



YELLOWSTONE & GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARKS WINTER USE PLANNING

Thanks and Happy New Year!

The winter use planning team would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the valuable input that many of you provided in the recent winter use planning effort. The 2007 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released September 24, 2007, and the final regulation was published December 13, 2007. The National Park Service (NPS) began implementing the decision and rule beginning in December 2007; implementation will continue over the next few years.

This newsletter, and others that follow in a similar format (we anticipate one or two newsletters per year), will provide updates on the parks' monitoring and adaptive management program for winter use, and will discuss other aspects of winter use plan implementation.

How's the winter so far?

The parks opened to oversnow vehicle travel on December 19, 2007, with good snow cover. Yellowstone oversnow visitation from December 19-January 21 is summarized below:

- 22,659 visitors visited (a 6.8% increase from same dates last winter):
 - 13,338 on snowmobiles (a 5% increase from last season)
 - 9,321 in snowcoaches (a 10% increase from last season)
- 9,807 in wheeled vehicles through December 31, 2007 (a 4% increase from 2005-2006)

Legal Status

In March 2005, the group, Save Our Snowplanes, filed suit in U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming, disputing the earlier decision to ban snowplanes from Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park. The court found in favor of the NPS on June 27, 2007; the decision has been appealed.

In December 2007 four lawsuits were filed regarding the new decision. The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and (separately) the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) (and a consortium of four other groups) filed suits in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The State of Wyoming and Park County, Wyoming each filed suits in Wyoming Federal District Court.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program

As discussed in Appendix E of the FEIS, the parks' monitoring and adaptive management program is an important resource management tool. As indicated for the resources below, ongoing monitoring efforts continue to provide information for successful winter use management in the parks. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/AdaptiveManagement/index.html>.

Winter Resource Updates

- Air Quality
 - Three long-term monitoring stations are located in or adjacent to Yellowstone. These stations provide valuable trend data for analysis:
 - Old Faithful
 - Lake Village
 - West Yellowstone



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- Additional information can be found at:
<http://www.greateryellowstonescience.org/topics/physical/air/winterquality>, and at
<http://www2.nature.nps.gov/air/studies/yell/yellAQwinter.cfm>.
- Natural Soundscapes
 - An initial round of snowcoach audibility testing is scheduled for late February. This testing will help manufacturers and the NPS prepare to implement snowcoach BAT requirements for the 2011-2012 winter season.
 - Monitoring stations are located at:
 - Old Faithful (long-term site)
 - Madison Junction (long-term site)
 - South Entrance Road (winter-long site)
 - De Lacy Creek (short-term sampling)
 - Mary Mountain Trail (short-term site)
 - Shoshone Geyser Basin (short-term sampling)
 - Additional information can be found at:
<http://www.greateryellowstonescience.org/topics/physical/sound>, and at
<http://www.greateryellowstonescience.org/topics/humans/soundscapes>.
- Health & Safety
 - Monitoring will occur over the President's Day weekend at the West Entrance, focusing on an evaluation of exposure to air contaminants and noise.
 - Air samples to be collected include those for aldehydes, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide and respirable particulate matter.
 - Noise dosimetry monitoring will follow the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Noise Standard, 29 CFR 1910.95.
 - Results from previous studies will be compared and contrasted with the results from this and future sampling efforts for a more complete assessment of occupational exposure and to assess what effect, if any, air contaminants and noise have on exposure to the general public and to Park Service personnel.
- Water/Snowpack
 - Annual deposition monitoring of acidic compounds in the snowpack is ongoing.
 - Additional information can be found at:
<http://www.greateryellowstonescience.org/topics/physical/water/quality>.
- Geothermal Features
 - Monitoring for human-caused damage to geothermal features is ongoing.
 - Additional information can be found at:
<http://www.nps.gov/yell/naturescience/geothermal.htm>.
- Visitor Experience
 - This winter, researchers from the University of Montana are surveying and interviewing visitors to determine their impressions of bison-human encounters and park soundscapes. Separately, guides are being surveyed regarding guiding and other park



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requirements, including best available technology, group sizes and the visitor experience.

- Wildlife
 - Testing of prototype camera systems is ongoing in Yellowstone this winter as the next of several steps in understanding how bison travel through the park in winter.
 - Wildlife researchers continue to monitor human/wildlife interactions in the park, as they have done for the past 5 winters.
 - Additional information can be found at:
<http://www.greateryellowstonescience.org/topics/biological/mammals>.

Sylvan Pass

Regarding Sylvan Pass and Yellowstone's East Entrance, the Record of Decision (ROD) states that for the winter season of 2007-2008, the pass will be managed continuing the combined program outlined in the 2004 Temporary Plan. After the winter of 2007-2008, in order to maximize risk reduction, the pass will be open and managed using full avalanche forecasting (as defined in the Sylvan Pass Operational Risk Management Assessment—no explosives will be used). When forecasting indicates the pass is safe, the pass will be open to oversnow travel (both motorized and non-motorized access). The ROD also explains that the National Park Service will, in good faith, work cooperatively with the State of Wyoming, Park County, Wyoming and the town of Cody to determine how to provide continued snowmobile and snowcoach motorized oversnow access to Yellowstone National Park through the East Gate via Sylvan Pass in the winter seasons beyond 2007-2008.

The National Park Service and representatives of the State of Wyoming, Park County, Wyoming, and the town of Cody are exploring avalanche and access mitigation safety measures and costs. In order to provide adequate time to amend the ROD if needed and to promulgate a new regulation reflecting the amended decision for the 2008-2009 winter season and beyond, consensus should be reached by June 1, 2008. The parties met on December 17 in Billings, Montana and primarily reviewed the ground rules for future meetings. The group met again on January 28-30, also in Billings, to learn what experts know about key issues. Wyoming, Montana and Idaho Congressional delegation representatives were invited to observe these meetings.

More Information

- ❖ To add or remove your name from our mail distribution list, please call the Yellowstone National Park Management Assistant's Office at (307) 344-2019, or send an email to yell_winter_use@nps.gov. If you received a paper copy of this newsletter in the mail, it is because we do not have an email address for you in our database. Newsletters are also available on the winter use website at www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm.

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