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Yellowstone/Grand Teton News Release

Yellowstone And Grand Teton Set To Open For Winter Season Next Monday

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks are set to open for the 2008- 2009 winter season as scheduled next Monday, December 15. Limited, managed snowmobile and snowcoach travel over groomed, snow- packed park roads will be permitted this season under rules similar to those followed the past four winters.

In early November, the U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming reinstated a 2004 rule to temporarily provide for snowmobile and snowcoach access in the parks, while the National Park Service (NPS) works on a new winter use plan. The NPS has complied with this court order by publishing the 2004 rule without sunset dates in today's edition of the *Federal Register*.

Up to 720 commercially guided, Best Available Technology (BAT) snowmobiles and up to 78 snowcoaches will be allowed per day in Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone's East Entrance and Sylvan Pass will be open for motorized and non- motorized oversnow travel beginning December 22, subject to weather and safety constraints. Trail and off- road use of snowmobiles and snowcoaches has always been, and will continue to be prohibited.

During the last two winters, an average of about 296 snowmobiles a day entered Yellowstone. Monitoring data from the past four winters shows excellent air quality, few wildlife disturbances, and reduced sound impacts. All were at fully acceptable levels, and below levels recorded during historical, unregulated use in the parks. Given the uncertainty caused by lawsuits on winter use, park managers forecast use levels for this winter to remain near these levels.

The reinstated 2004 rule also addresses snowmobile access in Grand Teton and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, including access along Grassy Lake Road, and on Jackson Lake for licensed anglers.

Since the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia rejected the park's latest winter use plan in September, the NPS began work on a proposed temporary plan to open the parks on time this winter season. The NPS will continue to analyze public comment received on that temporary plan, while assessing what steps to take in order to come up with a long- term rule governing motorized oversnow travel in the parks that is responsive to federal court decisions and diverse public interests. The goal is to have a suitable approach identified and to begin work on a new, sustainable, long- term winter use plan early next year.

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