

# Winter Use Plan and EIS

## Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks

### John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway



Newsletter – August 2007

#### COMMENT PERIODS ON THE DEIS AND PROPOSED RULE

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and long-term plan for managing winter recreational use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway (the parks) was available for public review and comment from March 27 through June 5, 2007.

The parks received about 122,000 comment letters on the DEIS; almost 6,000 of those were considered substantive. Four public comment meetings were held in Cody, Wyoming; West Yellowstone, Montana; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Lakewood, Colorado during the DEIS comment period. The separate comment period for the Proposed Rule closed on July 16. The parks received about 2,000 comment letters on the Proposed Rule.

#### TIMELINE

NPS continues to analyze comments and finalize the EIS.....September 2007

Final EIS released for a required 30-day waiting period..... October 2007

Record of Decision signed..... November 2007

Final regulation published..... November 2007

Winter use season begins.. December 19, 2007

The Final EIS and Final Regulation will include discussion of the comments received, and the NPS responses. It will also indicate what changes the parks made to the EIS or Rule as a direct result of comments, questions or suggestions. Once completed, comment analysis reports will be available on the winter use website.

#### COMMENT SUMMARY

NPS is always careful to emphasize that public comment periods are not “votes” the agency counts to know exactly how many are “for” and “against” various elements of the alternatives. Nonetheless, members of the public and government agencies are interested in comment trends. The major themes of the comments from the public meetings are consistent with the written comments received as described below:

- Keep snowmobile use levels at or below those experienced 2004-2007
- Transition to snowcoach only use
- Support for the preferred alternative with suggested changes (allow non-commercial guiding, some non-BAT use, and keep Sylvan Pass open)
- Allow for increased use levels

**For more information, please visit:** [www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm)

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

### **HOW IS THE NPS USING WHAT THEY HEARD IN THE COOPERATING AGENCY AND PUBLIC COMMENTS?**

In accordance with Council on Environmental Quality guidelines, the NPS is analyzing those substantive comments that question the accuracy of information in the EIS; question the adequacy of environmental analysis; present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the EIS; or cause changes or revisions in the proposal.

The NPS will either modify the alternatives as requested; develop and evaluate suggested alternatives; supplement, improve, or modify the analysis; make factual corrections; or explain why the comments do not warrant further agency response.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN THIS WINTER?**

The NPS plans to complete the EIS process and issue new regulations prior to the start of the 2007-2008 winter season. The final regulations will propose a transition period for portions of the Temporary Plans to remain in effect. In other words, the 2007-2008 season is expected to be similar to the past three seasons under the Temporary Plan. All entrances will be open, and snowmobiles will be BAT and commercially guided, with a limit of 720 snowmobiles per day. This is to provide the parks, park visitors and gateway communities with certainty and stability.

### **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 Fiscal Year 2008 Appropriations 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.

### **INFORMATION ON WEBSITE**

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/winteruse.htm>.

Recent and upcoming website additions include both monitoring and modeling reports:

- Public Comment Report (DEIS)
- Public Comment Report (Proposed Rule)
- A draft 2006-2007 winter soundscapes monitoring report for technical review.
- A draft report of an August 2007 Operational Risk Management (ORM) Assessment for avalanche hazard mitigation at Sylvan Pass and Talus Slope.
- Additional modeling and monitoring reports will be posted as they become available.

Please check the website regularly for updates.