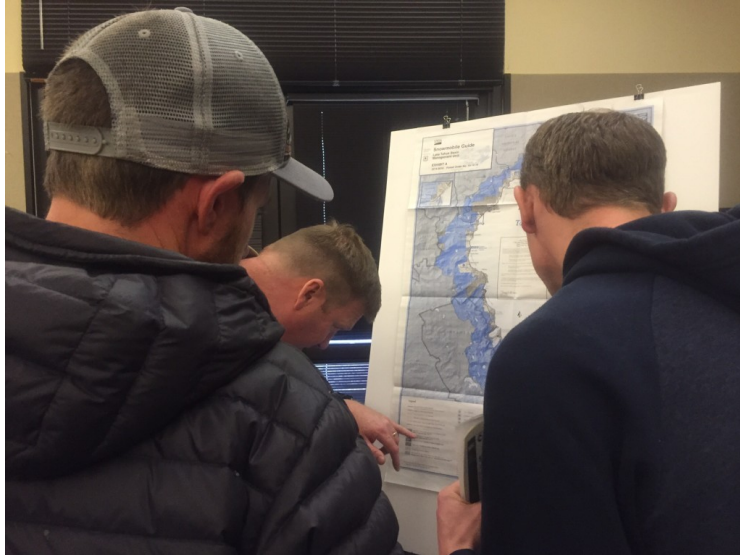


# Outdoor recreationists compete for USFS attention



Winter recreation enthusiasts are interested in the Forest Service's plans. Photo/Susan Wood

**By Susan Wood**

How can Lake Tahoe Basin residents and nature stakeholders deal with the inevitable power struggles that go with sharing open space in winter – whether that power is driven by human or machine?

That's the pervasive question the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit team is asking as it starts the long, laborious process of coming up with a winter recreation plan that serves the needs of those who play and live in the snow. The plan is expected to be completed next year.

And as longtime Tahoe park ranger icon Don Lane puts it: "How tolerant are you of what others do in this special place we call Tahoe?"

Leaning against the table in the LTBMU conference room Tuesday

night in its first open house on the subject, Lane was gesturing while pointing out to Fallen Leaf Lake resident Peggy Laughlin during their debate over the history of Tahoe that many people experience this beautiful winter recreation paradise in different ways.

And therein lies a balancing act as delicate as protecting the lake itself.

Some people cross country skiing in the basin like to stop to close their eyes and not hear any noise. Snowshoers often enjoy opening their eyes to see virgin snow with no tracks in sight. Snowmobilers relish the thrill of manipulating a sled in a mighty hairpin turn through powder. Fat tire mountain bike riders may want to hear the crack of the crust. And now there's a cross between a snowmobile and bike to plow through the white stuff.

Whatever floats the boat of the winter recreational enthusiast, sharing the land has its challenges. But in this case, the plan dictating the guidelines is long overdue.

The last time the Forest Service developed a plan here in the basin was 1975.

The federal land use agency was given the directive to revisit the "Snowmobile Guide" while the overall Forest Service general plan was being adopted because many winter enthusiasts were commenting on this type of recreation. The Forest Service's general plan is due to be signed at any time by the regional office in Vallejo.

In the meantime, LTBMU agreed to host open houses to receive input. The next one is slated for April 5 from 5-7pm at the North Tahoe Event Center, 8318 North Lake Tahoe Blvd. in Kings Beach. The third is scheduled in Sparks on April 19 at the same time in the Humboldt-Toiyabe office at 1200 Franklin Way.

More than 50 people showed up for the South Shore's March 29

meeting, filling the room with varied opinions. A comment box was placed on a table, along with questionnaires situated near a handful of Snowmobile Guide maps placed on easels around the room. Many gathered around them, pointing to different areas they ski in or ride a snowmobile in.

To help spur the process, the Forest Service asked:

- “What do you value about your winter recreation experience and opportunity?
- What conditions or circumstances detract from a high quality experience for you, and how could those be improved through different LTBMU management?
- What is working well with the current Snowmobile Guide regulations and with current conditions regarding winter recreation opportunities, access and experience?
- What kinds of partnerships or strategies might the LTBMU explore to provide improved winter recreation access and opportunity as well as improved resource stewardship?
- What other information or input might help the LTBMU develop a comprehensive proposed action for winter recreation?”

The questionnaire instructed the participant to submit the form to an LTBMU employee, the front desk or electronically to [comments-pacificsouthwest-ltbmu@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-ltbmu@fs.fed.us).

Phil Brand, who has lived in South Lake Tahoe for 53 years, told *Lake Tahoe News* he would take his home to work on.

Brand owns two snowmobiles and likes to ride up Oneidas Street to Armstrong Pass in the South Shore and in Blackwood Canyon and the Rubicon Trail on the west side where more unrestricted region exists. He recalls the days in the 1960s when “you could go almost any place” on the South Shore.

“Over the years it’s gotten where more and more areas are closed off. It’s harder to find places to go,” he said, adding that a segment of people “don’t want us there.”

He says that with a degree of understanding. Brand is also a cross country skier and occasionally pulls the snowshoes out.

When comparing this area to Mammoth, Brand contends those residents live in more harmony than Tahoe. He’d like to see more areas open up to snowmobilers, but that’s not his expectation.

“The way things are going, I’d settle for not less,” he said.

Longtime Tahoe environmental activist Laurel Ames said she wants the same – only for cross country skiers. Ames would like to see High Meadows east of the Black Bart region stay off limits to the snowmobilers because it’s “a special place for skiing” and represents an environmentally sensitive region.

“I want to see places quiet. (Snowmobilers) have a lot of places to go,” she declared.

Currently, the Snowmobile Guide outlines closed off zones in Desolation Wilderness, High Meadows and the Meiss Meadows region on the South Shore; Granite Chief Wilderness, Sugar Pine Point and Burton Creek state parks on the West Shore; East Shore beaches at Secret Harbor, Spooner and Lake Tahoe Nevada state parks on the east side; and the North Shore’s Tahoe Meadows, which LTBMU Recreation Supervisor Gina Thompson calls the most contentious area.

Thompson hopes that by having open houses where stakeholders may share their points of view they’ll come to a better understanding and therefore consensus on how to share the space.

Even the collaborative team of citizens assembled a few years

ago didn't come to that, so the Forest Service took back its own project.

"The collaborative focused on open and closed areas. There were other things to focus on," Thompson explained.

For example, the issue of where to park came up repeatedly. Most snowmobilers place their sleds on big trailers. While skiers simply want to get off the road when they leave their vehicles for hours.

"The challenge becomes who's going to plow and who's going to pay for that," Thompson said.

Keep in mind the Forest Service spent half its budget on fighting fires this year.

Thompson also realizes many users would like to see more signs.

Either way, it's a long road ahead.

LTBMU hopes to return in the fall with a proposal from the comments, a submitted NEPA document and a call for another meeting.

"It's really hard to give everyone their own little piece (of Tahoe), but we've got to be respectful," she said.