



YELLOWSTONE & GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARKS WINTER USE PLANNING

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WINTER?

Yellowstone National Park was open to oversnow vehicle travel from December 19, 2007, to March 9, 2008, with snowpack above normal. Winter visitation continued the patterns seen from the previous three winters, with 31,420 visitors arriving via snowmobile (a 1.2% decrease from the winter of 2006-2007), 22,344 visitors arriving in snowcoaches (a 9.8% increase from the previous winter), and 50,175 visitors arriving in private cars or buses (a 6.0% increase).

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF LITIGATION?

Four lawsuits were filed against the NPS concerning the September 2007 Final EIS, November 2007 Record of Decision, and December 2007 Final Rule. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the National Parks Conservation Association sued in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia; oral arguments are currently scheduled to be heard on both cases on August 27. The State of Wyoming and Park County, Wyoming sued in the U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming; oral arguments are currently scheduled to be heard on these two cases on September 15.

MONITORING REPORTS

Over the next few months, the NPS expects to receive draft monitoring reports for last winter. These reports summarize the NPS's ongoing soundscapes, wildlife, air quality, and personal exposure monitoring, along with other winter-related studies.

The NPS will post the draft monitoring reports on its website (<http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/winterusetechnicaldocuments.htm>) under the subheading "2007-2008 Monitoring Reports." At the same time, the NPS will alert the cooperating agencies and interested members of the public that the reports are available for review. After a month of review, the author(s) of the report will collect the comments and respond to them as appropriate. Once finalized, the reports will be posted to the same webpage and will inform the adaptive management program. The first of these reports, "Exterior Sound Level Measurements of Over-Snow Vehicles at Yellowstone National Park," prepared by the John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, will be posted shortly.

WHAT CHANGES WILL HAPPEN IN THE PARKS THIS WINTER—PARTICULARLY AT SYLVAN PASS IN YELLOWSTONE?

The parks will open December 15 for oversnow travel and close March 15 (assuming adequate snow cover). In Yellowstone, 540 Best Available Technology (BAT), commercially guided snowmobiles will be allowed each day, along with up to 83 snowcoaches. In Grand Teton, 40 unguided snowmobiles meeting BAT requirements will be allowed on Jackson Lake each day to provide access to ice fishing opportunities. Snowmobilers on Jackson Lake must possess a valid Wyoming fishing license and appropriate fishing gear. On the Grassy Lake Road, 25 snowmobiles will be allowed each day. Snowmobiles being used on this route will not need to meet BAT requirements, nor will guides be required. The portion of the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail between the vicinity of Moran Junction and Flagg Ranch will no longer be in operation.



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In accordance with the November 20, 2007, Record of Decision, members of the National Park Service, the State of Wyoming, the City of Cody, and Park County, Wyoming (the Sylvan Pass Study Group) met several times to explore options to keep Sylvan Pass on Yellowstone's East Entrance Road open for oversnow travel. The outcome of the meetings was:

On June 3, 2008, the Sylvan Pass Study Group recommended to the Intermountain Regional Director of the National Park Service that the November 2007 Record of Decision on Winter Use in Yellowstone National Park be amended to keep Sylvan Pass open in future winter use seasons to motorized and non-motorized oversnow travel between December 22 and March 1. The group recommends continued use of a combination of avalanche mitigation techniques, including forecasting and helicopter and howitzer dispensed explosives.

This recommendation to operate within a defined core season will reduce risk, improve safety, and maximize visitor access.

The Sylvan Pass Study group reached agreement based on the following guiding principles:

- 1) That the safety of visitors, guides and National Park Service employees is the first priority in any avalanche mitigation operation on Sylvan Pass.
- 2) That snowmobile and snowcoach motorized oversnow winter use access should be as regular and predictable as possible given weather constraints.
- 3) That regular communications between Yellowstone National Park, the city of Cody, Park County, the state of Wyoming and the Cody community is a key ingredient of any future winter operations on Sylvan Pass.

The City of Cody, Park County, and the state of Wyoming agree, in good faith, to work cooperatively to explore funding of safety and access improvements.

The members of the Sylvan Pass Study group agree to establish consistent ongoing communications regarding Sylvan Pass winter use operations.

The National Park Service agrees to make funding for safety and access improvements on Sylvan Pass a priority.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON WEBSITE

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

Please check the website regularly for updates.