Yellowstone National Park News Release

Yellowstone To Issue Updated Winter Use Plan Proposal

The National Park Service will release a proposed new plan to guide the future of winter use in Yellowstone National Park. The draft Winter Use Supplemental Impact Statement (SEIS), available for public review and comment in the coming days, examines a range of alternatives regarding the management of snowmobiles and snowcoach activity in the park.

“Yellowstone National Park has some of our nation’s most iconic landscapes, and we work to provide a safe and positive experience for the millions of visitors that come here every year,” said Superintendent Dan Wenk. “We look forward to hearing from the public on this proposal as we develop a science-based approach that provides for public use and enjoyment while protecting the resources with which we are entrusted.”

The National Park Service is hosting a series of open house meetings during the 45-day public comment period. Following the comment period, the park will review and address the comments received before issuing a final plan.

Under the preferred alternative identified in the draft SEIS, the park would manage oversnow vehicles by their overall impacts to air quality, soundscapes, wildlife, and visitors, rather than focusing solely on the number of snowmobiles and snowcoaches allowed in the park each day. The park would allow up to 110 “transportation events” a day, initially defined as either one snowcoach or, on average, a group of seven snowmobiles (maximum group size would be capped at 10). No more than 50 transportation events a day would be allocated for groups of snowmobiles. Should Over Snow Vehicles (OSVs) meet additional environmental performance standards, each transportation event size would be able to increase, allowing the seasonal average group size for snowmobiles to go from 7 to 8, and allowing up to 2 snowcoaches per transportation event, while reducing impacts to park resources.

The preferred alternative would provide for one entry a day per entrance for a noncommercially guided group of up to five snowmobiles. It would continue to allow for motorized oversnow travel on the East Entrance road over Sylvan Pass.

The Draft SEIS contains three other alternatives. The “no action” alternative would end all public snowmobile and snowcoach travel in the park. Alternative 2 would allow for winter oversnow access by snowmobile and snowcoach at the same levels as permitted in recent years under a series of temporary rules. Alternative 3 would phase-out snowmobiles and provide for an increased number of BAT snowcoaches. This alternative would close Sylvan Pass in the winter.

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Each of the three “action” alternatives calls for a two-year transition period, operating under the same rules and use levels as we have since 2008.

Park staff members will host a series of open houses during the public review and comment period:

- Monday, July 16 at The Virginian Lodge, 750 West Broadway in Jackson, WY
- Tuesday, July 17 at the Holiday Inn, 315 Yellowstone Ave. in West Yellowstone, MT
- Wednesday, July 18 at the Wingate by Wyndham, 2305 Catron St. in Bozeman, MT
- Thursday, July 19 at the Holiday Inn, 1702 Sheridan Ave. in Cody, WY

All four open houses will run from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Additional details on these meetings, the winter use plan, electronic copies of the plan, and a form for submitting public comments on the document electronically via the Internet will be available at the National Park Service’s Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website under the ‘Winter Use Plan’ link at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell. You can request a copy of the Draft SEIS in compact disc or printed paper form and submit written (hard copy) comments by mail to: National Park Service, Management Assistant’s Office, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190. Comments may be submitted in writing through the PEPC website, in person, or by mail. The park cannot accept comments by phone, fax, or email. The park is also unable to accept bulk comments.

The National Park Service intends to have a final Winter Use Plan SEIS, a Record of Decision, and a final rule guiding winter use in place before the start of the 2012-2013 winter season.

- www.nps.gov/yell -