



2021 NEWSLETTER  
FALL ISSUE

# TRAIL BREAK

WINTER  
WILDLANDS  
ALLIANCE



“It’s not just about the skiing. In addition to the wildlife and skiing impacts, there will also be social and economic impacts.”

*Teton Backcountry Alliance’s Gary Kofinas on a proposed expansion of Grand Targhee Resort on Forest Service land.  
(see pg. 12)*



A slice of winter in Glacier Peak Wilderness, Okanagan-Wenatchee National Forest, Washington, ancestral lands of the Sauk-Suiattle, Stillaguamish, Tulalip, Swinomish and Upper Skagit peoples. Photo by Winter Wildlands Alliance ambassador Jason Hummel @jasonhummel.

COVER PHOTO:

Kyle Toohey floats through a backcountry aspen grove in Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah, Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, ancestral lands of the Shoshone, Bannock, Goshute, and Ute peoples. Stay tuned to Winter Wildlands Alliance and Wasatch Backcountry Alliance channels tracking multiple immediate threats to wildlands, including transportation and ski area expansion proposals. Photo by Iz La Motte, @izmottphoto

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## Trail Break, Fall 2021 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.*



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## Land Acknowledgment

# LEST WE FORGET

## THE LEGACY AND CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC LANDS

By David Page, Advocacy Director

Les Arcs, France. Photo by Adam Clark @acpictures.

The United States government manages around 610 million acres of public land, which is more than the entire land mass of Mexico and Central America combined, and more than a quarter of the total territory of the United States. (State and local parks make up an additional 200 million acres of public lands.) All of these lands, for thousands of years before they were seized in the name of the United States of America, were inhabited, traveled through and fought over, depended on and stewarded by Indigenous people—people who were routinely killed or forcibly removed to make way for the public land system we know today.

Today, we call these “public lands” because they are owned collectively by all Americans, including by surviving

Indigenous peoples. They are held in trust for us and managed on our behalf by a variety of different government agencies with varying mandates and priorities. The overall goal is both to meet the needs of current generations—for clean air and water, recreation, timber and other resources, biodiversity, hunting and fishing, carbon sequestration, open space, native ceremonial needs, etcetera—and also to sustain the long-term health and productivity of these places and ecosystems for future generations.

When President Theodore Roosevelt, through some very canny political maneuvering during the first decade of the twentieth century, established the general architecture of our current public lands system, he did so despite powerful





opposition from corporate mining, grazing and timber interests, and deep hostility from many Western settlers who felt they should be able to possess and exploit these lands however they saw fit for personal and short-term gain. It was also a continuation of the centuries-old disregard for tribal and Indigenous claims.

The population of the United States has more than tripled since Teddy Roosevelt's time. Meanwhile, the vital importance of public lands to our collective well-being has become increasingly clear, and the threats—from development, climate change, habitat fragmentation, unmanaged recreation, etcetera—increasingly dire. If we are to make good on the ambitious promise of the public lands project we have inherited, and to

achieve some form of reparation for the way in which these places came to be part of our collective heritage, we must each of us, as citizens in a democracy, participate in their stewardship.

Stewardship can range from taking individual personal responsibility on the ground (Ski Kind!) to actively engaging in administrative and legislative processes as opportunities arise—in other words, showing up to meetings, writing letters, and otherwise pressuring decision-makers at all levels to do the right thing for the places we care about. Our goal at Winter Wildlands Alliance and with our partners across the country is to keep you informed of opportunities to participate. And to make it as easy as possible for you to engage when it matters most.

# Thank you **MEMBERS!**

Our members are a vital part of Winter Wildlands Alliance. You introduce 34,000+ kids annually to snowshoes and snow science. You bring the stoke to the Backcountry Film Festival. You take action for human powered winter recreation. You give voice to the forests, the flurries, the wild winter landscapes. You keep winter wild.

## Members like you make all this possible. Thank you!

You're a valued partner in this work and we want to hear from you. Please scan the QR code below and take a quick survey to let us know your thoughts and perspectives.







Hybrid powder smashing where appropriate on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest, ancestral crossroads and homelands of more than a dozen Indigenous tribes. Photo by Jeff Cricco @jeffcricco.



Photo: @aaroper



Photo: @bjornbauerphoto



## Member Profile:

# KATIE HAWKINS

TRUCKEE, CA

With 20 years of experience in the outdoor industry, Katie Hawkins has led international sales teams and growth initiatives for global brands such as Marmot, Black Diamond, and Gregory. For the past five years, Katie has been spearheading outdoor recreation advocacy and policy efforts on America's public lands and waters, and currently serves as the California Program Manager for Outdoor Alliance.

Katie is an avid backcountry skier, mountain biker, and trail runner. Her passions and love for the Range of Light led her and her family to the jewel of the Sierra—Lake Tahoe. She lives in Truckee, California with her husband, two adventurous sons, and a mischievous dog.

### **What are some issues affecting winter wildlands that are important to you?**

For almost three decades, the US Forest Service has undergone huge reductions in staffing at all levels and programming throughout the agency. Budget constraints have also reduced staffing for restoration, watershed, and recreation by nearly 40%. Meanwhile, visitation increases by an average of more than 800,000 visits year over year. It is critical that we advocate for increased appropriations for the Forest Service as an investment in our public lands and the communities who value them.

### **What is the most important thing you tell others about Winter Wildlands Alliance?**

Your voice matters. As outdoor recreation leaders, we have a responsibility to continue to amplify the amazing work of our organizations, partners, and community members to protect outdoor recreation and conserve the outdoors. Our public lands and waters continue to be threatened by the climate crisis, catastrophic wildfires, droughts, funding shortages, development, and misguided policy ideas. The outdoor community is a powerful force to protect the outdoors and the time is now to have your voice heard.

### **What Winter Wildlands Alliance projects have you worked on/taken action on?**

This past winter season I worked with my colleagues in the Tahoe backcountry community to elevate Tahoe Backcountry Safety Awareness Week ([takecaretahoe.org/backcountry](http://takecaretahoe.org/backcountry)) and Winter Wildlands Alliance's Ski Kind campaign ([skikind.org](http://skikind.org)). It was an amazing experience to work with a broad group of stakeholders that included the Tahoe National Forest, Sierra Avalanche Center, Tahoe Backcountry Alliance, athletes, local guides, and retailers on amplifying the importance of safety while recreating in the Tahoe backcountry.



Photo: Brian White



Photo: Crystal Gugliotta



Photo: Bruce Gugliotta

## Member Profile:

# BRUCE GUGLIOTTA

LYON MOUNTAIN, NY

### **Why and when did you get involved with Winter Wildlands Alliance?**

I found out about WWA through a Facebook ad during the Idaho Gives event. I really connected with the mission, with the advocacy around the science of climate change. I was feeling very defeated with our pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement and my own representative's approach and opinion on climate change and wanted to help contribute to the cause.

### **What is the primary value for you in being a Winter Wildlands Alliance member?**

I have three children—13, 4 and 3—and hope that they will be forever able to know winter.

I love to backcountry ski and I want my children to be able to do that.

### **What are some issues affecting winter wildlands that are important to you?**

Political inaction.

### **What is the most important thing you tell others about Winter Wildlands Alliance?**

This organization uses funding from donations to put people in the places where voice means something. Nothing will change if we just hope it does. We need people talking and presenting to members of Congress and Winter Wildlands Alliance puts the resources to advocacy at the federal, state and local levels.





# ski kind.

**HOWEVER YOU SLIDE OVER SNOW THIS SEASON—**

on skis, on a splitboard, on a snowmobile—please **do it with kindness.** It takes all of us together to keep the backcountry open, accessible, inclusive, and protected.

Dani Reyes-Acosta spreading joy in Teton National Park, ancestral lands of the Shoshone-Bannock, Apsaalooké (Crow), Eastern Shoshone, and Cheyenne. Photo by Winter Wildlands Alliance ambassador Sofia Jaramillo @sofia\_jaramillo5.





A full-page background image of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, a smooth, snow-covered slope descends. Several long, dark shadows of evergreen trees stretch diagonally across the snow from the upper right towards the lower left. In the mid-ground, a few small, snow-laden evergreen trees stand isolated. The background is filled with a dense forest of tall evergreen trees, their branches heavily coated in snow. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

# **DRAWING THE LINE**

**Across the U.S., the Growing Struggle to  
Keep Corporate Ski Resort Development  
Out of the Backcountry**

By Heather Hansman



North of Duluth, up the shore of Lake Superior, a group of obsessive backcountry skiers has been brewing a plan for the Midwest's first backcountry ski area, and a hut-to-hut ski touring route along the North Shore. Rory Scoles, the founder of Superior Highlands Backcountry, the local backcountry non-profit, says that hacking around outside in the winter is core to the culture up there. They're working to get people excited about ski touring, and to bring people into the mountains from across the Midwest.

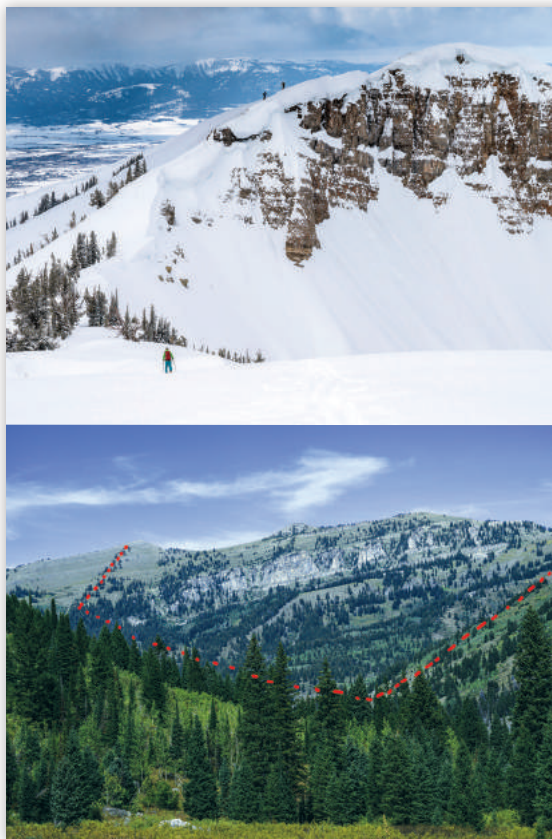
They're holding the first glading parties for the hut system this fall. The centerpiece of the plan would be Moose Mountain, which holds arguably the best backcountry skiing in the Midwest, in 1,000 vertical feet of sugar maple and rolling terrain.

But the backcountry skiing on Moose Mountain, and the hut-to-hut traverse plans, are at serious risk because of an impending corporate ski area expansion into the zone.

In 2017, Lutsen Mountains Corporation, the biggest ski resort in the Midwest, which owns the eastern third of Moose Mountain, proposed an expansion into 496 acres of U.S. Forest Service land. The project, currently under environmental review, would include seven chairlifts, a "mountain-top chalet," two new snowmaking reservoirs, and 1,260 new parking spaces. For context, they currently have 200 parking spots.

"What they're proposing is basically quadrupling the area. It's huge. They're shooting for the moon," Scoles says. "One of the many questions that arises just from the facts: are they fully utilizing the terrain they have? In my estimation they have not."

Scoles says the expansion, which he says feels unnecessary given the current scope



Photos by Howie Garber. (Upper) On the ridge between Mary's and Peaked Mountain, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Wyoming, unceded Indigenous territory, endangered backcountry. (Lower) Proposed South Bowl ski lifts in critical wildlife habitat and beloved backcountry terrain as seen from Teton Canyon, Jedediah Smith Wilderness. (Right) Grand Targhee Resort's Proposed South Bowl Expansion: Will there be adequate review of environmental and socio-economic impacts?

PREVIOUS PAGE: Wild backcountry terrain currently threatened by massive proposed Tamarack Resort expansion, Boise National Forest, Idaho, uncended lands of the Shoshone-Bannock and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce). Photo courtesy Leave Our Lands Alone Alliance (LOLA).

of the mountain, would impact all other recreation in the area. "I own the pro shop, of course I want the ski area to succeed, but not like this," he says.

As soon as they heard Lutsen had submitted a proposal for the expansion, Superior



LEGEND

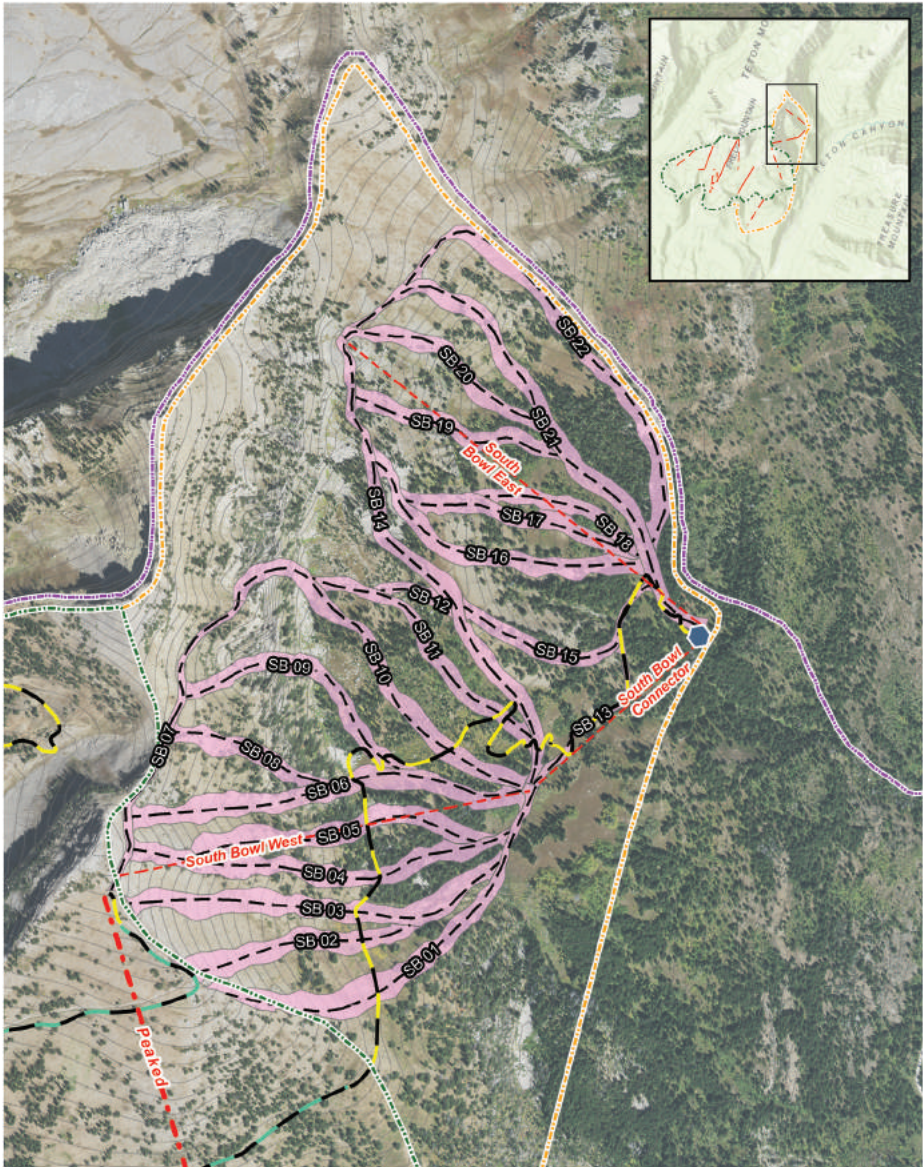
- Existing Lifts
- Previously Approved Lifts
- Proposed Lifts
- Proposed Trail Centerlines
- Proposed Trails
- Proposed Road
- Existing Road to be Upgraded
- Existing Permit Boundary
- Proposed Permit Boundary
- Wilderness Boundary
- Proposed Guest Support Facility



Graphic Scale: 1 inch = 800 Feet  
Contour Interval: 30 Feet



Scoping Figure 4  
Proposed South Bowl Projects



Highland Backcountry put together their own 82-page proposal for a backcountry ski area on Moose Mountain. They're trying to advocate for non-motorized recreation, and for open access to winter recreation on public land. "For the hut-to-hut to be viable we have to have Moose Mountain be available," he says.

But because of how the Forest Service manages ski area permits, groups like Superior Highland Backcountry don't have much of a voice in the process. The resort's interest comes first.

And they're fighting to even have their idea considered. "We've been pushing to make our proposal one of the alternatives," Scoles says, "But so far it's not even being considered."

Skiers in the scrappy mountains of northern Minnesota aren't the only ones pushing back on ski resort expansion and trying to protect space for backcountry recreation on public land, especially as the sport grows. Winter Wildlands Alliance is currently tracking 18 different projects related to ski resort development and expansion on national forest lands. This is in part because of the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act of 2011, which allowed ski resorts to offer year-round recreation, aside from just skiing and snowboarding, and which kicked off a wave of growth. According to a report by the Utah State University Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, 24 resorts have

expanded their operations on Forest Service land in recent years.

Resort expansions can be a way to spur more real estate development on adjacent private lands, and Hilary Eisen, Winter Wildlands Alliance Policy Director, says the goal is often to make a resort more appealing for a sale, especially as a generation of small resort owners ages out of the business. "While we are not opposed to ski areas making infrastructure improvements or even increasing

development within their existing permit area, we do not support, nor does SAROE require, unchecked resort expansions," WWA wrote in a February letter to Chris French, the then-Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the US Department

of Agriculture (which oversees the Forest Service).

And so far, because of current policy and practice, that growth has largely been unchecked. At Mission Ridge, in Wenatchee, Washington, resort owner Larry Scrivanich, who also owns an adjacent 800-acre parcel of private land, is proposing a 30-acre ski terrain expansion, to connect the two pieces, and build a 4,000-bed lift-accessed development. Local backcountry skiers, organized by El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club, say the development, which is slated for a low-water, high fire

**"A 4,407-acre Tamarack Resort would be the seventh largest ski resort in terms of acreage in all of North America, juxtaposed in a town with a population of 152."**

**Sean O'Brien**  
*Leave Our Lands Alone Alliance.*



danger area, would, among other things, impact elk habitat, and cut into a recently-designated winter non-motorized zone.

“They sold it to the community as a ski area expansion, but really it is a resort expansion,” says Gus Bekker, President of El Sendero. “They’re proposing to develop the private land real estate at the expense of the community and the county.”

East of there, in Idaho, Tamarack Resort LLC is proposing a 3,307-acre expansion onto the Boise National Forest that would quadruple the area’s current size of 1,100 acres. Local advocates think it’s a real estate move, instead of a push for better skiing, and an unnecessary one given the skier population. “A 4,407-acre Tamarack Resort would be the seventh largest ski resort in terms of acreage in all of North America, juxtaposed in a town with a population of 152. The entire Valley County has less than 10,000 people,” says Sean O’Brien, from Leave Our Lands Alone Alliance.

Like at Lutsen, O’Brien says they don’t think the resort is using the terrain they already have available, and that the expansion is a financial play to bring in wealthy second homeowners, while cutting off access in the process. “It destroys unspoiled parts of our National Forest system and impacts backcountry users by de facto privatizing public lands; thereby excising backcountry users from any of the terrain. Even though it technically remains public land, if we were to enter the area without a Tamarack pass, they could arrest us for trespassing,” he says.

Those backcountry skiers aren’t necessarily rejecting all development; they just want to have a voice in what happens on the public lands they use and love.

But the framework that the Forest Service uses to approve new projects, and the laws that shape their decisions, come down in favor of the ski industry, and give the entity proposing the project—in most cases a resort company—power to shape the preliminary proposals and the alternatives considered in the required environmental review. Like Scoles is attempting to do at Moose Mountain, backcountry advocates are trying to offer alternatives, and give skiers and other recreators a voice. But doing so will take creative, thoughtful change within the Forest Service.

That fight is particularly clear in the Tetons, where two recent ski area expansion projects have brought this issue to the fore. Like at Lutsen, the backcountry community is struggling to have their voices heard, even when they have proposals they think would be viable alternatives, and when protecting backcountry skiing zones would have cascading impacts on wildlife, socio-local economics, and more.

In March of 2021, the Jackson Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest approved an expansion onto the south side of Snow King, the ski hill that stretches across the south rim above the town of Jackson. Local skiers say they love Snow King, they want it to thrive, but that they didn’t think this expansion, which includes a zip line and new chairlift that access terrain off the backside was valuable for skiing, or for the ecosystem. “A low elevation south facing ski area doesn’t make sense, and it’s encroaching on what was a really nice wilderness area,” says Gary Kofinas, the chairperson of the Teton Backcountry Alliance.

Continued, pg. 20

What is the most important  
thing you tell others about

## **WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE?**

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—Bruce Gugliotta, Lyon Mountain, NY



Photo by Adam Clark @acpictures.

That's why we're excited to announce our new member benefits. As a member of the Alliance, you'll receive:

- ❄️ **A WWA window decal.**
- ❄️ **Member-only discounts to our online store and other retail partners.**
- ❄️ **Members-only early-bird discounts for Backcountry Film Festival and other WWA film screenings.**
- ❄️ **Discounted subscriptions to *Backcountry Magazine* & *Cross Country Skier Magazine*.**
- ❄️ **Exclusive invitations to WWA events, tours, and backcountry offerings.**
- ❄️ **Monthly Stash Blast newsletter.**
- ❄️ **Members contributing \$50 or more annually receive in the mail our bi-annual print magazine Trail Break.**
- ❄️ **Members contributing \$250 or more get first dibs on WWA backcountry tours and offerings.**

**Please renew your membership or  
make a donation to support  
Winter Wildlands Alliance today.**

[winterwildlands.org/membership](http://winterwildlands.org/membership)





Welcome to Snow King. Despite widespread local opposition, Snow King Mountain Resort LLC has pushed forward with expansion of resort facilities on public lands. Bridger-Teton National Forest, Wyoming, unceded homelands of Shoshone-Bannock, Eastern Shoshone and Cheyenne peoples.

And, just as importantly, he says community members didn't feel like they were included in the process, or like their voices were heard when they tried to offer alternatives. "There were lots of comments, it got lots of objections," Kofinas says. "But because the need and purpose statement was so narrow, they didn't consider them. In the end, they said, 'thank you for your objections,' and went forward."

Because of the way the current laws and regulations govern ski area management on public lands, the entity proposing a ski area expansion has a lot of sway in the decision-making process. When Congress passed the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986, it gave the Forest Service the power to approve and regulate permits on public land. In doing so, the Forest Service must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which mandates an environmental review and public comment

opportunities, but there are no additional regulations guiding the process to address the specific issues and challenges associated with ski area development.

When a resort proposes an expansion or development project on National Forest land, the local District Ranger or Forest Supervisor first considers if the project is compatible with their forest plan and other governing regulations. The Forest Service will often work with the project proponent to tweak the proposal as necessary for it to be considered for approval. Once this initial screening process is complete, the Forest Service publishes a notice of intent to analyze the project, kicking off the formal environmental review process—the NEPA process—with a "scoping period" to collect public comment on the initial proposal and input on what issues should be considered in the review.

At the start of the NEPA process, the Forest

Service defines the project's "purpose and need," which frames the whole review. It's essentially why the proposed project should happen. That purpose and need shapes the environmental review, because according to NEPA, the review—whether it's an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA)—must include alternatives, and these alternatives must fit within the purpose and need. In the environmental review, the Forest Service analyzes and compares the impacts of each alternative and pulls elements from the various alternatives to make a final, and presumably informed, decision.

That's where it often breaks down.

"The way that these projects work, they're proponent driven," Eisen says. "The Forest Service doesn't have money lying around to do the environmental review, so if the ski area wants to expand, they have to

pay a third party contractor to do the NEPA analysis. Because the resort gets to choose, the contractor is often the same company that wrote the master development plan. In our view, they're not impartial, and that bias affects the purpose and need statement, as well as the analysis of alternatives."

There are comment periods, where the public can get involved, but if public concerns are deemed to be outside of the scope of the purpose and need statement (which, remember is often shaped by the same people who developed the proposal in the first place), and not included in any of the alternatives, then the Forest Service won't consider those ideas.

Kofinas says that the Snow King NEPA review was comically narrow, and all the alternatives were slight variations of what the resort wanted, so public comments were brushed aside as being outside of the

New Mission LLC proposes resort expansion into Stemilt Basin, Okanagan-Wenatchee National Forest, Washington, Yakima and Wenatchi territory. Photo by Andy Dappen, El Sendero Ski and Snowshoe Club.



scope of the project.

He says they lost the battle on that project, but now they're trying to change tactics and challenge the Forest Service to hold off another proposed expansion on the other side of Teton Pass. There, Grand Targhee is proposing to expand deeper onto the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, into Teton Canyon and Mill Creek, potentially doubling the number of skiers in critical wildlife habitat.

Backcountry skiers want a say and a stake but Kofinas says it's not just about the skiing. In addition to the wildlife and skiing impacts, there will also be social and economic impacts if more resort skiers flood into

Driggs and Victor, Idaho. "Teton Village is already a major destination. If we duplicate that on the west side it will dramatically change the footprint of the Yellowstone ecosystem," Kofinas says.

Because the access road is in Idaho, but the ski area is in Wyoming, all of the benefit from tax revenue goes to Wyoming, while all the costs of waste, emergency services, traffic, employee housing and more, goes to Idaho. Local residents and politicians, including the Teton County, Idaho county commissioners are concerned because the expansion could impact much more than just skiing. So, with what they've learned from—and lost—at Snow King, they're trying to pressure the Forest Service to assess a wide range of alternatives, and

to look at the bigger picture benefits and impacts that can come from different ways of recreating on public land.

Teton County, Idaho is hoping Teton County, Wyoming will work with them on commissioning a socioeconomic study of the expansion, too, to show how widely the impacts might spread. Meanwhile, local activists are reaching out to as many community members as possible, and to collectively come up with options that are

mutually beneficial. But it's not easy.

Expanding ski resorts is about far more than skiing, and the battle in the Tetons is a microcosm for what's happening in all those other ski areas. In Wenatchee, they talk about fire

danger and water access. At Tamarack, O'Brien says they're worried about housing shortages.

That's why Winter Wildlands Alliance, and backcountry advocates across the country, feel strongly about having a voice in the expansion and permitting process. Winter Wildlands Alliance is trying to consolidate the battles and encourage the Forest Service to put more checks on its decision-making process to ensure that the broader interests of the community are taken into account: for climate impacts, wildlife habitat, and social good.

"We would like to see the Forest Service develop regulations to bring consistency to how the agency considers ski resort expansion and development projects, to

**"What they're proposing  
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moon."**

**Rory Scoles**  
*Superior Highlands Backcountry*



ensure that these projects are considered in light of recent executive orders calling on federal agencies to take bold steps to combat the climate crisis and pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all people,” Eisen said in an email, outlining her long-term desires for a more inclusive process. She says it wouldn’t be that hard to open up the process and that it could take a range of issues into account, from meaningfully addressing climate change to building in equity.

“Ski area development can have many effects, from the immediate consequences of developing forest land to far-reaching economic impacts felt in neighboring communities, but the current way in which the Forest Service analyzes these projects fails to capture the full range of effects. In much the same way that the Travel Management Rule guides the NEPA process by outlining specific issues that must be considered when designating routes and areas for motorized use, a Resort Development Rule, or even just formal guidance from

the Washington Office, could outline specific issues, and the scope of those issues, that forests must consider when analyzing resort development proposals,” she went on to say.

That’s what Scoles is trying to show at Lutsen, too. How different ways of backcountry recreating can benefit the community, the ecosystem, and the economy. He wants to think outside of the current framework of expansion to come up with other ways to manage the forest for recreation, ways that allow more community members to be involved. That’s a model that could work in a lot of places.

“My larger goal is to not play whack-a mole forever,” Eisen says. “We’re not trying to ban expansion unilaterally, just change the process so that all stakeholders can have a voice.” She, along with the skiers and riders whose backcountry zones are currently being threatened, want a way to protect the lands they love into the future.

**Join Winter Wildlands Alliance and follow our channels for updates and action alerts!**



**HEATHER HANSMAN** is the environmental columnist for Outside Online. She is the author of two awesome books: *Down River: Into the Future of Water in the West* (Chicago University Press) and the forthcoming *Powder Days: Ski Bums, Ski Towns, and the Future of Chasing Snow* (Hanover Square Press), to be published this coming November. Catch her talking about it in your local backcountry this winter.

Looking out toward Mount Mansfield from Bolton Valley, occupied lands of the Abenaki. Photo by Greg Maino.







Grassroots Partner Profile:

# GREEN MOUNTAINS FOREVER

**Catamount Trail Association Doubles  
Down on Conservation and Backcountry  
Access in Vermont**



For the last 37 years, the Catamount Trail Association (CTA), a long-time grassroots partner of Winter Wildlands Alliance, has been developing and maintaining backcountry terrain in the Green Mountains of Vermont. They got their start in 1984 with the creation of North America's longest backcountry ski trail, the Catamount Trail (CT). Today they continue to steward the CT, have added a number of side trails, and also manage an expanding collection of downhill oriented backcountry zones throughout the state of Vermont with the help of their chapters.

The CTA is also heavily involved in conservation efforts to permanently protect Vermont's mountain lands, and for the last 10 years have been offering free learn-to-ski youth programs to reduce barriers to outdoor recreation for less advantaged young Vermonters, helping them better connect with the local environment, and show them the benefits of a healthy and active lifestyle.

While the CTA's footprint in Vermont is significant, it's run by a very small, committed, crew. At the end of August they welcomed Courtney Dickerson to the team, increasing their full-time staff from two to three. Courtney spent the previous two years working at the CTA through the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board AmeriCorps Program. During these two years Courtney brought new energy to the CTA's programs. She helped identify new

conservation opportunities and contributed to expanding the CTA's project pipeline. She also grew youth program participation from around 200 participants per year to well over 800.

Courtney's addition reflects the CTA's focus and commitment to expanding access to outdoor experiences. With her on board, the CTA aims to more than double participation in youth programs over the next three years while maintaining their commitment to offer these opportunities for free to every participant.

Courtney will also continue to push forward a number of exciting conservation projects that would protect both the Catamount Trail and backcountry skiing access for future shredders. Conservation plays a key role in facilitating sustainable access to backcountry skiing in Vermont, a state where 80% of the land is privately owned. Many access points, trail corridors, and even high elevation summits and ridgelines are privately held, meaning access to many of Vermont's most treasured spaces are subject to yearly landowner permission and handshake agreements.

Outdoor experiences have the potential to unite us all, and by working to ensure as many people as possible have access to these opportunities the CTA has, and will continue to have, an impact that goes beyond skiing, helping to ensure a vibrant future for outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship in Vermont.



Photo: Matt William



Photo: Greg Maino



Photo: Greg Maino

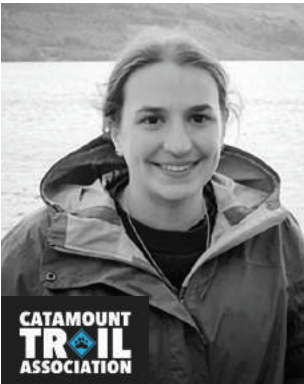


Photo: catamounttrail.org



Photo: Greg Maino



# EMBRACE THE BRR



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watch live in the snow  
+ on-demand

NOV 2021 - MAY 2022

Meadow Lodge, British Columbia, homeland of  
Niitsítapi, Sinixt, Secwépemc and Ktunaxa peoples.  
Photo by Adam Clark @acpictures.



Winter Wildlands Alliance Welcomes  
New Membership Director:

**KATE THORPE**

BOISE, ID

Photo: Chris Parri



Photo: Kate Thorpe



Photo: Kate Thorpe



In June, Kate Thorpe joined our team as Membership Director after more than eight years at Conservation Voters for Idaho. Growing up in New England, she learned to ski, snowshoe, and find joy in shoveling snow. She moved to Idaho in 2011 and holds an M.A. in Public Administration with an emphasis in environmental and natural resource policy from Boise State University. She has also worked for the Idaho Conservation League and the Idaho Nonprofit Center, and has served on the board of the Snake River Alliance.

In this new role she will lead Winter Wildlands Alliance's national membership and outreach program—helping you and people like you connect to, engage in, and support our work! When she's out recreating, she can be found kayaking one of Idaho's world class rivers, mountain biking in the Boise foothills, skiing or snowshoeing in the backcountry, or roving around with her partner Tj and their dogs, Burleigh and Riley.

### **Why and when did you get involved with Winter Wildlands Alliance?**

I learned about Winter Wildlands Alliance when I moved to Boise. As a newcomer, I was looking for volunteer opportunities that served the community and my passion for the outdoors. I was introduced to WWA's SnowSchool program and fell in love with what it was designed to do: connect kids to the world of snow science and winter recreation. I've since continued to follow WWA's work and learn how multifaceted it is. I was beyond excited when the opportunity presented itself to join the staff!

### **What is the primary value for you in being a Winter Wildlands Alliance member?**

I've spent the last ten years working in

conservation and public lands advocacy. There are a lot of great groups doing really good work in this area, but there's only one dedicated to preserving winter wildlands and a quality human-powered snowsports experience on public lands. I love getting out in the backcountry on a quiet and cold winter's day and want to protect that experience for future generations.

### **What inspires you to be active in protecting winter wildlands?**

The feeling when you're out in the woods and the snow is gently falling around you. The awe of gazing up at the mountains when they're completely white. The magic when you wake up early enough when there's been a hoar frost. The feeling of the sun reflecting off the snow on a cold day. I would hate to think we would let climate change, unfettered development, or poor recreation management threaten these things.

### **What is the most important thing you tell others about Winter Wildlands Alliance?**

If you're a backcountry skier, snowboarder, snowshoer, cross-country skier or someone who loves wild winter landscapes on their own terms, then we're your people.

### **Anything else you'd like to share?**

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention how much fun it is to be a part of this community and thank our members for that. Our members are spread across the country. They attend the Backcountry Film Festival. They volunteer with SnowSchool. They take action for the landscapes they love. They support the work. It's a stellar group of people to be associated with!

*Reach out to Kate directly:  
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Winter Wildlands  
Alliance Welcomes  
New Board Member

**MEGAN  
BIRZELL**

SEATTLE, WA



Photo: Rob Birzell

Our volunteer board of directors is a critical part of Winter Wildlands Alliance's nonprofit governance, helping to steer our organization and deepen our connection with communities across the US. This year we are thrilled to add to our board the passion and extensive policy expertise of The Wilderness Society's Washington State Director, Megan Birzell. Megan holds an M.S. in Forestry from Northern Arizona University and a B.S. in Recreation Management from the University of Montana. She has worked to protect, connect, and restore critical wildlands in Montana, Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. Most recently, she led The Wilderness Society's national campaign to protect the 2001 Roadless Rule, working closely with partners in Alaska and Utah. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the North Cascades with her family—ideally on skis—as well as curling up by the fire with a novel on rainy Seattle mornings.

**Why and when did you get involved with Winter Wildlands Alliance?**

I joined the board because WWA brings together my two greatest passions: skiing and wild places. Most of my best memories take place in the mountains in winter—laughter on the skin track, my dog chasing me through the powder, teaching my son to ski—and I want to make sure others have the same opportunities to experience wild winter. I've dedicated my career to advocating for the protection of public lands, and I'm excited to put my experience and expertise to use protecting the winter backcountry experience.

**What is the primary value for you in being a Winter Wildlands Alliance member?**

Connecting with a community of people who share my love of winter in the backcountry and working with them to protect those experiences.

**What inspires you to be active in protecting winter wildlands?**

Skiing in the backcountry has shaped who I am. The quiet, the solitude, the stillness. Lungs and quads burning on the ascent. Face shots! I head to the backcountry to find my center and I want to be able to keep finding those magical moments. I want my son to experience them. The key ingredients are 1) winter, and 2) wild places with few people. I worry that these are at risk of disappearing due to changing climate, overcrowding, and corporate greed. Getting involved with WWA helps me actually do something to protect the winter backcountry experience rather than just watch it fade away.

**What are some issues affecting winter wildlands that are important to you?**

Climate change is obviously the biggest one. Unless we make significant progress soon, I worry that winter—and skiing—will become a thing of the past. Second is how national forests are managed. I work on these issues in my day job, and am acutely aware of the impact an arcane policy can have on the forest and the recreation experience. Policies tend to have long lifespans, so it's important to get them right. Third is safety and overcrowding. Today's gear has made the backcountry more accessible to more people, a lot more people who don't know how to safely navigate avalanche terrain. This makes the backcountry less safe for everyone.



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