

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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The National Park Service Announces Scoping for a Supplemental Winter Use Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Your Participation is Requested

The National Park Service (NPS) is beginning work on a Supplemental Winter Use Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, in order to make a long-term decision regarding motorized winter use in Yellowstone National park. A formal 30-day public scoping period begins on February 8, 2012 and runs through **March 9, 2012**. During this public scoping period, the NPS is seeking comments on the scope of the SEIS, including the purpose, need and objectives, the preliminary range of draft alternatives, and issues to be addressed.

Four public scoping meetings will be held during the week of February

13th, with identical format and agenda. Each begins with a half-hour open house (6:30 to 7 P.M.) during which NPS staff can answer your questions and take your comments for the scoping record. At 7 P.M., there will be a brief presentation regarding winter use and the SEIS process. A question-and-answer period on the planning process will follow, and then those in attendance will be given an opportunity to provide oral comments. Following the comment portion of the meeting, as time allows, the open-house portion of the meeting will resume. Those in attendance can also leave their written comments on forms that will be available at the meetings.

Inside This Issue

Supplemental Winter Use Plan/EIS

Preliminary Range of Draft Alternatives

Your Participation

Upcoming Public Meetings

Anyone who wants to comment, whether they attend a public meeting or not, can comment online at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell> (click on the link to the 2012 Supplemental Winter Use Plan EIS).

Please join us to discuss winter use at Yellowstone National Park!

Public scoping meetings will be held on these dates, in these cities and locations:

Monday 2/13
6:30 – 8:30 PM

Holiday Inn at the
Buffalo Bill
Village Resort
1701 Sheridan Ave.,
Cody, WY 82414

Tuesday 2/14
6:30 – 8:30 PM

The Virginian Lodge
& Convention Center
750 W. Broadway,
Jackson, WY 83001

Wednesday 2/15
6:30 – 8:30 PM

Holiday Inn
315 Yellowstone Ave.,
West Yellowstone,
MT 49758

Thursday 2/16
6:30 – 8:30 PM

Holiday Inn
5 Baxter Lane,
Bozeman, MT 59715

For more information on these meetings, please visit
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell> (Click on the link to the 2012 Supplemental Winter Use Plan EIS)

Why Prepare a Supplemental EIS?

After months of public review and comment on the Draft EIS released in May 2011, the NPS determined that additional study was needed prior to putting a long-term plan in place. As a result, in November 2011 NPS released a Final Winter Use Plan/EIS with a preferred alternative applicable only for the 2011/2012 winter season, for which the park would operate under the same rules and restrictions in place during the previous two seasons. In December 2011, a Record of Decision and Final Regulation implementing the preferred alternative were issued. After the end of the current winter use season on March 15, 2012, no

motorized oversnow vehicles use can be allowed in the park unless a new regulation is issued.

The NPS is preparing a SEIS in order to help make a decision on a final long-term winter management plan, to take effect beginning in the 2012/2013 season. A SEIS is needed at this time so that the NPS can consider additional information not included in the 2011 Final EIS, and so that the NPS can be responsive to the more than 59,000 comments received on the 2011 Draft EIS.

What will be Different About the Supplemental EIS?

Much of the information in the 2011 Final EIS will remain the same for the supplement; however, the NPS will update its air quality and sound modeling assumptions, adaptive management strategy, and its assumptions for best available technology for snowcoaches. The NPS will also take another look at the operation of Sylvan Pass, opportunities for non-commercially guided access and at least two new alternatives that would take a new and different approach to winter use—regulating park entry according to the number of “sound events” created by snowcoaches or guided snowmobile groups, rather than by specific numbers of snowcoaches or snowmobiles. NPS expects that the new analysis in the SEIS will focus primarily on the substantial new information and issues that were raised during the Draft EIS comment period, as well as any other substantial new information or issues that are raised during the SEIS public scoping period.



The purpose and need for action are expected to remain the same for the SEIS as they were in the 2011 Final EIS:

The purpose of the plan/EIS is to establish a management framework that allows the public to experience the unique winter resources and values at Yellowstone National Park. The plan/EIS will be used to determine whether motorized winter use in the interior of the park (including wheeled motor vehicles,

snowmobiles, and snowcoaches) is appropriate, and if so, what type, extent, and location of this use are appropriate.

The NPS provides opportunities for people to experience the park in the winter; however 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. The park offers unique winter experiences that are distinct from other times of the



BISON TRAVERSING THE PARK - PHOTO CREDIT: DANCINGNOMAD03

year. In the past, the park has provided access to oversnow vehicle (OSV) users; however, the legal authority for OSV use (snowmobiles and snowcoaches) at Yellowstone will expire March 15, 2012. Therefore the park is developing this plan because a decision is needed about whether OSV use should continue, and if so, how to direct use to protect resources and values, and how to provide for visitor use and enjoyment.

The following objectives are also expected to remain the same as in the 2011 Final EIS:

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.
- Develop and implement an adaptive management program that includes monitoring the condition of resources.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 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

- 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.



OSVs GETTING READY TO EXPLORE THE PARK - PHOTO CREDIT: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Preliminary Range of Draft Alternatives

During this scoping period, the NPS is seeking comment on a preliminary range of draft alternatives. There is potential, based upon public comments received during the public scoping period, that some of the preliminary draft alternatives or alternative elements may change between now and the release of the Draft SEIS. Therefore, if you have specific issues relating to the preliminary draft range of alternatives, please include those in your comments.

Based upon impact analysis and public comments received on the 2011 Draft EIS, NPS anticipates removing Alternatives 3 and 6, as presented in the 2011 Final EIS,

from the range of alternatives that will be analyzed in detail in the SEIS. The NPS anticipates that there may also be minor changes to the remaining alternatives in the 2011 Final EIS, as described below. The NPS intends to evaluate two new alternatives that manage snowmobile and snowcoach use based on sound events, rather than numbers alone. These two new alternatives could reduce sound in the park, while allowing businesses more flexibility. Under these alternatives, a sound event, or sound events, would be allocated to an operator, and based upon a sound output equivalency between one snowcoach and a group of snowmobiles, the

operator or visitor would be able to pick which method of oversnow vehicle he or she would use to enter the park. The no-action alternative will remain the same as it was in the Final EIS. Under that alternative, no motorized oversnow vehicle use would be allowed in the park after March 15, 2012.

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION – NO SNOWMOBILE/SNOWCOACH USE

- Current interim rule expires after 2011-2012 season and no public oversnow vehicle (OSV) use would be allowed.
- Visitors could ski or snowshoe into Yellowstone.

ALTERNATIVE 2: CONTINUE SNOWMOBILE/SNOWCOACH USE AT 2008 PLAN LIMITS

- OSV use would be at the levels described under the current interim rule (up to 318 snowmobiles/78 snowcoaches per day).
- All snowmobiles would be Best Available Technology (BAT), and all snowmobiles would be commercially guided, except for one group per day of up to five snowmobiles that could be non-commercially guided.
- The park would develop a program for educating/training non-commercial guides. Each non-commercial guide would be allowed to lead up to two non-commercially guided groups per season.

ALTERNATIVE 3: MIXED-USE: SNOWCOACHES, SNOWMOBILES AND ROAD PLOWING FOR WHEELED VEHICLES

- Access to the park by wheeled commercial vehicles (buses and vans), snowcoaches, and snowmobiles.
- Plow two routes to Old Faithful (from West Yellowstone and Mammoth) for use by commercial multi-passenger wheeled vehicles. Up to 100 vehicles per day (based on feasibility of plowing parking spaces).
- Groom east and south access roads for use by up to 30 snowcoaches and 100 BAT snowmobiles.

ALTERNATIVE 4: TRANSITION TO BAT SNOWCOACHES ONLY

- Initially allow 78 snowcoaches and 318 BAT snowmobiles per day.
- Phase out snowmobiles as BAT snowcoaches are developed and put into service.
- Phase out of snowmobiles would begin once all 78 current coaches achieve BAT. As additional BAT coaches are added (up to 120 per day), snowmobile numbers would be reduced. The transition to snowcoaches only would occur within five years after the current 78 coaches achieve BAT.
- Sylvan Pass would be closed to oversnow vehicles (no snowmobile/snowcoach access through East Entrance) once phaseout.

Supplemental Winter Use Plan EIS Timeline

February 2012

Public scoping meetings

Late April 2012

Release of Draft Supplemental Winter Use Plan/EIS, for a 60-day public comment period

September 2012

Completion of the Final Supplemental Winter Use Plan/EIS

October/November 2011

Formal adoption and implementation of proposed rule governing Yellowstone winter use (if necessary)

is complete.

ALTERNATIVE 5: SOUND EVENT MANAGEMENT

- 120 "sound events" would be allowed per day, with each operator allocated a certain number of events. This could allow operators to increase the number of visitors while reducing noise impacts.
- A "sound event" would initially equal one snowcoach or one group of snowmobiles (average of up to 7 snowmobiles in one group, not to exceed 10). Snowmobile and snowcoach numbers, including snowmobile group size, could change over time through adaptive management.
- Depending on the market, could allow up to 840 snowmobiles and 0 snowcoaches, or up to 120 snowcoaches and 0 snowmobiles, or some combination between the extremes, in the park per day.
- Operators would be required to offer both snowmobile and snowcoach trips, thus allowing visitors to drive the demand for snowmobiles or snowcoaches.
- Entrance to the park during the first two weeks and last two weeks of the season (Dec. 15-29 and March 1-15) by commercial wheeled or rubber-tracked vehicles only.

- Impacts to other resources, such as air and wildlife could be limiting factors or the numbers of vehicles allowed.

ALTERNATIVE 6: SOUND EVENT MANAGEMENT, WITH VEHICLE LIMITS

- 100 “sound events” would be allowed per day, with each operator allocated a certain number of events.
- A “sound event” would initially equal one snowcoach or one group of snowmobiles (up to 7 snowmobiles in one group). Snowmobile and snowcoach numbers, including snowmobile group size, could change over time through adaptive management.
- Operators would decide whether to use their allocation for snowmobiles or snowcoaches, but no more than 50 percent of “sound events” could come from snowmobiles.
- Could allow up to 350 snowmobiles and 50 snowcoaches, or up to 100 snowcoaches and 0 snowmobiles per day, or some combination between the extremes, in the park per day.

ALTERNATIVE 7: VARIABLE USE ACROSS PARK AND WINTER SEASON

- OSV and visitor use would be managed for a variety of winter experiences. Days of higher and lower use would be set for snowmobile and snowcoach visitors.
- Daily snowmobile limits would vary from 110 to 330 a day. Snowcoach daily limits would vary from 30 to 80 a day. Some areas of the park would be closed to OSV use during portions of the season for undisturbed skiing and snowshoeing.
- A limit on nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions from snowmobiles would be implemented, along with continuing current limits on carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions.

There Are a Number of Ways you Can Participate in the Scoping Process

If you cannot attend one of the meetings or would like to comment in another form, you can still participate online or in writing. Here’s how:

Online:

- Use the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell> (click on the link to the 2012 Supplemental Winter Use Plan EIS).

Written, on Paper:

- Hand deliver any written comments to:

Management Assistant’s Office
Headquarters Building
Mammoth Hot Springs
Yellowstone National Park, WY

- Mail any written comments to this address:

Yellowstone National Park
Supplemental Winter Use Plan EIS
PO Box 168 Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

This includes mailing pre-addressed comment cards provided at public scoping meetings.

As stated above, the NPS received more than 59,000 comments on the 2011 Draft EIS. Many of those comments were addressed in the 2011 Final EIS, and the NPS has committed to addressing the remaining comments in the SEIS. There is no need to submit duplicate comments during the scoping period.

Please note that comments cannot be accepted by fax, email, or in any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Please submit **ALL** comments by **March 9, 2012**.