

Winter Use Plan & Environmental Impact Statement

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Yellowstone National Park
Wyoming, Montana, Idaho
May 2011



Draft Environmental Impact Statement

AS Yellowstone National Park finishes digging out for spring and summer visitors after a snow-filled winter, it is now time to discuss, revise and complete a new plan for winter use in the park beginning next winter.

We invite you to join us at public meetings on the Draft Winter Use Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft Plan/DEIS) for Yellowstone National Park. This brochure is meant to help you prepare to add your comments to the process of drawing a new management blueprint that will guide winter activities in the park for decades to come. The brochure includes:

- Summaries of each of seven alternative plans analyzed in depth in the Draft Plan/DEIS, including a “preferred” alternative that the park and the National Park Service (NPS) propose to adopt
- Information about how, where and when you can participate in reviewing the Draft Plan/DEIS and commenting on these alternative proposals either in person or in writing online and by mail
- A list of locations, dates and times for six public meetings and two online “webinars”
- The schedule for completing the environmental study and plan before the start of the park’s next winter season

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Coming Up With Alternatives	2
Alternatives	3
Your Participation	5
Upcoming Public Meetings	6

With your involvement, we intend to finish our analysis and adopt a new plan before the expected December 15, 2011 start of the next winter season at Yellowstone. Last year, you helped us shape, sharpen and direct our focus on this winter planning process. This year, we are ready to complete the winter use plan after we consider your comments. This is your park – and this is your time to comment on the alternatives and our analysis of them.

WINTER-USE PLAN PROJECT SCHEDULE

Draft Plan/DEIS and plan released	May 5, 2011
Public comment period	Begins May 5, 2011 and runs for 60-days from the date the official EPA Notice of Availability is published in the Federal Register
Analysis of public comments and writing of final EIS	July 2011 to Autumn 2011
Release of final EIS	Autumn 2011
Record of decision and plan implementation	December 2011

Coming Up With the Alternatives

To prepare this Draft Plan/DEIS, we drew on a variety of resources: Your public comment during the spring 2010 “scoping” period; previous winter-use plans; visitor-use statistics for recent seasons; legal decisions in federal court; and new and existing information about Yellowstone’s natural resources.

A winter use plan for Yellowstone is necessary because access to most of the park in winter, with its harsh environment and long distances, is impossible for most visitors without motorized vehicles. Whether and how to allow vehicles into the park was central to the planning effort as it has been for decades.

The park and the NPS studied and analyzed six alternatives that ranged from closing Yellowstone in winter (except for visitors on skis or snowshoes) to returning to the higher numbers of snowmobiles and snowcoaches—also referred to as oversnow vehicles or OSVs—allowed in the park’s 2004 winter-use plan. As a result of this study, we drafted a seventh, “preferred” alternative that includes some components of the other alternatives plus additional elements. In all cases of OSV use, the winter of 2011-12 would be a “transition year” for the park, its concessionaires and neighboring communities to adjust to new operations. For that one season, we would continue with last winter’s interim winter-plan levels of up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day.

The following are summaries of this preferred alternative and the original six alternatives, all of which were analyzed in the Draft Plan/DEIS.



The Yellowstone Winter-Use Plan Alternatives

- **NPS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (ALTERNATIVE 7): PROVIDE A VARIETY OF USE LEVELS AND EXPERIENCES FOR VISITORS.** This alternative proposes a variety of use levels, which would establish a maximum number of snowmobiles and snowcoaches permitted in the park for specific days throughout the winter season. Four different use levels for each vehicle type would be implemented, the combination of which may vary by day. Snowmobile use would range from 110 to 330 vehicles per day and snowcoach use from 30 to 80 vehicles per day. These varying levels would provide for high and low OSV use days, allowing for a variety of motorized and non-motorized visitor experiences throughout the winter. Varying levels would also allow the NPS to observe how park resources react to different levels of use, learning through management. All current OSV requirements would continue, including OSV commercial guide requirements, hours-of-operation restrictions, and best available technology (BAT) requirements for snowmobiles. BAT requirements would be developed and implemented for snowcoaches as well as additional BAT for snowmobiles that address nitrogen oxide emissions. OSVs entering the park would be required to do so by 10:30 a.m.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND ANALYZED

- **ALTERNATIVE 1: NO-ACTION—NO SNOWMOBILE/SNOWCOACH USE (ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE).** The most recent interim rule for winter use, which allowed up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day, expired after the 2010/2011 winter season. Under the no-action alternative, no further public OSV use in winter would be permitted in Yellowstone. Non-motorized access and wheeled vehicle access (northern road only) into the park would continue. The park’s east entrance (Sylvan Pass) would be closed.

- **ALTERNATIVE 2: CONTINUE SNOWMOBILE/ SNOWCOACH USE AT 2008 PLAN LIMITS.** Under this alternative, snowmobile and snowcoach use would continue at the most recent level (2010-11 interim plan) of up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day. All current OSV requirements would continue including OSV commercial guide requirements, hours-of-operation restrictions, and BAT requirements for snowmobiles. BAT requirements would be developed and implemented for snowcoaches.
- **ALTERNATIVE 3: RETURN SNOWMOBILE/ SNOWCOACH USE TO 2004 PLAN LIMITS.** This alternative would allow for snowmobile and snowcoach use to increase to the levels in the 2004 winter-use plan of up to 720 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day. All current OSV requirements would continue including OSV commercial guide requirements, hours-of-operation restrictions, and BAT requirements for snowmobiles. BAT requirements would be developed and implemented for snowcoaches.
- **ALTERNATIVE 4: MIXED-USE: SNOWCOACHES, SNOWMOBILES, AND ROAD PLOWING FOR WHEELED VEHICLES.** This alternative would provide a wide range of visitor use and manage for commercial wheeled vehicles (no private vehicles allowed), OSVs, and non-motorized use throughout the park in the winter-use season. Roads would be plowed from West Yellowstone and Mammoth Hot Springs to Old Faithful for access by wheeled, commercial, multi-passenger vehicles (buses and vans). The south entrance would be groomed for use by up to 110 snowmobiles and 30 snowcoaches per day, all of which must meet BAT and commercial guide requirements. The east entrance (Sylvan Pass) would be closed in winter. This is the only alternative, except for the No-Action Alternative, where Sylvan Pass would be closed. All current OSV requirements would continue including OSV commercial guide requirements, hours-of-operation restrictions, and BAT requirements for snowmobiles. BAT requirements would be developed and implemented for snowcoaches.

OSVs GETTING READY TO EXPLORE THE PARK - PHOTO CREDIT: NPS





BISON TRAVERSING THE PARK - PHOTO CREDIT: DANCINGNOMAD03

- **ALTERNATIVE 5: TRANSITION TO SNOWCOACHES MEETING BAT REQUIREMENTS ONLY.** Under this alternative, OSV access to the park could be via BAT snowcoach only. Snowmobiles would begin to be phased out in the 2014/2015 season, when all snowcoaches must meet BAT requirements. Snowcoaches would replace snowmobiles within a five-year period (depending on coach user demand). Should snowcoach demand not reach 120 snowcoaches per day, some level of snowmobile use could remain. Alternative 5 initially would provide for both snowmobile and snowcoach access under the most recent winter use levels of up to 318 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day. After the 2014/2015 season, snowcoach numbers could increase up to 120 a day, with a corresponding decrease in snowmobile numbers during the phase-out period.
- **ALTERNATIVE 6: IMPLEMENT VARIABLE MANAGEMENT.** This alternative would manage OSV and visitor use to increase the variety of winter experiences. It would create times and places for higher and lower levels of motorized use and opportunities for undisturbed skiing and snowshoeing. OSV use would have a seasonal maximum of up to 32,000 snowmobiles and 4,600 snowcoaches, with a daily limit of up to 540 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches. Up to 25 percent of snowmobile permits would be for unguided or non-commercially guided use. Most of the most recent OSV requirements would continue, including hours-of-operation restrictions and BAT requirements for snowmobiles. BAT requirements for snowcoaches would be developed and implemented.

The Next Step: Your Participation

Anyone can comment on the analyses and findings during the formal public review and comment period. That means that, if you believe a different mix of options should be considered, now is the time to make those suggestions. The comment period closes 60 days from the date that an official Environmental Protection Agency “Notice of Availability” is published in the *Federal Register*. Once published, the park will post the comment period end date on the PEPC website (see website below), please check back. We have prepared several ways for you to participate and comment:

- A dedicated website where the public can file formal written comments online
- Six public meetings – four in communities in the “local” region around Yellowstone and two “national” meetings, in Denver and Washington, DC
- Addresses for mailing or hand-delivering written comments on paper to the park
- Two online computer “webinars”

Getting a Copy of the DEIS and Draft Plan

You can visit the National Park Service’s “Planning, Environment and Public Comment” website – PEPC for short – at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell> to download a copy of the Draft Plan/DEIS to a computer. Once there, click on the “**winter use plan**” link. This is the same website you will visit if you want to write your comments electronically, as described in this newsletter.

A limited number of printed paper copies of the Draft Plan/DEIS’s Executive Summary/Maps and the full EIS and plan will be available at Yellowstone’s park headquarters and visitor centers. You also can request a copy by mail, as long as supplies last. Write to:

Yellowstone National Park
Winter Use DEIS
Box 168
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

Electronic Comment

The most efficient way to participate is to write your comments about the Draft Plan/DEIS electronically via the PEPC website. To do so, visit <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell>.

Click on “**Open For Comment**,” then,
Click on “**Winter Use Plan/EIS**,” and finally,
Click on “**Comment on Document**.”

Written Comment

To submit written comments in hard copy (e.g. in a letter, on paper), you may send them by U.S. Postal Service or other mail delivery service to:

Yellowstone National Park
Winter Use DEIS
Box 168
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

If you want to hand-deliver such written comments, bring them to the park headquarters in Mammoth Hot Springs, WY, near the northwest (Montana) entrance to the park.

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.

Online Webinars

Yellowstone and the NPS also will host two “webinars,” or meeting-style online presentations, about the Draft Plan/DEIS. These electronic meetings are intended for those who cannot attend one of the six public meetings but want to give spoken comments. With a computer and a telephone, those who “attend” can hear and view a short presentation about the Draft Plan/DEIS findings and alternatives, ask questions aloud or via computer keyboard, and make formal comments. The dates and times for these webinars are found on Page 6 of this newsletter.

Public Meetings

The six public meetings will be conducted as a combination of open house, question-and-answer session, and formal hearing for oral comments. As at the winter-use “scoping” meetings in spring 2010, there will be display panels stationed around the room. Yellowstone and NPS personnel will staff each of these information stations to answer questions and discuss. There also will be an oral and audio-visual presentation to explain the Draft Plan/DEIS.

These meetings also are forums for you to give your input about all aspects of the Draft Plan/DEIS. Participants will have the opportunity to speak aloud, at a microphone, with their comments included in the official record. You also can present your views one-on-one for the official record to a court reporter at the meeting. NPS will attempt to accommodate all those who wish to make oral comments at these meetings. Please be aware, however, that in cases of large attendance and many requests to speak, we may have to set time limits for individual comments in order to fit into the meeting time allowed.

And please remember: Before and after the meetings and at all stages of the comment period, you also can present your views in writing, online, via the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website mentioned above, or through the mail. For specific instructions and for public meeting locations, dates and times, please see the adjacent schedule.

For more information on how to comment, or on how to participate in the webinars, visit <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell/>. You can also go to the Yellowstone Winter Use website at <http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/winteruse.htm>.

WEBINAR SCHEDULE

Tuesday, June 21

Noon – 2 p.m. MDT (2 – 4 p.m. EDT)

Wednesday, June 22

5 – 7 p.m. MDT (7 – 9 p.m. EDT)

PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE

Wednesday, June 1

The Virginian
750 West Broadway
Jackson, WY 83001

6:30 – 9:30 p.m. MDT

Doors open at 6:30 for sign-in.

Meeting begins at 7:00 with a short presentation, followed by an open house and then an opportunity for public comment.

Thursday, June 2

Holiday Inn
1701 Sheridan Ave.
Cody, WY 82414

6:30 – 9:30 p.m. MDT

(Same schedule as above)

Tuesday, June 7

Holiday Inn
315 Yellowstone Avenue
West Yellowstone, MT 59758

6:30 – 9:30 p.m. MDT

(Same schedule as above)

Wednesday, June 8

Holiday Inn
5 Baxter Lane
Bozeman, MT 59715

6:30 – 9:30 p.m. MDT

(Same schedule as above)

Tuesday, June 21

Sheraton on Union
360 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, CO 80228

6:30 – 9:30 p.m. MDT

(Same schedule as above)

Thursday June 23

DAR Presidents General's Assembly Room
1776 D Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

6:30 – 9:30 p.m. EDT

(Same schedule as above)