years, with the most recent owner, Talisker Development (of proposed SkiLink infamy), slated to build ski lifts, a golf course and a gated community. However, when the bank financing the development foreclosed on the property, a coalition led by the town of Park City quickly came together to outbid another development company in order to protect Bonanza Flats as open space. Park City voters last November approved a \$25 million bond, and

several other municipalities followed with pledges toward the \$38 million price tag. But the public funding commitments left more than a \$3 million gap to close the deal.

That’s where a coalition of non-profit groups led by Utah Open Lands stepped in. Wasatch Backcountry Alliance and Winter Wildlands Alliance joined the coalition to rally support from the backcountry community and the response has been truly impressive. As of June 1, 430 donors have contributed a total of \$73,310. Early on, Wasatch Backcountry Alliance committed \$15,000 from its general funds to match individual donations and all proceeds from the Park City, and Salt Lake showings of the Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival were

dedicated to the Bonanza Flats purchase. In addition, many backcountry skiers alerted to the opportunity by Wasatch Backcountry Alliance and Winter Wildlands contributed at other fundraising events and through other donation portals. All told, the backcountry ski community is directly responsible for committing well over \$100,000 toward the project.

“This is our first major and to date most important fundraising campaign since Wasatch Backcountry Alliance formed,” says Alliance co-founder Jamie Kent. “Bonanza is a major piece of the puzzle in keeping the Central Wasatch from over development and this campaign fits perfectly with our mission goal to maintain the balance between developed and non-developed ski terrain.”

Kent adds that the number of Wasatch Backcountry Alliance members that have contributed – more than 20 percent of membership – demonstrates the commitment by this community to protect open lands for the conservation of winter landscapes and human-powered experiences. “We live in a great place,” he explains, “and the proximity to large populations make efforts like this more important than ever.”

While the coalition is closing in on the final goal, we’re not there yet. With a June 15 funding deadline looming, the final push is on to meet our overall goal. To contribute or learn more see below.

Donate or learn more at <http://wasatchbackcountryalliance.org/news/save-bonanza-flats/>

EDUCATE

SNOWSCHOOL - CONNECTING KIDS WITH WINTER ON PUBLIC LANDS

By Kerry McClay, National SnowSchool Director

It's a sunny day in March in rural Idaho City, with the first hint of spring during one of the strongest, coldest and snowiest winters anyone can remember. The town shops and historical buildings, wooden and sun-bleached, strain under the weight of accumulated winter snowfall. Around the local elementary school towering piles of plowed parking-lot snow and ice obscure a view of the school's tall concrete gymnasium. It's been an unprecedented winter for the state's education system too, as many school districts set records for days cancelled due to icy roads and snowfall too relentless and overwhelming for the plows. And when school finally resumed, outdoor recess was often cancelled due to extreme cold and ice-encased playgrounds. The upshot of all this has been students and teachers in many districts locked in an unwanted indoor hibernation.

But on this day a lone US Forest Service truck swings into the parking lot immediately adjacent to the school. A team of volunteers unloads forty pairs of snowshoes from the bed. Suddenly, excited shouts can be heard from a group of 4th grade students



still being collected). In many rural mountain areas, students don't need to get on a bus and drive hours to a nature center to explore the wilds of winter; they have public land right out the front door of their school, and SnowSchool comes to them. This "traveling SnowSchool" program is one new approach in an increasingly diverse array of strategies that Winter Wildlands Alliance is using to connect kids with nature and to help them understand the importance of our nation's public lands.

"By combining our nationally recognized snow science curriculum with fun outdoor exploration, SnowSchool participants gain both an emotional connection to winter wildlands and a greater understanding of the important role of these landscapes in local ecology.

- KERRY MCCLAY, NATIONAL SNOWSCHOOL DIRECTOR

Program Expansion: At WWA we believe the SnowSchool experience is one of universal importance and should be available to all kids, no matter what their background or where they live. Our efforts to expand the program were aided this year by the first-ever SnowSchool film to appear in the Backcountry Film Festival. The film, *SnowSchool Experiences*, featured our Northern Idaho Flagship SnowSchool site (Selkirk Outdoor Leadership and Education) and provided audiences at 107 showings nation-wide with a compelling illustration of the program.

as they burst out the front door of the school and head toward the snowshoes. After a quick introduction to their equipment and group leaders, the students give the snowshoes their first test: Using the metal crampons, they dig in and easily scale the steep piles of ice surrounding the parking lot. On the other side lies a vast expanse of snow-covered national forest; local public land that the kids now get to explore for the rest of the school day.

By combining our nationally recognized snow science curriculum with fun outdoor exploration, SnowSchool participants gain both an emotional connection to winter wildlands and a greater understanding of the important role of these landscapes in local ecology. This winter, SnowSchool sites—located on nature centers, Nordic centers, national forests, national parks, and ski areas—engaged an estimated 32,000+ participants (surveys are

Fueled by this additional exposure and our expanding national presence we were thrilled to establish new SnowSchool programs with a variety of partners in the following locations: with the USFS in Idaho City ID; with Friends of the Dillion Ranger District in CO; at the Beaver Ponds Environmental Education Center in Fairplay CO; with the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, the Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center, Mammoth Elementary School, Mammoth Resorts and Friends of the Inyo in Mammoth Lakes CA; with Friends of the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center in Livingston MT; at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center in WA; at the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery in WA; and with the Plumas County Unified School District in Northern CA. All of these successes are made possible by people and organizations like you who have continued to support WWA SnowSchool through the years.

WINTER WILDLANDS SNOWBALL DOUBLES DOWN ON FUN IN SECOND SEASON

By Kerry McClay, National SnowSchool Director



Kerry McClay and his wife Brooke performing the "SnowSchool shout".
Photo by Meg Kahnle

Last winter, we organized our first-ever WWA SnowBall on the Colorado Front Range as a benefit for our National SnowSchool Program. This year, due to the overwhelming popularity of the event, we doubled our efforts and threw two SnowBalls: one in Boulder CO (at Sanitas Brewing Company) and another in Boise ID in conjunction with the Backcountry Film Festival World Premiere! The winter revelry included live bluegrass music, libations, aerial dancers, ski-flare costumes, a dance-off, a Yeti M.C., Arctic Theater Royale, and many awesome raffle/auction items. If you don't know what some of those are but would like to find out, you should plan on coming to a SnowBall near you next year! Not only do these fundraisers support our work of getting thousands of underserved kids across the country outside in the winter, but they also serve as a great excuse to bring the backcountry tribe out of the hills to share our collective values and inspirations. Our heartfelt thanks go out to all of the sponsors, volunteers and SnowSchool supporters who made these events possible. We're already looking forward to next year!

CITIZEN SCIENCE IN THE SNOW

By Hilary Eisen, Recreation Planning and Policy Manager

Snow can be an effective buffer to protect vegetation and soils from damage by over-snow vehicles, but only if there's enough snow on the ground. This is why Winter Wildlands Alliance advocates for land managers and planners to include a minimum snow depth restriction in new travel or forest plans. In order to effectively use minimum snow depth as a management tool, however, the Forest Service needs to be able to ascertain snow depth at winter parking areas without having to actually go into the field and physically measure the snow every day – something the Agency doesn't have the resources to do.

For this reason, we're working with Dr. Ben Hatchett, a snow scientist with the Desert Research Institute in Reno Nevada, and volunteer citizen scientists and grassroots groups throughout California's Sierra Nevada to develop a model to determine the relationship between snow depth at certain key trailheads and the snow depth and density recorded at nearby SNOTEL stations. It's our hope that this kind of modeling will help Forest Service staff get an accurate estimate of how much snow is at a particular trailhead based on how much has been recorded at nearby SNOTEL stations. This is particularly important in early winter, when the Forest Service is deciding when to open certain trailheads, routes and backcountry zones to over-snow vehicle use, or in areas where the snowpack can change rapidly throughout the winter.



Trailhead to Bucks Lake Wilderness. Photo by Darrel Jury

Although summer is just getting started, at WWA we believe it's never too early to start thinking about winter. We will be ramping up our volunteer efforts for this project as soon as the snow flies this fall, so if you live near the Sierra Nevada and would like to get out and get involved, please contact David Page at dpage@winterwildlands.org.

SAVE THE DATE



Above: Jeremy Jones will be our keynote speaker.

Right: Our 2015 Grassroots Advocacy Conference was held at the American Alpine Club in Golden, CO.



JEREMY JONES TO KEYNOTE FALL GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY CONFERENCE

The 7th Biennial Winter Wildlands Alliance Grassroots Advocacy Conference will take place November 9-12, 2017, at the Sierra Club's historic Clair Tappaan Lodge, less than half an hour from Truckee, CA in the central Sierra Nevada. The conference is an opportunity for individuals and organizations who care about winter recreation and public lands to gather and discuss the latest developments in policy and planning issues, share grassroots successes, meet with land managers and spend quality lodge time with colleagues and partners from across the country.

The theme of this year's conference is **HARNESSING THE POWER OF LOCAL ACTION**. Jeremy Jones, professional snowboarder and founder and CEO of Protect Our Winters (POW), will kick off the event on Thursday evening with his inimitable tales of human-powered big-

mountain adventure and a rousing call to action. Come join scientists, policy makers, WWA ambassadors, athletes and grassroots activists for a weekend of engaging workshops and discussions.

Sessions will include: Stakeholder Collaborative Training, Advocacy in the Trump Era, Winter Travel Planning Engagement, Forest Planning and Sustainable Recreation, Organizing for Local Climate Action, Public Lands Stewardship, Engaging the Next Generation of Stewards and Advocates, Citizen Science, Non-profit Outreach and Communications, Leveraging Outdoor Brands for Local Action, and a hands-on SnowSchool Instructor Training. There will also be time, we promise, for getting outside and recreating in the woods, and for kicking back by the fire with local craft beer and live music.

Conference fees include lodging and meals. Space is limited. For more information and to register now, go to: winterwildlands.org/conference.

GRASSROOTS

NEW GRASSROOTS GROUP: EASTERN SIERRA INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION (ESIA)

Partnering with national forests for over 40 years, the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association (ESIA) is a non-profit organization with a mission to educate and inspire people about Eastern Sierra public lands through high quality interpretive products and programs.

ESIA operates eleven outstanding bookstores (on the Tahoe, Humboldt-Toiyabe and Inyo National Forests), cooperates with a range of public land management partners to operate successful visitor centers, and provides high quality interpretive programs, exhibits, and publications throughout the Eastern Sierra, Lake Tahoe and central Nevada. The organization is financed by the sale of publications, by its partnership fund and through philanthropic contributions.

This past season, Winter Wildlands

Alliance teamed up with ESIA and our other local grassroots partners in the Eastern Sierra (Friends of the Inyo and the Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center) to host a sold-out screening of the Backcountry Film Festival at the historic Inyo National Forest auditorium in Mammoth Lakes, as well as a Winter Adventure Series featuring inspiring slideshow presentations from WWA ambassadors Noah Howell and Clare Gallagher, and other cutting-edge adventurers.

ESIA was also a primary partner in establishing the first-ever Eastern Sierra SnowSchool program, providing exposure for over 100 Mammoth Elementary School fifth graders to an outdoor education curriculum in snow science, watershed and climate dynamics, and winter ecology.



ESIA operates 11 bookstores and visitors centers in cooperation with public land management agencies on the Inyo, Tahoe, and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests.

AMBASSADOR PROFILE: HANS-PETER "H.P." MARSHALL

H.P. is a snow scientist and glaciologist at Boise State University. He works with NASA, the National Science Foundation (NSF), the U.S. Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Lab (CRREL), the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC), the Idaho Transportation Department and other organizations to study the cryosphere, the snow- and ice-covered areas of the Earth (including the frozen parts of the ocean surrounding Antarctica and the Arctic).

Originally educated as an engineer, H.P. earned his PhD at the University of Colorado by designing a handy, transportable radar system for analyzing snow stratigraphy and determining the water content of a mountain snowpack. This innovative sensor was so transportable, in fact, that it could be mounted on a pole held between two backcountry skiers—allowing H.P. to get out in the backcountry on skis and call it work.

A major focus of his research involves quantifying the spatial variability of the seasonal snow cover and its effect on remote sensing measurements, snow hydrology, and snow avalanches. His interests also include snow slope stability modeling, snow and ice mechanics, and meltwater pathways in both snow and temperate ice.

HP has been closely involved with high profile projects such as NASA's Greenland Rover (nicknamed GROVER). This remotely operated instrument looks like a miniature tank outfitted with solar panels. During an early test in Greenland, H.P. remotely operated



WWA ambassador H.P. Marshall is part of a team of scientists studying ice-sheet surface melt in Greenland and its potential impact on global sea-level rise.

the Rover from his laboratory in Boise, guiding it across miles of inhospitable ice to collect snow pack data. In May of this year, he returned to Greenland for a second field season with fellow WWA ambassador Forrest McCarthy and the rest of the GreenTrACS team to study, among other things, the rate of surface melt and its potential impact on global sea-level rise.

As a Winter Wildlands Alliance ambassador, H.P. is an advocate for human-powered snow science, and supports our SnowSchool programs through grant writing and snow science curriculum development.

TRAVEL PLANNING UPDATE

Hilary Eisen, Recreation Planning and Policy Manager

In our fall newsletter we wrote about the **Lassen National Forest** publishing a draft winter travel plan and final Environmental Impact Statement. We were concerned that the draft plan failed to designate specific areas where over-snow vehicle (OSV) use is appropriate, proposing instead to close specific areas and leave the rest of the forest open to OSV travel. This is the opposite of what the OSV Rule requires. This backwards approach to winter travel planning would have left low-elevation areas that rarely receive snow, including 50% of the forest's mule deer winter range, open to OSV travel. The draft plan also failed to protect habitat for rare wildlife such as the Sierra Nevada red fox. Due to these

and other concerns we, along with several other groups, objected to the draft plan.

The Forest Service heard our objections and now, as a result, the Lassen is re-working their proposed winter travel plan to address our concerns. Not only that, the four other forests in California that are writing winter travel plans (**Plumas, Eldorado, Stanislaus** and **Tahoe**) have re-assessed their approach and are taking steps to ensure that their plans comply with the OSV Rule – including making sure that they designate specific areas for OSV use and prohibit it outside of these specific areas. Because of this, the timelines for these planning processes are a bit delayed. We had expected to see several draft plans published over the winter but now do not expect to see any travel plans – draft or otherwise - in California

until later this summer or early fall. Stay tuned!

The **Shoshone National Forest** in Wyoming has slowed down its travel planning timeline too. Like the California forests, the Shoshone realized that they had more work to do before publishing a draft plan and they have delayed their timeline by a year. While we would like to see these travel planning processes move quickly and efficiently, we think it's more important that the Forest Service take the time to do travel planning right the first time rather than having them tied up with legal challenges later. This is especially true given that these are the first forests to undergo winter travel planning under the OSV Rule. These plans will be the examples that later forest will follow and we want to make sure winter travel planning gets off to a good start.



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2016-17 BACKCOUNTRY FILM FESTIVAL WRAP-UP

By Keili Bell, Outreach and Events Coordinator



Cabin fever was palpable on February 9, 2017 across the town of Sun Valley, Idaho and neighboring communities, as extreme conditions shut down resort skiing and all aspiration to tour the backcountry. But that same evening, the Backcountry Film Festival opened the town's theater doors and the citizens got their fill of vicarious face shots and winter reverie. WWA Executive Director Mark Menlove introduced the program on stage, thanking local nonprofit and business partners, sponsors and filmmakers, and briefing the crowd on national issues important to public

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lands and the human-powered recreation community. Then the movies played, the beer poured, and a renewed feeling of stoke prevailed.

Such is the galvanic effect of the Backcountry Film Festival: that moment when we look around the room at the friends we haven't seen in the darkness of winter; when we get on the same page about local initiatives that will perpetuate our culture and way of life as solace-seeking, snow-infatuated kin.

This winter the Backcountry Film Festival toured to 107 different locations around the country, and generated \$180,000 of revenue for the benefit of our grassroots groups, SnowSchool sites and film festival hosts. Every dollar of those funds stays in local communities and directly benefits advocacy efforts, stewardship projects, avalanche safety workshops and kids' outdoor education programs.

We are already planning for next year's show, and look forward to developing another awesome program that inspires, entertains and educates—with plenty of powder shots. We are now on the lookout for the next batch of films. If you or anyone you know has a film that captures the spirit of winter wildlands and human-powered winter recreation, let us know. And stay tuned for our annual Call for Films.

The Backcountry Film Festival thrives with the support of filmmakers, corporate sponsors, hosts, ambassadors, our board members and attendees. Thank you all for an amazing 2016-2017 season! Now let's start booking venues for the party next year!