

Winter Use Plan & Environmental Impact Statement

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone National Park
Wyoming, Montana, Idaho

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UPDATE 1: Draft Range of Alternatives and Scoping Results

Thank you for your input on the Yellowstone Winter Use Plan! In January, February and March Yellowstone conducted public “scoping” – a period during which you, the public, helped define the “scope” of the park’s new winter use plan.

During the scoping period, the park received comments on the purpose, need, objectives, and suggestions for alternatives that should be considered in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). All together, more than 9,000 letters and web submissions were made with your ideas for the future of winter use at Yellowstone National Park.

Over the past three months, the park has been analyzing, considering, and incorporating your ideas and suggestions into a range of draft alternatives to be analyzed in the upcoming Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This newsletter provides an update of where you can go to see the summary of public comments, and also summarizes the draft range of alternatives that will be analyzed.

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What Happened To The Comments I Submitted During Public Scoping?

All comments received during public scoping were considered by the park. As each letter was read, individual comments within that letter were identified and given a code to help the park analyze the comments. Once all of the letters had been read and coded, the comments were summarized into what are called “concern statements.” A concern statement is a sentence or two that captures similar ideas provided in the multiple comments received. The NPS then used the concern statements to incorporate suggestions made by the public into the draft range of alternatives, as described in this newsletter.

Comments received on the purpose, need, and objectives were also reviewed and the objectives were revised (as shown on the following page) based

on public comments. The impact topics will also be reviewed against public comments and changed as necessary prior to the release of the DEIS.

The summary of public comments can be accessed at the NPS’s Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell>. Click “Winter Use Plan” and then on “Documents” and access the link to the Public Comment Summary.

If you do not have access to a computer, a hard copy of the summary can also be obtained by contacting (307) 344-2019.

What Alternatives are the Park Considering for the Winter Use Plan/EIS?

Based on purpose, need, and objectives, as well as past planning efforts and public comments received during scoping, the park has developed this draft range of alternatives:

- **ALTERNATIVE 1: No Action—No Snowmobile/Snowcoach Use.** The current interim rule for winter use would expire after the 2010/2011 winter season. After that, no public use of over-snow vehicles (OSV) would be permitted in Yellowstone. Only non-motorized winter access into the park (on foot, ski, and snowshoe) would continue.
- **ALTERNATIVE 2: Continue Snowmobile/Snowcoach Use at 2008 Plan Limits.** Winter access to the park via snowmobiles and snowcoaches would continue under present limits: up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day. All current OSV requirements would continue, including entry only with OSV guides, restrictions on hours of operation, and only snowmobiles that meet “Best Available Technology” (BAT) requirements. BAT also would be developed and implemented for snowcoaches by the 2014/2015 season.
- **ALTERNATIVE 3: Return Snowmobile/Snowcoach Use to 2004 Plan Limits.** Snowmobile and snowcoach use levels would be allowed to increase to the levels set in the 2004 plan – up to 720 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day. All current OSV requirements would continue, the same as under alternative 2, above, including development and implementation of BAT for snowcoaches by the 2014/2015 season.
- **ALTERNATIVE 4: Mixed-Use: Snowcoaches, Snowmobiles, and Wheeled Vehicles (Road Plowing).** Visitors could enter Yellowstone in the winter by multiple motorized methods. The roads from West Yellowstone and Mammoth Hot Springs to Old Faithful would be plowed for park access in wheeled, commercial, multi-passenger vehicles (buses and vans). The south entrance road would be groomed for use by up to 30 snowcoaches and 100 snowmobiles per day, all required to be BAT. The east entrance road over Sylvan Pass would be closed to OSV use. Non-motorized winter access would continue.

- **ALTERNATIVE 5: Transition to BAT Snowcoaches Only.** Motorized access to the park would be in BAT snowcoaches only. Snowmobiles would gradually be phased out, beginning in the 2014/2015 season, when all snowcoaches would be required to meet BAT standards. Snowcoaches would replace snowmobiles within a five-year period (depending on snowcoach user demand). This alternative initially provides for both snowmobile and snowcoach access under present levels – 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day. After the 2014/2015 season, snowcoach numbers would be allowed to increase to 120 per day, with a corresponding decrease in the number of snowmobiles during the five-year phase-out period.
- **ALTERNATIVE 6: Implement Variable Management.** OSV and visitor use would be managed for a greater variety of winter experiences by setting times and places for higher and lower levels of use, including additional opportunities for undisturbed skiing and snowshoeing. OSV entries into Yellowstone would have a winter season limit of up to 32,000 snowmobiles and 4,600 snowcoaches, and a daily limit of up to 540 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches. Up to 25 percent of snowmobile entries would be available for unguided use.

YELLOWSTONE IN WINTER - PHOTO CREDIT: LORI FOX



What is the Purpose of the Plan?

The purpose of the Winter Use Plan/EIS is to establish a management framework that allows the public to experience Yellowstone's unique winter resources and values. This plan will determine whether motorized winter use of the park (including wheeled motor vehicles, snowmobiles, and snowcoaches) is appropriate, and if so, the types, extent, and location of this use.

Why is this Action Needed?

A Winter Use Plan is needed at this time because:

- Yellowstone offers unique winter experiences that are distinct from other times of the year;
- The National Park Service provides opportunities for people to experience the park in the winter, but access to most of the park in the winter is limited by distance and the harsh winter environment, which present challenges to safety and park operations; and
- The legal authority for over-snow vehicle use (snowmobiles and snowcoaches) at Yellowstone expires after the winter of 2010-2011. A decision is needed about whether this use should continue, and if so, how to manage it so that park resources and values are protected and visitor use and enjoyment are provided.

What will be Analyzed?

Among the important issues the Winter Use Plan / EIS will examine are:

- Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat (including threatened and endangered species)
- Soundscapes
- Air Quality
- Visitor Use and Experience
- Socioeconomics
- Park Operations and Maintenance

Plan Objectives

After the park reviewed public comments made during scoping, it made minor changes in the plan objectives.

Here are the revised objectives:

Visitor Use

- Provide the opportunity for visitors to experience and be inspired by Yellowstone's unique winter resources and values while ensuring resource protection.
- Increase visitor understanding and appreciation of the park's winter resources.
- Provide access for winter opportunities in the park that are appropriate and universally accessible.

Resources

- **Wildlife:** Manage winter use so that it does not disrupt the winter wildlife ecology, including sensitive species.
- **Sound:** Manage winter use to protect naturally occurring background sound levels and to minimize loud noises.
- **Air Quality:** Manage winter use to minimize impacts to resources that may be affected by air pollution including visibility and aquatic systems.
- **Wilderness:** Manage winter use to protect wilderness character and values.

Health and Safety

- Seek to manage access in the winter for the safety of all visitors and employees, including limiting impacts from emissions, noise, and known hazards.

Coordination and Cooperation

- Improve coordination and communication regarding winter use management with park partners, gateway communities, and other stakeholders.

Park Management/Operations

- Develop and implement an adaptive management program that includes monitoring the condition of resources.
- Promote advances of vehicle technology (OSVs and commercial wheeled vehicles) that will reduce impacts and facilitate continuous improvement of technology over time.
- Provide for winter use that is consistent with the park priority to provide critical visitor services at core locations.

How Can I Continue to be Involved with Winter Use Planning Efforts at Yellowstone?

Throughout the winter use planning process, the park will be updating its website pages on winter use, which can be found at: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/winteruse.htm>.

You can also view all park news releases, including about winter use, at: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/parknews/newsreleases.htm>.

In addition, you can follow Yellowstone park news on twitter at <http://twitter.com/yellowstonenps>.

In early 2011 (February/March), the DEIS for the winter use plan will be released for public review. Then the public will have 60 days to review and comment on this DEIS, including its alternatives and analysis. The National Park Service will review these comments and develop a final plan and EIS that address and respond to the public's concerns.

The final Winter Use Plan and EIS are expected to be released in Fall 2011.

Find Out More!

The park will host two online presentations, or webinars, and one conference call the week of August 2nd to explain the draft range of alternatives and answer questions about them.

During the webinars and conference call, the NPS will answer questions from the public to help clarify the draft range of alternatives. When the DEIS is released for public comment

in February / March 2011, the NPS will be taking public comments on the alternatives and their impact analyses.

For more information, on how to participate in the webinars and calls, visit: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell/> and click on "Winter Use Plan" or go to the Yellowstone Winter Use website listed above.



YELLOWSTONE WINTER USE PLAN PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING - PHOTO CREDIT: NPS

WINTER USE PLAN/ EIS TIMELINE

July 2010

Range of Alternatives
Released to the Public

February/March 2011

Draft EIS Released to Public

March/April 2011

60-day Public Comment
Period on the Draft EIS

Fall 2011

Release of Final EIS