

2020 NEWSLETTER  
FALL ISSUE

**WINTER  
WILDLANDS  
ALLIANCE**

**TRAIL BREAK**



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Winter Wildlands Alliance was founded to represent backcountry skiers and human-powered recreation. We are an alliance of grassroots organizers, environmental advocates, backcountry skiers and snowboarders, and individuals who are devoted to protecting, preserving, and sharing access to quiet places in the mountains. Our main office is located in Boise, Idaho, ancestral land of the Bannock and Shoshone, and we recognize their community, their elders both past and present, as well as future generations, as the original inhabitants.

Winter Wildlands Alliance recognizes and respects indigenous peoples as traditional stewards of this land—and all of the land where we recreate, advocate, steward, and protect—and the enduring relationship that exists between indigenous peoples and their traditional territories.



Mount Hood, originally called Wy'East by the Multnomah Tribe.  
Photo: Terray Sylvester

## Trail Break, Fall 2020 Issue



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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.*

## COVER PHOTO:

An ice skater on a frozen lake in California's Eastern Sierra, traditionally known by the local Nüümü people as Payahuunadü, or "Place of Flowing Waters."  
Photo: John Dittli



# TAKING ACTION IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

A letter from the Executive Director of Winter Wildlands Alliance

It seems like both an eternity and yesterday that I was coming out of the Pioneer Mountains on our annual yurt trip last March. Just before, I'd spent time in Utah and Wyoming to meet with grassroots partners, attend events, and dive deep into the local and national issues that impact every aspect of Winter Wildlands Alliance. It was invigorating, exciting, frustrating, and incredibly important. Then, COVID-19 hit. We are all still feeling the impact. Our policy and advocacy team never slowed down, but their work morphed into more phone calls, Zoom meetings, and virtual planning sessions. We have been as proactive as possible as an organization and continue to adjust to the "new abnormal."

Our work continues on the ground, in person, in Washington D.C., with our partners, where it snows and even virtually. No matter what, WWA will do the work.

Winter is on its way and we are planning for it. When the resorts closed last season, gear sales shot up and people hit the resorts in droves to skin up the hills. As I write this, some resort operations are somewhat TBD and let's face it: There will be more people on the trails, in the backcountry, and at the parking areas. We've seen it all summer long. More people recreating on public lands, more trash, parking issues creating a massive impact in these areas. Remember to Recreate Responsibly. That includes planning ahead, leave no trace, staying local, maintaining physical distance, and making safe decisions. Being outside (especially in the backcountry) relieves anxiety and provides beauty and solace in a world where stress has become the norm. Embrace it. Have fun. Love it. Protect it. Fight for it.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is preparing for the winter. We are excited to share some of our work:

- **Backcountry Film Festival celebrated its 15th season last year! Despite the truncated tour schedule, we created a virtual experience—and even a “Best of Fest”—for the**

**upcoming season! Prepare your virtual theater and stay tuned for details!**

- **SnowSchool faced a challenging spring, but pivoted to a homeschool curriculum for students to do in their backyard. Again, stay tuned!**
- **NEPA is being gutted. No more transparency, science-based information, and environmental protection in this administration. The new NEPA tosses or limits public participation, restricts environmental analysis, and is designed to fast-track approval for development and infrastructure projects. Learn more about what we are doing to fight this on page 11.**

We are the national collective voice of the wintertime backcountry community. We exist at the confluence of stewardship, advocacy, education, and engagement, with a mission to protect wild winter spaces. We need your support to do our work and ensure the protection of these areas.

I want to thank each member, partner, grassroots group, and engaged individual that continues to be a part of WWA—especially if you are new to the community! Thank you.

**Join us and keep winter wild!**



Todd Walton, Executive Director



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An aerial photograph of a glacier, showing its complex, layered structure and deep crevasses. The entire image has a strong blue color cast, giving it a cold, ethereal feel. The sun is visible in the upper right corner, creating a bright glow and casting long shadows across the ice.

# OUR COMMITMENT

To Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)

By Todd Walton, Executive Director  
Photo: Jason Hummel, Nisqually Glacier, Yakama Nation



**E**nvironmental laws are critical to addressing many of the impacts of systemic racism and inequality. Right now, these laws and lands are facing unprecedented threats. If we don't fight for them we will lose them. We are working to defend these laws and bring Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) into public lands management so that together we can build a better future. A future where every community breathes clean air, drinks clean water, and feels welcome and safe in public spaces, including when recreating on public lands.

We believe it is important to acknowledge the violence and racism embedded in the history of public lands and recognize the need for restoration of equality and ownership of all these lands.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is a national nonprofit organization promoting and preserving winter wildlands and a quality human-powered snowsports experience on public lands. As stewards of winter and advocates for the backcountry, we are working on establishing our path forward. We are going to make mistakes, but we will stay engaged in and committed to the JEDI conversation, to listen, learn, and break trail as we can.

### Our JEDI Journey Thus Far

Last year, we became members of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, a community-focused organization that believes all forms of oppression (racism, sexism, etc) create a culture that enables violence. To prevent this violence, we must foster inclusiveness and diversity. We began working with their team to learn from their experiences and find out what processes might work for Winter Wildlands Alliance in JEDI training. It was a small step, but we asked questions, talked, and thought about how we can do better as individuals and as an organization.

Rather than scheduling a single seminar, discussion, or training, Winter Wildlands Alliance has pursued a path that was more than a day's work. We are committed to ongoing training from a variety of leaders in social and environmental justice. We are open to new learning experiences and opportunities. We see this journey as an evolution and we are committed to the work.

Last year at our Grassroots Advocacy Conference, we hosted a conversation about JEDI work within the winter backcountry community. A diverse range of panelists and participants dug into the theme, "Growing Equity in Public Lands." WWA staff, board, and members learned a great deal from this experience. And today, much of the program and policy work that we are currently involved in promotes environmental and social justice. This work includes but is not limited to:

- **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) defense:** We defend transparency, public input, and science in government decision-making.
- **Public lands management:** We advocate for equitable access to public lands, specifically for non-motorized experiences, for all people, including traditionally marginalized communities. We push federal agencies to provide and encourage equitable opportunities for the public to access and enjoy public lands.
- **Advancing and supporting climate and environmental justice** issues in legislation and public lands management.
- **Opposing development projects that infringe on**

**indigenous rights and traditions** and the ecological integrity of these lands, making sure indigenous voices are included and heard.

- **Through our SnowSchool program**, we provide resources that can be adapted and utilized by diverse communities to introduce their youth to exploring winter wildlands. Currently, SnowSchool reaches a population of roughly 60 percent underserved students.
- **The Backcountry Film Festival** is dedicated to telling human-powered stories on-screen in hundreds of communities across the country. We actively seek stories that represent the fullest possible range of experiences with the winter backcountry, and we've actively promoted a call within the outdoor industry for more diverse representation in these films.

### Looking Ahead

We are going to identify next steps as we finish our current ones and move forward in a considered way. WWA is not a racial justice organization first and foremost, so we will look for places where we can align our movement with other organizations doing this work. Some of our specific next steps are as follows:

- **Listen and Learn:** Winter Wildlands Alliance staff enrolled and completed the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights-Human Rights Certification Program. We are committed to working as individuals and as an organization. We believe that listening is paramount to our JEDI work. We will:
  - Stay Engaged
  - Speak Our Truth
  - Experience Discomfort
- **Advocate and Acknowledge:** We will better account for how our policy work touches on and connects to JEDI. We will also increase our efforts to more directly advocate for JEDI principles when engaging in public lands management policy and advocacy. We will formally acknowledge indigenous connections to the places where we work and play in our publications, online content, and through building relationships with indigenous people.
- **Promote:** We will diversify our photos and stories to reflect the people who get outside on public lands in winter. We will invest in a set of imagery that represents the winter recreation community that includes cultural diversity. We will use our platform and reach to amplify the voices of black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities.
- **Engage:** We will cultivate collaboration and meaningful relationships with BIPOC communities and identify/connect with organizations working with BIPOC in the winter recreation and conservation world. We will show up and do the work.

**Humility Statement:** *We are committed to doing our JEDI work and fully recognize that we will make mistakes. We do not know what the future holds, but we are open and willing to learn from it. \**



# Paradigm *Shift*

By Julie Brown. Ski Photos: John Dittli

**S**arah Michael, the founder of Winter Wildlands Alliance, grew up in a farm in California's Bay Area that is now a freeway interchange. She knows the importance of open space. She also knows what it's like to lose it.

"I grew up as a wild child outside. I was always either riding horses or outside doing something," she said in a phone interview in July. "I think your earliest childhood experiences really cement the need to be in open spaces."

As her horizons grew, Sarah, now 74, started to venture into the Sierra Nevada on solo backpacking trips, and eventually backcountry skiing. "It was all skins and telemark," she said. Little did she know then that her passion for winter recreation would go on to fundamentally change the way the Forest Service manages motorized and non-motorized recreation.

The roots of Winter Wildlands Alliance begin in Sun Valley. Looking back, Sarah says Sun Valley called to her twice.

The first time she heard the call was in 1975 while she was trekking through the Himalayas. "At the base of Mount Everest, I met a gorgeous mountain man who invited me to go skiing in Sun Valley," she said. She stayed there for four years before moving back to California in the '80s to continue her career in public policy and lobbying in Sacramento.

The second time she moved to Sun Valley was in 1993, to resume her "wilderness hobo life," as Sarah puts it. There, she met her now husband, Bob Jonas, a guide who owned Sun Valley Trekking. Together, they explored the far reaches of wild places in Idaho, Yellowstone, Utah, and in 1996, they left for a human-powered trek across the entire state of Alaska.

"It was the trip of a lifetime," Sarah said. After two years exploring one of the most remote places on the planet, they returned to a lot of change in Sun Valley in the late 1990s. "When we came back, we found all of this conflict."

Cross-country and backcountry skiing were blooming. The community cross-country ski area accessed groomed trails in the Wood River Valley, which is wedged north of Ketchum to the Galena Lodge. Yet, they were taken by the growth in snowmobiles, too. Sarah said there were 6,000 cross-country ski passes being sold and about 600 registered snowmobile users, but the outsized impact of snowmobiles made it difficult for skiers to find peaceful and untracked turns.

"People would spend hours getting up to the backcountry ski huts and all of the slopes would be tracked up," Sarah said. The



Photo: John Dittli, Payahüünadü





Twenty years ago, Sarah Michael founded Winter Wildlands Alliance with an idea that would go on to change the way the Forest Service understands winter.



The late Mark McNally over the moon in the Mammoth Lakes Basin, Inyo National Forest, Payahüünadü, winter 2000/2001.

Photo: John Dittli



absence of zoning rules for winter recreation meant that public lands were a free-for-all for motorized and non-motorized recreation alike, which manifested in clashes between skiers and snowmobilers.

Sarah got to work, leaning on her organizing background in Sacramento to start the Nordic and Backcountry Skiers Alliance in Sun Valley during the winter of '98-'99, and she traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with her representatives from Idaho. In D.C., she showed her congressmen a map displaying the “hundreds of thousands of acres” that snowmobiles had access to and the “very small terrain” in the Wood River Valley that skiers frequented. “I showed them the map and said, ‘All we have to do is have some zoning,’” Sarah said. “And they said that makes sense.”

When she returned to Sun Valley, Sarah met with the Forest Supervisor, who tasked her to organize a group of skiers to go into mediation with a group of snowmobilers and come up with a zoning map. The Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Coalition was made up of the Skiers Alliance, the Sawtooth Snowmobile Club, Blaine County Recreation, and the Forest Service. The coalition created a “Snow Pact” to designate motorized and non-motorized zones for winter recreation in the Wood River Valley. “It was a 10-month process, and we came up with a map,” she said. “And a special order stands to this day.”

While Sarah was organizing in Sun Valley, she started talking to people in other parts of the country, like Gail Ferrell, who was working on the ground in Tahoe to collect hundreds of email addresses and generate support for human-powered recreation. Sarah wanted to learn about other strategies people were using, how to build membership, and grow.

“Lesson number one: Talk to other groups,” she said. “Lesson number two: Don’t start a national organization unless you’re really filling a niche.”

Gail was working with a team in Tahoe that would go on to start the Snowlands Network. Their biggest focus was at the top of Mount Rose, where a meadow popular with snowshoers and Nordic skiers was seeing increases in traffic from snowmobiles. Meanwhile, Sarah’s success in Sun Valley with the Wood River coalition helped her see the need for a nationwide group that could connect smaller grassroots groups across the country to advocate for policy on a national level with federal agencies.

“Sarah is a very convincing and excellent speaker. When she talked about the need for a national group, I was completely focused on our local problems,” Gail said.

Sarah started Winter Wildlands Alliance in November of 2000 with funding from the Wilderness Society, a private foundation, and her fundraising efforts. She tapped Gail (and also Marcus Libkind, who worked with Gail in Tahoe) to be on the founding board for Winter Wildlands Alliance. In 2001, she hired the organization’s first executive director, Sally Grimes.

In those early years, Sarah’s vision was centered on collaboration and research. Winter Wildlands Alliance published its first report, called “Losing Ground: The Fight to Preserve Winter Solitude,” which was presented at one of the first Grassroots Advocacy Conferences. “One of the first things we did was reach out to other grassroots groups and develop a handbook and tools to help them organize,” Sarah said. “The research we did and the Grassroots Conferences were what energized us the most.”

Gail attended the first Grassroots Conference and says that Sarah and Winter Wildlands Alliance connected her local group to funding that helped them start a nonprofit, the Snowlands Network. Sarah also helped set up connections to Snowlands’ representatives in Washington, D.C.

“With her help, we had a lobby day where we were on Capitol Hill asking our representatives to weigh in on the issues for more non-motorized areas,” Gail said. “She helped me to see the bigger policy issues and how policy is created and implemented and where there are opportunities to try to influence policy.”

From the beginning, Sarah’s intention for Winter Wildlands Alliance was action-oriented, said Mark Menlove, who was the executive director from 2004 to 2019. “Taking a hard stand and being vocal, but it was also done with a recognition that we had to be collaborative,” he said. “[Sarah] is very disarming, and she is also very committed to outcomes. She’s just willing to stay in the conversation and stay in the relationship.”

Even so, when Sarah began working in areas beyond Sun Valley, the resistance she encountered was stronger than she expected.

“We were totally naive, thinking, ‘Oh, all we have to do is get people to cooperate!’”

she said.

A meeting between skiers and snowmobilers in Alaska stands out. Sarah said the animosity from the motorized community toward skiers who were pushing for non-motorized terrain was palpable. “The snowmobilers thought they were traitors,” Sarah said.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is still doing this work. In 2015, the Forest Service finalized the Over-Snow Vehicle Rule, which completely changed the paradigm of how the agency views and manages winter recreation. Before the rule, over-snow vehicles were allowed anywhere on forest lands. Now, forests covered in snow are closed to motors except in places that are designated open to over-snow vehicles. Gail said this fundamental shift began with Sarah’s organizing and vision.

“Sarah has done something so profound by creating a way for a paradigm or policy change in the U.S.,” Gail said. “It’s not just about skiing. It’s about the environment. It’s about climate change. It’s about quiet. All of these things are so important to preserve.”

Mark said that Winter Wildlands Alliance wouldn’t be the same without Sarah’s passion for wild places and acumen in politics.

“The fact that the organization exists is the culmination of those two things within Sarah,” Mark said.

Twenty years since she started Winter Wildlands Alliance, Sarah continues to engage with the organization, but she largely stepped back from the day-to-day operations when she hired Mark. Thinking of those early years of the group, she says that the grassroots collaboration and the research, as well as the groundsetting for the 2015 rule, have been the hallmarks that kept her going.

For inspiration, Sarah still immerses herself in very remote places. In 2017, she headed north with her husband for a 450-mile trek through Idaho’s Smokey Mountains, the Sawtooth Wilderness, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, the Boulder-White Cloud Wilderness, and the Pioneer Mountains. The trek took them 75 days, with two llamas and 10 resupply points. Come winter, the couple often heads out to one of the guiding company’s huts in the Sawtooths.

“The peace, the tranquility, the ability to meditate.” These are the things Sarah says she loves most about immersive experiences in remote places. “You’re in the moment. You are 100 percent living in the present and that, to me, is my form of meditation.” ❄





John Lewis suffered a fractured skull under the club of an Alabama state trooper during the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965 to demand and protect his constitutional right to vote. And yet in November, 2016, a whopping 40% of us didn't even bother to show up. Photo: Associated Press

# VOTE IT'S ON US

Unless you're luckier than the rest of us and have been living out of your backpack in the deepest depths of the Brooks Range or the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness for the last couple of years, you're likely to have an inkling that there's an important election coming up this November. As a 501c3 organization, we won't tell you who to vote for or against. What we will do, however, is remind you that your vote is the single most important tool you have as an American citizen to influence how—or if—the places and activities you love are managed and protected for present and future generations.

We're not just talking about who gets to sit behind the desk in the Oval Office. But let's start with that one: as we've learned over our country's history, whoever we elect to sit in that seat is not just someone who has the opportunity to say a unifying word to the American public after a difficult day, or a figurehead who shows up on aircraft carriers to give the thumbs-up to the troops. In fact, that person has enormous discretion over which laws to enforce and which to ignore or simply render meaningless. That person can appoint Federal judges who either protect the public and defend democracy, or who use their position to defend special interests. That person gets to choose the people who run our nation's public land management, public health, and environmental protection agencies—the Forest Service, the Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Center for Disease Control, Health and Human Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, and all the other federal agencies and departments that are charged with leveraging our taxpayer dollars to make our everyday lives better, safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable. Do we want those people to be qualified? Do we want those people to have the public's best interests in mind? Or are we cool with corporate shills, industry lobbyists, or just plain empty chairs?

And then there's Congress. When it works, it can get checks in the mail to help keep us over our skis when the economy launches off a cliff.

Public lands, watersheds, wildlife, climate, equitable and inclusive access, science, education, health, democracy, freedom, justice—the things we care about most need passionate champions at all levels and in every branch of government. **By David Page, Advocacy Director**

It can protect vast landscapes, fix multi-billion-dollar infrastructure issues, mitigate climate impacts, fund agencies and programs, and put us on a path to economic and environmental resilience and sustainability. It can hold the Executive Branch accountable to the people, and make social justice a reality. When it doesn't work, as it often doesn't, woe is us. But what do we have to do with it? How do we make it work? For starters, we buckle up, switch on our beacons, and vote for as many smart, functional, practical people as we can find on that ballot to truly do the hard work of representing all of us.

Finally, let's not forget about our elected representatives at the state and county level, and on city councils, local school boards, tax boards, and district courts. These people make all sorts of decisions that impact how your day goes and what the future of your community might look like. The only way to make all these people work for you is if you—that is, all of us—make your voice heard loud and clear right from the beginning. There'll be plenty more to do after voting, but let's at least start there. As the late Congressman John Lewis, who not that long ago got his skull broken for the right to vote, once said, "If you don't do everything you can to change things, then they will remain the same."

For every three people who took the time to vote in 2016, another two people either faced obstacles that prevented them from voting, or decided it just wasn't worth their time. Let's not let that happen again. Let's not sit this one out! If you think you might have something better to do on November 3<sup>RD</sup> this year, like skiing four inches of blower pow on granite or maintaining social distancing and avoiding polling places, make sure you contact your county registrar and line yourself up with a mail-in ballot, fill it out, and get it in! Then go trash your skis, knowing that you did your part to keep your country off the rocks. ❄️





“Over a million people and organizations weighed in during the public comment period following the publication of CEQ’s draft regulations this past winter, and 94 percent opposed the revisions.”



# THE SKINNY ON NEPA

**To defend our nation's cornerstone environmental law, we're joining a coalition with the American Alpine Club and conservationists to take the Administration to court.**

By Hilary Eisen, Policy Director

Photo: Terray Sylvester, WyEast

For 50 years, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has put the environment on even footing with commercial interests in government decision-making and moved us toward a world where every person enjoys a healthy environment. NEPA is the law that requires the federal government to let the public know when it's considering a decision that will affect the environment, and it's the law that gives you a voice in those decisions. From public lands to public health, NEPA has made this country a better place and it's a critical tool for the work that Winter Wildlands Alliance and our grassroots groups do to protect quiet recreation and wild places. But, on June 15, President Trump announced major policy changes gutting the National Environmental Policy Act.

## Why?

NEPA requires the government to look before it leaps—to consider public input, best available science, and the consequences of its actions before making a decision. This takes more time than simply rubber-stamping industry proposals or making decisions about public resources without notifying or listening to the public. For decades, certain industries and politicians have framed the public process required by NEPA as “needless delay” and “bureaucracy run amok” and those voices found a ready ear in the current administration. Knowing there was no way Congress would overturn NEPA, the Administration decided to “reinterpret” what the law requires. Specifically, President Trump ordered the Council on Environmental Quality (or, CEQ, the federal agency that oversees NEPA implementation) to revise the regulations that federal agencies follow to comply with the law. He has also used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to issue an Executive Order exempting many development projects from NEPA altogether.

While CEQ has updated its NEPA regulations several times over the past 50 years, this revision marks a significant departure from how the government has previously interpreted and implemented NEPA. Rather than prioritizing transparency, science-based decision-making and environmental protection, the new regulations limit public participation, restrict the scope of the law and environmental analyses, and are wholly intended to fast-track approval for development and infrastructure projects. They even go so far as

to prohibit the government from considering the impacts of its decisions on the climate! Essentially, the Administration is trying to turn the NEPA process from a meaningful information-gathering process intended to steward our natural resources and protect the environment for future generations to a mere paperwork exercise to be completed before approving development proposals.

Over a million people and organizations weighed in during the public comment period following the publication of CEQ's draft regulations this past winter, and 94 percent opposed the revisions. Winter Wildlands Alliance worked with our Outdoor Alliance partners to analyze the draft regulations and submit detailed comments. We also rallied thousands of outdoor recreationists to submit comments to CEQ. Yet, despite significant public opposition, CEQ finalized the new NEPA regulations a mere two and a half months after the public comment period closed. These new regulations—announced by President Trump in July—are the biggest environmental rollback of this Administration (and that's saying something).

## But we're not done fighting to protect NEPA.

Shortly before the CEQ regulations were finalized, we sent a letter to Congress on behalf of 31 other outdoor recreation organizations to call for Congressional oversight of the Administration's attack on NEPA. We've also helped thousands of activists—ordinary (and extraordinary) outdoor recreationists who want to keep the public in public lands—send letters to Congress calling for Congressional oversight. And on July 29, we joined forces with the American Alpine Club and 20 conservation and environmental justice organizations to take the Trump Administration to court for its attacks on NEPA. We're asking the court to strike down CEQ's new regulations because they violate the basic tenets of the National Environmental Policy Act.

We're going to keep working as hard as we can to protect NEPA, but you have an important role to play, too: Vote! Research the candidates on your ballot and vote for those who will work to protect and fight for the things you value. It's not too late to reverse course on NEPA and restore the law to its intended purpose. ✨





Photos: Dawn Kish, Shoshone and Bannock ancestral land

# NEW SNOWSCHOOL STRATEGIES

## FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Our storied past meets an uncertain future

By Kerry McClay, National Snowchool Director

Like a lot of things in 2020, the pandemic brought an unusual winter for SnowSchool. As kids across the country romped through snow-covered forests, dug snowpits, climbed inside igloos, and calculated snow-water equivalent measurements, the season was abruptly cut short, seemingly mid-snowshoe-stride. To make the most of a challenging situation we quickly created an online SnowSchool curriculum in March for homeschooling parents.

SnowSchool ended differently this year, but we still count the season as a success. Based on our 2019-20 survey of SnowSchool sites, SnowSchool engaged more than 32,500 participants across 70 active sites. More than half of the students who participated are underserved, and 66 percent said it was their first time on snowshoes. This success was made possible by the thousands of outdoor educators, parents, chaperones, K-12 teachers, and volunteer educators who prioritized getting these kids outside last winter. Of course, the pandemic still took its toll and when schools sent kids home and canceled field trips, we saw participation drop by 20 percent. On the brighter side, before the pandemic, SnowSchool engaged thousands of students in multiple states in our citizen snow science collaboration with the NASA SnowEx campaign.

Unless you've been living in an ice-cave, you've likely read a few headlines about the many issues surrounding schools reopening during the pandemic. To be clear, we believe the safety of students, teachers, and communities should be the top priority. At the same

time, school closures present challenges for SnowSchool and many other outdoor science education programs. It is clearly difficult to have field trips if you don't have in-person school. Still, the value of time outside and local nature is at an all-time high. So while community buildings, event centers, and even busy trailheads are worthy of avoiding, we are still able to find refuge in the tiny doses of nature happening right outside our windows and doors. This is and always has been the essence of SnowSchool—connecting kids and communities to their local winter wildlands. SnowSchool is well positioned to help kids and families navigate what is likely to be a very challenging winter.

Looking to next winter, we are going to continue developing a robust homeschool curriculum for SnowSchool. We want to continue our work to empower outdoor educators, classroom teachers, and homeschooling families so they can use their backyards and local public lands and parks to help students connect the dots between the snowpack and their watershed. For grades K-12, we're developing specific hands-on science activities that students can do every week of the winter, right out their back door. Working with our local SnowSchool site partners, we'll bring this experience to a snowdrift near you!

With your support, we aspire to continue our efforts to sustain the number of SnowSchool participants nationally and enhance the overall experience for every student this year and for years to come! Again, thank you! Your support makes SnowSchool possible. ❄️





“ We are able to find refuge in the tiny doses of nature happening right outside our windows and doors. This is and always has been the essence of SnowSchool—connecting kids and communities to their local winter wildlands.”





# Winter Wildlands Alliance **Members** Are the Backbone of Our Work

Photo: Terray Sylvester, WyEast



## Meet the newest addition to our staff, Membership Director **Jay Peery**

When I was a kid, as soon as I could confidently put one foot in front of the other, my father taught me how to ski on the gentle contours of a public golf course in my hometown of Spokane, Washington. From those very early days of hiking for turns, to my youth driving all over the Pacific Northwest to race slalom and GS on weekends, there is nothing that brings me more joy than a day out on skis in the backcountry. Joining the staff at Winter Wildlands Alliance fulfills a long-held aspiration of mine to work with a nonprofit focused on protecting access to public lands, conserving the environment, and advocating for wild places.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is the national voice of the winter human-powered recreation community. In my new position, I will be working to grow the ranks of our membership. Anyone who loves winter and wild places should consider joining Winter Wildlands Alliance. Each new member adds more power to the collective voice of our organization and brings their own unique life experience, personality, and insights to our community.

I recently spent time talking with some of our members about their motivation to join us. Some of them are 100 percent focused on the policy and advocacy work we do, and they appreciate being directly in touch with an organization actively doing this important work. Other members found their connection via the Snow School program, or the Backcountry Film Festival, which respectively bring education and stoke to the winter human-powered recreation community. One common thread ran through all of these conversations: a commitment to the ideas and mission embodied by the Winter Wildlands Alliance community.

We work at the confluence of stewardship, advocacy, education, and inspiration, with a clear mission and mandate to protect wild winter places. Please join us and contribute to the collective voice of the winter human-powered recreation community. ❄️





# Reimagining the Backcountry Film Festival

In its 16<sup>TH</sup> year, the Backcountry Film Festival will be coming to you directly.

By Melinda Quick, Events and Marketing Director

The Backcountry Film Festival has always brought people indoors to celebrate our favorite adventures in the outdoors. The 2019-20 season featured many a cheers over Sierra Nevada brews, a brand new logo, sweet gear giveaways thanks to our awesome sponsors, and a line-up of films from an inspiring crew of storytellers, adventurers, and conversation-starters in the backcountry.

But as we all know, COVID-19 interrupted many things, including the tail end of last season's film tour. The pandemic has also dramatically changed the landscape of film gatherings as we know and love them. The health, safety, and access of our backcountry communities is at the forefront of our minds. But we like to focus on the positives. The pandemic gave us an opportunity to reimagine the Backcountry Film Festival. The future of our shared vision has been dynamically rearranged and challenged to present more diverse stories in ways we haven't thought about before.

We hope to present a unique festival experience that inspires action, engages through knowledge, and brings together a community of backcountry storytellers. In order to better serve our communities, lift up the voices that are typically not heard as loudly as others, and to continue celebrating our backcountry experiences, we're leaning in deeper to just that: the "Backcountry" in our name. Over the next season, we're planning year-round film offerings that celebrate

the human-powered experience, even after the snow has melted. Additionally, we're working to provide intentional film funding opportunities for those who share our vision for a diverse and accessible backcountry. A collage of human-powered stories and backcountry-inspired experiences, our film collection will continue to bring wild conversations and inspire action. A mixture of films featuring backyard adventurers, grassroots groups, and more are featured on-screen adjacent to the standard industry, large-sponsor films to relay important messages around policy and advocacy, youth, and backcountry culture across all streams.


With all this in mind, we can't wait to launch into our 16<sup>TH</sup> season this winter featuring a virtual tour and some in-person screening experiences, as deemed safe to do so. Additionally, we'll be sharing a Best of Festival production and other programming that is set to inspire your backyard human-powered adventures all season long.

We're grateful to have such a unique community who shows up in full force at every screening; a wide range of films that speak to many experiences in the snowy backcountry season-after-season; to be able to adapt to changes in the forecast; and to continue sharing the backcountry with our fellow human-powered audience. What is adventure without change? ❄️



**BACKCOUNTRY  
FILM FESTIVAL**





## Celebrating human-powered stories of backcountry spirit

Photo: Bjarne Salen, Meteorite, AK, Land of the Alutiq



# THANK YOU!

WWA thanks our supporters, volunteers and board members for their commitment and dedication to our work promoting and protecting the human-powered winter experience. WWA is grateful to all of our members and supporters at every level. We are proud and grateful to list here all of the individuals, foundations and partners who contributed \$100 or more during fiscal year 2019-20, without whose generosity our work would not be possible.

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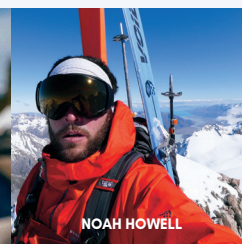
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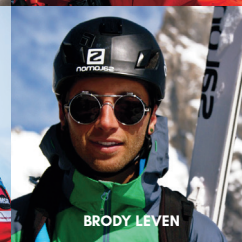
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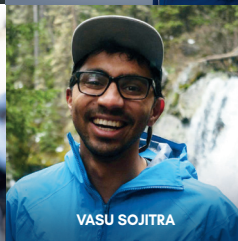
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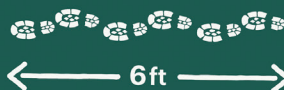
The Recreate Responsibly Coalition is a coalition of 650 nonprofits, outdoor businesses, and land managers developing and sharing best practices to protect each other and our natural landscapes. We are a diverse community brought together by our love of the outdoors and a desire to help everyone experience the benefits of nature safely during this public health crisis. The national coalition is a working group that looks to unify and amplify common-sense guidance about getting outside during COVID-19.

## #RecreateResponsibly

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO



### PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING



### PLAN AHEAD



### PLAY IT SAFE



### EXPLORE LOCALLY



### LEAVE NO TRACE



### BUILD AN INCLUSIVE OUTDOORS



For more information please visit:  
[recreateresponsibly.org](http://recreateresponsibly.org)

7/1/2020