



## Interpretive Plan

### For Jackson-based Concessioner Snowmobile Guides

The winter environment in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) is one of beauty, mystery, and hardship. During your trip from Jackson to Yellowstone National Park (NP) via Grand Teton NP and back, your guests will see a large swath of this diverse ecosystem. Without your help, guests may never understand the complexity, interconnectivity, and importance of this grand landscape.

As a park concession employee, you are required to provide for the safety of your guests. You also have the responsibility to share the resources of Grand Teton NP with your guests as you travel the length of the park on your way to and from Yellowstone NP. This document provides you with safety and interpretive tips that will help you fulfill your responsibilities as a park concessioner snowmobile guide.

#### Safety

##### In The Van

Safety is the most important element of a guided snowmobile trip. Seat belt use in the van is a major safety concern when driving to and from Flagg Ranch. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which are the federal laws enforced in national parks (i.e., justification for tickets), §4.15 states, "Each operator and passenger occupying any seating position of a motor vehicle in a park area will have a safety belt or child restraint system properly fastened at all times when the vehicle is in motion."

Another safety concern is safe winter driving. CFR§4.22 states, "Operating a motor vehicle without due care or at a speed greater than that which is reasonable and prudent considering wildlife, traffic, weather, road and light conditions and road character . . . [is prohibited]." In short, everyone in the van must use seatbelts and the driver must drive at or below the posted speed limits. To avoid feeling like the bad guy, you can approach the seatbelt issue by saying, "the Park Service requires us" or "it is federal law, so please use your seatbelt."

##### Snowmobile Orientation

The snowmobile orientation given at Flagg Ranch is another opportunity to provide critical safety information. As guides, you have the difficult job of figuring out the skill level of each of your guests and using

that information to tailor a snowmobile orientation to the skills and abilities of the group. Many novice riders may feel pressured into agreeing that they feel more comfortable with operating the sled than they really do so as not to hold up the group. Gear your comprehensive snowmobile orientation to meet the needs of the least experienced operator. As the group drives toward the south entrance of Yellowstone NP, take some time to observe the guests to make sure that everyone is comfortable with their sleds. A little extra attention to safety and visitor comfort can enhance the enjoyment of your trips.

#### Introductions

##### Road Maps

Once your guests' basic needs are met (e.g., restroom break at the office, picking out warm clothes and gloves), you can do a formalized introduction before you leave the office in Jackson. These introductions should include your name and a road map, literally and figuratively, of the day's events. Pointing out on a map the major stops of the day (e.g., Flagg Ranch and Old Faithful), which also happen to be the main restroom and food breaks, and the times between the stops will help visitors relax because they will know when and where their basic needs will be met. Maps are a useful tool because, when combined with the verbal description (i.e., it will be 2 hours and 53 miles to Flagg Ranch), you address both visual and auditory learners.

##### Guide, Guest, and Trip Introductions

After the formal introduction of yourself and the trip, a more casual introduction can be done within the first few minutes of the drive north. A friendly introduction might include your name, the name of the company you work for, where you are from, how long you have been a snowmobile guide, etc. You

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“The purpose of interpretation is to stimulate the reader or hearer toward a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact.”

-Freeman Tilden

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may also want to include self-introductions of each of the guests. Self-introductions (i.e., each guest says his/her name, where he is from, his snowmobiling experience, and her familiarity with the local area) can help break the ice and provide you with an opportunity to learn their names and something about each of your guests. These introductions will also help you customize your trip by giving you the opportunity to learn about the interests of your clients and gain an understanding of their snowmobiling experience.

#### Boundary Lines

To help visitors connect the boundary lines you pointed out on the map during the introduction at the office with the view on the ground, welcome guests to Grand Teton NP when you crest the hill (i.e., Fish Hatchery Hill) just north of the National Elk Refuge. This will help with the confusion that often occurs when the van approaches the Moran entrance gate. Many guests do not realize they entered Grand Teton NP just after the National Elk Refuge and assume the Moran entrance gate is the south gate of Yellowstone NP.

The next boundary line that you will cross is the transition from Grand Teton NP to the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway (JDR Parkway). This transition provides you the opportunity to mention the significant role John D. Rockefeller Jr. played in the formation of Grand Teton NP. You can also discuss the different management practices between the two areas such as hunting and backcountry camping (i.e., a backcountry permit is not required in the JDR Parkway).

Flagg Ranch is the next stop. This stop, in addition to addressing snowmobile safety, can be used to review the Yellowstone portion of the trip (e.g., hours to Old Faithful, restroom and scenic stops, etc.).

The stop at the South Gate of Yellowstone NP allows visitors time to make any adjustments to their gear or sleds and to have some photo op time at our nation's first NP, as well as hear a brief history of its creation.

Taking time to orient visitors using both a map and verbal communications allows your guests to connect the lines on the map with what they experience during the trip. These orientation exercises will help visitors realize the amazing opportunity they have to see and/or visit four protected areas (refuge, parks, and parkway) in one trip and that these protected areas comprise the heart of the GYE.

## Interpretation

### Organization

Think of last time you walked into a movie late. If you are like most people, it took you a while to figure out what is going on. Who were the main characters? What was the plot? Once you figured out those details, you could relax and enjoy the movie . . . but then, one of the characters did something that did not fit with what you thought was going on. You searched back through your memory of what you had seen and tried to again make sense of the movie. This process takes a lot of effort. If you paid a lot of money to see the movie, you probably were willing to stay and figure out the plot. However, if you were watching a movie at home, you may have been less likely to stick with the movie and may have flipped the channel to a program that was easier to follow. In either case you would be considered a “non-captive audience.” Non-captive audiences are voluntary audiences that do not expect external rewards and will switch attention if bored. Students in an academic class are “captive audiences.” They will make an effort to pay attention, even if bored, because the external reward (i.e., the grade) is important (Ham, 1992).

Guests on a snowmobile trip are non-captive audiences, and they won't spend a lot of time and effort to follow an unorganized program. It is important to present your information in an organized fashion that requires little mental effort to figure out what is going on because your non-captive audiences will tune you out if you are too hard to follow. Leaving your guests with a better understanding of the GYE and providing them with opportunities to create emotional and/or intellectual connections to this place involves planning ahead for each tour with an organized presentation. The key components to an organized program are a main idea, introduction, body, and conclusion.

### Main Ideas

The drive to and from Flagg Ranch offers many interpretive subjects (e.g., mountains, animals, and snow). It may be tempting to toss out random bits of information along the way as you see one of these subjects. Organization of your ideas will make your



1. Select your general topic and use it to complete the following sentence:

"Generally, my tour is about put your topic here (e.g., winter wildlife)."

2. State your topic in more specific terms and complete the following sentence:

"Specifically, I want to tell my audience about put your specific topic here (e.g., winter wildlife viewing in Grand Teton NP)."

3. Now, express your theme by completing the following sentence:

"After my snowmobile tour, I want my audience to understand that put your theme here (e.g., "Grand Teton NP is a great place for winter wildlife viewing, and you play a critical role in helping wildlife survive until spring)."

\*Text from Ham, 1992

program less work for your audience to follow and less likely that they will "flip the channel" to something that requires less mental effort. To provide programs that are effective in conveying your message and easy for your audience to follow, you should have a main idea or "theme."

Imagine a pearl necklace. Now imagine that necklace, but without the string. You no longer have a connected string of pearls, but rather a pile of loose pearls rolling in many different directions. Trips without a main idea are like the string of pearls without the string: bits of interesting information all rolling in different directions. Information rolling in many different directions is much like a movie without a plot and a constant change in the main characters—would you sit through a movie such as that? Themes can be as simple as, "Grand Teton NP is a great place for winter wildlife viewing" or a bit more descriptive: "Grand Teton NP is a great place for winter wildlife viewing, and you play a critical role in helping wildlife survive until spring."

Themes help keep your program organized by providing a common thread throughout the many stops and conversations that occur during the day.

#### Program Introductions

We already discussed the importance of guide, guest, and trip introductions. Just as those introductions are important for orienting your guests to the day's activities, it is also important to introduce the "verbal" part of your tour. A good program introduction creates interest in what you have to say and also orients guests to your theme.

Themes can easily be worked into your introduction. During the "road map" introduction you can use a map of the GYE to show the size of the ecosystem, the trip route, which includes the important food and bathroom breaks, and introduce a wildlife theme. For example, "Grand Teton NP is a great place for winter wildlife viewing. You play a critical role in helping wildlife survive until spring. Today we will see elk on the National Elk Refuge, and we

may see moose along the highway in the sagebrush flats around Blacktail Butte. We may also see bison in Yellowstone NP. As we travel today, I will be sharing with you what animals live here in the winter, how they adapt to these harsh conditions, and your role in helping wildlife survive until spring."

#### Body

The body of your program is made up of the facts that support your main idea. A well developed body is organized and uses whatever facts, concepts, analogies, and examples are needed to make the information enjoyable, entertaining, meaningful, and relevant to your audience (Ham, 1992). Another important part of the body is various resource messages, such as keep your distance from wildlife (a minimum of 100 yards), do not feed the wildlife by leaving trash out, etc. You can find details on the wildlife in Grand Teton NP and other information that will help you build the body of your program at: [www.nps.gov/grte/parkmgmt/brguide.htm](http://www.nps.gov/grte/parkmgmt/brguide.htm)

#### Conclusion

Your conclusion should reinforce your theme. The conclusion also provides a verbal clue that the trip is over. Program conclusions are your chance to summarize your main points into a package that visitors can take home and share with friends and family members who ask, "What did you talk about on your snowmobile trip to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks?" The conclusion is also a great time to mention the importance of protected areas, such as the GYE, in ensuring that we, and future generations, will continue to have recreational and educational experiences



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in amazing places such as Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks.

#### Park Themes

Grand Teton NP has a list of primary interpretive themes (see the “Grand Teton NP Interpretive Themes” table below). These themes are used to develop park interpretive programs. You can use these themes to develop organized and thematic programs that will help your guests connect to, and understand, the amazing resources of the GYE. Programs that are understood by audience members are more enjoyable and can increase visitor satisfaction with your tour.

#### Tips to Engage Your Audience

##### Interpretive Tricks

It may be difficult to gauge the interest level of the group as a whole. A few minutes of chit chat may help reveal the interest of your audience. For example, you have two groups in the van, and one party wants to hear everything you have to say about Grand Teton NP while the other group wants to rehash their skiing adventures at Teton Village. One trick to engage both parties would be to ask the uninterested party to share more about their skiing adventures. You can use that conversation as a spring board into a conversation about the many backcountry skiing opportunities in Grand Teton NP, and from there you can move into talking about the many park resources, which include winter recreation. A few other tips for engaging folks:

\*Use questions to focus attention on a specific object. For example, “Everyone look at how the elk are lined up out there on the refuge. Can anyone guess why they are all in a line? The elk are at the chow line left by the National Elk Refuge feed tractor that drops alfalfa pellets for the elk when the snow gets too deep or the food supply gets too low.” That line of questioning can lead into a discussion about the National Elk Refuge, wildlife populations in the GYE, and animal adaptations to winter.

\*Use foreshadowing. After you have focused everyone’s attention on the elk in the chow line, you can use foreshadowing

to peak curiosity and interest. For example, “In Yellowstone NP we may have the opportunity to view animals that, on the average, weigh 800 pounds more than the elk and use their large necks to shovel snow out of their path. Do you know what animal I am referring to?”

\*Positive attitude. If you look like you are relaxed and having fun, your guests will take that cue from you and relax and enjoy the trip.

\*Use a contrived situation. “If Congress had not established Grand Teton NP in 1950, what would this view look like today?”

\*Use personification. “What might moose say to us if they could talk about their winter experiences in Grand Teton NP?”

\*Use pictures. One challenge often encountered in the winter is the lack of a view of the Teton peaks. On those days when the only view is a gray expanse and the clouds refuse to give up their hold on the peaks visitors may be frustrated because they cannot see the well known Teton views. A laminated 8 X 10 photo of the wintry Tetons is a tangible visual of the sights that are covered by the clouds.

\*Make a joke. Humor may also be used to help lighten the mood. For example, “Some days are made for taking photos and other days are made for looking at photos. Today is a photo looking day. Here is a photo of what the clouds are hiding today.” Humor can be a very effective tool for engaging your audience, but it should be used with caution because what one person thinks is funny can be very offensive to another person.



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#### Grand Teton NP Interpretive Themes

1. The dramatic scenery of the Teton range and Jackson Hole comes from fault block mountain building, carving by glaciers, and other erosive forces.
2. Grand Teton NP, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, and Yellowstone NP comprise the heart of one of the largest, most intact temperate ecosystems remaining in the world.
3. Grand Teton NP provides a diversity of habitats for a variety of plant and animal species that interact as a unit rather than as individuals.
4. Visitors bear responsibility for, as well as ownership of, public lands such as Grand Teton NP, and must strive for a balance between resource preservation and use.

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Through interpretation,  
understanding.  
Through understanding,  
appreciation.  
Through appreciation,  
protection.

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## Being Heard

One of the difficulties with chatting with clients on the drive to and from Flagg Ranch is that not everyone in the back of the van can hear the driver. A head set microphone may be used to eliminate this problem. However, if you are not comfortable with that approach, you can allow the group to segregate themselves by interest level; folks who are not too interested can take the back seats. If most people seem interested, then you can have clients in the front row pass information to those in the back of the van. On rare occasions you may have a group that simply wants a chauffeur and not an interpretive guide. In these situations, it is important that you properly gauge the interest of your clients and respond appropriately. If they don't want to listen, be respectful, but also don't give up trying as interesting subjects come up. It is important to know the difference between disinterested parties and shy, but interested groups.

## Why do we do this?

We rely on you to share the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the GYE with your clients. If we miss opportunities to inspire visitors to care for and about protected resources, like those found in Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks, we jeopardize the future of wild places for generations yet to come. We rely on guides, like yourself, to help us reach our lofty goal of inspiring visitors to care for and about the amazing resources in the GYE. An enjoyable, safe, and informative trip can also inspire your clients to become avid winter recreation enthusiasts.

## Final Thoughts

Winter in the GYE can mean many things to many people. Some may focus on the beauty of steam rising out of the Yellowstone geysers. Others may think about the mystery of how animals have adapted to this wintry climate; while others may reflect on the hardship of the cold temperatures and deep snows. Through an organized and thoughtful approach to your guided trips, you can share the beauty, mystery, and hardship of Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks with your clients and inspire them to care about and for these resources and winter recreation.

## References and Suggested Reads

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