

Winter Use Plan Supplemental EIS

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone & Grand Teton National Parks
and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Pkwy



March 25, 2003

Fact Sheet - Record of Decision for Winter Use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway

Background: Winter use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway has been a significant issue for the past decade and has always generated extensive interest. In recent years, that attention has been even more focused, controversial, and contentious. The November 2000 Record of Decision (for the Winter Use Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)) calling for the elimination of recreational snowmobile and snowplane use by the winter of 2003-2004, resulted in a lawsuit brought by the snowmobile industry and others asking that the decision be set aside. A settlement agreement resulted in the National Park Service undertaking a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to solicit more public comment and consider any new or updated substantive information not available at the time of the earlier decision (especially as it related to new snowmobile technology). On February 21, the Final Supplemental Environmental Statement was made available to the public. The Record of Decision was issued by Karen Wade, Intermountain Regional Director for the National Park Service, on March 25, 2003.

Goals for Winter Use: Goals for winter use in Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and the Parkway remain the same, as does the commitment to achieving them. Winter use must be one of shared stewardship. We will work closely with local governments and businesses, concessioners, conservation and other interest groups, industry, park visitors, and the public to build a sustainable future that will allow for both snowmobile and snowcoach use while preserving park resources and providing a high quality visitor experience.

- Provide a high quality, safe and educational winter experience for all visitors
- Provide for visitor and employee health and safety
- Preserve pristine air quality
- Preserve natural soundscapes
- Mitigate impacts to wildlife
- Minimize adverse economic impacts to gateway communities

Record of Decision: The Record of Decision strikes a balance between phasing out all snowmobile use—as required under the November 2000 Record of Decision—and allowing for the unlimited snowmobile use of the park. The critical elements of the decision are a package that must be carried forward completely, with all components inextricably tied together. The principle components of the package are:

- Reduced numbers of snowmobiles through **Daily Limits**
- Implementing **Best Available Technology (BAT)** requirements for snowmobiles
- Implementation of an **Adaptive Management** Program
- Access is **Guided**, both snowmobiles and snowcoaches
- Phase-in** is reasonable and shared with the communities
- A new generation of **Snowcoaches** is developed as a key to winter transportation
- Funding** is available for implementation

Daily Limits

- The December 18, 2000, Proposed Rule (*Federal Register*, Vol. 65, No. 243) stated - *"If the NPS were to continue to allow snowmobiles in the parks...it would be necessary to establish very strict limitations on that use to remain consistent with the NPS Organic Act [and] the relevant executive orders..."*
- Snowmobile numbers could increase or decrease slightly over the existing historic average. Peak use would be dramatically reduced, and some use would be directed away from the heavily impacted West Yellowstone to Old Faithful corridor.
- Total actual average daily use will be capped at the historical average for West Entrance and allow for minor growth and redistribution of use at the other entrances.
- A key indicator of visitor experience is the condition of the oversnow roads. Snowmobile numbers affect oversnow road conditions.
- Initial snowmobile daily limits are: North Entrance (Mammoth Terraces), 50; West Entrance, 550; East Entrance, 100;

South Entrance, 250; Continental Snowmobile Divide Trail, 75; Jackson Lake, 40; and Grassy Lake Road, 75. Total daily limits for the three park units: 1,140.

Best Available Technology

- ❑ Best Available Technology (BAT) will ensure that oversnow vehicles are the cleanest and quietest possible under today's technology.
- ❑ NPS will work with manufacturers to develop snowmobiles that will reduce pollutants and sound - striving for continuous improvement.
- ❑ Current snowmobile BAT is believed to be the 2002 production, 4-stroke snowmobiles produced by Arctic Cat and Polaris (and possibly others).
- ❑ For the winter of 2003/2004 NPS would set BAT as any snowmobile that is capable of reducing hydrocarbon emissions by 90 percent and carbon monoxide emissions by 70 percent.

Adaptive Management

- ❑ The objectives for monitoring and adaptive management are to assess the short and long-term effects of management actions on park resources.
- ❑ Specific thresholds are set for each winter management zone.
- ❑ The ROD will prescribe monitoring methods and management actions for critical resources in winter.
- ❑ For each indicator, a threshold either exists or is hypothesized (for adaptive management).
- ❑ Each indicator and monitoring method and intensity is prescribed.
- ❑ Management actions are implemented if the thresholds should be exceeded.
- ❑ The NPS will establish an "open forum" strategy for the dissemination of monitoring results, technical expertise, monitoring techniques and results of peer review.

Guided Access

- ❑ Access will be 80% commercially guided and 20% non-commercially guided.
- ❑ Training will be required for both commercial and non-commercial guides.
- ❑ Guided trips improve compliance with park rules and regulations.
- ❑ Guides will be trained to avoid conflict with wildlife.
- ❑ Starting with 20% non-commercially guided use is a reasonable way to test a model during the phase-in period, including a training program for certification.
- ❑ Adaptive management techniques would be applied as experience is gained to adjust numbers within the limits as appropriate.

Phase-in: Over the course of two winter use seasons, the components of the new winter use plan would be implemented. A phase-in period allows communities, permittees, visitors, and concessioners time to adapt. During the phase-in period, existing commercial snowcoach operators would be encouraged to continue to increase their fleet size and snowmobile and other new operators will be encouraged to purchase coaches, achieve reduced snowmobile numbers, and shift to cleaner and quieter snowmobiles.

- ❑ **Year 1 (2003/2004)**
 - Implement daily limits.
 - **All entries (commercially and non-commercially) into Yellowstone National Park will be by reservation only**
 - 80% entries will be commercially guided
 - Comprehensive monitoring program underway
 - Commercially guided operations required to be BAT
 - Encourage rentals and private snowmobiles to be BAT
 - Complete concession contracting for commercially guided operations
 - Propose draft changes to be effective in Year 3
- ❑ **Year 2 (2004/2005)**
 - Retain daily limits
 - Comprehensive Monitoring program continues
 - All snowmobile entries to be guided (80% commercially guided and 20% non-commercially guided)
 - Training program in place for non-commercial guides
 - All snowmobile entries to be BAT
 - Propose final changes to be effective in Year 3
- ❑ **Year 3 (2005/2006)**
 - Implement changes, if required with regard to guiding, BAT, limits, monitoring program, hours of operation, etc.

Snowcoach Development

- ❑ Continue to support and help fund the current research and development for new snowcoach technology as an essential component of the package.
- ❑ Support exploration of ways to fund purchase of an initial fleet of new snowcoach vehicles through DOE (Department of Energy), DOT (Department of Transportation), and FTA (Federal Transit Administration) grants.
- ❑ Snowcoaches must meet BAT requirements for coaches. Historic snowcoaches would be initially exempted.

Funding: The National Park Service has received one-time funds to focus on enhanced winter operations, to implement a comprehensive monitoring program, to replace equipment, and to continue with research and development of the next-generation of snowcoaches. The three parks have requested on-going operational funds for monitoring and to implement the plan.

Schedule

- ❑ Record of Decision (ROD) to phase out snowmobile use in the three parks published November 22, 2000
- ❑ Final rule, implementing ROD, issued January 22, 2001
- ❑ A *Federal Register* notice delayed final rule for 60 days. Final rule became effective on April 22, 2001
- ❑ International Snowmobile Manufacturers, and others, filed lawsuit in December, 2000, asking that the November 2000 ROD be set aside
- ❑ Settlement Agreement finalized June 29, 2001
- ❑ The Settlement Agreement called for the SEIS and rule-making to be completed by December 2002, before implementation of the snowmobile limits that were to be effective the winter of 2002/2003 (as detailed in the existing rule)
- ❑ The DSEIS was released on March 29, 2002, and open for public comment until May 29, 2002. No Preferred Alternative was presented in the DSEIS
- ❑ Proposed "delaying" rule published on March 29, 2002 (and open for public comment until May 29, 2002) delaying implementation of snowmobile limits in the winter of 2002/2003
- ❑ A requested extension was approved to effectively analyze the more than 350,000 public comments received on the DSEIS.
- ❑ November 18, 2002 - Final Rule delaying phase-out of snowmobiles published
- ❑ February 21, 2003 - FSEIS available to public
- ❑ April 2003 – Prospectuses for snowcoach and snowmobile services issued
- ❑ March 25, 2003 - ROD completed and signed.
- ❑ Spring 2003 - Commence rule-making to implement ROD
- ❑ June 2003 – Draft rule published in the *Federal Register*
- ❑ July 2003 – New contracts awarded for commercial services
- ❑ October 2003 – Final Rule published in the *Federal Register*

A Final Note

Critical elements of the Record of Decision include: best available technology (BAT); a reduction in numbers of snowmobiles while maintaining historic visitor use numbers; an adaptive management program; guided snowmobile use; a reasonable phase-in period; and funding to effectively manage the winter use program. All of the critical elements must be implemented as a package to allow us to address the adverse impacts identified in the November 2000 ROD.

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