

Interaction of Wildlife and Oversnow Vehicles

A decade plus of Monitoring: Winter 1999 – Winter 2009, Winter 2013 – Winter 2015.

Species: Bison, Elk, Trumpeter Swans, Coyote and Bald Eagles

Focus: Quantify Human(OSV)-Wildlife Interactions during Winter

Monitoring Objectives:

1. Identify relevant variables shaping animals' behavioral responses
2. Assess effects of OSV use on individual animals' success and survival (stress response, behavior, mortality)
3. Assess effects of OSV use on wildlife population abundance, demographics and distribution

2013 Winter Use Plan/SEIS

- OSVs managed as transportation events
- Conclusion: Selected Alternative would not interfere with ecology of wildlife
- Displacement of individual animals is expected to be low
- Monitoring goal: keep impacts within ranges described in SEIS
- Assumption: impacts to wildlife from the type of transportation event are comparable

Data Supported Findings

- Movement responses occur in less than 10% of encounters regardless of OSV type
- Elk & bison – 35 years – no impact to populations or shifts in core winter habitat use
- Elk & bison – 90% showed no apparent response
- Human provocation increased responses from wildlife
- Wildlife responses decreased as cumulative OSV use increased during winters
- No evidence that movement responses affected population dynamics of bison, elk, or swans

Winter Use Wildlife Working Group

- SEIS – Adaptive management and monitoring plan will include input from stakeholders and the public

Working Group Questions/Discussion 2/14/14

1. What monitoring is needed to evaluate impacts and keep them within the ranges predicted in the SEIS
2. What research and monitoring is needed to compare impacts from OSV type
3. What research is needed to further reduce the social and ecological impacts of winter use on wildlife

Key Points from the Working Group

1. The impact levels to wildlife that are described in the SEIS are accurate.
2. The current 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.
4. The current monitoring program can adequately determine whether OSV impacts are being kept within the ranges described in the SEIS.

Suggested Modification to the Monitoring Plan

Supplement the core monitoring program with an additional monitoring team (at least temporarily)

1. Increases monitoring coverage in other areas of the park
2. The intensity of responses can be compared across different areas
3. Data can be collected 7 days/week during the peak period of OSV use

Suggested Modification to the Monitoring Plan

- Monitor Backcountry use by winter visitors
 - Not implemented in winter 2014 – 2015
- Monitor potential effects of post disturbance (wildfire/beetle kill) on how wildlife respond to OSV
 - current monitoring structure includes documentation of habitat type

Winter 2014 – 2015 Results (OSV)

12/29/2014 – 2/16/2015

- 134 Wildlife groups viewed by monitoring staff
- 107 wildlife groups had an interaction with OSV
- 39% of OSV stopped to view wildlife
- 89% of visitors viewed wildlife from the road
- 11% of visitors approached wildlife
- 14% of vehicles impeded or hastened wildlife

2014 – 2015 Results (Wildlife)

12/29/2014 – 2/16/2015

- NO REACTION – 88%
- LOOK RESUME – 4%
- TRAVEL – 3%
- ALARM / ATTENTION – 1%
- FLEE – 4%
- DEFENSIVE - <1%

CONTACT INFORMATION

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