



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Tahoe National Forest  
Supervisor's Office

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Per \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Paul Roen  
Sierra County Board of Supervisors  
P.O. Drawer D  
Downieville, CA 95936

Dear Supervisor Roen:

I have issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Draft Record of Decision (ROD) for the Tahoe National Forest Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Project. Availability of these documents was initially scheduled for January 4, 2019; however, due to the lapse in funding and partial government shutdown, availability of these documents has been delayed until this time. The FEIS has been modified in response to comments we received during the comment period. The FEIS and Draft ROD are available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>. In addition, copies of the FEIS are available at the Tahoe National Forest Supervisor's Office, 631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA 95959 or by contacting the Project Leader, Joe Chavez. (Contact information is provided in the last paragraph of this letter.)

The Draft Record of Decision would implement Alternative 2, Modified Proposed Action, which would designate: (1) approximately 410,703 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Tahoe National Forest for public cross-country OSV use and (2) approximately 384 miles of OSV trails, of which 247 miles would be available for snow grooming. Class 1 OSVs would be allowed on all designated OSV trails and areas; Class 2 OSVs would be allowed only on designated OSV trails available for grooming. This alternative designates 34 OSV crossings of the Pacific Crest Trail, and includes snow depth requirements and provisions for monitoring and enforcement. In addition, Alternative 2 would amend the *Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (1990) by removing the OSV use standards and guidelines for each management area and replacing them with the following forest-wide standard: "Manage over the snow vehicle (OSV) use through designation of areas and trails consistent with travel management regulations."

The draft decision is subject to two different objection processes because it includes both a project-level decision as well as a forest plan amendment decision. The project-level decision (which includes all elements of the draft decision except the proposed forest plan amendment) is subject to the objection regulations at 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B. The forest plan amendment portion of the decision is subject to the objection regulations at 36 CFR 219, Subpart B. While the two objection processes are similar, there are some important differences as described below.

#### **Who May File an Objection**

**36 CFR 218 (Project):** Individuals or entities who have submitted timely, specific written comments about the proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the Project (36 CFR 218.5(a)).

**36 CFR 219 (Forest Plan Amendment):** Individuals or entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the plan amendment during the opportunities for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the forest plan amendment portion of the Project (36 CFR 218.5).

#### **Required Content for an Objection**

**36 CFR 218 (Project):** Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed Project unless based on new information arising after the



designated comment opportunities. Objections on the Project must include the following information (36 CFR 218.8(d)): (1) objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available; (2) objector's signature or other verification of authorship; (3) identification of a single lead objector when applicable; (4) project name, Responsible Official name and title (Eli Ilano, Forest Supervisor, Tahoe National Forest), and name of affected National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s); (5) description of those aspects of the project being objected to, including specific issues related to the proposed project; (6) specific reasons for, and suggested remedies to resolve, the objection; and (7) description of the connection between the objection and the objector's prior comments, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment. Documents incorporated by reference must adhere to 36 CFR 218.8(b).

**36 CFR 219 (Forest Plan Amendment):** Objections on the forest plan amendment portion of the Project must include the following information (36 CFR 219.54(c)): (1) the objector's name and address, along with a telephone number or email address if available; (2) Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the objection); (3) identification of the lead objector, when multiple names are listed on an objection; (4) the name of the plan amendment being objected to and Responsible Official name and title (Eli Ilano, Forest Supervisor, Tahoe National Forest); (5) a statement of the issues and/or the parts of the plan amendment to which the objection applies; (6) a concise statement explaining the objection and suggesting how the proposed plan decision may be improved; and (7) a statement that demonstrates the link between prior substantive formal comments attributed to the objector and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the opportunities for formal comment. Documents incorporated by reference must adhere to 36 CFR 219.54(b).

#### ***Where to File an Objection***

The Regional Forester is the reviewing officer for objections for this Project filed under the 36 CFR 218 and/or 36 CFR 219 regulations. Objections must be submitted to: Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service; Attn: Tahoe National Forest Over-snow Vehicle Use Designation Project; 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, CA 94592. Objections may be submitted via mail, FAX (707-562-9229), or delivered during business hours (M-F 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). Electronic objections, in common (.doc, .pdf, .rtf, .txt) formats, may be submitted to: [objections-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:objections-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us) with Subject: Tahoe National Forest Over-snow Vehicle Use Designation Project

#### ***When to File an Objection***

**36 CFR 218 (Project):** Objections on the project-level decision must be submitted within **45 days** following the publication of the legal notice in Grass Valley's *The Union*. The date of the published legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source. It is the objector's responsibility to ensure evidence of timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer (36 CFR 218.9)

**36 CFR 219 (Forest Plan Amendment):** Objections on the forest plan amendment must be submitted within **60 days** following the publication of the legal notice in *The Union*. The date of the published legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source. It is the objector's responsibility to ensure evidence of timely receipt (36 CFR 219.56(c)).

Additional information about this Project can be obtained from: Joe Chavez, Forest Trails and Recreation Specialist for the Tahoe National Forest, 631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA 95959; telephone: 530-478-6158.

Sincerely,



ELI ILANO  
Forest Supervisor

Encl: Summary and FAQs



U.S. Forest Service  
TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST  
631 Coyote Street  
Nevada City, CA 95959  
[www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe/](http://www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe/)

## Project Summary

Contact: Joe Flannery  
(530) 478-6205  
[jflannery@fs.fed.us](mailto:jflannery@fs.fed.us)  
February 8, 2019



### Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation - Project Summary and FAQs

On February 8, 2019, the Tahoe National Forest released the Draft Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Record of Decision (Draft Decision) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). The Draft Decision and Final EIS were originally scheduled to be released on January 4, 2019, but were delayed due to the recent lapse in government funding.

The Draft Decision designates areas on the Tahoe National Forest for cross-country, over-snow vehicle travel and specific snow trails for over-snow vehicle use, some of which are available for grooming. Specifically, the designation allows for:

- Cross-country, over-snow vehicle\* travel on 410,703 acres of Tahoe National Forest managed lands when there is adequate snow depth to avoid damage to natural and cultural resources. Over-snow vehicle enthusiasts can continue to recreate in popular wintertime areas including Sierra Buttes/Lake Basin, Robinson Flat, Donner Summit, Yuba Pass, Carpenter Ridge, White Rock Lake, and other locations.
- Up to 34 over-snow vehicle crossings of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.
- Continued grooming on over 247 miles of over-snow vehicle trails where there is 12-18 inches of snow. This includes popular trails such as the Sierra Buttes, Yuba Pass, China Wall, and Little Truckee Summit trail networks.
- 135 additional miles of non-groomed, over-snow vehicle trails located outside of cross-country, designated areas. This includes 53 miles of easements crossing private property. These trails will be subject to the same snow-depth requirement as cross-country, designated areas or, where there is an underlying Tahoe National Forest System road, a 6 inch snow depth requirement.

Formal opportunities for public comment regarding the Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation have passed.

For more information please see the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), attached. Additional details, including the entire Draft Decision, the Final EIS, the Legal Notice, and project maps can be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>.

\* For Class-1 OSVs including snowmobiles, tracked motorcycles, snow-cats, tracked all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and tracked utility terrain vehicles (UTVs).

## **Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**Q:** *For cross-country use designation, what is “adequate snow depth to avoid damage to natural and cultural resources?”*

**A:** As a guideline to avoid damaging resources, a minimum of 12 inches of moderate to heavy density, uncompacted snow is generally needed. Sierra storms typically have a moderate to high water content. Snow water equivalency (SWE) is also an indicator for avoiding damage to resources. An SWE of 4 inches can be a reasonable baseline for avoiding resource damage.

On designated OSV trails with underlying roads (non-groomed), a minimum of 6 inches of uncompacted snow is typically needed to avoid damage to the underlying road surface.

**Q:** *What is the basis for the 12-18 inch snow-depth requirement for trails designated available for grooming?*

**A:** The California State Parks’ Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division snow depth standards for grooming is currently 12 to 18 inches of snow. Much of the grooming of over-snow vehicle trails on the Tahoe National Forest is accomplished through grants from California State Parks. Thus, adherence to the state snow-depth standard is mandatory to accomplish grooming activities.

**Q:** *I commented on the Draft EIS in 2018. Where can I see the response to my comments?*

**A:** The Tahoe National Forest received over 2,200 comment letters in response to the Draft EIS. The content of all comments was read, considered in the development of the Draft Decision, and entered into the project record. Responses to public comments were categorized and organized by seven general topics and seventy-four subtopics and are documented in Appendix H (FEIS Volume III). Each comment was assigned a unique identifier number. Appendix H contains an alphabetical list of commenters and the identifier number assigned to each comment. To find your unique identifier number, your comment, and the response, view Appendix H (Volume III of the Final EIS) located at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>.

**Q:** *Can I object to the Draft Record of Decision?*

**A:** The draft decision is subject to two different objection processes because it includes both a project-level decision as well as a Forest Plan amendment decision.

Individuals or entities who have submitted timely, specific written comments about the proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the project.

Individuals or entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the plan amendment during the opportunities for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the forest plan amendment portion of the Project.

For complete instructions on objection eligibility and how to object, please see the Tahoe NF OSV Project Opportunity to Object Legal Notice at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>.

**Q:** *Were there changes made to the Selected Alternative between the Draft EIS and the Final EIS?*

**A:** In response to comments and public involvement, there were a number of changes made to the selected Alternative between the Draft EIS (April, 2018) and the Draft Decision/Final EIS (February,

2019). For details regarding changes to the Selected Alternative please see the Final EIS, Volume I, pp. 24 -25 at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45914>. A few of the key changes include:

- Expanding areas designated for cross-county, over-snow vehicle use in the
  - Donner Lake Interchange area
  - Granite Flat area (west of HWY 89).
  
- Not designating over-snow vehicle use in
  - Fisher Lake and its watershed
  - A 300-500 foot zone near the ridgeline adjacent to Tinkers knob.
  - Tahoe National Forest parcels adjacent to Frog Lake
  
- Adding designated snow trails (not available for grooming) outside of designated cross-county, over-snow vehicle use areas.
  - Several OSV trails across private lands where the Tahoe National Forest holds easements.
  - Sawtooth Snow Trail
  - Cabin Creek access
  - Carpenter Ridge access
  
- Changing OSV Class from width basis to ground pressure basis (pounds per square inch -psi), which will be indirectly determined by via vehicle type
  - Class 1 OSVs: These are vehicles that typically exert 1.5 psi or less. Snowmobiles, tracked motorcycles, snow-cats, tracked ATVs, and tracked UTVs. These are vehicles that typically exert 1.5 psi or less.
  - Class 2 OSVs (restricted to Designated Snow Trails Available for Grooming) = OSVs over 1.5 psi, which include tracked 4WD SUVs, tracked 4WD trucks. These are vehicles that typically exert more than 1.5 psi.
  
- Changing the amount, and type, of Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) crossings. More PCT crossings were added based on public comment.

**Q:** *Why are there designated crossings of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT)?*

**A:** Approximately 99 miles of the PCT traverse the Tahoe National Forest. Of that, 76 miles of the PCT are on National Forest System lands. OSV use on the PCT is prohibited by the National Scenic Trails Act, P.L. 90-543, Section 7(c). To provide a legal opportunity to cross the PCT, the Draft Decision provides 34 designated OSV crossings of varying crossing widths. The purpose of these crossings is to allow OSV users to get across the PCT in situations where OSV use is designated in areas located on either side of the trail.

**Q:** *How are over-snow vehicle users supposed to cross the PCT?*

**A:** Of the 34 designated PCT crossings, fourteen crossings will utilize underlying roads identified on the Tahoe National Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map and will be the width of the underlying road (approximately 14 feet).

Twenty OSV crossings of the PCT will not utilize underlying roads and will range in width up to a 1/4 mile. These wider crossings are located where snow conditions are highly variable such as areas prone to

wind loading of snow and the formation of cornices. These wider crossings give OSV users options to select a safe crossing of the PCT.

In all cases, OSV users would be required to cross the PCT at 90 degrees, or as close to 90 degrees as is safe to cross, to minimize the time and distance needed to cross the trail. Additionally, OSV users would be required to cross the PCT at the designated location, or as close to the designated location as is safe. These situational variance allowances for the PCT designated crossings were added to the Draft Decision/Final EIS based on comments to the Draft EIS, and are designed for the safety of OSV users in highly variable snow conditions.

*Q: How many acres were previously designated for over-snow vehicle use before this process? Why has this amount changed?*

**A:** Before this Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation process, 636,000 acres were available for over snow vehicle use according to the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource management Plan.

The largest factor that accounts for decreases in OSV designated use acreage is elevation and adherence to the Travel Management Rule's Subpart C Regulations.

Subpart C regulations state – “Over-snow vehicle use on National Forest System roads, on National Forest System trails, and in areas on National Forest System lands shall be designated...where snowfall is adequate for that use to occur, and, if-appropriate, shall be designated by class of vehicle and time of year...”

Based on decades of managing and monitoring OSV use on the Tahoe NF, it is rare that there is consistent snow coverage to provide OSV opportunities under 5,000 foot elevation. Therefore, areas under 5,000 feet in elevation were generally not considered “adequate” for managed OSV use and were generally not included in the selected Alternative –**which accounts for over 145,000 acres previously designated as available for over-snow vehicle use.**