Yellowstone National Park News Release

National Park Service Releases New Rule for Winter Use in Yellowstone

Flexible plan allows for public enjoyment, resource protection; 2013/2014 winter season will serve as transition year for snowmobiles and snowcoaches

The National Park Service has published a final rule to guide winter use in Yellowstone National Park following extensive public review and comment. The final rule authorizes oversnow vehicle (OSV) use in Yellowstone and contains provisions that allow greater flexibility for commercial tour operators, provides mechanisms to make the park cleaner and quieter than what has been allowed during the previous four winter seasons, rewards oversnow vehicle innovations and technologies that improve the Yellowstone experience, and allows for an increase in visitation. The final rule relies on impact analysis conducted through the 2013 Winter Use Final Plan/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (final Plan/SEIS).

“This is a balanced and flexible plan that we believe will work for tour operators, for park visitors and for the iconic landscapes with which we are entrusted to protect,” said Superintendent Dan Wenk. “We appreciate the public comment and review that has gone into informing this science-based approach that will provide a safe and positive experience for the millions of visitors who come to Yellowstone every year.”

The 2013/2014 winter season will be a transition year to the new rule during which the park will allow snowmobiles and snowcoaches under the same conditions in place for the past four winters. The one-season transition period will also allow time for the NPS to advertise and award concession contracts and for commercial tour operators to adequately prepare for the new rule.

Beginning with the 2014/2015 winter season, the previous management approach of fixed maximum number of OSVs allowed in the park each day will be replaced with a more flexible concept of managing vehicle access by transportation events, defined as one snowcoach or a group of up to 10 snowmobiles, averaging seven seasonally. New best available technology standards will be required for snowmobiles no later than the 2015/2016 season, and for snowcoaches by the 2016/2017 winter season.

Commercial tour operators will be able to use their allocated transportation events for snowmobiles, snowcoaches, or a mix of both, as long as no more than 50 of the authorized 110 daily transportation events are snowmobile transportation events. This approach allows the proportion of snowcoaches or snowmobiles in the park each day to be adjusted, allows for an increase in the size of snowmobile groups to meet demand on peak days, and permits an increase in vehicle group size per transportation event if voluntary enhanced emission standards are met.
The plan also allows one non-commercially guided group of up to five snowmobiles to enter through each park entrance every day. The park will be working with interested stakeholders to develop the Non-commercially Guided Snowmobile Access Program, along with the Yellowstone Snowmobile Education Certification. The rule also continues to allow OSV use on the East Entrance road over Sylvan Pass.

To reinforce the central approach of the agency and a key tenant of this successful rule making, park managers will continue to collaborate with the public by implementing an Adaptive Management Program, which will combine science with public input, to ensure that OSV use impacts stay within limits predicted in the final Plan/SEIS. The kick-off meeting for this program is November 22, 2013 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on the campus of Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. Interested members of the public are encouraged to attend. More information can be found at http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/wuamp.htm.

Additional information and an electronic copy of the final Plan/SEIS and rule are available online at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell.

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