

Sledders unite to keep space open for their sport

By Kathryn Reed

With the greater Lake Tahoe area being in the news regarding access to public lands for snowmobilers and human-powered recreationists, the California-Nevada Snowmobile Association is having its convention in Stateline.

Greg McKay, a member of the Tahoe Sierra Snowmobile Club, told his group at a Dec. 6 meeting that discussions with Snowlands Network have been amicable, and that more meetings are scheduled for February before the March 1-3 convention at MontBleu.

“We are talking about how to co-exist. We have the right to ride the same area they want to play in,” McKay said.

Two representatives from the U.S. Forest Service were at Thursday’s gathering of snowmobilers at Tep’s restaurant in South Lake Tahoe.



Hanna Bernard of South Lake Tahoe rides as often as she can. Photo/Jeff Schauer

For now, the current level of access to sleds remains the

same. This could change in the coming years depending on the outcome of the Forest Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Snowmobiles are not allowed in wilderness areas. And there was a push by some folks to increase the wilderness designation in Tahoe. However, the LTBMU staff at meetings regarding the plan did not advocate doing so.

(The Forest Plan may be out for comment in late summer/early fall, with a decision in early 2014.)

An updated map for where snowmobilers may ride in the basin is being printed. It will be available by the first of the year at the South Lake Tahoe office or online.

Copies of the Carson Ranger District Winter Recreation Guide, which includes Alpine County, were distributed.

Dan Morris with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest tried to explain why some routes are open to off-highway vehicles, but not to snowmobiles.

“We manage over-the-snow separately from OHV,” Morris told the group. He said the state has different definitions for the user groups.

When it comes to why Sonora Pass access is cut off in April even in heavy snow years, Morris explained that sensitive species live in the area and therefore biologists have found that habitat disturbance can occur.

A change coming to Nevada is that as of July 1, 2013, all Silver State residents must register their sleds – just like a car.

Frank Machler with the LTBMU knows firsthand what is going on in the woods because he’s on a sled patrolling the forests.

“I find my biggest issue is with people not taking

responsibility to know what the rules and regulations on the land are," Machler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Much like operating a boat, no special license is needed to operate a snowmobile so the riders don't have to pass a written or driving test before turning on the ignition. This can contribute to not knowing the rules.

But through groups like this club, information is passed along. What is open and closed is often posted on the Tahoe Sierra Snowmobile Club's Facebook page so sledders can stay in the know.

While there is no snow at lake level, there is white stuff to ride on just a little higher up, according to many in the room who've already been out riding.