

TRAIL BREAK

your report for silent snowsports

Volume 2004, Spring Issue



Standing Up for Yellowstone

More than 100 Skiers Rally for Our First National Park

In an unprecedented show of support for Yellowstone and the quiet winter values most Americans cherish, more than 100 skiers, snowshoers, and other activists returned to the world's first national park to celebrate Valentine's Day with Winter Wildlands Alliance.

WWA's second "Stand Up for Yellowstone" event drew scores of supporters from around the nation to call for an end to snowmobiling in the park and for expanding your winter recreation opportunities both in Yellowstone and in surrounding communities.

"Once again, winter recreationists are raising their voice and showing Yellowstone and the towns around it that they can flourish if skiers, snowshoers, and others are allowed to return to a quiet, natural winter environment," WWA Executive Director Sally Grimes said. "Not only will a snowmobile-free Yellowstone be good for this magnificent park, the fact we spent more than \$40,000 here this weekend shows it can also be good for local economies."

snowmobile plan for Yellowstone in December, but then a Wyoming federal judge invalidated the Clinton-era snowmobile phase-out. With two different courts handing down dramatically different orders to the Park Service, the future of Yellowstone snowmobiling is uncertain, as is next year's planned snowmobile phase-out.

"That's why this year's rally was even more important," Grimes said. "We as skiers need to stay focused on this issue, but we also need to show communities like West Yellowstone they will prosper if they embrace skiers and snowshoers rather than try to keep snowmobiles in the park. Skiers will return once the park is clean and quiet again, and there are still plenty of places for snowmobilers to enjoy their sport outside the park."

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—Sally Grimes
WWA Executive Director



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Braving subzero temperatures, more than 100 skiers and snowshoers (including Executive Director Sally Grimes on the right and President Sarah Michael second from right) rallied against snowmobile access to Yellowstone National Park. Media coverage included regional print media, ABC World News Tonight, and CBS Evening News.

Temperatures in West Yellowstone read 14 below zero just after sunrise, when rally participants streamed out of a pre-rally briefing at a local hotel and through Yellowstone's west entrance. Once inside the park, they spent two hours greeting a steady stream of snowmobiles entering Yellowstone for what WWA hopes will be the final winter.

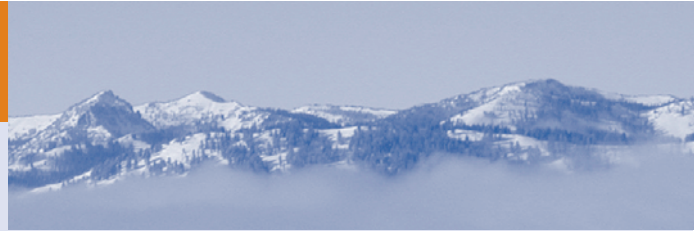
The Presidents' Day Weekend "Stand Up for Yellowstone" rally took place amid legal confusion over Yellowstone's future. A federal court in Washington, D.C., invalidated the Bush administration's add-more-

To drive home the point, "Stand Up" participants fanned out around West Yellowstone, spending tens of thousands of dollars in hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, gift shops, and grocery stores – a shot in the arm for an economy that has felt the impacts of the uncertainty surrounding the future of snowmobiling in the park. As they did so, they left behind "skier dollars" that read, "I came, I skied, and I spent! Skiers for a healthy Yellowstone."

In addition, before the rally WWA staff members attended a community-wide forum on economic diversification opportunities for West Yellowstone and met with key West Yellowstone business leaders in hopes Winter Wildlands can play a role as the town seeks to broaden its winter tourism business beyond snowmobiling.

While the increased number of newer-model "four-stroke" snowmobiles reduced the noise at the west gate and elsewhere in Yellowstone somewhat, the roar of the machines rumbling through the entrance was inescapable and the haze from their exhaust still clouded the busiest entryway.

Story continued on page 5.



WWA Nears Landmark Agreement with Forest Service

Groundbreaking Pact Ensures You Will be Heard

Winter Wildlands Alliance (WWA) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) are nearing completion on an agreement to give you and all quiet snowsports enthusiasts a greater voice in important Forest Service decisions on trails and other recreation issues.

WWA Grassroots Program Manager Sally Ferguson has been working for months with Forest Service recreation managers in Washington, D.C., to hammer out a groundbreaking Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that we expect to be signed later this spring in a ceremony in Washington. When completed, the MOU will formalize mutual efforts by WWA and the Forest Service in promoting and protecting non-motorized recreation opportunities on USFS lands.

“We’re encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by USFS officials in working toward this agreement,” Ferguson said as the document underwent final review by both parties. “With this MOU, WWA and all skiers and snowshoers will have a seat at the table as key decisions are made that affect all winter recreationists.”

Ferguson said snowmobile industry organizations have long had a similar agreement with the Forest Service, and the pending agreement with WWA gives non-motorized users like you equal footing in key winter recreation decisions.

While the Forest Service MOU is WWA’s first with a federal land-management agency, Winter Wildlands expects it to serve as a template for its 15 grassroots partner groups across the country. Armed with the national MOU, these local groups can take the agreement to their local USFS officials as they participate in forest planning and travel planning. It is WWA’s hope that similar agreements, designed to elevate the voice of skiers, snowshoers and other non-motorized winter recreationists, will be crafted to deal with specific issues on individual forests.

The agreement will call on the Forest Service and WWA to work together to increase non-motorized winter recreation opportunities on your forests and will call for more involvement by skiers and other recreationists in forest planning. For its part, WWA will urge grassroots groups and all non-motorized winter recreationists to become more involved in forest planning issues – including separating motorized and non-motorized users on trails where both are allowed on our forests. We also expect the MOU to promote winter recreation education and safety.

If you have any questions, contact Sally Ferguson at sferguson@winterwildlands.org or at 208.386.9227.

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- Sally Ferguson

WWA Objects as USFS Leaves Winter Out of Recreation Changes

New USFS Off-Road Vehicle Regulations Would Ignore Snowmobiles

The U.S. Forest Service is rewriting its regulations on the use of off-road vehicles on millions of acres of national forests and grasslands, but so far those plans do not include changes to runaway snowmobile use on your forests.

“Chief Dale Bosworth has long acknowledged unmanaged motorized recreation is one of the four great threats to our forests, but we’re disappointed the Forest Service is still not addressing unmanaged snowmobile use,” Winter Wildlands Alliance Public Policy Manager Ken Miller said. “For the millions of skiers, snowshoers and other non-motorized winter recreationists whose experiences are diminished or ruined by conflicts with snowmobiles, we see this as a huge missed opportunity to restore balance to recreation on our forests.”

Winter Wildlands Alliance, its grassroots partners, and its national membership have been working for more than three years to control illegal motorized uses on your forests and to find ways to separate motorized and non-motorized users in ways that will allow both groups to continue to enjoy their sports apart from each other. For winter forest users, the situation is all the more acute because insufficient enforcement and monitoring by the Forest Service in winter continues to deprive skiers and snowshoers of quality, quiet backcountry experiences.

WWA and its supporters last year provided Chief Bosworth and other Forest Service officials with ample evidence of user conflicts in the winter. Besides snowmobile speeding and other safety concerns, we have documented ongoing resource damage and the growing creation of illegal snowmobile trails on forests across the American Snowbelt. In a February letter to Chief Bosworth and Jack Troyer, the regional forester for the Utah-based Intermountain Region who is heading the regulatory revisions, WWA said over-the-snow vehicles must be included in the agency’s new recreation rules because existing laws and other regulations require it, and have for three decades.

Specifically, WWA is asking the Forest Service to reconsider its decision to ignore snowmobile conflicts on its lands and to designate non-motorized zones and motorized zones to minimize resource damage, wildlife harassment, and user conflicts. Winter Wildlands is also calling for better defined boundaries between users to make it easier to enforce recreation rules.

“It doesn’t make sense to write a new set of recreation rules on our forests and to leave out one of the biggest sources of conflicts,” Miller said. “The longer winter-use conflicts are ignored, the worse they’ll become.”

Winter Wildlands is working with a diverse national coalition to monitor and participate in the recreation regulation review, but given that the Forest Service is not addressing winter issues, WWA is working independently and with its grassroots groups to press for changes on snowmobile rules and enforcement.

For more information, contact Ken Miller, WWA Public Policy Manager, at 208.344.8692 or at kmiller@winterwildlands.org.

Stand Up for Yellowstone Photo Gallery

In the past, Park Service personnel were forced to wear respirators to protect themselves against snowmobiles' exhaust.



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Rally attendees came from as far away as North Carolina and California to rally for protection of Yellowstone.



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A line of guided snowmobilers enter Yellowstone National Park after passing the more than 100 skiers who protested snowmobile access to the park.

WWA Economic Report Update

Forthcoming Report will Detail Skier's Multi-Billion Dollar Contributions to Local Economies

Soon Winter Wildlands Alliance will release an economic report that details the total annual expenditures of cross-country skiers, snowshoers, and telemark skiers across the nation.

WWA staff and a consultant are working hard to ensure that the report will accurately represent the activity levels and spending habits of human-powered snowsport participants like you.

Winter Wildlands and a Boise-based data analysis firm teamed up in exhaustive efforts to locate secondary data sources, detailing a wide array of information characterizing human-powered snowsport participants. From multiple sources, WWA staff constructed the profiles of these participants.

Distinguishing characteristics include the national number of participants, average number of activity days per participant per year, total activity days by all participants for a particular activity, and expenditures per participant per day. Incorporating all of these variables, a single annual figure was derived that represents the combined economic contributions of cross-country skiers, snowshoers, and telemark skiers across the nation.

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It all adds up to a multi-billion dollar industry! And this does not consider what these snowsport participants spend on equipment, apparel, and other gear. It is simply an assessment of direct trip expenditures, such as money spent on lodging, meals, transportation, and access fees.

transportation, and access fees.

Winter Wildlands Alliance will use this economic report to more adequately represent the interests of skiers and snowshoers throughout the nation and the fact that our large investments are often faced with a diminished return in quality recreational opportunities.

A media campaign for the report will also highlight the plight of the many human-powered recreationists whose economic contributions to local economies are so often marginalized or ignored.

Keep an eye out for the final report in the coming weeks. It will be posted on the Winter Wildlands Alliance website at www.winterwildlands.org, and released to regional and national media outlets.

Funding for the report was generously provided by The Mountaineers Foundation.

For more information, contact Steve Miller, WWA Program Assistant at 208.344.2968 or smiller@winterwildlands.org.

Slow And Steady—The Path to Paradise in Utah

Cache Backcountry Skiers Alliance Volunteers Share their Story

NOTE: In this special feature, Winter Wildlands asked grassroots member Cache Backcountry Skiers Alliance to share, in their own words, the story of their struggle to protect their winter wildlands. If you or your group would like to write an article for future issues of TrailBreak, please contact Sally Ferguson at 208.386.9227 or sferguson@winterwildlands.org

Bear River Range in Northern Utah is a backcountry skier's paradise – classic Utah powder and widely varying terrain ranging from gentle rolling tours to short, steep couloirs and open bowls. This winter paradise has been home to a large and active group of backcountry skiers for many years. This paradise, however, is in danger of becoming a paradise lost.

Due to a combination of proximity to the mega-population growth center along the Wasatch Front, an aggressive promotional campaign by the local Chamber of Commerce, and promotion by the snowmobile industry, the Bear River Range has become far and away the most popular snowmobile destination in Utah. The technological advances in snowmobiles occurring over the past few years have also contributed to the problem by opening terrain that was inaccessible only a few years ago. Many long-time backcountry skiers are being forced out of their historic home mountains by the overabundance of snowmobiles and all that accompanies them.

During the Wasatch-Cache Forest Plan Revision, the Forest Service received overwhelming public support for areas to be designated for winter non-motorized recreation (in the Forest Service summarization of over 3,700 public comments on the Forest Plan, those requesting increased snowmobile restrictions outnumbered those requesting less restrictions by almost 3 to 1).

In response to this unanticipated public response, the final Forest Plan Revision set aside a small portion of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest for winter non-motorized recreation (approximately 7,500 acres, or 0.8 percent, compared to the 542,700 acres, or 44 percent, that are open to snowmobiles).

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As part of the Forest Service's strategy for implementing the new winter travel regulations, the Logan Ranger District initiated a Goodwill Trail program that is modeled after the ATV Goodwill Riders program. The intent of this program is to recruit volunteers from both the motorized and non-motorized community to interact and explain the new regulations to their respective peer-groups.

The Forest Service also hopes that the presence of volunteers will act as additional "eyes and ears," reporting both compliance and violations. The goal is to help ease some of the tensions that have led to polarization and

conflict between the two forest user groups. In addition, CBSA hopes the Goodwill Trail program will provide support for the overworked, understaffed, and besieged local Ranger and his attempts to gain compliance through education.

As the recent see-sawing of Yellowstone snowmobile regulations demonstrate, there are no ultimate victories in the campaign to protect our public lands for traditional winter recreation – there are only ephemeral advances in a long-running struggle. Regaining a small, but critical, area of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest for non-motorized winter recreation is such an advance.

SPREAD THE WORD!

Tell your friends about WWA and be sure to pass along this newsletter to them.

Or send the names of at least five friends who might like to know more about WWA and we will send you a FREE WWA travel mug!

Call 208.344.2968 TODAY with your list.

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To learn more, visit www.winterwildlands.org or call 208.336.4203.

WWA Welcomes Three New Grassroots Groups

Alliance of Local Groups Stands at Fifteen, And Counting

Winter Wildlands Alliance welcomed three new grassroots group members this winter, bringing the number of grassroots activist groups to 15 in nine states.

The three groups were created to secure designated non-motorized areas for winter recreation and to develop and maintain access and recreation opportunities for outdoors people like you in Idaho, Montana, and Minnesota. Here's a look at our newest members:

Teton Valley Trails and Pathways (TVTAP) is located in Eastern Idaho and works on the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

The mission of TVTAP is to develop and maintain year-round non-motorized transportation alternatives in Teton Valley. The organization brings together citizens, businesses, and local governments to expand the valley's opportunities for outdoor recreation and nature appreciation, while linking communities, providing access to national forest trails, and promoting healthy mountain lifestyles.

According to John Borstelmann, Executive Director, the main issues facing the group include growth and development in the Teton Valley and reasonable, balanced recreation management. Additionally, TVTAP non-motorized trails and pathways are periodically used by motorized recreationists to access the adjacent wilderness area.

To learn more about TVTAP, please visit their website: www.tvtap.org.

Backcountry Trail Patrol Association (BPTA) is located in Minnesota and also includes northwest Wisconsin. National forest and public lands patrolled by the group are the Chippewa and Chequamegon National Forests (which are in Eastern Region Nine) Lake Mariah State Park, and Sand Dunes State Forest (the state lands are located 45 minutes north of Minneapolis).

The Backcountry Trail Patrol is a year-round volunteer trail safety, education, and assistance organization whose mission is to serve trail users in the forests and parks of Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin. BPTA is also recognized as a source for quality backcountry and wilderness education and training. Additionally, the patrol advocates minimum impact camping and backcountry travel, and is developing a trail GPS and mapping program.

Hans Erdman, who coordinates the state park system's Cross-Country Ski Patrol, said that BPTA joined WWA primarily because Winter Wildlands is such an effective advocacy organization.

To learn more about the BPTA, please visit their web site: www.trailpatrol.org.

The Beaverhead Winter Walkers (BWW) was organized by Pat McKenna in 2004. The group works on the Beaverhead National Forest in southwestern Montana.

Standing Up for Yellowstone, continued from page 1

Before and after the rally, skiers and others who ventured into Yellowstone on their own or on one of the many multiple-passenger "snowcoaches" that take visitors to Old Faithful and other popular attractions reported the experience vastly improved from last year. Huge numbers of snowmobiles zooming around park roads in the past created bone-jarring moguls on the groomed roads, but this winter snowcoach drivers reported the reduced numbers made the snowcoach rides more pleasant.

Skiers spending the weekend at Old Faithful described breathtaking morning treks around nearby geyser basins, but by mid-morning those experiences gave way to the constant buzzing of machines as fleets of snowmobiles begin pouring into Old Faithful and surrounding geyser basins.

"For a few hours at least, we had a chance to see, hear, and smell what Yellowstone will one day be like when snowmobiles are removed," Grimes said. "Before the machines arrive each day, and after they leave, you can truly hear the wonders of Yellowstone."

That so many non-motorized snowsports enthusiasts came to West Yellowstone on one of the busiest snowmobiling weekends of the year was due in part to the many groups and "rally captains" who worked with WWA Program Assistant Steve Miller, who like last year coordinated logistics for the event.

"Working with so many energetic Winter Wildlands members to draw people to Yellowstone on Valentine's Day when they could be enjoying cleaner and quieter skiing elsewhere is always rewarding," Miller said. "But this year we were joined by so many partners who did all they could to bring their members, and that added to the camaraderie of the rally."

Joining WWA's "Stand Up" contingent were activists from Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Sierra Club, Montana Wilderness Association, Native Forest Network, National Forest Protection Alliance, Wildlands CPR, Idaho State University, and University of Montana.

BWW's goal is to secure designated non-motorized areas for winter recreation access and develop opportunities for all types of "winter walkers." In addition, BWW is a voice for Montana skiers, snowboarders, and snowshoers, and the group represents families, tubers, and tobogganers.

The Beaverhead National Forest recently completed its Revised Forest Plan and the release is pending. BWW believes that one of the first steps in implementing the travel plan is to create opportunities across the forest for all non-motorized winter recreationists. With this goal in mind, the group has begun working closely with the Forest Service.

For more information, please contact Pat McKenna, 27700 Southside Centennial Road, Lima MT, 59739.

For more information about WWA's grassroots membership, contact Sally Ferguson, WWA Grassroots Program Manager at 208.386.9227 or sferguson@winterwildlands.org.

About WWA

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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