

Yellowstone/Grand Teton Winter Use Plan and EIS

The National Park Service (NPS) has begun preparation of yet another long-term plan for managing winter recreational use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway. The initial public scoping phase of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process closed on September 1, 2005 (click link to view public scoping comments). The next public comment opportunity will be when the Draft EIS is released in late-Spring 2006.

WHY ANOTHER EIS?

The parks are currently open to snowmobiling through the Temporary Winter Use EA which is only intended to guide winter management for three winter seasons; this winter will be the second season of operation under the temporary EA. During this three-year period, the EA states that the NPS will prepare a long-term analysis on winter use in the parks. The NPS has developed ten scenarios for modeling purposes (click link to view). These scenarios will be utilized for sound and air quality modeling for the EIS. While these modeling scenarios represent a wide range of possible conditions, it is expected that only certain elements of them will be carried forward during the development of alternatives. Guiding requirements and BAT snowmobiles will continue to be central to this issue unless you can help convince the NPS differently.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Given that this is the third Winter Use EIS since 1997, along with two additional Environmental Assessments and numerous lawsuits, trust between and among interested parties is low and public cynicism and process fatigue with this subject are very high. But now is not the time to quit since the current EIS process is likely the last time snowmobiling access to Yellowstone and Grand Teton will be considered. The fact is that snowmobiling will be gone from these parks forever if we lose access this time around.

The NPS has outlined four “Participation Tools” by which the public can participate in this latest EIS process:

- 1. Project Contact List:** Individuals and groups need to contact the NPS to be added to their mailing list database. Call Debbie VanDePolder at 307-344-2019 or e-mail Deborah_VanDePolder@nps.gov to be added to the contact list.
- 2. Web Archive:** You can follow the planning process and view related documents at www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm Visit this site regularly to stay up-to-date on new information and updates as to where the process is at.
- 3. Project Newsletters and Updates:** Again, call Debbie VanDePolder at 307-344-2019 or e-mail Deborah_VanDePolder@nps.gov to be added to the newsletter and updates contact list.
- 4. NPS News Releases:** Watch for press releases from NPS as they progress through various steps of the EIS process.

The NPS has also outlined four “Participation Methods” designed to help provide more direct public involvement and opportunities for mutual learning during the EIS process:

- 1. Roving NPS Winter Use Team:** Individuals from this roving team of planning team members are available to come meet with your group to discuss the current EIS planning efforts and process. In-person visits are preferred, although internet, conference calls, or video conferencing are also available options. Contact one of the Roving Team Members to schedule a meeting: John Sacklin – Yellowstone at 307-344-2020; Gary Pollock – Grand Teton at 307-739-3428; Denice Swanke – Yellowstone at 307-344-2023; or Mike Yochim – Yellowstone at 307-344-2703.
- 2. Cooperating Agency Work:** The states of Idaho, Montana and Idaho, along with Fremont County, Idaho, Gallatin and Park Counties, Montana, and Park and Teton Counties, Wyoming are once again “cooperating agencies” for the completion of this EIS. Contact local cooperating agency representatives to provide input about the process.
- 3. NPS Phone Calls and E-mails to Parties:** The NPS will make periodic phone calls and send e-mails to what they call a “stakeholders” list. Certainly, snowmobile clubs and associations should qualify as a stakeholder and should be on this list. Call Debbie VanDePolder at 307-344-2019 or e-mail Deborah_VanDePolder@nps.gov to request to be added to the stakeholders contact list – and be sure to let them who the group is that you represent.
- 4. NPS “Purposeful Receipt and Acknowledgement” of Comments:** The NPS will provide feedback regarding comments they receive by providing “explicit description of NPS perspectives and policies to help avoid misunderstandings and mistrust.” This will most like occur through a series of NPS fact sheets about the various winter use issues.

It is important that snowmobilers take advantage of these participation opportunities – take action today to get on the mailing/e-mail lists and to also schedule meetings in your areas with the NPS Roving Team.