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a publication of Winter Wildlands Alliance

TRAIL BREAK

your report for silent snowsports

Volume 2011, Summer Issue



The Final Push to Protect Yellowstone's Magical Winter Season

After more than a decade of political wrangling, nearly a million public comments, and, yes, a few discouraging setbacks, all of us who value the natural sights and sounds of winter in Yellowstone are on the verge of achieving long-term protection for our nation's first national park and most iconic winter sanctuary.

As most WWA members know, the park has made a profound comeback from its days of being overwhelmed by the noise and exhaust of snowmobiles. Thanks to the steadfast work of WWA and our partner organizations, over-snow vehicle traffic in the park has been greatly reduced and visitors have turned increasingly to entering the Park under their own power or on more environmentally-friendly snowcoaches. For the past two winters the park has operated under an interim plan that capped snowmobile numbers at 330 per day and furthered Yellowstone's recovery.

In May, park officials released a Draft Winter Use Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement including a "preferred alternative" that the park proposes to adopt. The plan, once finalized, will take effect in December, 2011 and will guide winter activities in Yellowstone for decades to come. The preferred alternative includes some good ideas that deserve praise. Services for skiers, snowshoers, and other low-impact visitors are improved and include a number of side roads set aside as ski and snowshoe routes. This plan acknowledges, finally, the strong public demand for skiing, snowshoeing and other quiet experiences in Yellowstone's winter season. However, the preferred alternative authorizes numbers of snowmobiles on peak days that are higher than either the interim plan or the average of the past five years, the number above which the park's own scientists note will undercut Yellowstone's resurgent conditions and adversely impact wildlife, natural soundscapes and air quality. WWA and our members continue to advocate for a long-term plan that protects park resources and allows for responsible visitor

access in winter. The comment period on the Draft Plan closed July 18 but there is still one last opportunity to comment on how the park will implement the final plan. For background and instructions on how to comment please go to www.winterwildlands.org and click on the Take Action button.

Please tell the park's new superintendent that you want Yellowstone's winter recovery to continue. That you don't want the park to slide back to levels of snowmobile traffic that disturbed wildlife, made noise a constant unpleasant companion and diminished the experience of visiting Yellowstone to a degree that led many folks – including you? - to regard the first national park in the world as a place to mostly avoid in winter. Thank you!

Mark Menlove, Executive Director
mmenlove@winterwildlands.org

WWA Welcomes Outdoor Alliance Advocacy Fellow

WWA is pleased to welcome Tom Flynn as Outdoor Alliance Grass-top Advocacy Fellow. Working from WWA's Boise office, Tom is responsible for building coalitions of climbers, paddlers, hikers, backcountry skiers and mountain bikers at the local and regional levels to positively impact conservation policy at the state, regional and national level.

While the position is based in WWA's office, the Grass-top Advocacy Fellow works for the Outdoor Alliance, a coalition of six national human-powered recreation organizations which WWA helped found in 2005. Serving as the human-powered outdoor recreation community's collective voice on public lands and waters issues, Outdoor Alliance includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicyclists Association and Winter Wildlands Alliance.

Tom is a recent graduate of Dartmouth College where he was president of the Dartmouth Outings Club during the club's centennial year. In his Outings Club capacity he worked with clubs

across the spectrum of Outdoor Alliance activities and brings a great background in and connection to human-powered recreation.

The two-year fellowship is funded through the Wyss Fellows Program, REI and contributions from the Outdoor Alliance member organizations. The Wyss Fellows Program is designed to provide campaign experience and training for individuals who have the potential to become future conservation leaders. The Grass-top Advocacy Fellow will be co-mentored by WWA Executive Director Mark Menlove and Outdoor Alliance's Washington, DC-based Policy Architect Adam Cramer.

Keep it Cool - Summer Membership Campaign

We all have ways in which we love the winter season, whether it is getting out on skis in the backcountry, exploring new Nordic trails or sipping hot chocolate by the fire. By protecting those places in which we recreate or visit, we ensure that we will preserve the breathtaking beauty of winter for generations to come.

Join Winter Wildlands Alliance today and together we will keep it wild. Visit www.winterwildlands.org or call Lana Weber at (208)343-1630.

For regular updates, follow us on Facebook or find us on Twitter.

Colorado's White River National Forest Gets it Right

The White River National Forest contains some of Colorado's best and most popular backcountry ski and snowboard terrain. This spring the long awaited Record of Decision on Colorado's White River Travel Management Plan was released. To the delight of the human-powered snowsports community the USFS not only included winter travel planning, but did so in a thorough and just process. The Travel Management Plan addresses winter travel and over-snow vehicles by making "area-wide decisions as to whether to allow motorized and non-motorized use in a particular area" and "through standards and guidelines and management area prescriptions, dictate[s] where open, restricted, and prohibited areas of winter motorized activity can occur."

Much of the Plan's analyses were guided by "quality user experience." Based on robust user data, the Travel Management Plan clearly shows the majority of users of the Forest's vast backcountry desire quality opportunities for quiet non-motorized recreation. The recognition the Plan gives to the shifting value of our National Forest from resource extraction to sustainable recreation is refreshing. In particular, WWA is pleased by the acknowledgement

of user conflicts and separation of uses, with the attention given to wildlife conservation and the recreation based economies of local communities.

The Travel Management Plan avoids a common pitfall of ignoring user conflict issues and instead acknowledges and addresses them. The Plan recognizes and considers the impacts motorized recreation has on air quality, visibility, soundscapes and visitor safety. The Forest Service clearly articulates a process termed ‘invasion and succession’ whereby traditional uses are displaced by more recent innovations in recreation use and technology. By recognizing the necessity of separation of uses in some areas in order to reduce conflict, the Plan generates a higher quality experience for all forest users.

Winter Wildlands Alliance whole-heartedly endorses the White River Travel Management Plan and believes the Plan is a great model of how winter recreation and travel can be successfully managed. Hats off to all our members and advocates that participated in the process. **Great work!**

Forrest McCarthy, Public Lands Director
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Day of Action Project Will Focus on Winter Wilderness Stewardship Values

For the past couple of months we have been thrilled to partner with Clif Bar on their Meet the Moment photo sharing campaign. When you visit www.meetthemoment.com, upload a photo of you in your outdoor moment, and dedicate it to WWA, Clif Bar donates \$5 to us! It’s an easy way to support Winter Wildlands and share the joy of the outdoors. The big question though, is “what do we plan on doing with that donated money?” Drumroll please...on October 1st 2011 WWA is putting together our first annual Day of Action. This Day of Action is part of our Winter Wilderness Stewardship Project, designed to educate and engage a local constituency in wilderness stewardship in order to protect the wilderness character of a local forest.

The Day of Action project will take place in two main locations near Yellowstone Park and Grand Teton National Park. In these areas, WWA volunteers will be installing permanent wilderness boundary markers at key locations on the Jedediah Smith and Winegar Hole Wilderness Areas and will install education and informational kiosks at key winter trailheads giving backcountry skiers, snowshoers and snowmobile users information and tips on

backcountry winter travel and wilderness stewardship. WWA will utilize the Winter Wilderness Stewardship Project as a template for better winter management of wilderness areas throughout the country.

Are you interested in joining WWA and Clif Bar for a day in the dirt? Please email Shelley at spursell@winterwildlands.org. And please remember to check out www.meetthemoment.com to share your awesome photos and stories.

Shelley Pursell, Outreach and Events Coordinator
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Grassroots Spotlight

Montana Backcountry Alliance Work Promotes Non-Motorized Zone on Lolo Pass

At an elevation of 5,233 feet, Lolo pass is the highest point of the historic Lolo Trail between the Bitterroot Valley in Montana and the Weippe Prairie in Idaho. Nez Perce Indians used the trail in the 18th century and the Lewis and Clark Expedition trekked westward over the pass on their snowbound journey in September 1805. Lolo Pass is only 40 miles from Missoula and is a popular destination for backcountry skiers, snowboarders and snowshoers seeking quiet landscapes and untracked snow.

Thanks to the work of WWA Grassroots Group, Montana Backcountry Alliance (MBA) and its members, two key areas on Lolo Pass may soon be set aside as non-motorized winter recreation zones. Under its Forest Plan Revision, the Lolo National Forest Service is considering non-motorized designation for the two long-time backcountry ski and snowboard favorites known locally as “Crystal Theater” and “The G-Spot.” The designation would also apply to the roads leading to these areas, which during summer and fall are already closed to motorized vehicles. WWA and MBA rallied strong support for the proposal during the recent public comment period and are working directly with the local district ranger office.

Part of the Montana Legacy Project in which the Forest Service acquired 39,249 acres of former Plum Creek Timber Company lands, these two areas combine easy access, diverse terrain, low avalanche danger and dependable snow cover. Designating these areas on Lolo Pass for quiet winter recreation will promote a balance and diversity of winter recreation for all visitors and protect forest resources for future generations.

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Backcountry Spotlight



Pedal Your Turns

WWA's Backcountry Partner program is a unique partnership opportunity for backcountry-oriented retail stores, guide services, outfitters and other small businesses who support, and want their customers to know they support, Winter Wildlands Alliance’s mission of promoting and preserving winter wildlands and a quality human-powered snowsports experience on public lands. Pedal Your Turns recently approached WWA with the interest in joining our Partner Network. Based out of Eugene, Oregon, Pedal Your Turns promotes environmental consciousness and responsibility through bicycle-supported backcountry snow sliding expeditions utilizing a mix of pedal-power and public transportation (bus, train) in order to get them from the doorstep to the skin track. We are excited to share their recent trip report from Eugene, OR to Tioga Pass, CA. You can check out more information and follow Fred and Sam on their blog at <http://www.pedalyourturns.com>

Pedal Your Turns: Sierra Nevada Expedition

A pedal-powered backcountry tour from Eugene, Or to Tioga Pass, CA.
Fred Sproat and Sam Appelbaum

It was over a year ago that the high peaks and easy access of the Eastern Sierra Nevada Range captivated our collective imagination. At the end of a three day backcountry tour we realized we only scratched the surface of the range of light and were already planning a second trip on the drive back home.

We dreamed of returning to this range but riding on two wheels instead of four and burning calories instead of gas. Why not make our return a pedaled powered backcountry expedition? Why not earn our turns all the way from the doorstep instead of just the trailhead? We were environmental studies graduates from the University of Oregon and this trip was our direct action response to the issues that were taught and tested in lecture halls and debated at bars.

Our 630 mile ride began amidst Eugene’s vibrant bike culture and weaved through roads where cyclists were few and far between. We pedaled through towns where the idea of bikes as a viable form of transportation was an afterthought. We left Eugene with little more than torn out pages from a road atlas and a vague idea of the route we’d take. The allure of Tioga Pass’s peaks and couloirs made our loaded down 80 pound bikes feel manageable and like we were pedaling with a purpose.

We arrived in Lee Vining, California after nine full days of riding and felt like the bike tour was done and the backcountry tour was about

to begin. The ten mile 3,000 foot climb up Tioga Pass was over before noon and 24 hours later we found ourselves dropping into our first lines. We made turns through spring corn and climbed granite lined couloirs. The profundity of the trip hit home atop 13,000 ft. Mt. Dana. For most folks the climb begins at 10,000 feet and takes three hours. For us it began at 400 feet and took two weeks. The bliss, freedom, and flow of sliding down its north face was only paralleled by biking back down to our camp that night.

Coming to a town near you! It’s the 2011-12 Backcountry Film Festival

Wow, it looks like summer has finally arrived and my thoughts are already returning to winter and the 2011-12 Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival. A celebration of the backcountry experience, the Backcountry Film Festival highlights non-motorized winter travel through film and storytelling. The premiere will be on November 11, 2011 (yes, that is 11-11-11), in Boise, Idaho and several other key locations including Seattle and Spokane, Wash. The festival will then travel the country with over 60 tour stops. Want to make sure the tour comes to your town? Please contact us for information on how you can host the film festival in your town or check out our website www.backcountryfilmfestival.org for more information.

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