

Winter Use Plan and EIS

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway



Newsletter – September 2007

FINAL EIS NOW AVAILABLE

A new long-term plan to guide management of winter use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway is now available.

The superintendents of Yellowstone and Grand Teton will use the analysis and recommendations contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to make a recommendation to Mike Snyder, Regional Director of the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service regarding the direction of winter use in the parks.

Regional Director Snyder will make the final decision on the direction of winter use in the parks. He may choose the revised preferred alternative or any combination of management approaches addressed in the FEIS. He is expected to issue this Record of Decision (ROD) in early to mid-November.

A rule to implement the ROD must then be published in the *Federal Register* in order to allow the parks to open for the winter 2007-2008 season as scheduled on December 19, 2007.

The goal of the Winter Use Plans FEIS is to implement a long-term winter use plan that ensures park visitors have a range of appropriate winter recreation opportunities that do not impair or irreparably harm park resources or values. The National Park Service (NPS) believes that the limited, managed use of both Best Available Technology (BAT) snowmobiles and snowcoaches for oversnow travel meets this goal and is in full compliance with the Organic Act, the NPS Management Policies of 2006, and other mandates.

Appendix I of the FEIS includes a discussion of the comments received on the Draft EIS and the NPS responses. It also indicates what changes the parks made to the EIS as a direct result of comments, questions or suggestions.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN THIS WINTER?

The NPS expects operations to continue this winter under essentially the same rules that were in effect the past three winters. All alternatives in the FEIS call for a transition year.

In Yellowstone, this means up to 720 commercially guided BAT snowmobiles per day would be allowed to enter the park during the winter of 2007-2008. Yellowstone intends to conduct avalanche control operations this winter to allow motorized oversnow travel on the East Entrance road across Sylvan Pass.

In Grand Teton and the Parkway, 140 snowmobiles per day would be allowed this winter. Most of the snowmobiles would have to meet BAT requirements. Access to the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail, Grassy Lake Road, Jackson Lake, and adjacent public and private lands would continue under the same regulations used the past three winters.

There would be changes to snowmobile and snowcoach use in both parks beginning with the 2008-2009 winter season under the revised preferred alternative contained in the Final EIS.

For more information, please visit: www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm

You may also contact Yellowstone National Park at: (307) 344-2019.

WHAT CHANGES WILL HAPPEN IN YELLOWSTONE AFTER THIS WINTER BASED ON THE FEIS?

The revised preferred alternative would allow fewer snowmobiles in Yellowstone in the future than were allowed during the last three winters. It calls for reducing the maximum number of BAT snowmobiles allowed in the park from 720 to 540 per day. Analysis and improved modeling have shown that reducing snowmobile numbers would better address resource protection - especially sound impacts - while at the same time being responsive to most access and economic concerns as well as public comment. Eighty-three snowcoaches would be allowed in Yellowstone per day. Beginning with the 2011-2012 season, all snowcoaches operating in the parks would be required to meet BAT emission and sound level requirements.

Under the revised preferred alternative, all snowmobiles and snowcoaches in Yellowstone would be 100% commercially guided. Mandatory guiding under the temporary plan addressed most of the concerns regarding the impacts of historic, unregulated winter use. Snowmobile and snowcoach travel would continue to be restricted to existing park roads groomed for their use. Trail and off-road use of snowmobiles and snowcoaches has always been and would continue to be prohibited.

The NPS has determined it is an unacceptable risk to use howitzers according to past practice or to continue use of the helicopter for avalanche control for Sylvan Pass. The revised preferred alternative calls for eliminating motorized oversnow travel over Sylvan Pass after this winter. The first four miles of the road west of the park's East Entrance would be open for motorized oversnow travel to allow the drop off of individuals who want to ski or snowshoe.

TIMELINE

Final EIS released.....September 24, 2007

Notice of Availability of Final EIS published by EPA in *Federal Register* beginning a required 30-day waiting periodSeptember 28, 2007

Record of Decision signed..... November 2007

Final regulation published..... November 2007

Winter use season begins.. December 19, 2007

WHAT CHANGES WILL HAPPEN IN GRAND TETON AND THE PARKWAY AFTER THIS WINTER BASED ON THE FEIS?

In Grand Teton and the Parkway, grooming and motorized oversnow travel on the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST) between Moran Junction and Flagg Ranch would be discontinued. Current or anticipated use levels do not warrant the effort or expense to keep this section of the CDST open to motorized oversnow travel. However, those interested in through travel on the CDST would be able to haul their snowmobiles on trailers between these locations. Commercial options to transport snowmobiles between these locations may be available.

In order to improve access between Flagg Ranch and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, 25 snowmobiles a day would be allowed to travel on the Grassy Lake Road (as counted at Flagg Ranch). There would be no BAT or guiding requirement on the Grassy Lake Road.

Forty unguided, BAT snowmobiles a day would be allowed on Jackson Lake to facilitate ice fishing by those possessing appropriate fishing gear and a valid State of Wyoming fishing license.

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WHAT IF NPS ISN'T ABLE TO COMPLETE AND IMPLEMENT A RECORD OF DECISION AND ASSOCIATED RULE BEFORE THE START OF THE 2007-2008 WINTER SEASON?

The Temporary Winter Use Plans and rules that were in place for the last three winter seasons have expired. Without a new plan and new rule, the use of snowmobiles and snowcoaches would be prohibited this coming winter. One possible exception to this is if Congress passes language in the Department of the Interior Appropriations Bill to re-authorize the motorized use provisions from the Temporary Plans for the 2007-2008 season. This would provide certainty by continuing the Temporary Plans through another winter.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON WEBSITE
<http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/winteruse.htm>.

Recent and upcoming website additions include both monitoring and modeling reports which are under Technical Documents on the above site:

- Public Comment Report (DEIS)
- Public Comment Report (Proposed Rule)
- Final 2006-2007 winter soundscapes monitoring report.
- Additional modeling and monitoring reports will continue to be posted as they become available.

Please check the website regularly for updates.

For more information, please visit: www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm

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