

USDA Forest Service, EMC
Attn: Judicial & Administrative Review Group
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Mailstop Code 1400
Washington D.C. 20250-1104

January 17, 2014

Also via email to objections-chief@fs.fed.us

Tom Tidwell, Chief, U.S. Forest Service

Regarding:

Objection to the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan;

Responsible Official--Randy Moore, Regional Forester, Pacific Southwest Region

This objection is made by James Miller, P.O. Box 3041, Incline Village Nevada, 89450; telephone 775-831-8608; email, jamesmiller14@msn.com.

The objections stated herein are regarding issues previously raised in comments regarding the Draft Forest Management Plan Made to the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) via email from jamesmiller14@msn.com on July 12, 2012.

The Revised Land and Resource Plan (the Revised Plan) completed by the LTBMU does not include policies needed to ensure ecological, social and economic sustainability as described under the "Vision" heading in the Revised Plan and which are necessary to reasonably manage land use as well as ensuring public safety for winter recreationists.

While the Revised Plan acknowledges that population has increased more in areas of Nevada near the Lake Tahoe Basin than in most parts of California, the Plan does not specify policies regarding the increased demand for largely day use recreational opportunities in the north/east portions of the Lake Tahoe Basin or mitigation of the effects caused by such visitors. The population in Nevada is less than in proximate areas of California, but it is much nearer to the Basin. Along the Highway 395/580 corridor, hundreds of thousands of people live less than an hour away from Lake Tahoe. The impact these people have on the Basin is significantly different than that of visitors from farther away and the Plan should include provisions to monitor the number of such visitors over time and determine how best to provide recreational opportunities as well as mitigating effects on the ecology of the Basin.

In chapter 3 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, under the heading, "Social and Economic Conditions" mention is made of visitors seeking day use recreational opportunities, but the issue of rapidly increasing demand for this type of recreation from Nevada is neglected.

The Revised Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement propose to continue current policies regarding the use of snowmobiles, termed "over snow vehicles" or "OSVs". The number of winter recreationists and the weight/speed of modern OSVs make this an untenable policy. To suggest that people using snowshoes or cross country skis, moving at two to three miles per hour should share

terrain with OSVs moving at up to sixty miles per hour is simply irrational. As the number of pedestrians increases, the danger that someone will be struck and seriously injured by an OSV has become quite real in some areas of the Basin and is likely to become worse in the future. In addition to the danger, the noise and exhaust from OSVs enormously reduce the quality of an outing on snowshoes or cross country skis. Snowmobile operators are in less danger from collisions than pedestrians, but it can hardly be enjoyable for them to slowly pick their way through a crowd of pedestrians. The fun of riding a snowmobile is to enjoy the mobility at speed, not to be forever cautious to avoid injuring someone. Eventually, concern over adverse effects on the environment may limit the use of all types of motorized vehicles off roads. However, in the meantime the Forest Service has a responsibility to establish separate areas where OSV operators and pedestrians can both safely enjoy their sports. The Nevada Department of Transportation has in recent years recognized the increasing danger of collisions between motorists and pedestrians along this section of Highway 431 by reducing the speed limit during periods of heavy recreational usage. It behooves the Forest Service to show the same concern for the safety of people who choose to recreate in this area.

One of the most immediate needs for additional restrictions on OSVs is to address problems southeast of Nevada Highway 431. For decades the Forest Service has established an area for OSV use northwest of Highway 431, near Mount Rose Pass. Until recent years, OSV users went to this designated area and pedestrians went southeast of Highway 431. The Carson Ranger District of Region 4 of the Forest Service has prohibited use of OSVs in a meadow area southeast of the road, but pedestrians also intensively use the terrain south of the meadows, in the purview of the LTBMU. In recent years, increasing numbers of OSVs have entered the area south of the meadows. These incursions are limited, relative to OSV usage on the other side of the highway, but because pedestrian usage of the area is intense, have caused serious disruption and user conflict. To my knowledge, there have yet to be serious injuries, but someone being hurt seems inevitable if Forest Service policies remain unchanged as specified in the Revised Plan. Continued allocation of an area northwest of Highway 431 for OSV usage may be justified at present, but OSV use should not be permitted on the southeast side of the highway south of the meadows (an area characterized by Chickadee Ridge).

On pages 2-20 and 2-21, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) includes a conclusion that currently approved OSV use does not have sufficient adverse impact to justify further restrictions on such usage. The LTBMU presents an analysis to support the above conclusion under various headings in Chapter 3. However, the evidence presented is not sufficient to justify the LTBMU conclusion. Further, it is impossible to review the findings cited since research is referred to only by author and year, without any indication as to whether the findings have been published, or if so in what publication.

On page 2-21 of the FEIS reference is made to the National Visitor Use Monitoring Surveys (NVUM) to support a conclusion that less than 10% of visitors surveyed participated in either pedestrian or OSV related winter recreation. This conclusion is not supported by the data presented on page 3-448 of the FEIS. The survey results show cross country skiing as having been done by 9.8% of respondents, but apparently the survey did not include those using snowshoes or engaging in snowplay (use of sleds, toboggans, discs, or inner tubes to slide down slopes). If these additional recreationists were included, the percentage of pedestrian recreationists would have been considerably larger, especially since at

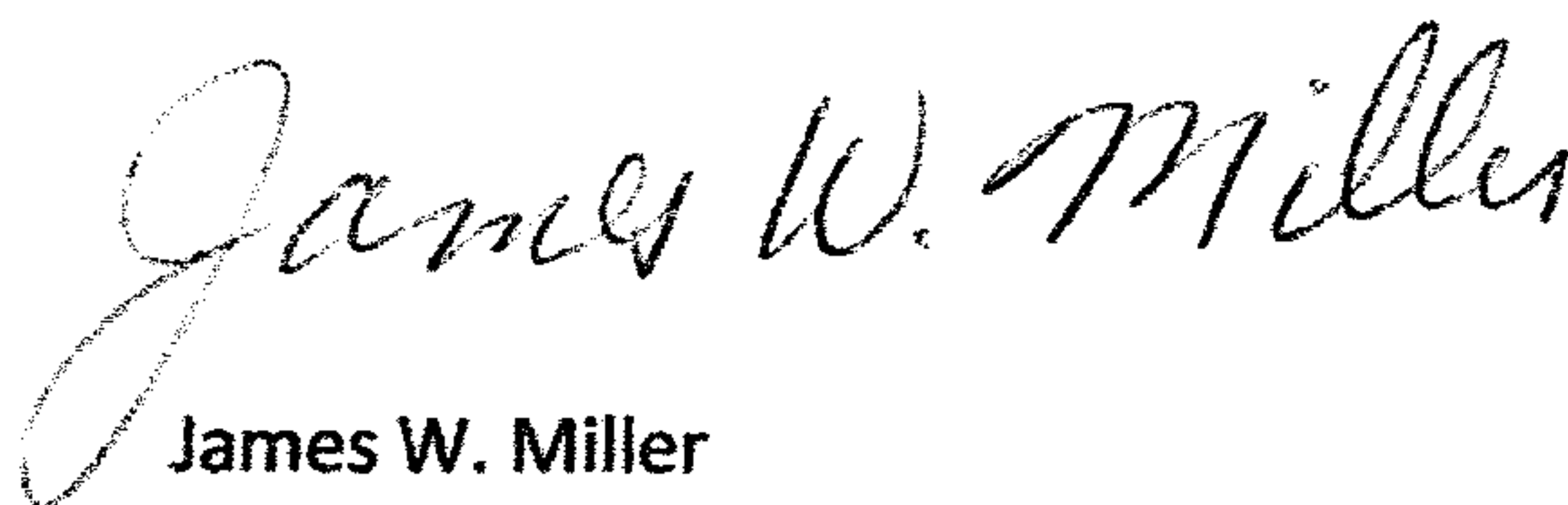
most times/places my observation is that at least twice as many people use snowshoes as cross country skis.

On page 3-34 of the FEIS, the LTBMU cites 2013 research indicating that trapped emissions from OSVs are released during spring snow melt, but notes that the State of California is adopting new standards for OSVs. No estimate is made of the amount of pollutants released, or when the California standards would become effective. On pages 3-63 and 3-64 of the FEIS the LTBMU indicates that an estimated 12,207 metric tons of CO₂ and 125 metric tons of NO_x per year are generated by OSVs into the air of the Lake Tahoe Basin. However, these amounts are dismissed as being "insignificant when compared to the release from prescribed and wildland fires". The estimated amounts of emissions seem quite large and, in any case, pollutants resulting from recreational activities allowed at the discretion of the LTBMU should not be compared to those resulting from natural processes such as wildland fires and prescribed burns to limit such fires. Emissions from OSVs should logically be evaluated in terms of the benefits to be derived from OSV recreational use versus the harm caused by such activities.

On pages 520 and 521 of the FEIS the LTBMU acknowledges that dispersed recreational activities can adversely impact wildlife in various ways, but seems to arrive at no conclusions regarding such impacts. An unnamed study conducted in the LTBMU is referred to as indicating that martens were not impacted by low frequency use of OSVs; one pass per two hour period. In the area designated for OSVs northwest of Highway 431 my observation is that an OSV would often pass most places at intervals closer to two minutes than two hours, making this study not pertinent.

The scientific evidence presented in chapter 3 of the FEIS seems usually to be based on a literature search in an attempt to locate research that is at least somewhat pertinent to the subject at hand. This approach does not provide sufficient evidence to justify the conclusions regarding OSV use stated in chapter 2 of the FEIS. The Lake Tahoe Basin is often regarded as a national treasure. The Revised Plan will have an important and enduring impact on land use and environmental protection in the Basin. It therefore seems that applied research pertaining to issues raised by the plan is justified; if not done directly by the Forest Service, then through some arrangement with other public or private entities.

In summary, the policies stated in the Revised Plan regarding demand for recreational opportunities from those parts of Nevada near Lake Tahoe and OSV use would cause serious harm to parts of the Lake Tahoe Basin and to those who seek to pursue recreational opportunities in the Basin.



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