

DRAFT Meeting Notes for Winter Use Wildlife Working Group Meeting #1: Feb 14, 2014

Members attending the call:

1. Chris Edelen
2. Ron Ducharme
3. Sue Bury
4. Bruce Gourley
5. Brad Johnson
6. Scott Christianson
7. Bart (NPCA)
8. Dan Reinhart
9. John Treanor

Key points of the conference call

1. The impact levels to wildlife that are described in the SEIS are accurate.
2. The study design for assessing OSV impacts to wildlife is appropriate and should not be changed.
3. For monitoring impacts to wildlife, additional studies that specifically compare the impacts from OSV type (snowmobile vs. snowcoach) are not necessary

Response to description of historic data and preliminary data described in agenda

KR – What constitutes historic data; impacts during the period of unmanaged use were higher. Changes since 2004 have made a difference. NPS has done a tremendous monitoring job since 1997. Great strides have been made.

What are acceptable impact levels for wildlife? Are the levels described in SEIS acceptable?

- Yes, the levels are acceptable
- Of course, no disturbance is ideal, but may not be realistic
- It is difficult to say what is acceptable based on impacts to individual vs. population
- Group agrees that the level of impacts to wildlife described in the SEIS are accurate and can be used as a baseline for future comparisons
- The current study design is appropriate and should be kept for consistency
- It would be improper to change the current study design

DR – The primary years of the study were 1999 to 2009, when most monitoring took place. During this period monitoring was conducted on a consistent basis and focused on the west side of the park.

Should there be additional coverage (i.e., more areas of the park monitored)?

- Areas outside the Firehole-Madison Gibbon Study Area have less use and less wildlife

KR – The study design is appropriate; most visitation is in the current study area. Being fiscally responsible, there is no need to add passive monitoring

SB – More information is better but there are financial constraints

BG – Agrees

DR – Potential change – keep the primary survey routes (Firehole-Madison Gibbon Study Area) as the main objective and include secondary routes if feasible (available finances)

CE – additional routes may be used in the short-term to see if there is a significant difference, if not, focus on primary routes

Do individual animals/groups need to be monitored over an entire day?

BJ – If there are no population impacts, there is no need for additional monitoring

Should monitoring address behavior of OSV users (e.g., duration and number of visitors approaching wildlife on foot) in more detail?

KR – There seems to be an increase in snowcoach riders; similarities to tour bus riders. Are coach riders having more day trips (BC skiing). For long-term monitoring, the question might be broadened to identify changes in winter recreation by visitors in the park.

Based on low responses of wildlife to either OSV type, is a rigorous study of comparability necessary? Does the current monitoring program adequately describe wildlife responses to OSV type?

KR – This is extremely difficult to distinguish

BJ – funding should not be applied

DR – It is hard to distinguish between the types of OSV events. Observed interactions frequently involve multiple OSV types

Potential research ideas

How should the behavior of OSV users (approaching wildlife on foot) be addressed?

- Monitoring winter backcountry use by visitors

Should new research address the overall health (e.g., productivity) of wildlife populations, which would occur outside the winter use season? What is the state of the populations experiencing OSVs?

- May be outside the task of the wildlife working group
- Need for understanding what the park is doing (big picture) regarding the monitoring of wildlife populations
- Need to pull together information on what and how wildlife populations are being monitored

Brad – Potential effects for post disturbance (wildfire, beetle) on how wildlife respond to OSV
Are wildlife responses augmented in disturbed habitat?

DR- current monitoring can address this by including some characteristics/classifications of the habitat where interactions take place.

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