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Yellowstone/Grand Teton News Release

Parks To Open On Time For Winter Use *Court order provides for snowmobile and snowcoach access in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks*

A recent court order removes uncertainty about snowmobile and snowcoach access in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks this winter.

Back in September, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., rejected the park's latest winter use plan, thereby prohibiting snowmobile and snowcoach access without a new regulation. In response, the National Park Service (NPS) began work on a new temporary plan to guide winter use management in the parks, in an effort to get the parks open on time this winter on December 15, 2008. The preferred alternative in the temporary plan calls for limited, managed snowmobile and snowcoach access in the parks.

A related challenge to winter use management in the parks has been before the U.S. District Court in Wyoming. On November 7, 2008, that court ordered the National Park Service to reinstate a 2004 rule, which will allow snowmobile and snowcoach access in Yellowstone and Grand Teton this winter.

The NPS will publish a rule in the *Federal Register* to reinstate the 2004 rule in accordance with the Wyoming court's order. The parks will operate under this reinstated rule for this winter season, providing visitors, area businesses, and park employees with a plan they can count on for this year. The reinstated 2004 rule will also allow the NPS time to analyze public comment received on the temporary plan and its supporting proposed rule, in order to guide a long-term planning process for winter use in the parks as directed in the orders issued by both federal courts. Public comment on the temporary plan ends at midnight tonight, and at midnight November 20, on the supporting proposed rule.

Under the reinstated 2004 rule, motorized oversnow access will be allowed this winter as it has for the past four winters. Up to 720 commercially guided, Best Available Technology (BAT) snowmobiles and up to 78 snowcoaches will be allowed per day in Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone's East Entrance and Sylvan Pass will be open for motorized and non-motorized oversnow travel, subject to weather and safety constraints. Trail and off-road use of snowmobiles and snowcoaches has always been, and will continue to be prohibited.

The 2004 rule also addresses snowmobile access in Grand Teton and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, including access along Grassy Lake Road, and on Jackson Lake for licensed anglers.

During the last two winters, an average of about 296 snowmobiles a day entered Yellowstone. The park's peak day was during last December, when 557 snowmobiles entered the park. Given the uncertainty caused by lawsuits on winter use, park managers forecast use levels for this winter to remain near these levels.

Monitoring data from the past four winters shows excellent air quality, few wildlife disturbances, and reduced sound impacts. All were at fully acceptable levels, and below levels recorded during historic, unregulated use in the parks, which show that the limited use of guided, BAT snowmobiles has worked.

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