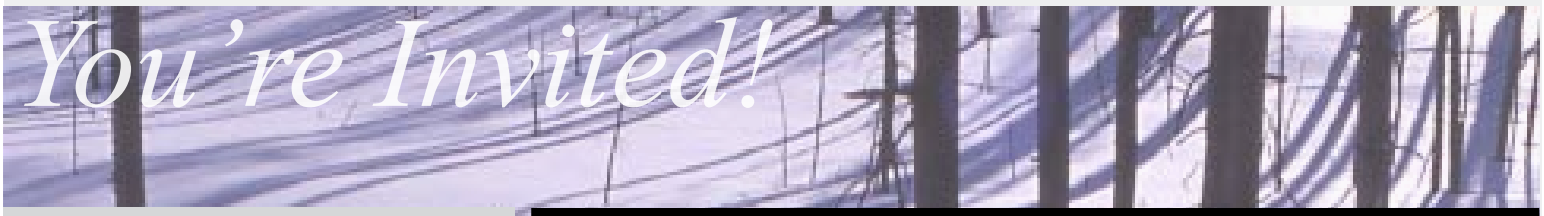
Yellowstone National Park
Wyoming, Montana,& Idaho

Yellowstone Winter Use Draft Plan

Public Meetings on the Yellowstone Winter Use Draft Plan/
Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement | June2012



Because of your interest in Yellowstone National Park, we request your input on the Yellowstone Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)/Winter Use Plan. Your participation is vital to our planning process.

Yellowstone in Winter

Yellowstone is a magical place in winter. With daytime temperatures rarely rising above single digits, the park becomes cloaked in deep layers of snow and ice. Bison and elk forage in meadows scattered with hot springs and mud pots. Geysers spout boiling water high into cold winter air. Natural quiet blankets the landscape.

On June 29, 2012, Yellowstone National Park released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)/winter use plan that contains alternatives for managing the park in winter. Inside this newsletter you will find the goals for the SEIS, a schedule for upcoming public meetings, and three action alternatives for managing winter use, including our preferred alternative.

The NPS preferred alternative, Alternative 4, proposes a management framework that will make the park cleaner, quieter, and allow for more people to visit the park. The preferred alternative encourages oversnow vehicle (OSV) innovation and clean technologies, and provides for greater operator flexibility.

Instead of focusing on the total number of OSVs in the park daily, Alternative 4 focuses on minimizing the impacts of OSVs and would put in place lasting measures to keep snowmobile and snowcoach impacts to a minimum, both in the short term and in the long term.

To accomplish these goals, the park is proposing to manage OSVs by 'transportation events.' A transportation event will initially be defined as one snowcoach or a group of, on average, seven snowmobiles traveling together within the park.

Recent research shows that 1 snowcoach and 7 snowmobiles, the average group size over the past 8 years, have comparable impacts on park resources such as air quality, the natural soundscape, and impacts to wildlife. Managing by transportation events, requiring that all visitor travel in the park be 100 percent guided, and requiring all OSVs use best available technology (BAT) will allow the park to welcome more winter visitors while minimizing impacts to Yellowstone's fragile winter ecosystem.

We believe that Alternative 4, managing oversnow vehicle use by transportation events, would create a sustainable solution that meets Yellowstone's mission to protect the park and its resources while creating opportunities for future generations to experience Yellowstone in the winter.

Purpose of the Winter Use Management Plan

The purpose of this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is to establish a management framework that allows the public to experience the unique winter resources and values at Yellowstone National Park. This Draft SEIS will be used to determine whether motorized winter use in the interior of the park is appropriate, and if so, the type, extent, and location of this use.

Objectives in Taking Action

Provide for Visitor Use, Experience, and Accessibility

- Provide the oportunity for visitors to experience and be insprited by Yellowstone's unique winter resources and values while ensuring resource protection
- Increase visitor understanding and appreciation of the park's winter resources
- Provide access for winter opportunities in the park that are appropriate and universally accessible

Protect Resources

- Wildlife: Manage winter use so that it does not disrupt the winter wildlife ecology, including those of sensitive species
- Sound: Mange winter use to protect naturally occurring sounds, and to minimize loud noises
- Air Quality: Create guidelines that minimize impacts on natural resources, including visibility and aquatic systems, that may be affected by air pollution
- Wilderness: Manage winter use to protect wilderness character and values
- Develop and implement an adaptive management program that includes monitoring the condition of resources

Ensure Health and Safety

- Manage access in the winter for the safety of all visitors and employees, including limiting impacts from emissions, noise, and known hazards

Improve Coordination and Cooperation

- Improve coordination and communication regarding winter use management with park parteners, gateway communities, and other stakeholders

Promote Park Operations and Management

- Provide advances of OSV technology that will reduce impacts and facilitate continuous improvement of technology over time
- Provide for winter use that is consistent with the park priority to provide critical visitor services at core locations

Range of Alternatives

All action alternatives would include development of Best Available Technology (BAT) for snowcoaches by the 2017-2018 season, BAT standards for snowmobiles, 100 percent guided snowmobile use, Sylvan Pass Avalanche Control for Alternatives 2 and 4, and adaptive management.
Sylvan Pass would be closed under Alternative 3.

Alternative 1: No Action

- Public OSV use would not be permitted because the 2009 to 2012 interim regulations expired after the 2011-2012 winter season.
- Non-motorized access throughout the park and wheeled vehicle use along the northern road would still be allowed.

Alternative 2: Continue Snowmobile/Snowcoach Use at 2011-2012 Limits

- Yellowstone would allow up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches in the park per day.
- All OSV interim regulation requirements would continue including commercial guiding and BAT standards for snowmobiles.

Alternative 3: Transition to BAT Snowcoaches

- This alternative would initially provide up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day, the same levels as the interim regulation.
- After the 2017-2018 season, when all snowcoaches must meet BAT requirements, snowcoach numbers would increase up to 120 per day, with a corresponding decrease in snowmobile numbers to zero during a 3-year phase-out period.
- East Entrance to Fishing Bridge (Sylvan Pass) would be closed to OSVs during the winter season once the phase-out of snowmobiles is complete.

Alternative 4 (NPS Preferred Alternative): Manage OSV Use by Transportation Events

Alternative 4 packages groups of visitors traveling by oversnow vehicle and manages snowmobile and snowcoach use by the effects of these grouped visitors on the park. This shift to management by transportation events, explained below, provides for a sustainable solution for winter use management that protects park resources.

Transportation Events

- Definition: A group of visitors entering Yellowstone by oversnow vehicle. If entering by snowmobile, one event would initially equal 7 snowmobiles traveling together. If entering by snowcoach, one event would initially equal a single snowcoach traveling in the park.
- 110 total transportation events per day, with up to 50 events allocated for snowmobiles.
- Snowmobiles and snowcoaches will be subject to robust sound emission standards – 68 decibels (dBA) and 75 decibels (dBA), respectively by the 2017-2018 season.
- Operators would decide how to split their daily allotments of transportation events between snowmobiles and snowcoaches.
- Should oversnow vehicle technology improve further and vehicles meet an enhanced BAT (e-BAT) standard of 66 dBA for snowmobiles and 71 decibels dBA for snowcoaches, additional vehicles may be added to each transportation event.
- All snowmobile use in the park would be guided. One non-commercially guided group of up to five snowmobiles would be permitted into the park daily through each entrance. Non-commercial guides and members of their group operating snowmobiles would be required to complete both online and on-site training.

This alternative allows for greater flexibility, a cleaner, quieter park, and could allow for more visitors into the park. For more information, visit the Yellowstone Winter Use website: http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/winteruse.

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Public Meetings Schedule & Locations

We will hold four open house meetings to present our preferred alternative, answer questions, and formally hear public comments. Doors open at 6:30 PM for sign-in.

Jackson, WY
Monday, July 16, 2012 6:30-9:00 pm
The Virginian
750 West Broadway
Jackson, WY 83001

West Yellowstone, MT
Tuesday, July 17, 2012 6:30-9:00 pm
The Holiday Inn
315 Yellowstone Avenue
West Yellowstone, MT 59758

Bozeman, MT
Wednesday, July 18, 2012 6:30-9:00 pm
The Wingate by Wyndham
2305 Catron Street
Bozeman, MT 59718

Cody, WY
Thursday, July 19, 2012 6:30-9:00 pm
The Holiday Inn
1725 Sheridan Avenue
Cody, WY 82414

Your Participation Will Help Shape This Project

There are a number of ways to be involved:

- Attend a public meeting
- Submit comments electronically:
  logon to http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell and select "2012 Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement," to begin
- Submit written comments by mail or hand delivery to:
  Yellowstone National Park
  Winter Use SEIS
  PO Box 168,
  Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

Please comment on-line or provide written comments by mail. We encourage you to comment online. Unfortunately, we cannot accept comments by fax, e-mail or in any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

Please be sure to include your full name and address with the comments so we may add you to our mailing list for information on the planning process. The public comment period will be open for 45 days following publication of the EPA notice of availability for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. We look forward to your comments, concerns and suggestions.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal indentifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment - including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.