

# Opinion: More wilderness designations bad for Tahoe basin

To the community,

We are very concerned as we follow the dialogue focused on the U.S. Forest Service Draft Management Plan. Some of the proposals could possibly ban assorted recreational use or allow for increased logging and mining in the Tahoe basin.

For more than 30 years, have enjoyed the incredible beauty of the areas slated to be turned into “wilderness” – funny, we thought much of it was already pretty wild. The lands in question have never needed special signage or designation in order to be enjoyed by those who mountain bike, snowmobile, snowshoe and/or cross country ski. For those who live here, these spectacular areas are our “backyards”. They exist as public lands for all.

Nonetheless, areas have previously been closed without opportunity for public input; eliminating snowmobiling in High Meadows is a perfect example. To think that current and future generations may lose the opportunity to experience these unique areas is truly upsetting. Isn't that why many of us have chosen to live in this incredible place?

Call us spoiled, but we realize how lucky we've been to be able to get on a bike (in town) and ride to many of these trails without ever having to get in a car. There's enough room for everyone to enjoy these places and it is ludicrous to consider restricting access to the tax-paying public who live and visit here unless they're willing and able to hike or ride a horse to these areas. Although we've become more limited in our own ability to “power ourselves” to some of these remote areas, the proposed restrictions could prohibit us from ever

enjoying these places again.

Let's not forget that in many cases, it has been "locals" contributing their time and sweat equity to create and maintain these trails. We thank you.

No one needs to be reminded that in these challenging economic times, our community must do all it can to support the visitors who come to enjoy the outdoor experience of the Tahoe basin. Like them or not, these same visitors ultimately help support all of us. It is interesting to note that Joanne Marchetta, executive director of the TRPA recently commented (read column on *LTN* from July 22, 2012) on the various positive impacts of biking in our community. As for motorized sports, one only has to look to our Mammoth Lakes neighbors to see how they have embraced snowmobiling and cross country skiing/snowshoe enthusiasts by developing an incredible system of shared and single use trails.

It requires minimal effort for those who support quiet and/or "no tracks" activities to access thousands of acres of beautiful terrain (think Desolation Wilderness). For those "proponents of increased wilderness designation" who visit Tahoe, do you travel by public transportation to do so? Seems quite hypocritical to say you wish to protect the environment and natural habitats, yet use mass paper mailings to support the cause.

Should a wilderness designation be granted, those who do not or cannot hike or ride a horse will not only have to travel even greater distances than we do now to access the ever-shrinking motor and bike-friendly recreation areas, it will also concentrate too many people in too small an area: how do these actions protect and respect the environment in the long term?

Placing a wilderness designation on more areas in the Tahoe basin will sorely impact recreational enthusiasts of all

abilities and interests. It would be foolish to deny that there is a minority who do not respect back country etiquette but please don't create a situation that would criminalize the majority of us who wish to continue enjoying our "backyards" as we've done for many years.

**Eddie and Susy Walker, South Lake Tahoe**