

Winter Use Plan & Environmental Impact Statement

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone National Park
Wyoming, Montana, Idaho

January 2010



You're Invited to Participate!

Yellowstone National Park is preparing a new long-term plan to manage winter use. The plan will take effect in the winter of 2011/12, when the present two-year interim plan expires. The new plan will focus on motorized winter use, including oversnow vehicle (OSV) use in the park in winter — including whether use is appropriate and, if so, in what form and at what levels. As the park and the National Park Service (NPS) prepare to draft the new plan, the public will have numerous opportunities to participate. The first opportunity is in the public “scoping” meetings described in this newsletter. In addition to the meetings, you are encouraged to ask questions and provide comments via the internet (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell>) or by mail in written, paper form. Yellowstone will also introduce an updated winter use planning website that will include educational materials, background data and links to numerous scientific reports and other information about winter use in the park. It also plans to provide information via a new Facebook page.

As their name implies, the public scoping meetings give you an opportunity to help develop the Winter Use Plan by defining and shaping the scope of issues in the project's environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS is a required study that evaluates the potential effects of the new plan on the park and its resources. The park wants your comments on the purpose, need, and objectives of the plan, potential management alternatives, as well as the issues to be addressed, as outlined in this newsletter.

Four scoping meetings will be held, each with identical formats and agendas. Meetings begin with a half-hour open house (6:30 to 7 p.m.), during which NPS staff can answer your questions and take your comments for the scoping record. At 7 p.m., the NPS will give a brief presentation, which will include the history of winter use in Yellowstone and a description of the planning process and how it will be developed. A brief question-and-answer period on the planning process will follow. Then the open-house portion of the meeting resumes, with more opportunity for discussion with NPS staff and for giving public comments. Those in attendance can leave their written comments on forms available at the meetings.

Anyone who wishes to comment, whether they attend a public meeting or not, can comment online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell> (click on the link to Winter Use Plan) during the public scoping period. The comments and concerns gathered during the public scoping period will be used to develop the Winter Use Plan/EIS.

Please join us to discuss winter use at Yellowstone National Park!

Public Scoping Meetings will be held on the following dates and times:

February 16, 2010: Idaho Falls, Idaho
Hilton Garden Inn, 700 Lindsay Blvd.
Idaho Falls, ID 83402
6:30pm to 8:30pm

February 18, 2010: Billings, Montana
Hilton Garden Inn, 2465 Grant Road
Billings, MT 59102
6:30pm to 8:30pm

March 15, 2010: Cheyenne, Wyoming
Little America, 2800 West Lincolnway
Cheyenne, WY 82009
6:30pm to 8:30pm

March 17, 2010: Washington, DC
Old Post Office Pavilion
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20004
6:30pm to 8:30pm

What is the Purpose of the Plan?

The purpose of the Winter Use Plan/EIS is to establish a management framework that allows the public to experience Yellowstone's unique winter resources and values. This plan will determine whether motorized winter use of the park (including wheeled motor vehicles, snowmobiles, and snowcoaches) is appropriate, and if so, the types, extent, and location of this use.

Why is this Action Needed?

A Winter Use Plan is needed at this time because:

- Yellowstone offers unique winter experiences that are distinct from other times of the year;
- The National Park Service provides opportunities for people to experience the park in the winter, but access to most of the park in the winter is limited by distance and the harsh winter environment, which present challenges to safety and park operations; and
- The legal authority for oversnow vehicle use (snowmobiles and snowcoaches) at Yellowstone expires after the winter of 2010-2011. A decision is needed about whether this use should continue, and if so, how to structure use to protect resources and values and to provide for visitor use and enjoyment.

What will be Analyzed?

Some of the important issues the Winter Use Plan / EIS will include:

- Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat (Including threatened and endangered species)
- Sound
- Air Quality
- Visitor Use and Experience
- Socioeconomics
- Park Operations and Maintenance



Plan Objectives

What does the NPS wish to accomplish with this plan?

Visitor Use

- Provide the public an opportunity to experience and be inspired by Yellowstone's unique winter resources and values while ensuring resource protection.
- Increase visitor understanding and appreciation of Yellowstone's winter resources.
- Provide visitors access to winter opportunities appropriate to the park. Provide opportunities that are universally accessible.

Resources

- **Wildlife:** Manage winter use so that it does not disrupt the winter wildlife ecology, including sensitive species.
- **Sound:** Manage winter use to protect naturally occurring background sound levels and to minimize loud noises.
- **Air Quality:** Manage winter use to minimize impacts to resources that may be affected by air pollution including visibility and aquatic systems.
- **Wilderness:** Manage winter use in developed areas and road corridors to protect wilderness character and values.

Health and Safety

- Seek to manage access in the winter for the safety of all visitors and employees, including limiting impacts from emissions, noise, and accidents.

Coordination and Cooperation

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

Park Management/Operations

- Develop and implement an adaptive management program that includes monitoring the condition of resources.
- Promote advances of oversnow vehicle (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.

What is the Status of Access?

Winter use in the park for the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 seasons will be managed under the interim rule that is in place as a result of Yellowstone's 2008 Interim Winter Use Plan and Environmental Assessment. Under the interim rule, up to 318 commercially guided, "Best Available Technology" (BAT) snowmobiles and up to 78 commercially guided snow coaches are allowed per day in Yellowstone.

The interim rule remains in effect through the winter of 2010/2011, while the long-term Winter Use Plan/EIS is being developed. The long-term Winter Use Plan/EIS, and associated rule (if necessary, based on the outcome of the EIS), are intended to be in place by the 2011/2012 winter use season. More information on the history and current status of winter use can be found at: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/winteruse.htm>.



What Can I Do To Help?

This cannot be done without you. Please take time to consider the following questions when submitting your comments:

What is special to you about winter use in Yellowstone? What would you add, delete, or otherwise change in the draft purpose, need, and objective statements provided on the previous page?

What park resources and values do you believe are most important and which of these should guide development of the winter use plan for Yellowstone? Why are they important?

What other issues, concerns, or suggestions do you think should be considered as we develop the new long-term Winter Use Plan/EIS?

What are some potential options for managing motorized winter use at Yellowstone?

What is the Timeline for the Winter Use Plan/EIS?

February / March 2010

Public Scoping

Late Winter / Early Spring 2011

Draft Plan / EIS Released with 60-Day Public Review & Comment Period

Fall 2011

Final Plan / EIS Completed

November 2011

Proposed Regulation Implemented , if necessary based upon the outcome of the EIS





Your Participation is Vital

Because of your interest in winter use at Yellowstone National Park, we ask that you help the park develop the purpose, need, objectives, and preliminary issues for the park's study this year of the potential environmental impacts of a new long-term Winter Use Plan.

Please join us at the public scoping meetings to begin this process. If you cannot attend the public scoping meetings or would like to provide comment in another form, you can still participate online or in writing. Here's how:

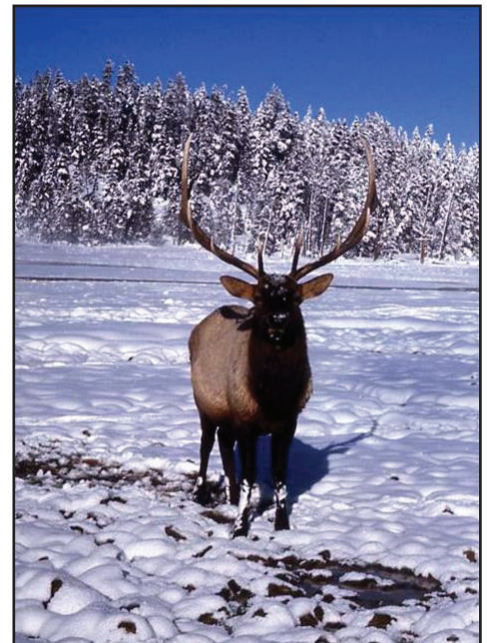
- On-line using the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) web site at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell>. (click on the link to the Winter Use Plan)

- Hand deliver your comments to:
**Management Assistant's Office
Headquarters Building
Mammoth Hot Springs
Yellowstone National Park, WY**
- Mail any written comments to this address:
**Yellowstone National Park
Winter Use Scoping,
P.O. Box 168
Yellowstone NP, WY 82190**

This includes mailing pre-addressed comment cards provided at public scoping meetings.

Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or in any other way than those specified above.

Please submit all comments by March 30, 2010.



Please Note: Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying 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 withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.