



2020 NEWSLETTER  
WINTER 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.

Snowshoeing on the Boise National Forest, ancestral land of the Bannock and Shoshone.

Photo: Sue Birnbaum, explorumentary.com

The Winter Wildlands Alliance Newsletter  
VOLUME 2019/20 WINTER ISSUE



**WINTER  
WILDLANDS**  
ALLIANCE

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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:

Jim Morrison getting early season, cold powder on the west shore of Lake Tahoe, CA, ancestral lands of the Washoe (Wa She Shu) People, now public lands managed by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the United States Forest Service. (See California Report, page 12).

Photo: Hilaree Nelson



# SKINTRACK MIND

## Thoughts During the Uphill Journey

A letter from the Executive Director of Winter Wildlands Alliance

Wildness touches people in diverse ways. For me, wild landscapes connect, motivate, inspire and calm my being. I feel an awe that comes with new experiences, or even the same experiences on a different day. Venturing into the wild forces me to be truly in the moment, which never fails to give me a new perspective and a certain awareness. I am passionate about protecting winter wildlands because without fail they give us unique experiences and important spiritual refuge.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is made up of members, communities, groups, and organizations who are all motivated to stand for the places we love. Together, we are a unified voice. It's our mission to protect and keep these spaces wild and quiet. Our work protects these landscapes year-round; what we do is not limited to the season when snow falls. But winter stands apart from other seasons. It offers a refuge from the human landscape and it ignites courage and passion for us to uphold pristine, unspoiled places. Public lands belong to all of us, yet they are constantly threatened.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is forging a path ahead and the future is bright:

- **Our national SnowSchool program is fostering the next generation of student scientists, explorers, and stewards, giving under-served kids experiences on snow and in the field. This year, our students are collecting valuable snowpack data to help NASA scientists.**
- **In its 15<sup>TH</sup> year, the Backcountry Film Festival continues**

**to grow with a tour that visits over 100 locations nationwide.**

- **At our 8th biennial Grassroots Advocacy Conference, we chose the theme "Growing Equity in Public Lands" not because we have the answers, but because we want to ask questions and do the work to be better.**
- **Climate change is the biggest threat to our future and what we do is geared not only toward saving winter, but mitigating the impacts of warming on the places we love.**
- **As forest planning continues, we are engaged to ensure our advocacy and policy efforts have lasting impacts and set precedents for quiet, wild winter places locally and nationally.**

We look forward to continuing our positive impact across the country, and keeping you involved. Our mission is always to defend, advocate for, and engage with winter recreation on public lands. And we're continuing to learn, evolve, and break new trail.

My personal gratitude goes out to our community, members, and alliances. If you aren't a part of it yet, we need you.

Join Us - Keep Winter Wild!



Todd Walton, Executive Director



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# Wildlife Interrupted



**Scientists are documenting the profound impact of human-powered recreation on imperiled wildlife during the winter.**

By Hilary Eisen, Policy Director

Photos: Josh Metten/Ecotour Adventures

**T**he Teton Range in Wyoming is a special place for backcountry skiers. Its unmistakable skyline holds some of the best and most iconic skiing to be found in the world. The Tetons are also an important refuge for wildlife. Many species make their home in the Teton Range, including the threatened Teton bighorn sheep herd.

Historically, bighorn sheep were abundant and widespread in the Tetons. Biologists estimate more than a thousand bighorns once lived in the range, although it's impossible to say for sure. Every fall, they migrated out of the mountains to winter in warmer, drier, low-elevation foothills. However, development and human impact have affected the bighorn's annual migration patterns.

Over the past several decades, bighorn sheep in the Tetons have stopped moving to lower elevations for winter in order to avoid humans. Now, they live year-round in the high reaches of the range. As a result, their population has dropped dramatically, to approximately 100 animals. Biologists fear this unique population may go extinct.

For a long time, we've understood that motorized recreation disturbs wintering wildlife, and land managers often close winter ranges to motor vehicles to protect vulnerable species. However, new research is showing that non-motorized recreation, like backcountry skiing, can disturb wintering wildlife, too.

To better understand why bighorns are struggling in the Tetons, researchers spent two years tracking sheep and people throughout the range. While many factors contribute to their decline, the impact of backcountry skiing is significant. Sheep are sensitive to human activity, especially when they are confined to tiny, windswept alpine islands. When a skier comes into view, the sheep run, often through deep snow, sometimes for a long time, to find a new "island" with no sign of people. This skittishness consumes more energy than the sheep can afford. Combine this with the ever-present threat of avalanches, and many bighorns don't survive the winter.

As a conservation organization that speaks for the backcountry ski community, Winter Wildlands Alliance is uniquely positioned to

advocate for winter wildlife conservation. We work with public land management policy experts who are well-versed in using policy tools to protect winter wildlife habitat from human impacts. We're passionate about skiing, but we recognize that people are mobile and have a range of options of where to ski. Wildlife don't have that same luxury. It's our responsibility to ensure recreation doesn't negatively impact wildlife.

Protecting winter wildlife habitat has long been a conservation priority on both public and private lands because it's critical to ensuring wildlife populations persist. A 2019 study in the northern Rockies found that both motorized and non-motorized winter recreation disturbs female wolverines, causing them to stop using areas within their home range where lots of recreation occurs. An animal's home range is defined as the region that encompasses all the resources an animal requires to survive and reproduce. Home ranges are never bigger than what an animal truly requires, so anything that causes an animal to lose or stop using part of its home range is cause for concern.

Winter is a tough season for almost every



critter, and animals are sensitive to human activities whether we're on foot or astride a motor. Food is scarce. It takes a lot of energy to stay warm and move around. It's also when many females are pregnant, and late winter and early spring is when many species give birth. As conservation-minded skiers who value wildlife, we have a responsibility to work with land managers and biologists to ensure that our recreation isn't harming the wildlife we share the landscape with.

Solutions are still being developed. Right now, we're working with land managers, other conservation groups, winter recreationists, and biologists to develop management recommendations that the Forest Service can use during winter travel planning to protect wolverines while continuing to provide winter recreation opportunities.

Likewise, this winter in the Tetons, we'll be working with skiers, biologists, land managers, and wildlife enthusiasts to find a

way to protect the Teton bighorn sheep herd. If you would like to get involved or learn more, attend one of the collaborative meetings and help us figure out the best course forward for the sheep and skiers of the Teton range. The meetings will be in Jackson, Wyoming, on January 23, February 13 and 20, and April 9. \*

*For more information, contact Hilary Eisen at Winter Wildlands Alliance or the Teton Bighorn Sheep Working Group at [TetonSheep.org](http://TetonSheep.org).*

“Historically, bighorn sheep were abundant and widespread in the Tetons. Biologists estimate more than a thousand bighorns once lived in the range.





# Skiing the Pacific Crest Trail

**On California's Plumas National Forest, skiers push to protect a historic backcountry ski route along the PCT.** By Julie Brown

Every summer season, once the snow melts out, hundreds of thousands of people hike at least one section of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in California's Sierra Nevada. Nearly 8,000 through-hikers are awarded permits to cover the entire trail from Mexico to Canada each year. To date, despite its 50-year history as a Congressionally-designated National Scenic Trail, only a handful of strong winter mountaineers have successfully completed long traverses of the trail through the deep snows of the High Sierra Nevada. But with improved backcountry ski technology and the increasing popularity (and feasibility) of multi-day touring, this is changing.

The number of people getting out on an average winter's day to explore the solitude and quiet along some of the most popular and accessible sections of the trail, such as the classic high-route ski tour from Sugar Bowl to Squaw Valley (via Tinker Knob), or from Donner Summit to the Peter Grubb Hut (both on the Tahoe National Forest), has exploded. And with increasing use has come increased recognition of the need to protect the nonmotorized character of the trail, not just in summer but in all seasons.

One section that skiers are especially excited about is called the Lost Sierra Traverse. Connecting the historic mining towns of Johnsville and Onion Valley, the Lost Sierra Traverse is a multi-day backcountry ski adventure on the Plumas National Forest, north of Tahoe, that follows a section of the Pacific Crest Trail. This is old-time gold country, and is actually home to some of the oldest ski towns in the United States. Miners used to race on longboard skis here starting in the 1860s, and for many decades—even into the first decades of the 20th century—winter travel and mail delivery were accomplished exclusively on skis.

The legacy of human-powered winter recreation continues to this day with the work done by the Plumas Ski Club, and on the advocacy side by one of our grassroots partners, Friends of Plumas Wilderness (FOPW). Aside from working tirelessly to protect wildlife, wilderness and roadless areas in the Lost Sierra region, and the important Middle Fork of the Feather River watershed, FOPW has recently served as a key voice for backcountry skiers and snowboarders.

Throughout the Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) planning process on the Plumas National Forest, as the forest worked to delineate specific areas and trails for motorized and non-motorized recreation, FOPW has been advocating — alongside our friends at the Pacific Crest Trail Association — for an ample non-motorized corridor along the Pacific Crest Trail in wintertime. Ideally, this corridor would include a non-motorized buffer of at least 500 feet on either side of the trail, with designated motorized crossing zones so that snowmobiles would still have access to appropriate OSV terrain without unduly impacting the non-motorized winter trail experience.

"The Lost Sierra Traverse has one crux area," says Darrel Jury, president of FOPW, but a lot of it is open ridges." Compared to the bigger mountains farther south, the Lost Sierra is known for thicker woods, rolling slopes, and deep snowfall. The ski terrain may not be quite as steep or sustained as in the High Sierra, but it's remote—almost as remote today as it must have seemed to the early European prospectors who stumbled into ancient Maidu territory in the early 1850s.

"You can truly get lost and get away," says Jury. ❄️

For more information about ongoing efforts to protect the Lost Sierra Traverse and the Pacific Crest Trail, visit [plumaswilderness.org](http://plumaswilderness.org) and [pcta.org](http://pcta.org).



*Spring ski touring the Lost Sierra Traverse (ancestral Mountain Maidu territory) with Darrel Jury, Executive Director of Friends of Plumas Wilderness. Photo: Darla DeRuiter.*



*The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail traverses 10 National Forest Units across the Sierra Nevada, 7 of which are now in the process of winter travel and recreation planning. See California Report, p. 12. (Map prepared by Pacific Crest Trail Association)*



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# SKATING 100 MILES THROUGH THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

O

Ambassador Luc Mehl's epic traverses of Alaskan wilderness give us a glimpse of a changing climate, and the vast, remote landscapes we're fighting to protect.

By Julie Brown  
Photos: Luc Mehl

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Back in the middle of November, Luc Mehl was sitting at his desk in an environmental data science lab in Anchorage, Alaska, searching for an elusive sheet of ice.

Mehl is an ambassador for Winter Wildlands Alliance. A modern day explorer, he has a penchant for long, immersive, human-powered traverses that allow him to experience Alaskan wilderness. He estimates that he has traveled overland, by his own might, for some 10,000 miles through the Brooks Range, up and over Denali, and across all corners of the vast state. He's completed a dozen or so Alaskan Mountain Wilderness Classics, an underground, minimalist, leave-no-trace event that ends hundreds of miles from its start. Mehl's newest passion is Nordic ice skating, and it's not the average lap around the ice rink. He skates for hundreds of miles on frozen sheets of ice.

There's a catch: ice is hard to find, and climate change is making it harder.

Ice in the Arctic is disappearing, rapidly and faster than scientists ever expected. Air temperatures are soaring. Snow cover and Arctic sea ice are exceptionally low. The Greenland Ice Sheet is shrinking. These findings are documented by more than 80 scientists from across the world in the Arctic Report Card, published in December 2019 by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. The loss of ice is pushing marine species farther north in search of colder waters, impacting native people who have fished these waters for all of time and are now reliant on alternative

They saw caribou. The only humans they encountered were standing around fishing holes at the edge of Selawik, just around the first bend in the ice. One pair was an Iñupiat father and son, pulling fish out of a net. Curious, Mehl and Mills skated over to the fisherman and listened as the Iñupiat father described native fishing techniques. They were looking for mud shark, a type of fish Mehl had never heard of, even though Mehl also grew up in a rural Alaskan village on a river, hundreds of miles to the south.

As a Westerner who passes through these places purely for recreation's sake, Mehl says he has intentionally been working on skills and seeking education so he can have healthy interactions with Native Alaskans. A month earlier, he attended Winter Wildlands Alliance's Grassroots Advocacy Conference to learn tools for supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoors. Now, he was in the Arctic, listening to an Iñupiat fisherman describe a skill that his people have relied on for generations.

Sadly, those traditional fishing skills may not serve the Iñupiat's youth as much as they served their elders. In the Arctic Report Card, the Bering Sea Elders Group describes the changes they've seen in the ice and how climate change has affected their primary food source: marine animals. They fear for their young people: "We worry that they will grow without the same foods and places that we have known throughout our lives," they report.

The Iñupiat fishers were the only people Mehl and Mills would see on their journey. They said goodbye to the man and his son and

## There's a catch: ice is hard to find, and climate change is making it harder.

food sources. The melting permafrost is releasing so much carbon, scientists say the feedback loop to runaway climate change that we've feared has arrived.

For skiers like Mehl, climate change is delaying the arrival of snow and lengthening the shoulder seasons. To fill the gap, Mehl has taken up this new hobby of long-distance ice skating. On this day in November, scouring information from all sorts of resources—social media, satellite and radar imagery, bush pilot reports—Mehl found what he was looking for. Word came from a pilot friend of a friend who had just returned from a flight up north along the Arctic Circle: Selawik Lake was frozen.

A few days later, Mehl and his partner in adventure, Greg Mills, were lacing up skates and shouldering packs to embark on an ice skating traverse across a lake system between Selawik and Kotzebue, two rural Alaskan Villages on the far northern slope of the state. Of the 125 miles from start to finish, they ended up skating 110-95 miles in the first two days, entirely on ice. More distance if you count the squiggles in their tracks, Mehl says. With a tailwind pushing them forward, they followed lake shores and coastline, north and south, crossing into the Arctic Circle three times.

"I'm watching Greg, and he's getting 20, 25 feet out of each stride," Mehl says. "We're traveling through awesome country. It's not big mountainous country, but it's two feet of ice with all these cool textures, bubbles, and cracks."

skated into the distance, heading the opposite direction of town.

"What Alaska has that's unique is the extensive wilderness," Mehl says. "The fact that you can go not just 120 miles without seeing anybody, but 1,000 miles."

The temperatures hovered between zero and negative 10 degrees the entire time. The sun was never very high in the sky. It arced low just along the horizon, stretching out the hours and colors of dusk and dawn. Mehl described streaks of purples and reds, and then darkness. They'd skate just a few hours into the dark, with headlamps beaming a path forward, to gain a bit more distance before calling it for the long night. They slept two nights at emergency shelter cabins maintained by the Northwest Arctic Bureau, and one night in a tent.

Four days after they set off, they skated into the village of Kotzebue, took off their skates, and got a hamburger.

"I came home with the sense that I got away with something, like I caught this prize and it feels even more valuable because of how uncommon it is to have those conditions align, not just the environmental ones, but to have the vacation time from work and to have that amazing interaction with the Iñupiat fisherman," Mehl says. "I'm still totally high on life from that trip."

The day after their ice skating adventure, a storm rolled in, closing the window of opportunity and covering the ice with snow. ❄







## WHAT BACKCOUNTRY ADVOCACY LOOKS LIKE IN THE

# NORTHEAST

The woods of New Hampshire are dense and thick. To ski them, Granite Backcountry Alliance is cutting glades. By Julie Brown. Photos: Granite Backcountry Alliance

In the Northeast, advocacy and environmental issues for backcountry skiers are profoundly different than in the West, says Tyler T. Ray, the founder of Granite Backcountry Alliance.

“Anyone who is from New England understands that in order to ski, trees need to be cut,” Ray says.

The forests of the Northeast are dense second growth, a comeback from a timber boom of the long-ago past that devastated the landscape. Such density of immature trees makes skiing the Northeast’s frigid slopes nearly impossible without some type of forestry work, Ray says. That’s true for whether you’re skiing in or out of bounds. Many of the founding trails for East Coast ski resorts were cut by the Civilian Conservation Corps—part of President Franklin D.

Roosevelt’s New Deal—in the first part of the 20th century.

Now, glading terrain for backcountry skiing is the work of nonprofits like Granite Backcountry Alliance, which was established in 2016. They’ve been part of Winter Wildlands’ network of grassroots groups since their beginning. Developing ski glades for backcountry skiing is only part of Granite Backcountry’s mission. They also seek to unify the backcountry community, forge a sustainable method of cutting trees legally, and build trust and partnerships with land managers.

“You could say that what we really do is practicing forestry management,” Ray says.

A primer for those of us in the West who might balk at the thought of a grassroots group

cutting down trees: Granite Backcountry Alliance professes a low-impact, sustainable method of cutting. Everything they do is in partnership with the land management agency or authority (eg. the U.S. Forest Service), with environmental review. They avoid sensitive habitat for wildlife. They lay all the slash on the ground to mitigate soil erosion. They do not cut trees that are bigger than three inches in diameter, and they limit the width of their glades, or ski runs, to 30-50 feet wide. They create uneven-aged cutting, to help maintain the forest’s resiliency against invasive species. Their glading design incorporates islands and braiding strategies, to the point where it looks as if the glading never happened.

“You can’t see it from the road and if you didn’t have a map, it would probably be hard to find,” Ray says. “So you know, it’s really





low-impact stuff that we're doing. And of course, on the East Coast, many skiers are used to tight lines and quick turns, and that's pretty much what they get."

Since its founding in 2016, the group has generated 30,000 vertical feet of skiing. They have eight glade zones dotted in the mountains between Franconia, New Hampshire, and Rumpford, Maine. The terrain caters to a range of abilities, from beginners to experts, and they feature a mix of terrain features. Each zone is essentially its own small ski area, with its own charisma, style, and local characters—but without chairlifts, of course.

Ray is a lawyer based in North Conway. He owns a legal practice that centers on outdoor recreation and his mind revolves around skiing. He says his motivation for starting Granite Backcountry Alliance had a lot to do with his desire to ski the mountains around his hometown.

"I look around in our town and there's 360 degrees of mountains and I basically can't ski on any of them. I can just look at them," Ray says. "To me, that was very frustrating and I felt bottled up. These mountains should and can be enjoyed responsibly."

Turns out, a lot of other people felt similarly. Granite Backcountry Alliance hosts about 18 events a year, including a dozen or so glade days. At each glade day, Ray says volunteers number in the realm of 70 or so.

"We really caught the groundswell," Ray says. "I don't even think it's crested yet. We're still on the rise."

Granite Backcountry Alliance has generated a lot more than ski turns in eastern glades. Last winter, backcountry skiing at three of their glade zones yielded close to \$1 million in spending at local communities nearby.

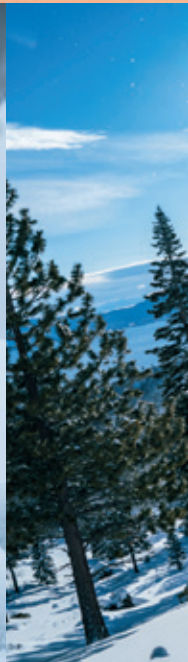
"That's the basis for all of this, let's use the assets in our communities in a positive way to recreate and be outside. Why not?," Ray says. "And why does skiing have to include a chairlift?" ❄️







Inyo National Forest, Payahūünadū, ancestral Nuumu/Paiute lands. Photo: Lesley Allen.  
USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, ancestral Washoe lands. Photos: Ming Poon.





FOREST SERVICE WINTER RECREATION

# PLANNING 2.0

As the deeply contentious OSV designation process moves on to Lake Tahoe and the Eastern Sierra, is there any hope for a more collaborative approach?

By David Page, Advocacy Director  
Photos: Lesley Allen and Ming Poon



On a rainy Monday evening in December, with an early snowpack already turning to dirty mush on the slopes above Lake Tahoe, the U.S. Forest Service's Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) closed a public scoping period on its proposed basin-wide winter recreation plan. After more than four years of halting NEPA process on five other forests across the northern and central Sierra Nevada—Lassen, Eldorado, Stanislaus, Tahoe and Plumas National Forests—and several years of scoping on the LTBMU, including a long series of tense meetings and public open-houses across the region, broad misinformation campaigns by specific user groups, and ongoing less-than-civil social media trolling, the divide between folks who prefer to recreate on motorized over-snow vehicles (OSVs) and those who prefer to get out under their own power, away from motors, still seemed as wide and un-crossable as a wild river canyon in springtime. But maybe there was hope for a better way forward.





Inyo National Forest,  
Payahüünadü, ancestral  
Nuumu/Paiute lands.  
Photo: Lesley Allen.

“We know it won’t be easy. But for the sake of this nationally-beloved landscape, we have to try.”

There’d been no final decisions made—yet. The final objection resolution meeting on the last of the five forests, the Plumas, would take place early in 2020. And rumor had it we’d see Records of Decision (RODs) on two or three final plans, starting with the Lassen, before mid-year. The extent to which these final plans might actually solve issues of use conflict, establish minimum snow depth requirements, protect access to important non-motorized frontcountry zones, protect sensitive wildlife, or the nonmotorized character of the Pacific Crest Trail—and/or actually impact snowmobiling in any significant way—remained to be seen. But all signs pointed to decisions that were, on the one hand, slightly better from a human-powered recreationist’s point of view, but on the other hand not likely to make anyone—of any species—particularly full of joy.

A number of attempts at collaborative dialogue between stakeholder groups along the way—especially on the Lassen and Tahoe—had yielded no formal compromises, and generally the Forest Service decision makers on each forest, with some help from the Regional Office, were left to “split the baby” as they saw fit. On some levels there seemed to be new hope on the LTBMU for a better, more collaborative approach to planning. For one thing, the unit supervisor had chosen (wisely, we think) to broaden the scope to include not merely where snowmobiles should or should not be allowed, but also what might be done to minimize trailhead conflict and to improve winter recreation more broadly by designating family snowplay areas and by addressing key plowing, parking and staging issues.

Another possible advantage on the LTBMU was that the unit was not legally required, as the first five forests had been under the terms of a 2013 settlement agreement, to include in its range of alternatives one that had been submitted by Winter Wildlands Alliance and partners (the “nonmotorized alternative”), and another submitted by motorized intervenors, including the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association and Blue Ribbon Coalition (the “motorized alternative”). The LTBMU, by contrast, if it so desired, had an opportunity here to develop a more nuanced, even collaboratively-developed set of alternatives as part of a full NEPA process.

Unfortunately, at the close of scoping, despite his calls for greater collaboration between user groups, the Forest Supervisor on the LTBMU seemed instead to be leaning toward a shortcut

Environmental Assessment, rather than a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), with only limited analysis and public input on a forest-wide project that would clearly have significant impacts to the human and natural environment. This was particularly concerning given the deeply unsatisfactory nature of some of the forest’s initial proposals.

Perhaps the most egregious and impractical of these, by way of example, was the idea to alternate days between motorized and nonmotorized use at one of the busiest winter recreation areas in the basin—indeed in the State of Nevada—in the popular Chickadee Ridge area off the Mt. Rose Highway. This was a proposal to almost literally split the baby. Ironically, it seemed to unify sledders and skiers in opposition to the idea (rather than to each other), though of course it did nothing to bring anyone closer to a real solution to real conflicts on the ground. We’ll see where all that goes later this year.

Meanwhile, next on the docket is the Inyo National Forest, the internationally renowned backcountry ski mecca of the Eastern Sierra Nevada. In October 2019, as part of her signing of the Record of Decision on the new, once-in-a-generation Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan, the Forest Supervisor committed to beginning official scoping for winter travel planning within a year. With the rocky experience of six forests now mostly behind us, this presents an opportunity for all parties to try a different approach.

Based on preliminary discussions with forest staff, the Inyo seems willing to engage in a broader process that looks at the whole big picture of winter recreation, including not merely OSV designations and grooming, but also parking and staging issues, family snowplay opportunities, bathrooms and trailheads, volunteer trail hosts, community partnership opportunities, and other solutions to help minimize impacts to the environment and conflicts between different, sometimes incompatible winter uses, thereby potentially enhancing the experience of all users, motorized and non-motorized. To this end, we will be working hard through 2020 to help bring together and participate in a productive collaborative working group with the goal of bringing forward for consideration and analysis a community-developed winter recreation alternative with buy-in from a broad range of stakeholders.

We know it won’t be easy. But for the sake of this nationally-beloved landscape, and for the precedent it could set for winter recreation on public lands across the country, we have to try. ✱





# ANNUAL REPORT: FISCAL YEAR 2020 BY THE NUMBERS

Winter Wildlands Alliance, grassroots groups, backcountry partners, ambassadors and individual members working together to Keep Winter Wild.

**OVER 1,000 HOURS**



working with Outdoor Alliance and other partners on policy issues affecting public lands and recreation

**MOBILIZED OVER 1,500**



individual comments on Forest Service plans, national and state-level legislation, and regulatory documents

**OVER 40 HOURS**



spent meeting with local elected officials



**Hosted 85 participants at the 8<sup>TH</sup> Biennial Grassroots Advocacy Conference**



**OVER 30 HOURS**

spent with congressional members and staff to discuss issues affecting public lands and winter recreation

Worked with grassroots groups on

**8**

**NATIONAL FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT**

**PLAN REVISIONS**

**IN 6 STATES**



**30 DIRECT**

**ACTION ALERT EMAILS**

sent informing supporters of policy maneuvers or public land management actions impacting winter recreation and how to get involved



**439 LETTERS**

sent to Members of Congress and state elected officials from WWA supporters



**12 MONTHLY**

policy updates to grassroots member groups on issues impacting winter recreation

**32**

**BLOG POSTS**

focused on policy, advocacy and citizen science



**PARTICIPATED IN 6 STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATIVES OR WORKING GROUPS**



# CITIZEN SCIENCE COMES TO SNOWSCHOOL

A new partnership with NASA is one way we're bolstering the SnowSchool curriculum. The goal continues to be getting kids excited for winter.

By Kerry McClay, National Snowschool Director

Can you predict how much water is in the snowpack? This winter, students enrolled in SnowSchool will be able to.

Every winter, SnowSchool introduces thousands of kids to the wonders of winter and snowshoeing. Our curriculum is being taught at 70 sites nationwide, and many of the students come from underserved Title 1 schools that have diverse populations. Winter is a great environment for kids to connect with nature. It encourages play: we build snow caves, dig snow pits, and go belly sliding. Now, some of our students will have even more opportunities to turn play into science.

After their field trip into the snow, students will be asked to predict how much snow their local mountains will receive during the coming winter. They'll have decades of historical snowpack data collected from snow scientists at the US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station and NRCS SNOTEL sites. Teachers will help them calculate averages and analyze recent precipitation trends, so they can make informed predictions about the maximum snowpack depth and the maximum snow-water equivalency. This is the same approach that hydrologists make when they're developing water forecasts based on the snowpack. The students, though, get a prize for the closest predictions.

This winter, we're launching a new partnership with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's SnowEx program. SnowSchool students will collect snowpack measurements and send their findings to NASA scientists who are testing out new LiDAR, microwave, and infrared technology, mounted on aircraft, that are designed to scan the mountain snowpack. The hope is to one day develop the technology so that scientists can detect the water content of snow in a mountain watershed in real time from a satellite. Our students' data will help scientists test the accuracy of these new sensors.

Educators play a huge role at SnowSchool, so we're also actively working to provide additional training to classroom teachers and outdoor science educators so they'll be equipped to make the most of these new opportunities. At the National Flagship SnowSchool site at Bogus Basin Mountain Recreation Area, program coordinator Dirk Anderson is working to create a new Environmental Education credential program with Boise State University that features an internship at SnowSchool. And of course, we're always working with educators across the snow-belt to launch new sites and bring these experiences to underserved kids who need it most.

All of this is made possible because of people and organizations like you, who have continued to support Winter Wildlands Alliance SnowSchool through the years. Thank you! Now, find a SnowSchool student and ask them how to predict the snow-water equivalent in the snowpack.







A growing national education program of Winter Wildlands Alliance, SnowSchool is a bridge connecting kids to the world of snow science and winter recreation. Our curriculums are designed for kindergarten to high school and combine a field trip to the snow with classroom presentations. Students learn about hydrology, winter ecology, wildlife, and snow crystals. They also make a vital connection between the snowpack—the largest reservoir in the West—and the water they drink every day.


## SNOWSCHOOL + NASA

Starting this year, we've added a citizen science element to connect students with scientists at NASA who are developing technologies to measure the snowpack remotely. On-the-ground data recorded by the students will be used to compare the results of remote sensors deployed by NASA's SnowEx program.

Donate, Volunteer, Start a SnowSchool Site in Your Area! [www.snowschool.org](http://www.snowschool.org)

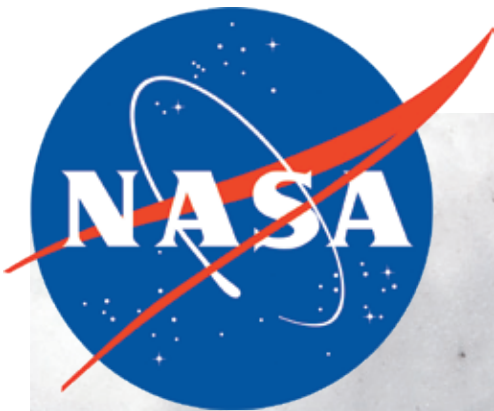
**68%**  
never having  
been on  
**SNOWSHOES**



**53%**   
**QUALIFYING AS**  
**UNDERSERVED**

**35,000**  
**PARTICIPANTS**  
**NATIONWIDE**

 **70**  
**ACTIVE**  
SnowSchool Sites





# 15 Years of the Backcountry Film Festival

**Every fall, a hand-picked selection of ski movies has created a platform for communities of snow enthusiasts to gather and celebrate their shared passion.** By Melinda Quick, Festival and Membership Manager

Fifteen years ago, Winter Wildlands Alliance staff, volunteers, and community members pushed play on a small DVD player at our first official ski movie night. Meanwhile, I was a 13-year-old who was just learning how to turn my rented alpine skis down the hills of Bogus Basin, the local mountain in my hometown of Boise. The always-breaking-down-school-bus carried my peers and I to that mountain every Wednesday in the winter. I learned that sharing experiences in the outdoors with folks you like (and some you may not know) was the first step in discovering my passion.

Winter Wildlands' "ski movie night" has evolved into the Backcountry Film Festival. This year, the Backcountry Film Festival toured across the country with 108 stops in 22 states and four countries. Together, we raised just over \$190,000 dollars to support local grassroots efforts that promote environmental conservation and human-powered recreation.

I attended my first Backcountry Film Festival premiere in Boise, ID three years ago. I was still floating around the world; slowly figuring out what I wanted to do. Sitting down in the theater at the Backcountry Film Festival validated my two loves for bringing people together over

films and tromping around in the snow in my snowshoes or working my way down a ski hill. I felt right.

Our goal is to share the diversity of experiences in the winter. While one person may be skiing a steep line down a rocky mountain, another may be hiking out in the snowy woods with their dog. However people experience winter, we choose a range of films with the goal to represent everyone, from all walks of life and backgrounds.

When the movies flicker on the big screen, the theater gets quiet and people revel at the adventures other people embark. As the manager of film festival, I hope these films remind us of the place where we all feel right: outside. We're still just as happy to press the play button this season and for many more to come. In the future, we hope to fund our own films and support filmmakers who are telling stories with an emphasis on diversity. We want to expand our youth programming. But most of all, we want to continue growing the festival, to serve each and every community who enjoys a good ski movie night. Thank you to everyone who believed in the original ski movie night back in 2005, and to everyone who has joined us at a tour stop of the Backcountry Film Festival since. Let's press play on the dream to Keep Winter Wild!






# YEAR 2020 **BY THE NUMBERS**



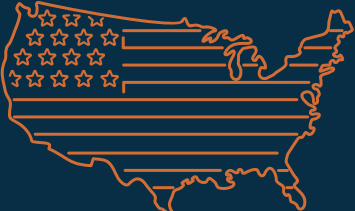
Celebrating the  
Winter Human-  
powered Experience

The Backcountry Film Festival is produced each year by Winter Wildlands Alliance as a celebration of the human-powered winter experience, a gathering place for the backcountry snowsports community, and a direct benefit for local grassroots programs nationwide.

[backcountryfilmfestival.org](http://backcountryfilmfestival.org)

**108**  
screenings  
globally 

**\$190,000**  
**FUNDS RAISED**  
FOR LOCAL  
COMMUNITY  
PROGRAMS

**22 STATES**  


**13**

corporate sponsors supported the  
Backcountry Film Festival World Tour



**22,000+**  
outdoor recreation  
enthusiasts  
**REACHED**

 **4**  
COUNTRIES

**100**  
LOCAL PARTNERS

In collaboration with the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office and 5Point Film Festival, Winter Wildlands Alliance hosted the second annual Backcountry Film Festival **NIGHT OF STOKE** at the Outdoor Retailer SnowShow. With a sold-out crowd, attendees were ignited with stoke for our outdoor community, inspired to get outside, and informed on how to

advocate for their favorite wild landscapes.

Funds raised from the Backcountry Film Festival help support SnowSchool sites, fund mountain safety workshops, gather volunteers for stewardship projects, raise public awareness for local trail development, and drive advocacy efforts for the protection of wild places and public lands.





# 2019 POLICY/ADVOCACY UPDATE



**Met with Forest Service** decision makers at the national, regional, and local level to advocate for sustainable recreation components in forest planning and timely and thoughtful implementation of the Over-Snow Vehicle Rule.



**Met with members of Congress** and their staff in DC and in their home districts to talk with them about legislation of importance to the human-powered recreation community, such as Recreation Not Red Tape and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act.



**Partnered with other human-powered recreation organizations** through the Outdoor Alliance to leverage our influence in recreation management and planning at the national level.



**Worked on a broad range of sustainable recreation issues** at the state level through Outdoor Alliance Montana and Colorado, and co-founded (with OA, American Whitewater, Access Fund, Surfrider and IMBA) Outdoor Alliance California.



**Worked with partners in California** to increase human-powered community engagement and provide constructive comments on winter travel plans for national forests in the Sierra Nevada.



**Intervened to defend protections for wolverines and mountain goats** in litigation brought by the Idaho State Snowmobile Association concerning the Sawtooth National Forest's Fairfield Winter Travel Plan.



**Successfully advocated for 59,929 acres of the Inyo National Forest** to be protected as Recommended Wilderness in its new forest plan, supported robust sustainable recreation language, improved Wild & Scenic inventory, language for allowing for maintenance of fixed climbing anchors in Wilderness, and secured a commitment from the Forest Supervisor to start winter travel planning on the forest in 2020.



**Pushed back against state-by-state efforts** to dismantle the Roadless Rule, specifically in Utah and Alaska, and Forest Service efforts to undermine the National Environmental Policy Act.



**Worked with Montana Backcountry Alliance** and Crosscut Mountain Sports Center to secure new access through private land for backcountry skiers in Montana's Bridger Mountains.



**Represented backcountry skiers** and human-powered recreation interests in multiple collaborative stakeholder groups.



**Helped to organize a massive Public Lands Rally** in Montana's Capitol building.

**Organized and convened our 8<sup>th</sup> annual Grassroots Advocacy Conference**, in Boise ID, with a focus on expanding equity on public lands.

**32 TOTAL**   
**GRASSROOTS GROUPS**

**21**   
**AMBASSADORS**



# FISCAL YEAR 2019

## AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Following are the statements for the year ending June 30, 2018 as presented by Harris & Co. P.A. Certified Public Accountants.

For more information email [info@winterwildlands.org](mailto:info@winterwildlands.org) or call (208) 336-4203.

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

#### ASSETS

##### CURRENT ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$81,124
Certificates of Deposit	\$150,085
Inventory	\$2,192
Prepaid and Other Assets	\$6,389

Total Current Assets \$239,790

Deposits \$660

**Total Assets** **\$240,450**

#### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

##### CURRENT LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	\$17,086
Accrued Payroll and Related Costs	\$13,939

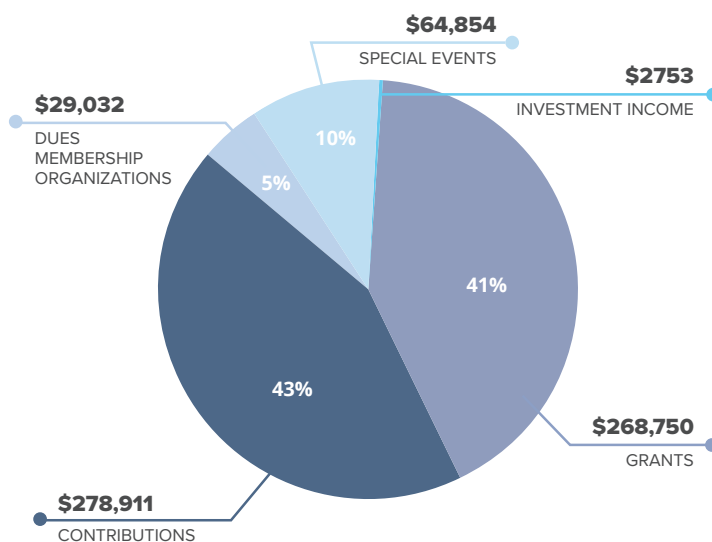
Total Current Liabilities \$31,025

##### NET ASSETS

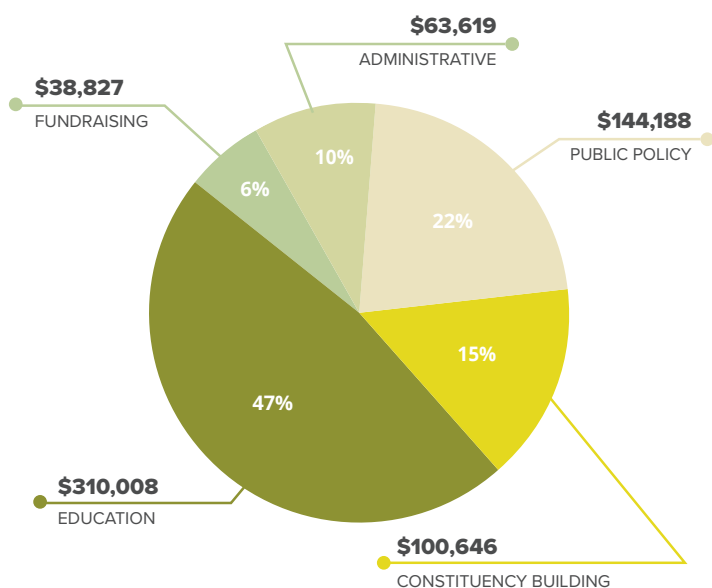
Without donor restrictions	\$54,654
With donor restrictions	\$154,771
Total Net Assets	\$209,425

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets** **\$240,450**

### TOTAL REVENUE: \$644,300



### TOTAL EXPENSES: \$657,288





# 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, without whose generosity our work would not be possible.

444S Foundation  
Henry Abrons and Li-Hsia Wang  
David Ackerson  
Alaska Avalanche Information Center  
Alaska Guide Collective  
Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition  
Frank and Katherine Alexander  
All Good  
Alpenglow Sports  
Ambler  
Judy Anderson and Galen Shaver  
Alex Anderson  
Russell and Carol Atha III  
Ascent Backcountry Snow Journal  
Avalanche Science LLC  
Backcountry Babes  
Backcountry Magazine  
Backwoods Mountain Sports  
Grant Barnard  
Beartooth Recreational Trails Association  
Carey and Don Bell  
Benevity Community Impact Fund  
Jennifer Bennett  
Big Agnes  
Big Sky Backcountry Guides  
Jennifer Bock  
Boise Gear Collective  
Kyle Bolen  
Bonfire Collective  
Andrea Braddock  
Daniel Brookmann  
Mark Brown  
Frank Brzenk  
Cable Natural History Museum  
Justin Canny  
Jerry Cantor  
Catherine Carmen  
Chris Carr  
Cascade Backcountry Alliance  
Cascade Designs  
Stephen Casimiro  
Aaron Castonguay  
Catamount Trail Association  
John and Theresa Cederholm  
Chama Valley Outdoor Club  
Brad and Kimberly Chatlin  
Tom and Sue Chelstrom  
Clif Bar  
Colorado Mountain Club  
Constellation Brands (Pacifico)  
Corning Incorporated Foundation  
Beth Cortright  
Chris Costa  
Ryan Cox  
Adam Cramer  
Peter Curran  
Eric Decker  
Craig Dejong  
Desert Mountain Medicine  
Judy Greer and Dick Dreissigacker  
Daniel Doherty  
DPS  
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Steven Durnal  
Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association  
Kirk and Pam Ebertz  
Tiffany Eck  
Eco Tour Adventures  
El Sendero Backcountry Ski  
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Emerald Expositions  
Endurance Conspiracy  
Jeff and Brenda Erdoes  
Cindy Farny  
Feather River College  
Tony Ferlisi  
Michael Fiebig  
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First Interstate Bank  
Liz Fitzgerald  
FlyLow  
Freeheel & Wheel Freeheel & Wheel  
Friends of Blackwater  
Friends of Plumas Wilderness  
Friends of The Earth  
Friends of the Inyo  
Friends of the Routt Backcountry  
Jeremy Fryberger  
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Douglas Gammell  
Joan Ganz  
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Frank Gariglio  
Teresa Garland  
Elizabeth Gemmill  
Jim Gibson  
John Gilbert III  
Gogglesoc  
Arelene Gonzales  
Thomas Gordon  
Bruce Gottschall  
David Gottschall  
Granite Backcountry Alliance  
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Greenwood's Ski Haus  
John Griffiths  
Katherine Grobe  
David Groff  
Bruce Gugliotta  
Nathan Hadar  
Harold Hallstein IV  
Pamela Hanson  
William Hardham  
Emily Hargraves  
Ginger Harmon  
Robin Harms  
Brad Hatch  
Elizabeth Hatton  
Hayden Beverage Company  
Tom Heinrich  
High Camp Hut  
High Country Conservation Advocates  
Kellen Hilton  
Tracey and Maynard Hoover  
Bruce Horn  
Chris Hyde  
Ice Axe Expeditions  
Idaho Conservation League  
Idaho Mountain Touring  
Indian Creek Nature Center  
Inland Northwest Backcountry Alliance  
International Alpine Guides  
Chris Johnson  
Jara Johnson  
Nina Jonas and Andreas Heaphy  
Jenna Kane  
KEEN  
Jeffrey Keyser  
Steve Kramer  
Erik Lambert  
John Latta  
Bryan McMartin and Lauren Jones  
Brian Lemmon  
Marcus Libkind  
Neal Lischner  
Lone Cone  
Lost Grove Brewing  
Gail J. & Robert B. Loveman  
Charlie Luce  
Elise Lufkin  
Randolph Luskey  
Tim Lydon  
Marybeth Lynch  
Brad Maddock  
Maine Community Foundation  
Maki Foundation

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Madhuri Martin  
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Mike and Martha McClay  
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Karen Mebane  
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Rich Meyer  
Sarah Michael  
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Montana Backcountry Yurts  
Montana Wilderness Association  
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Leigh Morse  
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Jaime Musnicki  
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Chase Nelson  
Michael Nieling  
Justin Nielsen  
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Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks  
North Central Regional Library  
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Cailin O'Brien-Feeny  
Amaya Odiaga  
Brent Olson  
Osprey  
Outdoor Exchange  
Outdoor Gear Exchange  
Outdoor Project  
Outdoor Prolink  
Outdoor Research  
Elizabeth Pantazelos  
Allison Parker  
Jan Parker  
Patagonia  
Payette Powder Guides  
James Pearre  
Greg Peters  
Eric Peterson  
Kathy Pierce  
Pine Mountain Sports  
Drew Pogge  
Powder Ridge Ski Touring  
Benjamin Pursley  
Ashley Rawhouser  
Tyler Ray  
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Frederick Reimers  
David Reiss  
Jerry And Laura Richards  
Lee Rimel  
Dorothy Ritschel  
Samuel Roberts  
Santiago Rodriguez  
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David Rosenberg  
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San Juan Huts  
Steven Sanford  
Sawtooth Mountain Guides  
David Saylor  
Garrett Scalario  
Daniel Schlehuber  
David Schneider

Rory Scoles  
Caleb and Louise Scott  
Shasta Mountain Guides  
Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.  
Signal Kitchen, LLC  
Silent Tracks  
Richard Simpson  
Skinny Skis  
Oliver Smith  
M Snowdon  
Snowlands Network  
Snowmetrics  
Erik Snyder  
David Spira  
Spokane Mountaineers  
Spokane Mountaineers Foundation  
Sports Basement  
State of the Backcountry  
Max Stein  
Julie Streeter  
Katherine Strong  
Andrew Stucker  
Summit Sales NW  
Sun Valley Trekking  
Superior Highland Backcountry  
Syracuse University  
Tahoe Backcountry Alliance  
Tahoe Mountain Sports  
Dawson Taylor  
Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association  
Teton Backcountry Alliance  
Teton Backcountry Guides  
Teton Valley Trails & Pathways  
The Conservation Alliance  
The Elephant's Perch  
The Mountaineer  
The Mountaineers  
The North Face  
The STIL  
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Timber Trails  
Togwotee Backcountry Alliance  
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Tsalteshi Trails Association  
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University of Wisconsin Milwaukee  
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Wallowa Avalanche Center  
Matthew Walter  
Todd and Shannon Walton  
Wasatch Backcountry Alliance  
Lesa Way  
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Dennison Webb  
Stephanie Weber  
Mark Wenzler  
James Wernitz  
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Wigwam  
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Laura Yale  
Yampatika  
Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative  
Society Y2Y  
YETI  
Karen Yoshioka  
James Young  
Dubinina Yulia



# WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE NETWORK

## GRASSROOTS GROUPS

### ALASKA

- Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition
- Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks
- Tsalteshi Trails Association

### CALIFORNIA & NEVADA

- Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association
- Friends of the Inyo
- Friends of Plumas Wilderness
- Snowlands Network
- Tahoe Backcountry Alliance

### COLORADO

- Colorado Mountain Club
- High Country Conservation Advocates
- Friends of the Routt Backcountry
- Silent Tracks
- Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association

### IDAHO

- Idaho Conservation League
- Nordic and Backcountry Skiers Alliance of Idaho
- Teton Valley Trails and Pathways

### IOWA

- Indian Creek Nature Center

### MINNESOTA

- Superior Highlands Backcountry

### MONTANA

- Beartooth Recreational Trails
- Montana Backcountry Alliance
- Montana Wilderness Association

### NEW HAMPSHIRE & MAINE

- Granite Backcountry Alliance

### NEW MEXICO

- Chama Valley Outdoor Club

### MARYLAND

- Friends of the Blackwater

### UTAH

- Wasatch Backcountry Alliance

### VERMONT

- Vermont Backcountry Alliance

### WASHINGTON

- Cascade Backcountry Alliance
- El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club
- Inland Northwest Backcountry Alliance
- The Mountaineers
- Spokane Mountaineers

### WYOMING

- Teton Backcountry Alliance
- Togwotee Backcountry Alliance
- Wyoming Wilderness Association

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

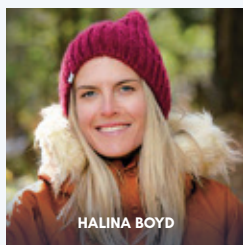
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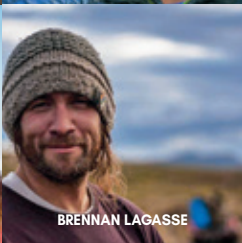
NOAH HOWELL



JASON HUMMEL



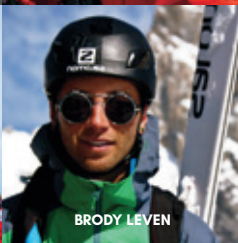
JOHN HUSTON



BRENNAN LAGASSE



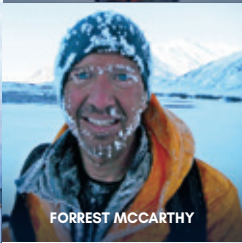
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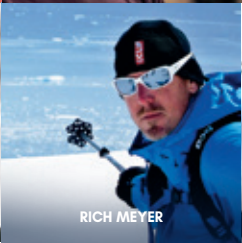
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WINTER  
WILDLANDS  
ALLIANCE

BE THE DIFFERENCE. JOIN US.

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

Custer Gallatin National Forest, ancestral lands and travel ways  
of Mountain Shoshone (Sheepeater), Salish-Kootenai, and  
Northern Cheyenne peoples. Photo: Ben Wickham

