

Summary

NPS Winter Use Roving Team Meeting with State of Montana

Date/Time: December 13, 2006, 1-3 pm

Location: Fish Wildlife and Parks Commission Room, Helena

Present:

Chandler	Nedra	Cadence facilitation team
Crockett	Carol	Travel Montana
Erp	Elton	Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Heagney	Ray	Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
Maurier	Joe	FWP
Paige	Ray	FWP
Sacklin	John	NPS
Spangler	Brian	DEQ
Swanke	Denice	NPS
Walker	Bob	FWP
Yochim	Mike	NPS

1) Purpose agency/group or NPS gave for wanting a visit at this time: opportunity for dialogue about the winter use cooperating agency review draft – summary of alternatives.

2) Results of this visit and/or next steps:

- For this round of feedback, the group will continue to copy Pat Flowers, but also use Bob Walker as the point person this time, since comments are needed back to NPS by January 5.
- Next cooperating agency meeting likely to be toward end of April, location and date to be determined, probably using that online tool again to find best possible.
- Open house formats also likely during public review and comment period -- around the region.
- NPS will also continue to do these types of roving team meetings by invitation as their schedule allows.

3) Questions/Discussion:

- **Do you think it's a foregone conclusion this decision will end up back in the court(s)?**

(Not out of court now... NPS and other parties are there already on some parts of this.)

- **How long is the Continuing Resolution from Congress in effect?**

(Until Feb. 15, 2007 – gives NPS certainty almost through winter season.)

- **What was the impetus for changing the group size from 11 to 8?**

(Responds to various scoping comments. It's a judgment call that figures you need a certain ratio of guides to see what's going on.)

- **For all the alternatives with unguided aspects, is there training involved for each, or is there one that allows people to just go on their own with no training?**

(All members of the party would be expected to take brief orientation, watch maybe a 15-minute video, have interaction with uniformed staff, eg., if you see a bison herd at the bridge, you will have sense of what to do. From NPS perspective it would be like a backcountry trip in the summer, someone signs the permit, but all members of the party are responsible.)

- **How many times would you allow that individual into the park to "guide"?**

(NPS acknowledged that past issues along these lines weren't resolved since court decisions kept NPS from working them through – e.g., past issue such as blocking up non-commercial reservations in West. Yes, there is a potential to come back more than once with a group, so it will be necessary to work out more detail on this. The leader of any non-commercially-guided group would likely have to have gone through, say a 2-3 hour course and be certified as a non-commercial guide responsible for the behavior of the group.)

- **What's the flexible daily limit? How does that work in alternative 5?**

(Commercial operations would have the responsibility to manage use however they want to over the season – e.g., fill the whole season or squeeze it in smaller time periods. Businesses could allow as much as 20% more as their daily allocation, however the seasonal limit is lower than 540 X 85 days per season. The other feature of alternative 5 is improved BAT.)

- **What are the operational consequences of alternative 6 with commercially guided wheeled vehicle access, and how do those costs compare?**

(Cost to park service fairly comparable. NPS sat down with maintenance staff and asked them to redevelop new cost-per-lane mile for grooming versus plowing – it's really similar.)

- **What is the situation with Sylvan Pass?**

(Several cooperators stressed with NPS in Cody that if the record of decision closes the pass, there should be a way to word a closure so that it is re-visitible in the future – e.g., if technology and circumstances substantially change, the decision doesn't have to be absolute and forever. It's an understandable request but not an easy one to respond to, with lots of pros and cons. NPS has funded an independent person to take a look at Sylvan, not to tell the agency what to do, but to give an independent evaluation of situation up on the pass. NPS has also become aware Wyoming is interested in doing independent analysis of Sylvan Pass, and now we need to keep sharing information and keep it as useful and timely as possible.)

- **What about the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail, how many people per day would you need to justify the approximate \$100,000 a year? Is there a threshold?**

(As Gary Pollock let the cooperators know in Cody that there is no threshold and that Grand Teton will keep the management flexibility they need. But, the current alternatives, vary from 50-75 per day when CDST is open. It varies from alternative to alternative what might be reasonable for that segment. Last season the segment had a total of 17 the entire season, with 11 the previous season, at an approximate cost of \$100,000. We're like any agency manager, asking, at what point is it reasonable to have an active presence? When use is de minimus, NPS isn't going to put staff out there any more than any other agency would.)

- **A person at the Montana Snowmobile Convention asked about Best Available Technology for snowcoaches. Have you set the standards since that meeting?**

(Minimum would be equivalent of EPA Tier 1 requirements. Wording is still being drafted. EPA told us if it's a modern engine with catalytic converter and direct injection, then good. EPA also suggested we figure out incentive language to encourage guides and outfitters to do better than Tier 1. We all want to encourage industry to move in that direction without making it an immediate requirement.)

- **Looking at the tables on air quality in the cooperator review draft, it looks like things are much improved over that winter of '98 when it was as bad as ever, is that right? Even under the worst circumstances (e.g., no wind, cold temperatures) air quality is good? Regarding the concern that the maximum allowable number of snowmobiles is so much higher than what the average has been, could you take average day, average use, and arrive at average impact to show that air quality will still be excellent even at the maximum?**

(Alternative 1 assumes 720 coming in under poor ambient conditions. By way of more context, back in chapter 4 where modeling results are provided, you can compare differences across alternatives. Table 72, p. 181, may give some insight into this question. This is the one hour CO concentrations predicted from the modeling -- current and historic conditions. When NPS did that modeling, we asked what 250 looks like, and also looked at historic conditions. See 4th column: remember this is the modeling, not the monitoring.)

- **What about the bison study proposal?**

(Regarding the study NPS contracted with Dr. Cormack Gates, there is the idea of implementing a management experiment in Gibbon Canyon according to Dr. Gate's recommendation. Last January NPS sat down with many bison experts and talked about what that experiment would look like. NPS is very serious about this issue (which is the issue in Judge Sullivan's court). NPS is moving forward with this experiment concept. The Judge couldn't order NPS to close the road, but could order NPS to study the road. NPS is taking every step to demonstrate how serious the agency is about looking at this in the NEPA process; the idea of a management experiment is an action common to all alternatives in the DEIS..)

- **Regarding one of the goal statements in the cooperator review draft about minimizing impacts on gateway communities, are you recognizing that growth of use on the NW corner of the park (for example the Taylor's Fork area and 320 Ranch, and rental shops at Big Sky) – could end up being a really growing problem of encroachment such as happened in the Cooke City area in the past?**

(The group had a short discussion about how they could work cooperatively on those incursions and how effective signage and infield citations helped a lot in Cooke City area. That also led to affirmations all around about how cooperatively the state and NPS have worked as effective partners on many things over the years from Headwaters recycling to many sustainability initiatives, alternative fuels, lots of outstanding work to be proud of. Winter use has been hard partly because of the litigation context, but there are other partnering examples to lean on.)

5) Parting comments/reflections from participants:

Cooperating agency meeting in Cody was very positive and emphasized shared stewardship.

Thanks for this chance to talk.

END