

## WWA 2016 AMBASSADOR FORUM

# SKIING AND STRATEGIZING

BY DAVID PAGE  
ADVOCACY MANAGER



*Ambassador Forum on-snow session, Jake's Peak, West Shore of Lake Tahoe. Photo by Forrest McCarthy*

**IN APRIL WE CONVENED** a half dozen of our ambassadors—those who could arrange for a brief window between far-flung adventures—for two days of strategy and conversation up at Winter Wildlands board member and ambassador Rich Meyer's place at the end of Ward Canyon on the West Shore of Lake Tahoe.

Donny Roth made the trek across the Great Basin from Crested Butte, bearing reminiscences from a recent trip to the Pyrenees and ambitious plans for a new high camp in the Andes. Tahoe local Brennan Lagasse found a wedge of time between guiding in the Chugach and a sailboat ski expedition to Iceland. Our policy manager Hilary Eisen flew in as directly as possible from Alaska's Brooks Range, where she'd just skied 200 self-supported miles in 4 days in her second successful Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic Ski Classic.

Forrest McCarthy drove out in his boot-liner-funk-smelling AstroVan from a packrafting trip on the Owyhee River. The following week he'd be on his way to Greenland for another season of climate change research. There'd been days the

previous season, he said, when surface temps there had been too warm even to measure the rate of melt. And now it was 64 degrees, he reported—35 degrees warmer than normal.

Noah Howell, out from Salt Lake City, brought tales of endurance skiing the Hardrock 100 and—more vividly—of skiing the Otterbody off the Grand Teton a few days earlier. He conjured an image of his partner weathering a full drubbing by a wet slide while hanging from two ice screws. "I've never been so scared—ever," Noah said. Later, at the top of a key rappel, his partner dropped their rope. Oops. Luckily there was a crowd.

On the subject, Forrest marshalled every last microbyte of Rich's satellite Internet connection to stream Bob Carmichael and Greg Lowe's 16mm film of Steve Shea skiing the Grand on a pair of 210 Rossignols in 1980—before it was a bucket-list thing for tourists like Noah Howell.

Kim Havell, who as it happens was the first woman to ski the Otterbody, had just been in Morocco visiting her friends Cloe and Kris Erickson at their home deep in the High Atlas mountains. She'd planned to ski, but even after a decent storm a few days earlier the coverage was too thin; and so she'd enjoyed the culture and the expansive cragging.

During a sticky skintrack session along the Alpine Meadows boundary up to Grouse Rock and subsequent indoor sessions (occasionally sipping moderately from Rich's selection of brownwater)—with cameo participation by the likes of Squaw



*Mark Menlove talks about the importance of forest travel planning to the backcountry community.*

## NEWS FROM WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE

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Valley original Glen Poulsen, members of the Tahoe Backcountry Alliance and Snowlands Network—we talked about the issues that affect the winter landscapes we cherish.

We talked about proposed ski area expansions, parking and access issues, the increased range of snowmachines and snowbikes, and a range of efforts by cynical legislators to wrest control of public lands away from the public. We talked about safety and ethics, signage and stewardship, and the hard realities of climate change. We talked about how best to communicate the urgency and the unique opportunity presented by current Forest Service travel planning efforts across the west—and how to engage our tribe of wild individualists to help protect the increasingly rare backcountry zones where we go to find ourselves.

The two days were inspirational," Donny would write later. "It's an honor to be part of such an amazing group of people, connecting the dots between our small mountain communities and working at a national level to protect our public lands."

On the second morning, climbing a firm track up the steep east side of Jake's Peak, single-file, the lake unfurling blue and turquoise below us, it was hard not to look forward to next year's forum. In the meantime, we had our work cut out for us, and a formidable team well suited to the task.



Mark Menlove, Winter Wildlands Alliance Executive Director, skiing spring corn above Lake Tahoe. Photo by Brennan Legasse, [stateofthebackcountry.com](http://stateofthebackcountry.com)

## WINTER TRAVEL PLANNING RAMPS UP ACROSS THE WEST

### WWA AND LOCAL GROUPS ADVOCATE TO PROTECT NON-MOTORIZED WINTER EXPERIENCE ON NATIONAL FORESTS

BY HILARY EISEN  
RECREATION PLANNING AND POLICY MANAGER

**IT'S BEEN A BUSY WINTER** for travel planning. With the process in full-swing on several forests in California and gearing up in northwest Wyoming, Winter Wildlands Alliance has been working with a number of our Grassroots Groups to speak up for quiet recreation and the protection of winter wild lands.

The Shoshone National Forest in northwest Wyoming has just begun a comprehensive travel planning process to designate routes and areas for winter and summer motorized use. In early 2016 the Forest Service hosted a number of public meetings to talk about the process and gather information to shape its proposed action, which will be released this coming summer. We worked with the Wyoming Wilderness Association and Togwotee Backcountry Alliance to make sure that folks who ski on Togwotee Pass and Beartooth Pass, as well as elsewhere on the Shoshone, attended those meetings. Our organizations also presented a number of proposals to the Shoshone with suggestions of how to manage over-snow vehicle (OSV) use and zone popular winter recreation areas to reduce conflict between motorized and non-motorized users. Finally, in partnership with the Togwotee Backcountry Alliance, Wyoming Wilderness Association, the Beartooth Recreational Trails Association, NOLS, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and REI, we hosted mapping workshops throughout northwest Wyoming and southwest Montana to gather information about where people ski on the Shoshone and to talk to them about the opportunity to protect the places where they play.

In the meantime, in California, the five forests that were the first to begin winter travel planning once the OSV Rule was published are now moving along in the process. The Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas National Forests have all completed the first step in travel planning – scoping – and are



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

#### Staff

Mark Menlove, Executive Director

Hilary Eisen, Recreation Planning and Policy Manager

David Page, Advocacy Manager

Kerry McClay, National SnowSchool Director

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now each working to develop and analyze a range of Alternatives, or different possible plans. In February the Lassen published a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) that described four different alternatives for managing winter travel on the Lassen and compared the environmental, social, and economic effects of each one. This gave us our first glimpse of what winter travel management might look like in the northern Sierra.

Unfortunately, we were disappointed by the Lassen DEIS. The Forest Service is legally required to show how each specific route and area open to motorized use has been located to minimize damage to natural resources, minimize conflicts with other uses (including non-motorized recreation), and minimize impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat. One of the published alternatives was



*Talking winter travel planning and the Over Snow Vehicle Rule with the Colorado Mountain Club's Backcountry Sports Initiative. Sangre Hut, CO. Photo by David Page*

based on the "Skiers Alternative" we submitted, and does protect key non-motorized recreation areas, but the DEIS doesn't show how the open areas or designated OSV routes in each Alternative were located to minimize impacts. Instead, the forest compared how many acres were open or closed to OSVs under each Alternative as a proxy for comparing the extent to which each Alternative minimized impacts. This approach has been roundly rejected by the courts in other travel planning processes, and we are working to steer the Forest Service in the right direction. The Forest Service must explain in the final EIS how it has located each OSV route, and drawn the boundaries of each OSV open area to minimize the impacts that motorized use has on other forest resources and uses.

During the public comment period for the Lassen DEIS we worked with Snowlands Network as well as our other, and newest, grassroots partner in the northern Sierra – Friends of Plumas Wilderness - to comment on the DEIS and help local skiers provide their input as well. We will continue to track progress as the Lassen works toward its final EIS, and have already begun work to help other forests avoid similar missteps in their process.

Meanwhile, two more forests in California have begun winter travel planning. The Inyo and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) are both in the preliminary stages of this process, with each hosting public "pre-scoping" meetings and soliciting a first round of comments through March and April. On the Inyo we will be working with Friends of the Inyo, Friends of the Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center, Snowlands Network, the Eastern Sierra Recreation Collaborative, and others to engage the Eastern Sierra ski community and ensure that important non-motorized recreation areas are protected. Likewise, in Lake Tahoe, we are working with the Tahoe Backcountry Alliance and Snowlands Network to give the human-powered winter recreation community a voice in the travel planning process.

In the coming months we will be meeting with the Forest Service both at the district level and at the national office in Washington DC to promote travel planning best practices, to highlight the need to work with local stakeholder groups to minimize impacts and protect areas for non-motorized recreation, and to bring more clarity to the winter travel planning process. We are also continuing to work with grassroots partners throughout the country to lay solid groundwork for productive future travel planning on forests across the nation. Tune in to our Facebook or sign up for email updates on your favorite forests!



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## CAROLINE GLEICH AND HALINA BOYD JOIN WWA AMBASSADOR TEAM



*Caroline Gleich. Photo by Adam Clark*

Caroline Gleich is a ski mountaineer and adventurer known for her human-powered ski descents around her home mountain range, the Wasatch, and worldwide. She's been featured on covers of Powder, Ski, and Backcountry and on the big screen in two Warren Miller films. She's an outspoken environmental activist who works with a variety of non-profits to speak up on local and national issues related to climate change, energy policy and wilderness protection, finding common ground with legislators over a shared love of the outdoors. She skis for Patagonia, Jaybird, Julbo, LifeProof, Clif Bar, Goal Zero, Nordica, Leki and Pret helmets. When she's not outside, she enjoys painting, cooking and tending to her organic fruit and vegetable garden at her home in Salt Lake City, UT.



*Halina Boyd. Photo by David Bowers*

Growing up in the small town of Sebastopol, California, Halina was taught early on the importance of environmentally conscious living and sustainable foresight. Learning to ski and snowboard in Lake Tahoe and spending summers at nearby Fallen Leaf Lake, the mountains became an integral part of her development as a child. As a professional big mountain snowboarder, her life continues to revolve around this love and respect for the mountains. Halina now lives in Jackson, Wyoming and spends winters exploring Grand Teton National Park and wild mountainous regions around the world. She is passionate about protecting these wild places in order for future generations to experience the peaceful and awe-inspiring moments only a mountain covered in a blanket of fresh snow can create.

## AWARD-WINNING JOURNALIST JOINS WWA AS ADVOCACY MANAGER

BY MARK MENLOVE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Winter Wildlands Alliance is delighted to welcome David Page to the newly created position of Advocacy Manager. With a deep communications resume including serving as senior correspondent for Powder magazine, David will work directly with WWA grassroots groups, ambassadors, volunteers and individual activists to protect their local winter landscapes.

In addition to his journalism work, David is the co-founder, project manager and former executive director of Mammoth Medical Missions, a non-profit international medical relief organization, and a co-founding board member of Mammoth Lakes Recreation. While his work will be national in scope, David will work from his home office in Mammoth Lakes, California, giving WWA a much-needed presence in the Sierra Nevada where seven national forests are currently taking on winter travel management plans.



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## SNOWSCHOOL SPOTLIGHT



## SNOWSCHOOL BLAZES WINTER TRAILS WITH NEW WEATHER STATION

BY KERRY MCCLAY, ED.D.  
NATIONAL SNOWSCHOOL DIRECTOR

**SNOWSCHOOL HAS ALWAYS BEEN** about connecting kids to nature through snow. Romping through a snow-covered forest is an adventure that resonates across generations and provides an opportunity for students of all backgrounds to experience the simple joy of being outside in the winter. But the SnowSchool program is also uniquely situated to help kids explore connections between mountain snow, climate change and water, topics that are particularly relevant in western states and communities where mountain snow provides approximately 80 percent of the water supply.

To make the most of this learning opportunity we partnered with the US Forest Service this past fall to install a new Snowpack Weather Station at our National Flagship SnowSchool site in Idaho. This innovative resource boasts online snowpack depth and snow/water equivalency (SWE) data, and in the first season of use allowed over 800 K-12 students and teachers to continue to learn about hydrology and snow science once back in their classroom.

By creating a new opportunity for extended learning, the weather station transformed SnowSchool from a 1-2 day event into a fun three-month science exploration. Quantitative outcome data collected by Winter Wildlands Alliance this spring shows that underserved students (Title 1) who used this new resource continued to make statistically significant gains in science learning even three months after their SnowSchool field trip!

With this new SnowSchool enhancement and your continuing support of our work, Winter Wildlands Alliance is making good on our aspirations to get more kids outside and to foster rich ecological literacy among our youngest generation. Our future work will focus on honing and replicating this innovative SnowSchool resource.

## SnowSchool National Expansion

We believe that all kids should have the opportunity to experience our nation's winter wildlands. By collaborating with organizations and communities across the country we work to bring this opportunity to thousands of underserved kids who need it most. We were thrilled this year to add new SnowSchool programs in such places as Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan, Grande Mesa Uncompahgre & Gunnison National Forests in Colorado, Montana Outdoor Science School in



*Training future volunteers at our emerging SnowSchool site in Colorado.*

Bozeman, Mt. Ashland Ski Area in Oregon, Hunthill Audubon Sanctuary in Wisconsin, and with Mammoth Lakes Elementary School students in California. We are also very excited to have hosted a spring volunteer educator training event at our emerging SnowSchool site at the University of Colorado's Niwot Ridge Mountain Research Station.

All of these successes are made possible by people like you who have continued to support Winter Wildlands Alliance's SnowSchool through the years. Thank you and stay tuned for future updates!



**SnowSchool** is an unforgettable winter adventure that combines hands-on science education with snowshoe-powered outdoor exploration.

**SNOWSCHOOL**

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[winterwildlands.org/what-we-do/snowschoo/](http://winterwildlands.org/what-we-do/snowschoo/)

## SNOWBALL A SMASH SUCCESS!

BY BRITTANY JONES  
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

This February over 200 winter enthusiasts from the Colorado Front Range community, including artists and athletes from the Backcountry Film Festival, gathered for the first ever Winter Wildlands Alliance SnowBall. The evening was dedicated to our National SnowSchool Program, and attendees directly supported our work of getting 29,000 kids across the country outside exploring the wilds of winter on snowshoes! This fundraiser led to immediate results in the Boulder community as Winter Wildlands Alliance and University of Colorado's Mountain Research Station are now teaming up to establish a new SnowSchool program at the Niwot Ridge Long-Term Ecological Research site. Our deepest gratitude to all of the sponsors, volunteers and SnowSchool supporters who made this event possible, we are already looking forward to next year!



Photo by Drew Landis

including Winter Wildlands Alliance, American Whitewater, American Canoe Association, Access Fund, International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), the Mountaineers, and American Alpine Club.

Representing Winter Wildlands, our executive director and OA co-founder, Mark Menlove, flew in from Boise. Our new advocacy manager, David Page, flew in from California.

Mark spent the first of the three days meeting with fellow Outdoor Alliance board members discussing top-level strategy for the coming year and how best to represent the interests of the more than 200,000 climbers, paddlers, mountain bikers, and backcountry skiers and riders who make up the respective Outdoor Alliance member organizations. Day two, Mark and other OA board members teamed up with CEOs and high level management from Outdoor Industry Association companies to educate key Senators and Congress members on issues important to the recreation community and businesses—items such as permanent reauthorization of the Land and

## CAPITOL SUMMIT 2016: WWA GOES TO WASHINGTON D.C.

BY DAVID PAGE  
ADVOCACY MANAGER

**FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER**, during the last week of April, Outdoor Alliance (OA), The Conservation Alliance and the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) came together in Washington D.C. to meet with key decision makers in Congress and the Administration to discuss and show support for national policies that will help protect public lands, the recreation economy, and the outdoor recreation experience.

Outdoor Alliance's annual DC Fly-In, scheduled to coincide with The Conservation Alliance Policy Training and Hill visits and the 24th annual OIA Capitol Summit, brought executives, board members and staff from OA's seven member organizations,



*Finding common ground on the importance of outdoor recreation with Congressman Tom McClintock (R-CA), Patagonia, Marmot and Winter Wildlands Alliance.*

Water Conservation Fund, the Outdoor REC Act, which calls for measuring the contributions of the outdoor economy as part of our national Gross Domestic Product, and Senator Ron Wyden's (D-OR) Recreation Not Red Tape Act.

Meanwhile, David jumped in with board and member company representatives from The Conservation Alliance for a full day intensive Conservation Policy and Advocacy Training workshop at the Pew Environment Group Offices on E Street. Highlights included candid reports from Nikki Buffa, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Department of the Interior, and Michael Degnan, White House Council on Environmental Quality, regarding the pressures

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and difficulties facing the Obama administration's national monument designation team in the final 268-day countdown of the current presidency.

The following day, David traded his dirty Mountain Khakis for a pinstripe suit to represent Winter Wildlands Alliance on Capitol Hill as part of a small team that also included one representative each from California-based outdoor companies Patagonia, CamelBak, Klean Kanteen and Marmot. Meeting with a series of California legislators from both sides of the aisle, the team made a strong case for the powerful impact of outdoor recreation on local economies—generating \$85.4 billion in consumer spending in California and 732,000 direct California jobs—and by extension the fundamental importance of protecting public lands across the west where recreation takes place.

"People say we can't afford to put money into public lands," said Congresswoman Lois Capps (D-CA24), recently back from an inspiring visit to Channel Islands National Park with US Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and a group of local fourth graders. "I say we can't afford not to protect the resources we cherish."

On Day three, Mark and David met with Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, who oversees the Forest Service, and in a separate meeting with Forest Service Director of Recreation Joe Meade, his faithful "snow lab" service dog Skittles, and a small contingent of the Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) planning team. The purpose of both meetings was to emphasize the need for clearer guidance from the Washington office to the Forest Service field offices on how to implement the new Over-Snow Vehicle Rule and local-level winter travel plans. The team reiterated the high value that quiet human powered recreation has on forest service lands and expressed its "full intent" to move the winter travel planning process forward in compliance with the new federal rule on winter management.

Direct from administration offices on the National Mall, the Winter Wildlands delegation shared a quick taxi to Reagan National. After some delays due to rain and fog and stacked-up airline traffic, they shot off in separate conveyances into serious weather coming in from the west, carrying with them a renewed sense of mission and of the power of a unified recreation community to effect a positive influence on the way our public lands are managed.

"We see the impacts of lobbyists from other industries," John Gilroy, Program Director for Pew's Campaign for America's Wilderness, had said on the first day. "You guys counter that with spirit, good arguments, and the right answers."

## BACKCOUNTRY FILM FESTIVAL LOGS ANOTHER GREAT WINTER

BY KEILI BELL  
OUTREACH AND EVENTS COORDINATOR



**CELEBRATING THE HUMAN-POWERED EXPERIENCE** and the wild and far-flung adventures of the winter backcountry tribe, this season's Backcountry Film Festival — our 11th Annual! — premiered at the Egyptian Theater in Boise on November 19, 2015, and then toured 88 cities to reach 15,000 attendees worldwide by the end of the 2015-2016 season.

The Festival collectively raised over \$120,000 for our Grassroots Members, SnowSchool sites and University Outdoor Programs. The dollars raised benefit local communities by funding children's outdoor education programs, scholarship funds, local advocacy efforts, and stewardship projects.

We co-hosted many of our festival screenings this season with Grassroots and SnowSchool partners. Bend's screening, for example, was organized in partnership with Discover Your Forest (SnowSchool Partner) and emceed by Pine Mountain Sports (Backcountry Partner). The sense of community within our network—the unity, caring and civic/environmental responsibility—is inspiring. We look forward to connecting with more and more partners and co-hosts each season.

The Backcountry Film Festival thrives with the generous support and dedication of our filmmakers, hosts, ambassadors, sponsors and attendees, which support in turn allows us to provide an accessible and effective fundraising and community-building tool for our powerful and ever-growing network of grassroots partners. We are already working hard in preparation for next year's festival and tour, and even with summer upon us are already looking forward to another season's fabulous winter adventures!



**The Backcountry Film Festival** celebrates the human-powered experience, raising funds and awareness for local groups working on advocacy, snow safety and outdoor education programs.

**BACKCOUNTRY  
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CELEBRATING THE HUMAN  
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## WWA HITS THE ROAD IN CALIFORNIA

BY HILARY EISEN  
RECREATION PLANNING AND POLICY MANAGER

**IN LATE APRIL WE TEAMED** up with The Wilderness Society to check in on the progress of winter travel planning in California. National forests in California are leading the charge in implementing the new over-snow vehicle rule and we want to make sure they get it right and set a good example for the rest of the country to follow. In the course of a week, we put 1,000 miles on a rental car, met with five National Forests, the Forest Service's Region 5 (California) office, and many local partners who share our goal of crafting travel plans that protect winter wildlands and opportunities for quiet winter recreation.

During these meetings we focused on discussing the high-level policy components of winter travel planning – what the OSV rule requires, lessons we've learned from travel planning elsewhere (for wheeled vehicles or on forests that had written travel plans before it was required), and spent many hours discussing what it means to minimize the impacts of winter motorized use on other uses, natural resources, and wildlife.

Among other things, we learned that the timeline has been pushed back a bit and that the Forest Service will be publishing draft Environmental Impact Statements for the Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas starting this fall rather than in the spring. The draft plans will be staggered, but we are expecting a busy fall and winter as we review and comment on each DEIS. We will be sure to alert Winter Wildlands Alliance members and supporters when there is an opportunity to comment on these drafts so stay tuned!



*Sabrina Basin in the Eastern Sierras. Photo by Sam Roberts*

While phone calls, emails, and letters can go a long way in communicating with the Forest Service, there's something to be said for in-person meetings. Sitting around a table looking at maps and having a discussion that overlays policy, goals, and on-the-ground management leads to the type of quality discussion that's hard to get to if you only ever communicate remotely. So, while we'd really rather be skiing instead of spending hours behind the wheel, it's well worth our while when we hit the road.

## JOIN US

Join the backcountry community and help protect the places we play. You can become a member by simply going online at [winterwildlands.org/join](http://winterwildlands.org/join) or calling Program Administrator, Brittany Jones at 208.336.4203.