

The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Update on the Bunchgrass Winter Motorized Closure

Didn't the Wasatch-Cache Forest Plan announced in April 2003 designate part of Franklin Basin for non-motorized winter recreation? Yes. (See accompanying map.) Didn't snowmobile groups appeal that decision because they refused any additional restrictions to snowmobiling? Yes. Didn't BAS also appeal that decision because the area was too small and the boundaries too difficult to enforce? Yes...and...?

BAS joined six other prestigious environmental groups to appeal the Plan, charging the Forest Service with inadequate protection of roadless areas, Canada lynx, inadequate indicator species for wildlife, inadequate livestock grazing controls, blithe adoption of former Rep. Hansen's Shoshone ATV Trail system without considering environmental impacts, and

unenforceability of snowmobile closures in Franklin Basin of Logan Canyon. The latter has been, by far, the most contentious.

The Chief of the Forest Service in Washington, D.C. has yet to decide on our appeal (we were told it was most recently postponed until after the election – not unexpected in this administration), however, we have not been inactive since the Plan was announced. After the appeals were filed, the Forest Supervisor (responsible for creating the plan) and the Intermountain Regional Forester (who approved the plan) agreed to some minor amendments and then asked us to meet with snowmobile groups to seek an alternative to resolve the conflict between snowmobilers and non-motorized users that might allow us all to drop these appeals. There was a veiled threat that if we didn't agree to meet, then the "powers that be" would eliminate the closure

altogether. We were tempted to take that chance, after all, Rep. Bishop cannot overturn the law. However, we did agree to meet, but what transpired proved to be a waste of many hours and much patience.

The first meeting in November 2003 set the tone. The attendees included Rob Cruz, Logan District Ranger, members of his staff, representatives of local snowmobile organizations, representatives of the Cache Backcountry Skiers Alliance (now Nordic United), and BAS. The snowmobilers lashed out with angry words, untrue allegations, anti-wilderness ranting, assertions of "rights" to take motorized toys anywhere they wished, and threats to force "their" congressional representatives to ignore us. The leader of one snowmobile organization even implied

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Bunchgrass

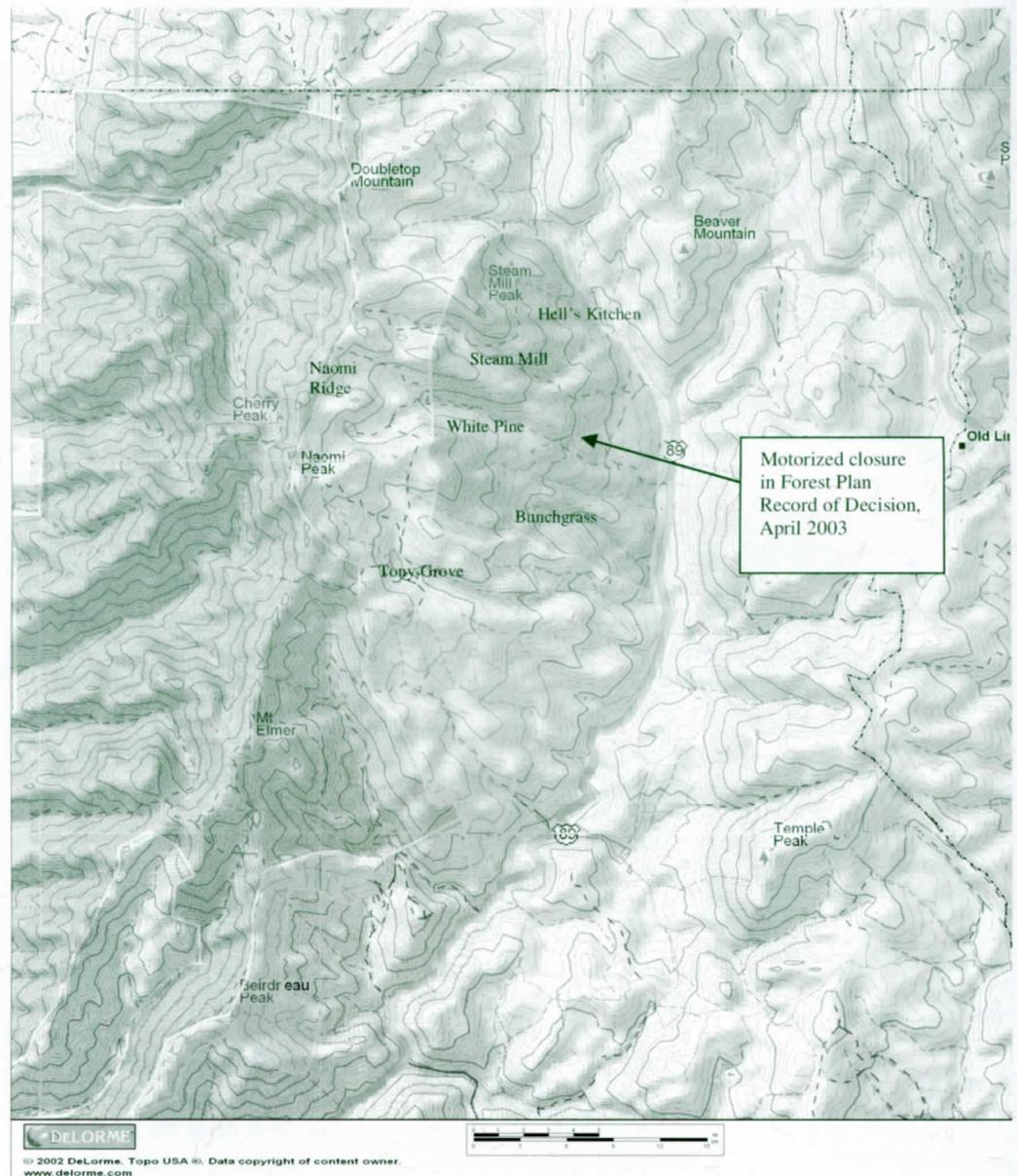
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violence ("I'll go postal if I can't ride at Tony Grove."). In the face of this verbal assault, we tried to remain calm, quiet, and patient. We pointed out that there had been far more comments during the planning process supporting non-motorized than motorized

uses, the vast majority of the forest was still open to snowmobiles, and our agenda was not to eliminate all snowmobile use from the forest. However, in subsequent meetings, their shrill demands have proven so unreasonable and uncivil that even the congressional representatives have commented on their narrow-minded, boorish behavior.

It should have been obvious that there would be no compromise. These fellows – for they're all male – believe sincerely that snowmobiling anywhere on public lands is a right, not a privilege. They are ungrateful for the over 500,000 acres in the Logan District alone designated as open to snowmobiling, and they chafe at the paltry 7,500

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Audubon Calendar

March 2005

5 Sewage Lagoons/Amalga Barrens for Returning Waterfowl. The Logan Sewage Lagoons offer a treasure trove of migrating waterfowl in late winter/early spring. Join local expert Keith Archibald as he shows you the large numbers of waterfowl in the area and points out rare species in their midst. Meet at the parking lot between the Logan Fire Station and the Caffé Ibis (50 East 150 North) at 9 a.m. Saturday. We will return by lunch time. For more information call Keith Archibald at 752-8258 or Dick Hurren at (435) 734-2653.

9 BAS Board of Trustees. Bridgerland Audubon's Board of Trustees meets at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the offices of Bio-Resources, 135 E. Center, Logan. All interested are invited to attend.

12 Bald Eagles at Willard Bay for Hikers and Non-Hikers. A great trip to chase away cabin fever and get some exercise! This is an annual outing led by Jim Sinclair of Cache Hikers to observe bald eagles, golden eagles and other raptors. This year we will again have a challenging hike for those who are up to it and an easy trek on flat ground for those who prefer that. Meet at 9 a.m. Saturday at the parking lot between Logan Fire Station and Caffé Ibis (50 East 150 North). The group will carpool to the entrance of Willard Bay Gravel Pit, where they will be able to look down on eagles and other raptors soaring below. The less avid hikers will explore both the north and south parts of Willard Bay State Park, where bald eagles and many other birds of interest are found. Box Elder County participants may prefer to meet about 9:50 a.m. at the entrance to Willard Bay State Park. Bring a lunch; carpooling will be available. For more information call Jim Sinclair at 752-0061 or Dick Hurren at (435) 734-2653.

12 "Chimpanzees: The People of the Forest" with Yared Fubusa at Stokes Nature Center. A captivating slide-show presentation of Dr. Jane Goodall's research in the Gombe National Park in East Africa. Yared Fubusa, a native who grew up in a small village near Gombe, will guide you through his experience as the youngest field assistant ever hired by Dr. Jane Goodall. Learn about the numerous studies of animal behavior that have been conducted at Gombe. He also addresses the geographic and cultural differences in views on conservation and how these differences affect the future of the chimps and baboons in Gombe. This Saturday afternoon program includes a 4 p.m. reception and refreshments to follow. Pre-registration is required. Space is limited. Program fee: \$8 SNC members, \$10 non-members. For more information call Stokes Nature Center, (435) 755-3239.

19 Reinhard Jockel Leads Us to Early Migrants. In conjunction with the 200 Club, there will be a field trip in the Benson area of Cache Valley. We will look for early spring migrant birds such as Sandhill cranes, swans, geese, ducks, gulls, etc. Meet in the parking lot between the Logan Fire Station and Caffé Ibis (50 East 150 North) at 8 a.m. Bring a lunch and be prepared for any kind of weather. We will return in the early afternoon, 2 to 3 p.m.

25 California Condors at Vermillion Cliffs. Join us March 25-27 for an extended foray down to the Utah-Arizona border to find California condors and other wildlife in this enchanting part of our country. We will travel individually or in small groups to Kanab on Friday, where we will overnight. Early Saturday morning we will convoy to the Cliffs area. Dick Hurren, who has had success in finding the condors in the past, will lead this trip. We will also do general wildlife viewing throughout the day, as we make a rather lengthy loop and return to Kanab Saturday evening. People will then return home on their own on Sunday or as they see fit. You will be expected to make your own motel/camping arrangements for the Kanab area. Dick can provide you with the names and numbers of motels/campgrounds in the area. If you plan to go, you must let Dick know in advance. He can be reached at (435) 734-2653.



If you'd like to come along on a field trip but do not have binoculars, call Dick Hurren (435) 734-2653. He'll try to find a pair for you to use.

Redstart, Late Start

A research report in the December 24th issue of *Science* underscores the competing costs of reproduction and migration for the American redstart and presumably other Neotropical migrants that depart our frigid north for balmy climes every autumn. I have often puzzled over why our resident songbirds, like chickadees and kinglets, don't go too, rather than linger here for freeze and famine. But after reading this article, maybe I have the question backward. Perhaps our resident songbirds are not to be pitied but admired for being adapted to stay and ride out winter's chill.

It turns out that redstarts are sometimes forced to molt during the southward migration. This fact was revealed to clever investigators by hydrogen isotope ratios in the male bird's feathers, which were correlated with the latitude of feather replacement. Males that bred later molted later, during migration, which cost them energy that should have been devoted to fat reserves. Those tardy molters that made the trip apparently ate less of whatever red/orange fruit colors their plumage too, for they were more drab than those that tidied up family matters earlier and molted before migration. If housefinch studies are predictive, then the following spring, back on their old northern home territories, these more drab males will be less attractive to prospective mates (please, no human analogies intended!). An earlier study showed that the quality of that tropical wintering habitat also predicted arrival time back north; poor habitat, late departure, tardy return to ol' the home territory, and now we know, late reproduction, delayed molt, pale advertising colors, and so on. And you thought that you had stress! This spring, as you admire the colorful, relentless male songbirds that return to sing on their home turf, save some sympathy for their plights...whiling away the winter months in some tropical forest may not be the easy way out after all.

—Jim Cane

Bunchgrass

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acres east of Mt. Naomi recently closed to winter motorized use. They came up with wild rhetoric and ridiculous assertions (such as “restricting snowmobiling below White Pine Lake makes it unsafe”). In their minds there is no “conflict”.

Late winter, each side was asked to present – calmly, if at all possible – alternatives to the 7,500-acre closure to resolve the major issue – egress from the bowls below the Naomi ridgeline.

Note on the accompanying map that the snowmobile closure does not extend to the wilderness boundary; it stops short approximately one mile east of the Mt. Naomi ridge. This boundary was created by the Forest Service for two main reasons. First, non-motorized users had asked the Forest Service to focus a closure near trailheads similar to the Franklin Basin road rather than areas east of Logan Peak because most skiers simply can't travel more than 3-4 miles from a trailhead in a day, especially when breaking trail through new snow, certainly not far enough to reach most of the interior of the Logan Ranger District. Second, the Forest Service had been told that the most

experienced snowmobilers wanted access to “highmark” the bowls below the Mt. Naomi ridgeline above White Pine Lake and east of Doubletop. The Forest Service thought that a boundary one mile east of the ridge would provide skiers with a relatively large quiet area for undisturbed backcountry travel with varied terrain for both beginners and advanced skiers, and would still allow snowmobilers to use the steep country along the ridge.

The problem is that, although the snowmobilers could still access some of these areas from Tony Grove on the south or Steep Hollow on the north, they say it would be difficult to leave the way they came in. Apparently, climbing back up those slopes can only be done by “the most experienced riders and most powerful machines.” For example, they said that a group of snowmobilers might go up the Tony Grove Road, climb up to Mt. Naomi along the summer foot trail, and then drop down to the north onto the benches above White Pine Lake. From there, they'd ride north around Mt. Gog, emerging into White Pine Canyon just below the lake. A few might then climb back up the summer trail from White Pine Lake to return to Tony Grove. Others, however, on “wimpy” snowmobiles would have

to ride down canyon and cross back to the Tony Grove Gravel Pit through the upper reaches of Bunchgrass drainage, and thence back to their trucks via the Tony Grove Road. Their proposed solution was to allow egress for anyone anytime down through the closure so they could play in the high bowls and return to their trucks without inconvenience. They also wanted a similar route in and out of Steam Mill Canyon from the Franklin Basin parking lot. Obviously, this essentially eliminates the closure! They just don't seem to understand that the noise from snowmobiles travels for miles, that on a calm, cold winter's day the stench from two-stroke motors hangs in the air for hours, and that skiers have trouble skiing through snowmobile tracks. Indeed, the idea that some folks just don't like snowmobiles seems anathema to them, downright un-American, even.

Nonetheless, we dutifully proposed some options, including exchanging egress corridors for more closed acreage in upper Steam Mill Canyon and Steep Hollow. “No more closure,” they said. Or, how about closing the north part during early winter, and close the south part around Tony Grove during the last part of winter? “What? Close Tony Grove? No way, not

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Bunchgrass

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ever!" Their alternatives eliminated the closure altogether, or moved it to lower elevations of south-facing, crusty snow. Not very helpful.

By late spring, it was obvious there would be no resolution between the groups. Non-motorized users were reluctant to give up ground that cost so much to gain. Snowmobilers were unwilling to accept any meaningful closure. We had agreed at the outset not to contact the press and not to publicize the negotiations in an attempt to avoid increasing the polarity while we sought a compromise. At this point, however, I doubt we can increase the polarity. There's little to be gained by further discussions, and we await the decision on the appeals. Depending on the outcome, we may elect to continue the fight in court.

Throughout it all, the local Forest Service representatives have proven to be thoughtful, dedicated to providing a non-motorized area of diverse opportunities, and determined to cut through the bullpoo (well, this is a family newsletter) from the snowmobilers to ensure that there is plenty of terrain still available for the motorized crowd. Forest Service personnel

put up boundary markers last year and, until a decision from Washington, they're committed to enforcing the existing closure even more rigorously this year. For that, we should thank and commend them. They understand that the conflict between snowmobilers and other users is real but one-sided, and they're trying hard to manage these public lands to provide opportunities for quiet, clean-smelling, and safe winter recreation for those who travel on foot.

What can you do? First, use it. Many of us in recent years have stopped going into the Bunchgrass, White Pine, Steam Mill and Hell's Kitchen Canyons because it was so unpleasant to be practically run over by snowmobiles. It's closed to snowmobiles now, though. Review the map of the Franklin Basin closure and start going back. Let the Forest Service see that this area is valued by non-motorized users. Second, when you confront snowmobiles, smile and wave. Some of these people are dangerous idiots, of course, but many others are reasonable, courteous folk who understand the need for and, indeed, support a closure. Third, when you see a snowmobile violating the closure boundaries, note the time and place and call the Forest Service (755-

3620) when you get home. You don't have to confront illegal users. Forest Service personnel are determined to enforce the boundaries. If they hear reports of violations, they'll increase their patrols. Fourth, it wouldn't hurt to call Representative Rob Bishop (801-625-0107). You don't have to talk to him. Just leave a message that you're a non-motorized user who appreciates the "Bunchgrass closure." He doesn't hear from us enough. Finally, realize that this is going to take some time. The Chamber of Commerce has been publicizing the "wonders" of snowmobiling Logan Canyon far and wide. In their minds, the more snowmobiles, the merrier. The result has been a staggering increase in snowmobile users over the last five years. It's just going to take some time to develop the awareness among snowmobilers that the Bunchgrass closure is for non-motorized users.

Oh, and there's one more thing. Call the local Forest Service district office and leave a message of "thanks". They've got a very, very difficult job trying to manage the exploding popularity of mindless motorized recreationists, both winter and summer. Yes, and there's still one more thing. Include higher gasoline taxes in your evening prayers.

—Bryan Dixon

Welcome to BAS

New Members

Ian Campbell
Heather Christenson
Jerryle G Collings
Dewayne Dimick
George O Hill

Virginia M McKee
Roger Peart
P Reid
Martha Stephens

Renewing Members

Keith L Dixon
Rebecca S Echols
Glen Gantz
Lu Georgi
Deann Lester
Mrs Meredith Matlack

Austin & Krista McHugh
Jane Murphey
Richard Olsen
Ann W Peralta
Kazuko Toelken
Wayne Wurtsbaugh

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

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Stephen Peterson.

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Membership in the Bridgerland Audubon Society includes a subscription to *The Stilt*, as well as *Audubon* magazine. The editor of *The Stilt* invites submissions, due on the 15th of each month. Send to stiltnews@hotmail.com.

National Audubon Society Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to contribute to Audubon and receive the Bridgerland Audubon newsletter, *The Stilt*, and the *National AUDUBON* magazine, as a:

- New member of the National Audubon Society and Bridgerland Audubon.
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My check for \$_____ is enclosed (\$20 membership dues)

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Please make all checks payable to National Audubon Society and send with this card to:
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Boulder, CO 80322-1001
W-52 Local Chapter Code: 7XCHA

Note to new National Audubon members: To get on *The Stilt* newsletter mailing list without the usual 8 week delay, contact Susan Durham, 753-5637, sdurham@cc.usu.edu.

Prefer the local newsletter only? Send \$20 and this form to: Bridgerland Audubon Society, PO Box 3501, Logan, UT 84323-3501 for a subscription to *The Stilt*.

National Audubon occasionally makes its membership list available to selected organizations. To have your name omitted from this, please check this box.



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