Yellowstone National Park News Release

National Park Service Proposed Rule to Implement New Yellowstone Winter Use Plan Released for 60-day Public Review and Comment Period

The National Park Service today released for public comment a proposed rule to more effectively manage access for snowmobiles and snow coaches in Yellowstone National Park while minimizing impacts on visitors, air and sound quality, and wildlife. The Proposed Rule to guide management of winter use in the park was published in the Federal Register today, opening a 60-day public review and comment period.

The rulemaking process supports the Final Winter Use Plan Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) which was released on February 22, 2013. The proposed rule and would implement the preferred alternative in the Final SEIS.

Under the preferred alternative, the park would permit up to 110 “transportation events” daily, initially defined as one snowcoach or a group of up to 10 snowmobiles, averaging seven snowmobiles per group per season. Up to 50 transportation events may be groups of snowmobiles. Management by transportation events is an impact-centric approach designed to minimize the impact of oversnow vehicles (OSVs) on air quality, soundscapes, and wildlife rather than focusing solely on the number vehicles allowed in the park.

This new, practical approach to OSV management also provides greater flexibility for OSV commercial tour operators, rewards future OSV technological innovations, and reduces OSV-caused environmental impacts all while making the park cleaner and quieter than previously authorized and allowing for increases in visitation.

Four transportation events per day (one per gate) would be reserved for non-commercially guided snowmobile access and Sylvan Pass would continue to be operated in accordance with the Sylvan Pass Working Group Agreement.

The Final Winter Use Plan and SEIS were developed with extensive consultation with the public, conservation and industry groups. The National Park Service specifically seeks public comments on the following elements of the proposed rule: management of OSVs by transportation events, the attainability of the new Best Available Technology requirements, anticipated costs associated with the BAT requirements, and the proposed implementation schedule.

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The winter of 2013/2014 will be a transition year, during which the park will allow motorized over-snow travel under the same conditions in place for the past four winters: up to 318 commercially guided Best Available Technology snowmobiles and up to 78 commercially guided snowcoaches daily.

The proposed rule and an electronic form to submit written comments can be found on the Internet at www.regulations.gov by searching the “Documents Open For Public Comment” and selecting the National Park Service as the agency. It is also available on CD or in hard copy by writing the Winter Use Planning Team, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming 82190. Written comments may be submitted through the Regulations.gov website, in person, or by mail. Comments will not be accepted by phone, fax, or e-mail. All public comments must be received or postmarked by midnight, June 17, 2013.

Additional information on Yellowstone’s winter use planning process including answers to Frequently Asked Questions can be found online at http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/currentmgmt.htm.

The Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park will use the analysis and recommendations contained in the Final SEIS and comments on the proposed rule to make a final recommendation to the NPS Intermountain Regional Director regarding the direction of winter use. The Regional Director is expected to issue the Record of Decision (ROD) sometime this summer, after which a final rule to implement the decision will be published in the Federal Register in order to allow the park to open for the 2013/2014 winter season.

- www.nps.gov/yell -