



**Appendix D**

**Yellowstone National Park**

**Draft Winter Use Plan / Environmental**

**Impact Statement**

**Comment Response Report**



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## **INTRODUCTION AND GUIDE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), its implementing regulations, and National Park Service (NPS) guidance on meeting the NEPA obligations, Yellowstone National Park (Yellowstone or the park) must assess and consider comments submitted on the Draft Winter Use Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (plan/DEIS) and provide responses. This report describes how the NPS considered public comments and provides responses to those comments.

After release of the plan/DEIS, a 60-day public comment period was open between May 6, 2011, and July 18, 2011. This public comment period was announced on the park website ([www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell)); in a newsletter sent to interested parties, elected officials, and appropriate local and state agencies; and through press releases. The plan/DEIS was made available through several outlets, including the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>, hardcopies at the parks headquarters and visitor centers, and by request to receive a copy through the mail. After reviewing the plan/DEIS, the public was encouraged to submit comments about the plan/DEIS through the NPS PEPC website, by postal mail sent directly to the park, or delivered in person directly to the park. Oral statements and written comments were accepted during the hearing-style portion of the meetings and oral statements were accepted during online webinars.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT MEETINGS AND ONLINE WEBINARS**

The plan/DEIS was available for public review and comment between May 6, 2011, and July 18, 2011. Six public meetings and two webinars were held in June 2011. Public meetings were held to describe the plan, continue the public involvement process, and obtain and community and national input on the plan/DEIS for winter use and Yellowstone National Park. Electronic meetings (or webinars) were held for those who could not attend one of the six public meetings but wanted to provide spoken comments. The public meetings and webinars held during the public comment period for the plan/DEIS are listed below:

- June 1, 2011: The Virginian in Jackson, Wyoming
- June 2, 2011: Holiday Inn in Cody, Wyoming
- June 7, 2011: Holiday Inn in West Yellowstone, Wyoming
- June 8, 2011: Holiday Inn in Bozeman, Montana
- June 21, 2011: Sheraton in Lakewood, Colorado
- June 23, 2011: Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Presidents General's Assembly Room in Washington, D.C.
  
- June 21, 2011: Webinar from 2 – 4 p.m. EDT
- June 22, 2011: Webinar from 7 – 9 p.m. EDT

A total of 177 meeting attendees signed in during the six meetings (see Appendix 1). The meetings began with an open house where displays were stationed around the room and the public was able to ask questions to Yellowstone and NPS personnel. Next, a presentation was given about the plan/DEIS and preferred alternative, followed by another open house. The meetings ended with a hearing-style comment period that gave people the opportunity to provide oral comments directed toward the superintendent in a public forum. Members of the public were also given the opportunity to provide comments privately to a court reporter. Those attending the meeting received a handout that described the NEPA process, detailed the alternatives, and listed additional opportunities to comment on the project, such as providing comments on the NPS PEPC website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>. Public comments received are categorized in the following sections of this report.

Park staff were available at the meetings and webinars to answer questions and provide additional information to open house participants. During the public comment period, 59,019 pieces of correspondence were entered into the PEPC website. Some comments were entered directly by the commenter. The NPS or the NPS contractor uploaded hard copy letters, emails, and comment forms sent to the NPS by the public.

### **THE COMMENT ANALYSIS PROCESS**

Comment analysis is a process used to compile and correlate similar public comments into a format that can be used by decision makers and the Interdisciplinary Team. Comment analysis assists the team in organizing, clarifying, and addressing technical information pursuant to NEPA regulations. It also aids in identifying the topics and issues to be evaluated and considered throughout the planning process.

The process includes five main components:

- Developing a coding structure
- Employing a comment database for comment management
- Reading and coding public comments
- Interpreting and analyzing the comments to identify issues and themes
- Preparing a comment summary

A coding structure was developed to help sort comments into logical groups by topics and issues. The coding structure was derived by analyzing the range of topics discussed during internal NPS scoping, past planning documents, and the comments themselves. The coding structure was designed to capture all comment content rather than to restrict or exclude any ideas.

The NPS PEPC database was used for managing the comments. The database stores the full text of all correspondence and allows each comment to be coded by topic and issue. Outputs from the database include the total number of correspondence and comments received, sorting and reporting of comments by a particular topic or issue, and demographic information for the sources of the comments.

Analysis of the public comments involved assigning codes to statements made by the public in their letters, email messages, and written comment forms. All comments were read and analyzed, including those of a technical nature; opinions, feelings, and preferences of one element or one potential alternative over another; and comments of a personal or philosophical nature.

During coding, comments were classified as substantive or non-substantive. A substantive comment is defined in the NPS Director's Order #12 Handbook as one that does one or more of the following (Section 4.6A):

- Question, with a reasonable basis, the accuracy of information presented in the EIS;
- Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental analysis;
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the EIS; and/or
- Cause changes or revisions in the proposal.

As further stated in Director's Order 12, substantive comments "raise, debate, or question a point of fact or policy. Comments in favor of or against the proposed action or alternatives, or comments that only agree or disagree with NPS policy, are not considered substantive." All comments were read and considered and will be used to help create the final plan/EIS; however, only those determined to be substantive were used to develop concern statements.

Although the analysis process attempts to capture the full range of public concerns, this content analysis report should be used with caution. Comments from people who chose to respond do not necessarily represent the sentiments of all members of the public. Furthermore, comment analysis is not a vote counting process; comment analysis emphasizes the content of the comment rather than the number of times a comment is received.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Primary terms used in the document are defined below.

**Correspondence:** An item of correspondence is the entire document received from a commenter. It can be in the form of a letter, email, written comment form, note card, open house or webinar transcript, or petition.

**Comment:** A comment is a portion of the text within an item of correspondence that addresses a single subject. A comment could include such information as an expression of support or opposition to the use of a potential management tool, additional data regarding the existing condition, or an opinion debating the adequacy of an analysis.

**Code:** A code is a grouping centered on a common subject. Codes were developed during the public comment process and were used to track major subjects.

**Concern:** A concern summarizes the issues identified by each code. Each code is further characterized by concern statements that focus on the content of comments. Some codes require multiple concern statements. In cases where no comments were received about an issue, the issue was not identified or discussed in this report.

**Representative Quote:** Representative quotes are portions of text taken directly from comments received from the public. Representative quotes help clarify the concern statements. Representative quotes are not edited.

All public comments were considered important as useful guidance and input to the public comment process, but only substantive comments were analyzed in the Public Comment Summary Report.

## **GUIDE TO THIS DOCUMENT**

This report is organized as follows.

**Content Analysis Report:** This basic report generated by PEPC provides information about the numbers and types of comments received, organized by code. Table 1 summarizes the number of comments that were coded under each topic. Tables 2–5 show general demographic information, such as the states where commenters live and the number of letters received from different organizations.

**Concern Response Report:** This report summarizes the substantive comments received during the public comment period. These comments are organized by codes and further organized into concern statements. Following each concern statement are representative quotes, which have been taken directly from the text of public comments to further clarify the concern statements.

**Correspondence Index of Organizations:** This index lists all groups that submitted comments, arranged by the following organization types as defined by PEPC (and in this order): businesses; churches and religious groups; civic groups; conservation/preservation groups; federal government; NPS employees; non-governmental groups; recreational groups; state government; town or city government; tribal

government; unaffiliated individuals; university/professional society. Each item of correspondence was assigned a unique identification number upon entry into PEPC. This number can be used to assist the public in identifying how the NPS addressed their comments.

**Index by Organization Type:** This index identifies all of the codes that were assigned to each item of correspondence and is arranged by organization type. Individual commenters are also included in this report, identified as Unaffiliated Individuals.

**Index by Code:** This index lists which organization or unaffiliated individual commented on which topics, as identified by the codes used in this analysis. The index is organized by code. Under each code is a list of the organizations that submitted comments on the coded topic and the related correspondence number. Entries identified as N/A represent unaffiliated individuals.

**Non-Substantive Comment Report:** This report includes all of the comments received that were categorized as non-substantive.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS REPORT

**Table 1: Comment Distribution**

Notes: Each comment may have multiple codes. As a result, the total number of comments may be different than the actual comment totals.

\*denotes code for which form letters were received; 17 total form letters were received

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of Comments</b>
AE12000	Affected Environment: Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat	2	0.001%
AE21000	Affected Environment: Socioeconomics	2	0.001%
AE22500	Affected Environment: Visitor Use and Experience	4	0.002%
AE30000	Affected Environment: Health and Safety	4	0.002%
AE7000	Affected Environment: Air Quality	1	0.001%
AE8100	Affected Environment: Soundscapes	1	0.001%
AE9500	Affected Environment: General/Other	76	0.042%
AL1000	Alternatives: Support Alternative 1	16	0.009%
AL1050	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 1	41	0.023%
AL1100	Alternatives: Alternative 1	3	0.002%
AL1150	Alternatives: Support Alternative 2	24	0.013%
AL1200	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 2	5	0.003%
AL1300	Alternatives: Support Alternative 3	33	0.018%
AL1350	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 3	6	0.003%
AL1400	Alternatives: Alternative 3	25	0.014%
AL1450	Alternatives: Support Alternative 4	11	0.006%
AL1500	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 4	10	0.006%
AL1550	Alternatives: Alternative 4	164	0.092%
AL1600	Alternatives: Support Alternative 5	394	0.220%
AL1650	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 5	38	0.021%
AL1700	Alternatives: Alternative 5	176	0.098%
AL1750	Alternatives: Support Alternative 6	18	0.010%
AL1800	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 6	8	0.004%
AL1850	Alternatives: Alternative 6	17	0.009%
AL1900	Alternatives: Support Alternative 7 - NPS Preferred	61	0.034%

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of Comments</b>
AL1950	Alternatives: Oppose Alternative 7 - NPS Preferred	80	0.045%
AL2000	Alternatives: Alternative 7 - NPS Preferred	24,182*	13.503%
AL2050	Alternatives: Disagree with all Alternatives	7	0.004%
AL4000	Alternatives: New Alternatives or Elements	153	0.085%
AL5020	Alternatives: Support More OSVs	87	0.049%
AL5025	Alternatives: Support Less OSVs	23,436*	13.087%
AL5030	Alternatives: Support Snowcoach Only	82,362*	45.991%
AL5065	Alternatives: Support OSV Access	150	0.001%
AL5069	Alternatives: Support no OSV/Snowmobile Access	407	0.084%
AL5070	Alternatives: Unguided OSV Use	195	0.227%
AL5073	Alternatives: Unguided OSV Use (Non-Substantive)	16,148*	0.109%
AL5075	Alternatives: Non-commercially Guided OSV Use	54	9.017%
AL5077	Alternatives: Non-commercially Guided OSV Use (Non-Substantive)	30	0.030%
AL6000	Alternatives: Support Snowmobiles Using Sylvan Pass and East Entrance	5	0.017%
AL6010	Alternatives: Oppose Snowmobiles Using Sylvan Pass and East Entrance	14,733*	0.003%
AL6015	Alternatives: Snowmobiles Using Sylvan Pass and East Entrance	20	8.227%
AL6020	Alternatives: Best Available Technology (BAT)	91	0.011%
AL6025	Alternatives: Best Available Technology (BAT) (Non-Substantive)	40	0.051%
AL6070	Alternatives: Summer Use	25	0.022%
AL6075	Alternatives: Summer Use (Non-Substantive)	56	0.014%
AL7150	Alternatives Dismissed: Allow use of Personal, Wheeled Vehicles on Plowed Roads	16	0.031%
AL7250	Alternatives Dismissed: Allow Snowbikes and Kite-skiing	47	0.009%
AL7450	Alternatives Dismissed: Manage/Limit OSV Use Daily Based on Weather and Other Resource Conditions	1	0.026%
AL7550	Alternatives Dismissed: General (Non-Substantive)	10	0.001%
AM1000	Adaptive Management	12	0.006%
AQ2000	Air Quality: Methodology and Assumptions	32	0.007%
AQ4000	Air Quality: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	20	0.018%
AQ4500	Air Quality: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	6	0.011%

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of Comments</b>
CC1000	Consultation and Coordination: General Comments	6	0.003%
GA1000	Impact Analysis: Impact Analyses	54	0.003%
GA1200	Impact Analysis: Impact Analysis (Non-Substantive)	22	0.030%
GA3000	Impact Analysis: General Methodology for Establishing Impacts/Effects	5	0.012%
HS2000	Health and Safety: Methodology and Assumptions	1	0.003%
HS4000	Health and Safety: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	2	0.001%
HS4500	Health and Safety: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	2	0.001%
HU2000	Historic Use Levels (Non-Substantive)	4	0.001%
MT1000	Miscellaneous Topics: General Comments	75	0.002%
ON1000	Other NEPA Issues: General Comments	3	0.042%
ON2000	Cumulative Impacts (Non-Substantive)	1	0.002%
PN2000	Purpose and Need: Park Purpose and Significance	3	0.001%
PN3000	Purpose and Need: Scope of the Analysis	7	0.002%
PN4000	Purpose and Need: Park Legislation/Authority	536	0.004%
PN8000	Purpose and Need: Objectives in Taking Action	9	0.299%
PO2000	Park Operations: Methodology and Assumptions	2	0.005%
PO4000	Park Operations: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	1	0.001%
PO4500	Park Operations and Management: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	2	0.001%
SE2000	Socioeconomics: Methodology and Assumptions	6	0.001%
SE4000	Socioeconomics: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	14,373*	0.003%
SE4500	Socioeconomics: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	69	8.026%
SS1000	Soundscapes: Guiding Policies, Regulations and Laws	2	0.039%
SS2000	Soundscapes: Methodology and Assumptions	8	0.001%
SS3000	Soundscapes: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	19	0.004%
SS4000	Soundscapes: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	53	0.011%
VA2000	Visitor Use and Experience: Methodology and Assumptions	6	0.030%
VA4000	Visitor Use and Experience: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	27	0.003%
VA4500	Visitor Use and Experience: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	66	0.015%

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of Comments</b>
VQ4000	Visual Quality: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	2	0.037%
WH2000	Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: Methodology and Assumptions	5	0.001%
WH4000	Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives	32	0.003%
WH4500	Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives (Non-Substantive)	49	0.018%
WH5000	Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: Cumulative Impacts	1	0.027%
XX1000	Duplicate Correspondence/Duplicate Comment	85	0.001%
<b>Total</b>		<b>179,084</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2: Correspondence by Type**

<b>Type</b>	<b># of Items of Correspondence</b>
Other	4
Web Form*	57,570
Park Form	15
Letter*	1,372
Fax	2
Transcript	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>59,019</b>

\*The letter and web form categories include 17 form letters, totaling 56,462 items of correspondence

**Table 3: Correspondence by Organization Type**

<b>Organization Type</b>	<b># of Items of Correspondence</b>
Town or City Government	6
Business	28
County Government	6
State Government	5
Conservation/Preservation	13
Recreational Groups	15
Federal Government	1
Civic Groups	1
Unaffiliated Individual	58,944
<b>Total</b>	<b>59,019</b>

Note: This table includes 17 form letters, totaling 56,462 items of correspondence

**Table 4: Correspondence Distribution by State, Territory, or Country**

<b>State</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b># of Items of Correspondence</b>
AK	0.35%	206
AL	0.39%	233
AR	0.40%	234
AS	0.10%	57
AZ	2.47%	1,458
CA	19.39%	11,445
CO	4.00%	2,360
CT	1.61%	950
DC	0.27%	162
DE	0.30%	180
FL	5.09%	3,003
GA	1.26%	744
HI	0.58%	343
IA	0.56%	333
ID	0.62%	367

State	Percentage	# of Items of Correspondence
IL	4.08%	2,407
IN	1.20%	707
KS	0.64%	375
KY	0.63%	373
LA	0.43%	253
MA	2.94%	1,737
MD	1.74%	1,025
ME	0.69%	410
MI	2.20%	1,297
MN	1.81%	1,070
MO	1.24%	733
MS	0.21%	126
MT	0.89%	528
NC	2.27%	1,340
ND	0.12%	69
NE	0.34%	200
NH	0.71%	419
NJ	2.85%	1,681
NM	1.46%	860
NV	0.73%	433
NY	7.71%	4,550
OH	2.36%	1,393
OK	0.39%	229
OR	3.06%	1,806
PA	5.07%	2,995
RI	0.34%	200
SC	0.60%	356
SD	0.15%	86
TN	1.01%	596
TX	3.74%	2,207

State	Percentage	# of Items of Correspondence
UT	0.74%	436
VA	2.05%	1,212
VT	0.55%	323
WA	4.49%	2,651
WI	1.92%	1,135
WV	0.27%	159
WY	0.55%	322
GU	0.04%	21
PR	0.08%	50
VI	0.10%	61
Canada	0.04%	23
Other	0.15%	90
<b>Total</b>		<b>59,019</b>

Note: Distribution by state does not include the 56,462 form letter items of correspondence, which were not categorized by state.

**Table 5: Correspondence Distribution by Country**

Country	Percent	# of Items of Correspondence
United Kingdom	Less than 1%	1
United States of America	99%	58,995
Canada	Less than 1%	23
<b>Total</b>		<b>58,906</b>

## YELLOWSTONE DRAFT WINTER USE PLAN / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT COMMENT RESPONSE REPORT

### *AE12000 - Affected Environment: Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat*

**Concern ID:** 29828

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter asked for clarification on the presence of red fox, fisher, martin, mink, and river otters in the park, and the potential impacts to these species from snowmobiles.

**Response:** Mid-sized carnivores other than lynx and wolverine are discussed in the EIS under “Issues and Impact Topic Discussed but Dismissed from Further Analysis.” Impacts to red fox, fisher, martin, and mink were determined to be short-term negligible adverse under all alternatives and these species were dismissed from detailed analysis due to the expected low-level of impacts. River otters were not discussed in the DEIS. This species is active in the park during the winter, and its habitat is along river corridors (e.g., Lamar Valley). Because OSV use would occur along designated routes, the amount of disturbance in river otter habitat would be minimized, and impacts would be minor adverse or less. A full description of why this species was considered but dismissed from detailed analysis is included in the FEIS.

**Concern ID:** 29831

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter indicated that a statement in the affected environment relating habituation to stress is unfounded and should be removed from the document.

**Response:** As discussed on pages 96–98 of the DEIS, visible wildlife responses do not necessarily indicate the stress levels of the animal. An animal may tolerate disturbance stimuli for a variety of ecological reasons separate from the behavioral process of habituation. For example, an individual may tolerate disturbance if it cannot afford energetically to respond, if it needs to remain in an area to avoid predation risks or competition, or if there are no suitable habitats nearby in which to move (Gill et al. 2001; Frid and Dill 2002; Bejder et al. 2009). The Scientific Assessment of Winter Use discusses stress and habituation on page 111, supporting the statement that visible displays of habituation by an animal do not reflect the stress levels of this animal and to the difficulty of differentiating habituation from tolerance without further, more invasive, research.

### *AE21000 - Affected Environment: Socioeconomics*

**Concern ID:** 29832

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter indicated that the affected environment does not accurately reflect the role of restricting OSV use on tax revenue trends in Idaho.

**Response:** Table 32 and figure 17 present winter lodging collections for Fremont County, Idaho. In general, during the period when winter visitation to Yellowstone was decreasing (2002/2003 through 2005/2006), winter lodging tax collections in

Fremont County trended upwards—the opposite of Yellowstone visitation trends. Fremont County winter lodging tax collections in 2005/2006 were more than double the level of the four years before 2002 (and the management changes that began in 2003). As shown in table 32, between 2003/2004 and 2009/2010, total sales for lodging in Fremont county for the months of December through March increased by almost 30%. During the same period, annual tax collections for lodging for the State of Idaho increased 18%. However, many other factors affect lodging tax revenues in different parts of the state. Therefore, the NPS is unable to draw conclusions or determine causality for differences throughout the state.

***AE22500 - Affected Environment: Visitor Use and Experience***

**Concern ID:** 29836

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested including a map of areas currently accessed by guided snowmobile tours.

**Response:** Figure 2 illustrates where OSV use would be allowed under alternative 2. These are the same areas where OSV use was allowed under the interim regulation and will be allowed under the preferred alternative. Main routes are shown on the map in red; side roads are indicated with a number.

**Concern ID:** 29837

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested additional visitor use information, such as the identification of Cave Falls Road as an entrance point, additional available trail heads, and additional visitor experiences.

**Response:** The role of Cave Falls Road in winter use is described on page 42 of the DEIS, which states, “The snowmobile route to Cave Falls would continue to operate.” Further clarification has been added to the FEIS about this access point in chapter 3, “Visitor Use and Experience.” This text states, “In addition to the five main entrances that access the interior of the park, visitors may also access the park on Cave Falls Road. Cave Falls Road is approximately 1 mile long. It enters the park in the southeast corner and dead-ends at Cave Falls. This route does not provide OSV access to other locations in the interior of the park.”

Page 139 of the DEIS includes examples of existing non-motorized uses areas, but does not provide an exhaustive list of these areas. To clarify that the routes mentioned serve as examples, the following text will be added to the FEIS in chapter 3, “Visitor Use and Experience”: “In addition to these examples, a list of all non-motorized use trails in the park can be found on the park’s website at: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/skiyell.htm>.”

In regard to the description of non-motorized uses, comments suggesting interagency cooperation to expand non-motorized uses outside the park are outside of the scope of this plan.

***AE30000 - Affected Environment: Health and Safety***

**Concern ID:** 29848

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested more information about Sylvan Pass operations, including clarification of slope measurements in the DEIS, information about the spring opening, and additional information about the dangers associated with operating the pass.

**Response:** The NPS reached an agreement with the Sylvan Pass Study Group to keep the pass open. Supporting information for operations of Sylvan Pass was provided from the Operational Risk Management Assessment (ORMA), which was conducted in August 2010 and is cited in the DEIS (page 7). This review was a follow-up to the initial ORMA conducted in 2007. During the August 2010 meeting, a panel of experts evaluated the risks to employee and visitor safety as reflected by the existing operations that were initiated in 2007. The ORMA also reviewed the potential benefits (for visitor access, agency cost, resource protection, and effectiveness of avalanche control) of several new avalanche control options that stress avoiding negative avalanche-human contact. The ORMA results were considered and incorporated into the health and safety section of the EIS. The ORMA can be found on the Yellowstone Winter Use webpage. Management of the pass will continue to be evaluated as the NPS decides on a long-term winter use plan.

**Concern ID:** 29852

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested including methods for transporting children of employees, researchers, and “duly permitted parties” during the winter season.

**Response:** Approximately 82 permanent and seasonal NPS employees, including those at the West Entrance, plus their family members overwinter in the interior of Yellowstone National Park. Additionally, Xanterra Parks & Resorts stations approximately 150 employees in the interior during the winter season. The employees living in the park’s interior occupy a unique environment, for they have no wheeled vehicle access to their homes and their only access to groceries, supplies, and medical care is by OSVs. Almost nowhere else in the contiguous United States are whole communities of people living and working in an oversnow environment such as the interior of Yellowstone National Park. Most permanent interior NPS employees must own a snowmobile as a precondition of employment, but interior-based concessions employees do not have such a requirement.

Guests of employees are required to use BAT OSVs when authorized to enter the park. Permitted researchers are required to use BAT vehicles as a condition of their permit. Any newly issued contracts that require a contractor to travel via OSV to conduct their work in the park (for example, a construction project) include a BAT requirement. Older contracts did not include this requirement. The majority of the NPS administrative OSV fleet in Yellowstone is now BAT. For the 2009/2010 season, Yellowstone had 126 snowmobiles (both leased and owned) in its administrative fleet, of which 93% met BAT requirement. The preferred alternative is for a one-year rule. However, in the supplement to this EIS that considers the long-term plan, the NPS will look closely at how administrative traffic is managed, including transportation of employees and researchers.

### ***AE7000 - Affected Environment: Air Quality***

**Concern ID:** 29853

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested clarification of the nonattainment status of surrounding communities.

**Response:** Please note that the entire counties surrounding the Park listed in the first full paragraph on page 120 of the DEIS are not designated as nonattainment by EPA; instead, portions of these counties within specific nonattainment area boundaries are designated as nonattainment. For these specific nonattainment areas, please see 40 CFR 81.313 for Idaho, 40 CFR 81.327 for Montana, and 40 CFR 81.351 for Wyoming.

The NPS notes that minor errors were made in Table 17 on page 126 of the DEIS entitled “Results of PM2.5 and PM10 Monitoring at Yellowstone National Park.” For Site ID 300310013 (west entrance) the annual mean PM2.5 values are in reverse order (i.e., 2003 should be 2.47; 2004 should be 4.68; 2005 should be 3.67; 2006 should be 4.26; 2007 should be 5.00; and 2008 should be 3.80). Footnote 2 is incorrect for the annual values. The Old Faithful Site ID has also been corrected. These changes are reflected in the FEIS.

***AE8100 - Affected Environment: Soundscapes***

**Concern ID:** 29858

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter provided information about the impact of mufflers on snowmobile noise emissions.

**Response:** Mufflers are effective at controlling noise emissions from snowmobiles. Under BAT requirements, all snowmobiles must meet the 73 dBA limit. Snowmobiles can, and frequently do, use a combination of mufflers, throttle plate restrictors, and computers to meet this requirement.

***AL1100 - Alternatives: Alternative 1***

**Concern ID:** 29861

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that alternative 1 does not meet the purpose and need of the plan and should not be the environmentally preferable alternative, and asserts that the park must provide some level of winter use in order to meet the intent of the park's legislation and the NPS Organic Act.

**Response:** The purpose and need of the EIS include the concepts of whether motorized use in the interior of the park is appropriate, and whether motorized use should continue. If either of these questions were answered in the negative, Alternative 1 would be the selected alternative. Therefore, Alternative 1 does meet the purpose and need of the plan. While NPS agrees that public use and enjoyment is part of the fundamental mandate of Yellowstone and the entire national park system, the suggestion that the Yellowstone statute and the NPS Organic Act mandate some particular level or type of snowmobile use is incorrect.

The environmentally preferable alternative is defined as the alternative that “causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment, and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources” (43 CFR 46.30). After a thorough analysis of the potential environmental impacts of each alternative, Alternative 1 was identified as causing the least damage to the environment and best protecting park resources.

**Concern ID:** 29862

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter suggested adopting a modified alternative 1. The modification would limit the number of OSVs permitted from the South Entrance to Old Faithful. The same commenter suggested that the NPS should have selected alternative 1 as the preferred alternative because it is the environmentally preferable alternative.

**Response:** NPS believes that providing visitor access to areas such as the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Norris Geyser Basin, Gibbon Falls, Roaring Mountain, Mud Volcano, and other attractions are important for visitor enjoyment of Yellowstone in winter. This could not be achieved by allowing access only from the South entrance to Old Faithful.

NPS notes the commenter's preference for selecting the environmentally preferred alternative. However, when making a decision, the NPS must also consider factors such as visitor use and enjoyment of the park. The preferred alternative in the FEIS, to extend the interim regulation for an additional year, provides for access to the park so visitors may experience the unique winter resources and values, while minimizing adverse impacts to those resources and values.

### ***AL1400 - Alternatives: Alternative 3***

**Concern ID:** 29866

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that alternative 3 should be implemented because the DEIS and associated science do not show impacts to the park. Commenters also suggested allowing unguided or non-commercially guided use (some commenters suggested up to 25% unguided or non-commercially guided use) and other modifications to Alternative 3 such as incorporating the variable use concept and adding noise limits.

**Response:** NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters relative to Alternative 3.

### ***AL1550 - Alternatives: Alternative 4***

**Concern ID:** 29868

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested incorporating the closure of Sylvan Pass into the final preferred alternative, regardless of the alternative selected.

**Response:** The preferred alternative in the FEIS is to implement the interim regulation that was in place for the winters of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 for an additional year, while a decision can be made on the long-term winter use plan. Sylvan Pass was open under the interim regulation and would continue to be open under the preferred alternative in the FEIS. The NPS analyzed closing Sylvan Pass under Alternative 4 in the EIS, and will consider management of Sylvan Pass as part of the long-term regulation.

**Concern ID:** 29900

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that gate allocations are not balanced based on historic use patterns.

**Response:** Gate allocations were established using information and patterns from previous managed winter use patterns. About half of the park's winter visitors enter the park through the north entrance (note: this number includes traffic across the northern Grand Loop segment to Lamar Valley/Cooke City, which is plowed for wheeled vehicle traffic), however the gate allocations were developed based on OSV entries (DEIS page 139). The west entrance is the next busiest, with about 33% of winter visitors. The south entrance accounts for 16%, with the east entrance admitting 0.5% (DEIS page 139).

For the preferred alternative, gate allocations will remain as they had been under the interim regulation. The NPS will consider gate allocations in greater detail in the supplement to the EIS that considers the long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 29909

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

One commenter felt that it is difficult to compare alternatives because the number of vehicle days is not discussed consistently in the DEIS.

**Response:**

As detailed in chapter 2 of the EIS, the duration of the season under all action alternatives would be from December 15 to March 15, with OSV use beginning as snow conditions permit. Because there is no difference in the length of the season under each alternative, the EIS provides estimates of total visitation over the season to allow for comparison between alternatives. Estimates for visitor use on a daily basis for all alternatives is estimated on page 82 of the DEIS. Under alternative 6, which provides for a variety of use levels throughout the year, a daily average for the season is 408 snowmobile passengers and 361 snowcoach passengers. In regard to the daily distribution of OSVs under alternative 6, Figure 5 on pages 57 and 58 of the DEIS is an example of how the seasonal cap could be distributed, with use ranging from a minimum of no OSVs on some days, to a maximum of 540 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches on other days.

**Concern ID:** 29869

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

One commenter requested selecting alternative 4 as the preferred alternative because it would reduce impacts to the park including reduced noise and fuel consumption. Other commenters suggested selecting a modified version of alternative 4 that eliminates OSV use and the need for grooming in the park or retaining alternative 4 as a future option, should climate change lead to reduced snow levels that would make plowing easier.

**Response:**

NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters relative to Alternative 4.

**AL1700 - Alternatives: Alternative 5**

**Concern ID:** 29876

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters suggested modifying alternative 5 to use a fixed (rather than variable) phase-out schedule, reduce the maximum number of snowcoaches from 120 to 78, restrict the number of access points, and close Sylvan Pass.

**Response:**

NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters relative to Alternative 5.

***AL1850 - Alternatives: Alternative 6***

***Concern ID:*** 29878

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** Commenters questioned the level of detail presented in alternative 6 and requested more information about the number of OSVs allowed and how those OSVs would be distributed at park entrances.

***Response:*** Should Alternative 6 be included in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan, NPS will provide the additional detail the commenter has requested.

***Concern ID:*** 29880

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** One commenter suggested modifying alternative 6 as follows: do not count non-motorized use toward allocations, alter the fee system for snowmobile use, make unused unguided permits available at a different time, keep the East Entrance open the same time as the other entrances, and reduce the cap to 540 snowmobiles.

***Response:*** NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters relative to Alternative 6.

***AL2000 - Alternatives: Alternative 7 - NPS Preferred***

***Concern ID:*** 29887

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** Commenters requested increasing the number of OSVs permitted under alternative 7. Suggestions included 540, 480–520, 400–500, and 800–1000 snowmobiles per day as well as an increase in the number of snowcoach tours provided. Some commenters offered alternative use limits for specific entrances.

***Response:*** Based upon the analysis in the EIS, the higher numbers suggested could result in major adverse impacts to park resources. NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters relative to Alternative 7.

***Concern ID:*** 29889

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** Commenters expressed concern with the 10:30 entry time limitation in the preferred alternative. These concerns included exclusion of visitors due to distance, weather, or other factors; decrease in flexibility for visitors; and promotion of crowding in the park during the limited entrance time. Some commenters expressed concern that operators trying to reach the entrance at 10:30 may be encouraged to operate in an unsafe manner. Some commenters suggested alternate entry times such as 11:00 a.m. or 12:00 p.m.

***Response:*** NPS received a number of comments opposing the 10:30 entry time and the variable use levels in alternative 7. NPS may reconsider these aspects of alternative 7 in the supplement to the EIS prior to its decision on a long-term plan.

<b>Concern ID:</b>	29892
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters recommended implementing restrictions on the size and weight of snowcoaches.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS agrees there is a need to address the issue of rutting, and will address this issue in the supplement to the EIS prior to its decision on a long-term plan.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29893
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters disagreed with the element of alternative 7 that closes portions of the park at the end of the season. The commenters stated that “quiet times” are achieved by natural fluctuations and do not need to be mandated. Commenters opposed closing side roads for non-motorized use; the experience of solitude would not be available because these areas are near OSV use areas.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS believes closing side roads allows for a variety of uses close to the areas most frequently used by visitors. NPS believes there are a number of ways to provide for natural quiet, including closures and temporal and spatial zoning. These concepts will be explored further in the supplement to the EIS prior to the decision on a long-term plan.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29894
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters suggested adding or replacing non-motorized use areas to alternative 7. Some commenters expressed concern that the sample distribution in the DEIS focuses the low use days at the start and end of the winter season, rather than throughout the season.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS will consider adding additional non-motorized use areas as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29895
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters requested modifying alternative 7 to allow for unguided or non-commercially guided use. Specific comments about managing this use are provided under comment code AL5070 and AL5075.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS will specifically address non-commercially guided use in more detail as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29901
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters requested the methodology for determining gate allocations and specific allocations per operator listed for alternative 7.
<b>Response:</b>	Gate allocations were established using information and patterns from previous managed winter use patterns. About half of the park’s winter visitors enter the park through the north entrance. The west entrance is the next busiest, with about 33% of winter visitors. The south entrance accounts for 16%, with the east entrance admitting 0.5%. Allocations to operators would be set through the standard allocation process that has been used in the past.

- Concern ID:** 29902
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested changing alternative 7 to reduce the number of snowmobiles in the park (some suggested no more than 194 per day). Others commenters felt that the number of snowmobiles allowed in alternative 7 is not consistent with NPS Management Policies or the direction of the NPS. Some commenters requested including days when no OSV use would be allowed.
- Response:** NPS believes the numbers proposed under alternative 7 are consistent with NPS policy. The analysis of alternative 7 indicates that no direct impacts would be greater than moderate on any park resources or values affected. NPS considered zero use days as part of alternative 6, and may consider zero use days in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.
- Concern ID:** 29904
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested a new alternative that combines elements of the existing alternatives. One commenter suggested using a different word than “variable” in alternative 7.
- Response:** NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters regarding combining elements from different DEIS alternatives.
- Concern ID:** 29908
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested additional education and information about the variable schedule, including informing operators earlier about the upcoming schedule.
- Response:** Should Alternative 7 be included in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan, NPS will provide the additional detail and changes commenter has requested.

**AL4000 - Alternatives: New Alternatives or Elements**

- Concern ID:** 29913
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested the NPS implement a public transit system for winter access to the park.
- Response:** NPS considered a monorail system through the park, but for a number of reasons, dismissed such an alternative from detailed study. NPS may consider some other type of public transit system, if feasible in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.
- Concern ID:** 29914
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested non-motorized options such as creating non-motorized zones, using horse and sleigh, and adding more cross-country trail routes. Commenters suggested adding a yurt system to support non-motorized users.
- Response:** The NPS will continue to facilitate non-motorized recreation by grooming approximately 35 miles of park road. The concept of maintaining additional non-motorized areas is considered in the range of alternatives in the EIS, and may be

further explored in order to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

Yellowstone's large distances and harsh winter weather conditions make using horse and sleigh infeasible. It is 30 miles from the closest winter entrance to Old Faithful, a distance that would be difficult for most horses pulling a sleigh to travel in a day. A yurt camp is available at Canyon, which is operated by one of the park's concessioners. The park also issues winter backcountry camping permits.

**Concern ID:** 29915

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested limiting the types of vehicles allowed at the park, such as allowing only electric vehicles or those that use biodiesel and ethanol blends, or requiring certain types of vehicles (such as bombardiers) to become quieter.

**Response:** NPS does not believe it is feasible at this time to limit traffic in the park to only vehicles using "green" technology. However, NPS did consider, as part of all action alternatives (except alternative 8), requiring snowcoaches to meet sound standards. In addition, under all action alternatives as part of BAT requirements, snowmobiles must be no louder than 73dBA.

**Concern ID:** 29917

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested counting snowmobile guides as administrative travelers and not as part of the snowmobile group because guides are not recreating in the park.

**Response:** The analysis in the EIS looks at numbers of snowmobiles, and the potential impacts that could result from a given level of use. Impacts of snowmobiles are assessed, in some instances, based on the size of the group they will be travelling in. Guides enter the park on snowmobiles, and therefore are considered part of the group.

**Concern ID:** 29918

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested including additional law enforcement and increased fines, which would increase compliance with existing OSV regulations and allow OSV use to continue.

**Response:** The NPS will continue enforcement of its regulations, and believes there is already good compliance on the part of the public. Introduction of commercially led snowmobile tours has significantly reduced the number of law enforcement incidents since the managed use era began in 2003/2004. OSV related incidents are down 90% from 2002/2003(282 incidents) to 2009/2010 (27 incidents). Rangers regularly patrol the boundary and have the option to ticket and arrest.

**Concern ID:** 29931

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested implementing cooperative agreements with surrounding land owners to allow for OSV use adjacent to the park.

**Response:** OSV use in areas adjacent to the park is outside of the scope of this plan/EIS.

<b>Concern ID:</b>	29932
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters suggested changing the grooming regimen at the park.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS will look at the grooming regimen, and consider whether changes should be made, as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29936
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters offered different scenarios for allowing OSV into the park, including limiting “incursions” rather than numbers of OSVs, allowing unlimited numbers of EPA/BAT machines, revising the number of entrances allowed, creating a “challenge” area in the park, allowing entrance only every five years, alternating the use of side roads, providing each company the same number of coach and snowmobile group permits, and closing the park to all use if non-guided use is not allowed.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. NPS may consider a number of these suggestions during the supplemental EIS process.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29938
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters requested a new alternative that combines the use limits in alternative 3 with the unguided or non-commercially guided option in alternative 6. Other elements would include a broader definition of BAT requirements, removing time restrictions for entry, and changing the location of collecting air quality and noise data.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will consider the suggestions submitted by commenters.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29939
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters suggested a new alternative that would close the east side of the park and allow for 298 snowmobiles and 76 snowcoaches per day in other areas of the park.
<b>Response:</b>	NPS may consider such an alternative as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.
<b>Concern ID:</b>	29941
<b>CONCERN STATEMENT:</b>	Commenters requested a new alternative that includes more coordination with local business owners and neighboring communities.
<b>Response:</b>	One of the objectives in the plan/EIS is to improve coordination and communication regarding winter use management with park partners, gateway communities, and other stakeholders. NPS will continue to explore options regarding how to best achieve this objective, as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 29942

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested including additional education and interpretation in the preferred alternative.

**Response:** Education and interpretation is provided at warming huts, entrance stations, visitor centers, and through commercial guides. Staff from these entities provides knowledge and interpretation of the geologic features, wildlife and other aspects of the park for which it is famous and for which people from around the globe visit. Other informational material may be found in the park newspaper or on the park webpage.

**Concern ID:** 29944

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Additional elements were suggested such as adding a stop light in Yellowstone and making it clearer that Cave Falls Road and Flagg Ranch trail will remain open.

**Response:** Stop signs are in place at many of the intersections and in developed areas where OSV use is allowed.

As stated in the DEIS, up to 50 snowmobiles per day would be allowed on the snowmobile route to Cave Falls (DEIS page ix, 42, 50, 54).

Text in the FEIS has been clarified to state that Flagg Ranch trail will be allowed, because it is necessary for accessing the South entrance of the park.

**AL5070 - Alternatives: Unguided OSV Use**

**Concern ID:** 29921

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Several commenters requested granting unguided snowmobile access and provided suggestions for online, video, or in person training could that could be required as a condition for unguided access. Commenters provided suggestions for unguided access.

**Response:** NPS believes guiding requirements implemented in recent years have helped to minimize impacts to park resources and values and have increased visitor safety. However, NPS will address unguided and non-commercially guided use in greater detail, as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 29923

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Several commenters requested a requirement for snowmobile use to be commercially guided because all unguided use is inappropriate for the park. This would ensure all rules are followed.

**Response:** The preferred alternative, to extend the interim regulation by one year, continues the 100% commercial guiding requirement that has been in place since 2004.

**Concern ID:** 29924

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested a review of the science that supports requirements for guided snowmobile use. The commenter questioned why snowmobiles are described as off-road vehicles when they are required to stay on plowed roads.

**Response:** The potential impacts of unguided use on wildlife are described in the DEIS on page 192. This text discusses the overall decrease in behavioral responses from a predictable pattern of use, which would occur with guided use. Additional literature that supports this assertion is provided in the Scientific Assessment of Winter Use (available on the NPS PEPC site at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell>, Click on Winter Use, then click on Documents). Additionally, introduction of commercially led snowmobile tours has significantly reduced the number of law enforcement incidents since 2003/2004; OSV related incidents are down 90% from 2002/2003(282 incidents) to 2009/2010 (27 incidents). Snowmobiles are described as off-road vehicles, pursuant to Executive Order 11644 and NPS regulation (36 CFR 2.18).

**Concern ID:** 29946

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested making a distinction between unguided and non-commercially guided, and reflecting this distinction in the impact analysis.

**Response:** The EIS does not make a distinction between unguided and non-commercially guided use. During public comment, it was noted that these two terms could mean different on-the-ground management. The NPS will explore providing further distinction between these terms in the supplement to the EIS that will support the long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 29947

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested keeping Sylvan Pass open and providing a greater commitment to grooming this area. Commenters stated that with time, visitation at this entrance could increase and access to this entrance should be provided. One commenter suggested using a cannon, rather than a helicopter, in operations to keep the pass open.

**Response:** The NPS reached an agreement with the Sylvan Pass Study Group to keep Sylvan Pass open. Under the preferred alternative, the pass would continue to be open for another winter season.

Supporting information for operations of Sylvan Pass was provided from the Operational Risk Management Assessment (ORMA), which was conducted in August 2010 and is cited in the DEIS (page 7). This review was a follow-up to the initial ORMA conducted in 2007. During the August 2010 meeting, a panel of experts evaluated the risks to employee and visitor safety as reflected by the existing operations that were initiated in 2007. The ORMA also reviewed the potential benefits (for visitor access, agency cost, resource protection, and effectiveness of avalanche control) of several new avalanche control options that stress avoiding negative avalanche-human contact.

The Sylvan Pass Study Group recommended to the Intermountain Regional Director of the National Park Service amending the November 2007 Record of Decision on Winter Use in Yellowstone National Park to keep Sylvan Pass open in future winter use seasons to motorized and non-motorized oversnow travel between December 22 and March 1. The group recommended continued use of a combination of avalanche mitigation techniques, including forecasting and helicopter and howitzer dispensed explosives (ORMA page 6). NPS will revisit these ideas in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 29948

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested closing Sylvan Pass because of the impact to wildlife from motorized use during the winter, the high cost of keeping the pass open, and impacts to park staff health and safety. One commenter suggested analyzing the impact of explosive avalanche control on wilderness.

**Response:** The EIS examined the impacts of closing Sylvan Pass under alternative 4. Costs, impacts to park employee health and safety, and the use of explosives are included in the analysis. The analysis also includes potential impacts to wildlife.

The preferred alternative in the EIS is to extend the interim regulation for one year. Therefore, under the preferred alternative, Sylvan Pass will be open. The NPS has reached an agreement with the Sylvan Pass Study Group to keep Sylvan Pass open. However, the NPS will consider additional management, including closing Sylvan Pass, as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**AL6020 - Alternatives: Best Available Technology (BAT)**

**Concern ID:** 29950

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter suggested that requiring the rental of BAT sleds is against the commerce clause of the constitution.

**Response:** Under the Organic Act, the NPS has exclusive responsibility in determining the appropriate level and type of public access into national parks. Based on the analysis in the EIS, NPS has determined that commercial guiding and BAT should be implemented to allow access to the park while protecting park resources. NPS notes that these measures are mitigations against potential adverse impacts of OSV use, and are appropriate in light of the level of OSV use envisioned under the preferred alternative. The NPS further notes that many other national parks close entirely in the winter, and do not allow any access at all. NPS believes the best way to ensure compliance with the requirements for motorized winter use is through concessioners, who have a contractual obligation to comply. As a result, the only way to obtain a BAT snowmobile under the preferred alternative is to rent one.

The NPS does not believe requiring rental of BAT snowmobiles violates the U.S. Constitution in any way.

**Concern ID:** 29952

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the DEIS should not include standards for NOx. Many felt that this standard was removed from the EPA snowmobile regulations; NPS does not have the authority to set NOx regulations; and NOx is not an issue in the park.

**Response:** The preferred alternative, which is to implement a one-year rule with the exact requirements and restrictions as the 2009/2010–2010/2011 interim rule, does not contain a standard for NOx.

**Concern ID:** 29954

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter asked for clarification about the provision to consider increased allocation of permits for operators using machines with improved technology.

**Response:** Under this provision the park, when awarding OSV allocations, would consider giving greater allocations to those operators who use machines that are cleaner and quieter than the current fleet.

**Concern ID:** 29955

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated BAT snowmobile noise testing should retain the barometric pressure variance. Commenters also felt that vehicles should be tested at park speed limits, rather than full throttle.

**Response:** The barometric pressure variance is retained as part of the preferred alternative. Snowmobiles are tested at full throttle because many use full-throttle in order to get up to speed.

**Concern ID:** 29956

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the BAT standards for snowcoaches, including the PSI standard, would not be obtainable for snowcoaches and would not be an accurate measure for BAT snowcoaches. Some operators felt this would eliminate the use of most, if not all of their vehicles. Other commenters stated that impacts on wildlife resulting from implementation of BAT for snowcoaches is not adequately addressed.

**Response:** BAT for snowcoaches is not part of the preferred alternative. NPS will continue to consider BAT for snowcoaches in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan. As part of this consideration, NPS will re-examine whether a PSI standard should be included, and if so, what that standard should be.

**Concern ID:** 29958

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned the existing BAT standards for the park, including the provision of only certifying BAT machines less than 6 years old. Some suggested that all vehicles, including NPS vehicles and snowcoaches, should meet BAT standards. Commenters suggested the type of technology that should be used. One commenter requested clarification about the relationship between 4-stroke engines and BAT. One commenter requested a clear definition of snowcoach BAT. Another commenter asked how long the BAT certification would be valid.

**Response:** The NPS preferred alternative in the EIS is to implement a one-year rule with the same requirements as the 2009/2010–2010/2011 interim regulation. Under the interim regulation and the preferred alternative, snowcoach BAT certification is good for six years. This six-year certification is based on the assumption that when a snowmobile reaches six years of life, it would no longer meet the BAT standards due to wear and tear. In the absence of new emissions and sound information, after six years a snowmobile make and model will no longer be BAT-certified and its use will not be allowed in the park. The six-year timeframe allows for the continued incorporation of new technology without creating undo financial hardship of needing to replace snowmobiles every two to three years as new BAT snowmobiles are developed.

NPS administrative snowmobiles are almost entirely BAT machines, and the few that are not BAT are primarily used for boundary patrol, where the increased power of a 2-stroke vehicle is necessary.

BAT requirements do not address 4-stroke vs. 2-stroke machines. To date, the only BAT certified snowmobiles have been 4-stroke; however, as long as the individual model meets BAT requirements, it would be possible to use a 2-stroke machine in the park.

**Concern ID:** 29961

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters requested revising the plan to consider improving technology and to revisit regulations for BAT throughout the life of the plan.

**Response:** Under the preferred alternative, BAT requirements will remain the same as they have been for the past two winters. The NPS will address this comment further in the supplement to the EIS.

**Concern ID:** 29964

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested analyzing snowmobile availability and costs to concessioners before adopting any new EPA standard for BAT.

**Response:** Under the preferred alternative, NPS does not propose adopting any new EPA standard for BAT. Should NPS propose new BAT standards in the supplement to the EIS, NPS will consider snowmobile availability and costs to concessioners

***AL6070 - Alternatives: Summer Use***

**Concern ID:** 29965

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned why winter use is regulated when summer use is not. Some suggested instituting limitations on summer use.

**Response:** Oversnow vehicles typically are not allowed in parks. 36 CFR 2.18 prohibits oversnow vehicle use absent a specific regulation authorizing such use. In order to promulgate such a regulation, the NPS must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. The scope of this EIS is to determine whether a regulation allowing oversnow vehicle use in Yellowstone should be promulgated, and if so, what level of use should be allowed. No similar regulation prohibiting summer use exists. Limitations on summer use are beyond the scope of this plan.

***AL7150 - Alternatives Dismissed: Allow Use of Personal, Wheeled Vehicles on Plowed Roads***

**Concern ID:** 29967

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated their preference for an alternative that includes plowing roads for personal vehicle use, which was dismissed in the DEIS. They stated this alternative would be financially feasible for visitors. One commenter suggested this alternative could be implemented on low elevation transportation corridors.

**Response:** As noted in the EIS, a number of factors relating to visitor safety led to dismissal of an alternative that includes plowing roads for personal vehicle use. These considerations include winter road conditions that can be extremely hazardous due to winter storms, fast-changing conditions, delayed emergency response times, and the need for a high level of ongoing road maintenance in the winter.

***AL7250 - Alternatives Dismissed: Allow Snowbikes and Kite-skiing***

**Concern ID:** 29968

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters asked the NPS to reconsider allowing snowbikes in the park during the winter. They stated that snowbike use on established roadways, where other uses are allowed, would not impact the resources at the park. Commenters felt that snowbikes were not fully considered in the planning process and this element may be incorporated through adaptive management.

**Response:** The use of snowbikes was considered and dismissed in the plan/EIS due to potential conflicts with other park users. However, NPS will take a new look at the use of snowbikes in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

***AL7450 - Alternatives Dismissed: Manage/Limit OSV Use Daily Based on Weather and Other Resource Conditions***

**Concern ID:** 29970

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter questioned if the analysis considers snow quality with time of day in relation to the types of use allowed.

**Response:** Altering the types of use based upon snow quality would be logistically difficult to implement and would not provide the consistency needed for park operations, operators, or for visitors trying to plan their trips. Further, managing or limiting OSV use based on snow quality with time of day in relation to the types of use could cause a high level of uncertainty for visitors, park staff, and concessioners and would make such an alternative too difficult to implement logistically.

***AM1000 - Adaptive Management***

**Concern ID:** 29972

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Some commenters requested improving the adaptive management strategy to include specific impact thresholds and management actions, and to allow for flexibility and change. Commenters requested more detail in the adaptive management strategy to include future funding, mechanisms for public disclosure, and management alternatives and mitigation.

**Response:** The preferred alternative is to implement a one-year rule with the exact requirements and restrictions as the 2009/2010–2010/2011 interim rule. Due to the one-year implementation, use of adaptive management is not feasible. NPS will, however, continue to monitor resources and, if necessary mandate closures to protect resources.

The NPS will include an updated, detailed adaptive management strategy in the supplement to the EIS that will be completed prior to making a decision on a long-term plan, and will include any monitoring data obtained during the winter of 2011/2012.

***AQ2000 - Air Quality: Methodology and Assumptions***

**Concern ID:** 29973

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested clarification of the term “VOC sink.”

**Response:** The NPS was unable to locate a reference to “VOC sink” in the DEIS.

**Concern ID:** 29976

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested that to better relay the impacts, the air quality analysis should include a comparison of emissions between 2-stroke and 4-stroke technology, and a relation of this information to the reduction of snowmobiles in the park.

**Response:** When Yellowstone introduced its BAT requirement for snowmobiles to enter the park, the manufacturer’s response was to shift to snowmobiles powered by 4-stroke engines. As a result, carbon monoxide (CO) and hydrocarbon (HC) emissions were greatly reduced and air quality along the roads in Yellowstone became much cleaner (Ray 2008). Although air quality has improved since implementation of

BAT, the BAT requirements do not mandate 2-stroke or 4-stroke machines. The modeling contained in the DEIS assumes compliance with BAT requirements, and does not address whether that compliance is achieved by use of any particular technology. Should a 2-stroke snowmobile that meets BAT requirements be developed, that machine could be used in the park.

**Concern ID:** 29977

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested the air quality analysis should focus on sources outside the park shown to be major sources of pollution, such as wildfires and gas exploration.

**Response:** Wildfires were not discussed in the cumulative impact analysis for air quality because the majority of wildfires occur outside the winter season that is the subject of the winter use plan and EIS. Emissions from wildfires would generally not be occurring at the same time as emissions from OSVs and therefore would not contribute to cumulative air quality impacts in the park.

Gas industry development was a reasonably foreseeable trend considered in the DEIS air quality cumulative impact. Specifically, the analysis referenced the conclusions of the Greater Yellowstone Clean Air Partnership report cited in the comment, as well as information on the impacts to Yellowstone National Park from the Bureau of Land Management’s Pinedale Anticline Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS page 256).

The NPS agrees with the commenter that non-OSV sources outside the park generate greater emissions than OSVs. However, this difference does not obviate the NPS’s obligations under the Organic Act and the directive of the NPS *Management Policies 2006* to “seek to perpetuate the best possible air quality in parks” by minimizing air pollution from sources under its direct control. In addition, unregulated OSV use has the potential to create localized air pollution “hot spots” that were the focus of the DEIS impact assessment.

The NPS will continue to participate in regional air quality planning efforts that address the full range of sources contributing to air quality and visibility issues in the Greater Yellowstone Area. The NPS is also involved in the review of proposals for new major sources under the Clean Air Act Prevention of Significant Deterioration program summarized on page 116 of the DEIS.

**Concern ID:** 29979

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned the method of NOx monitoring and the need for NOx monitoring. Commenters stated that an adequate baseline for analysis is not provided, and because data from the west gate indicates the park is in compliance with the NOx standard, there is no need for monitoring.

**Response:** When Yellowstone introduced its BAT requirement for snowmobiles to enter the park, the manufacturer’s response was to shift to snowmobiles powered by 4-stroke engines. As a result, carbon monoxide (CO) and hydrocarbon (HC) emissions were greatly reduced and air along the roads in Yellowstone became much cleaner (Ray 2008). However, as a result from the switch to 4-stroke engines and the way manufacturers tuned the engines, there was a relative increase in the emissions of NOx. The increased usage of snowcoaches and diesel engines for transport within Yellowstone National Park has also contributed to increased NOx emissions. The NPS considers NOx a potential emerging issue and will continue to take roadside measurements of NOx at the West entrance.

***AQ4000 - Air Quality: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives***

***Concern ID:*** 30002

***CONCERN STATEMENT:***

Commenters asked how air emissions would be monitored and who would conduct the monitoring. One commenter questioned the number of entrances monitored, stating that actual impacts would be higher than monitored. One commenter noted that NOx monitoring should consider that snowpack is a nitrogen sink, and not all of the NOx in the snowpack is from snowmobiles.

***Response:***

Air quality in the park is monitored by several entities, including the NPS, at a number of different locations. For a detailed discussion, please refer to the discussion beginning on Chapter 3, page 128 of the FEIS. NPS acknowledges that snowpack is a nitrogen sink, and that not all of the NOx in the park's snowpack comes from OSV use.

***Concern ID:*** 30004

***CONCERN STATEMENT:***

Commenters stated that the impacts of NPS employees idling their engines should be analyzed.

***Response:***

The analysis of air quality in the DEIS takes into account monitoring data throughout the park, which includes both visitor and administrative use, and therefore captures any idling from either group that would occur in the DEIS analysis. The issue of idling of all OSVs, including administrative travel, will be addressed in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

***Concern ID:*** 30006

***CONCERN STATEMENT:***

Commenters stated that the air quality analysis does not provide justification for selecting alternative 7 over alternative 6. One commenter asked for further explanation of the reason that 540 snowmobiles a day would be an impairment to park resources.

***Response:***

NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. The analysis in the EIS shows that overall, alternative 7 would have less adverse impacts to park resources than alternative 6. The EIS does not conclude that the levels proposed in alternative 6 would result in impairment to park resources.

***Concern ID:*** 30007

***CONCERN STATEMENT:***

Commenters asked for clarification of how the alternatives would impact air quality. The number of OSVs in Yellowstone in recent years was lower than any of the alternatives analyzed and the emission reductions expected by replacing snowmobiles with snowcoaches needs to be more clearly presented. One commenter noted that the approach to air quality modeling is appropriate, and expected emission reductions with Tier 2 technologies.

***Response:***

One of the reasons NPS decided to implement alternative 8 for one year, was so that it could complete new modeling and analyses for air quality impacts prior to making a long-term decision. These new analyses will be included as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan. NPS will make every effort to clearly present its updated findings in the supplemental EIS.

**Concern ID:** 30008

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters asked the NPS to select a preferred alternative that is consistent with NPS Management Policies “to seek to perpetuate the best possible air quality.” Commenters further stated that the data shows snowcoaches have less of an air quality impact than snowmobiles.

**Response:**

NPS believes the preferred alternative is consistent with NPS policies. Based upon the date in the EIS, impacts to air quality from snowmobiles are similar to impacts from snowcoaches. However, one of the reasons NPS decided to implement alternative 8 for one year was so that it could complete new modeling and analyses for air quality impacts prior to making a long-term decision. These new analyses will be included as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 30011

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters objected to any attempt to summarize the NOx monitoring program as a positive economic impact. Commenters stated that BAT snowmobiles have been a commercial failure and are not viable for use outside the park. Commenters felt that BAT snowmobiles have addressed existing air quality issues in the park and reversed a long-term deterioration of air quality in the park, however the costs of obtaining further benefits are far in excess of any return on the investment.

**Response:**

Restrictions on NOx are not part of the preferred alternative. However, should NPS consider including NOx restrictions in one or more alternatives in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan, the issues raised by the commenter will be considered.

**CC1000 - Consultation and Coordination: General Comments**

**Concern ID:** 30012

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters expressed concern about the public involvement process, in part because the website did not function properly. Some commenters requested an extension of the comment period.

**Response:**

The DEIS was made available online on May 5, 2011; the NPS announced its availability through various news releases, on the park’s website, and through a Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register on May 10, 2011. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Notice of Availability for the DEIS was published on May 20, 2011, which opened the “formal” 60-day public comment period and established the closing date of July 18, 2011. During the comment period, NPS held six public meetings and two webinars. During this period, the NPS received approximately 59,000 comments. The NPS believes the 60-day public comment period provided a reasonable opportunity for all interested parties to comment. The NPS regrets any difficulties entering comments into its public comment system, but notes that comments sent by regular mail were also accepted.

**Concern ID:** 30014

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters requested a greater level of partnering with the surrounding communities and full engagement of cooperating agencies.

**Response:**

In January 2010, the NPS sent invitations to federal and state agencies involved in past winter use planning efforts, inviting them to become cooperating agencies for this winter use planning process. The following entities responded that they would serve as cooperating agencies for this effort: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; State of Idaho; State of Montana; State of Wyoming; Fremont County, Idaho; Gallatin County, Montana; Park County, Montana; Park County, Wyoming; and Teton County, Wyoming. The U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declined the invitation to be cooperating agencies. Several meetings in person and via teleconference were conducted with cooperating agencies (DEIS page 347).

Public scoping began on January 29, 2010, with the release of the public scoping brochure and Federal Register publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement. During the scoping period and the comment period for the DEIS, six public open houses (four local and two national) were held. Additionally, the public was given an opportunity to ask questions related to the draft range of alternative and DEIS through a series of web and phone based meetings (DEIS page 7).

The NPS believes it has met its obligation to interact and partner with surrounding communities and cooperating agencies. The NPS will continue to interact with the surrounding communities and cooperating agencies during the supplemental EIS process regarding the long-term plan.

**GA1000 - Impact Analysis: Impact Analyses**

**Concern ID:**

30015

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters expressed concern that the NPS is ignoring its own DEIS analysis and science by continuing to allow snowmobile use, and urged a transition to snowcoaches. One commenter expressed concern that the DEIS does not adequately address adverse impacts, unacceptable impacts, and impairment. Another commenter asked the NPS to reconsider if snowmobile use is an “appropriate use.”

**Response:**

NPS *Management Policies 2006*, Section 1.4.3 states, “NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest extent practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values.” This means that NPS managers must take reasonable, affirmative steps toward avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts, but it does not constrain the NPS’s discretion to allow impacts that the NPS deems necessary and appropriate to promote the enjoyment or conservation of the park.

If the NPS is to provide for any sizeable visitor access to Yellowstone in the winter, motorized vehicle use is necessary, and the NPS believes that a limit of 318 snowmobiles per day and 78 snowcoaches per day effectively allows the agency to protect its resources while providing for visitation. Based upon the impact analysis in the EIS, NPS believes oversnow vehicle use, at the levels described in the preferred alternative, including the requirements and restrictions, is an appropriate use of the park. Furthermore, based upon the impact analysis in the EIS, NPS has determined that no unacceptable impacts would occur as a result of implementing the preferred alternative (See DEIS Appendix D).

The preferred alternative has undergone an impairment determination, finding that no impairment to park resources or values will result from its implementation. In accordance with current NPS Impairment Guidance, that determination will be appended to the Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will also discuss appropriate use of OSVs in the context of winter at Yellowstone.

**Concern ID:** 30017

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the impact analysis does not show adverse impacts from snowmobile use and requested the continuation of snowmobile use. Some commenters suggested an increase in use based on impacts to adjacent communities and visitor opportunities.

**Response:** The preferred alternative is to implement a one-year rule with the exact requirements and restrictions as the 2009/2010–2010/2011 interim rule. While the impact analysis in the EIS does disclose that there are adverse impacts from snowmobile use, impacts are expected to be no greater than moderate to any park resources.

Increased and decreased levels of use will be considered in the supplemental EIS that will be conducted for the long-term winter use plan.

**Concern ID:** 30019

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned how the OSV use caps were developed and where the numbers came from.

**Response:** The no-OSV use alternative (no-action) came from the fact that without a new regulation, there can be no OSV use in the park. The cap on OSV use in the action alternatives came from alternatives considered in prior winter use plans. Alternative 2 values came from the 2009 interim plan (2008 Environmental Assessment); alternative 3 values came from the 2007 EIS preferred alternative; alternative 4 values were derived from the 2004 winter use plan/environmental assessment; alternative 5 came from public comments submitted to NPS; alternative 6 values were derived from the preferred alternative in the 2007 EIS; and alternative 7 (peak numbers) values were derived from the 2009 interim plan.

**Concern ID:** 30021

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested more information on how scientists were selected for the Science Advisory Team.

**Response:** The Science Advisory Team (SAT) comprises six federal agency employees both inside and outside of the NPS. These team members were selected because of their area of expertise that related to this planning effort (such as wildlife impacts or soundscapes) to provide a broad overview of the multiple issues related to winter use in Yellowstone. Each member selected was not part of previous planning efforts for winter use in an effort to bring a new perspective to the process. The SAT was informed by facilitated workshops with natural resource and social science experts from both the public and private sector.

**Concern ID:** 30024

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter felt that the Organic Act could not be fulfilled by “appreciation from afar.”

**Response:** NPS *Management Policies 2006*, Section 1.4.3 states that the enjoyment contemplated by the Organic Act is broad, and among other things, includes, “enjoyment both by people who visit parks and by those who appreciate them from afar.” This is not the driving consideration for winter use management, but the NPS considered this factor.

- Concern ID:** 30025
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter recommended changing the spelling of “bio-diesel” to “biodiesel.”
- Response:** The FEIS will change the spelling of bio-diesel to biodiesel, per Webster’s Dictionary.
- 
- Concern ID:** 30026
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested that the NPS conduct a visitor safety study before setting standards.
- Response:** Visitor safety has improved greatly since the beginning of the managed use era (2004). NPS *Management Policies 2006* address health and safety for both NPS staff and visitors. In relation to visitor safety, section 8.2.5.1, in part, states that “while recognizing that there are limitations on its capability to totally eliminate all hazards, the Service and its concessioners, contractors, and cooperators will seek to provide a safe and healthful environment for visitors and employees. ...When practicable and consistent with congressionally designated purposes and mandates, the Service will reduce or remove known hazards and apply other appropriate measures, including closures, guarding, signing, or other forms of education. In doing so, the Service’s preferred actions will be those that have the least impact on park resources and values. The Service recognizes that the park resources it protects are not only visitor attractions, but that they may also be potentially hazardous.”
- Supporting information for operations of Sylvan Pass was provided from the Operational Risk Management Assessment (ORMA), which was conducted in August 2010 and is cited in the DEIS (page 7). This review was a follow-up to the initial ORMA conducted in 2007. During the August 2010 meeting, a panel of experts evaluated the risks to employee and visitor safety as reflected by the existing operations that were initiated in 2007.
- Conducting a visitor safety study before setting standards would further delay implementation of a long-term winter use plan. However, this idea will be considered in the supplement to the EIS.
- 
- Concern ID:** 30028
- CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that the dismissal of climate change as an impact topic is a deficiency of the document.
- Response:** Climate change was considered in the EIS under the heading “NATURAL OR DEPLETABLE RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS AND CONSERVATION POTENTIAL.” This section of the EIS details the concerns related to climate change from winter use and concludes that climate changes “will likely affect winter precipitation patterns and amounts in the park; however, it would be speculative to predict localized changes in snow water equivalency or average winter temperatures, in part because many variables are not fully understood and there may be variables not currently defined.” In addition, the EIS states that impacts from GHG emissions associated with motorized winter use would be expected to be negligible in comparison to local, regional, and national GHG emissions. Therefore, the impacts of OSV management and use activities contributing to climate change through GHG emissions under the alternatives considered in this plan were considered in the EIS but dismissed from further analysis.

**Concern ID:** 30029

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters questioned how snowmobiles are characterized in the DEIS. Some commenters felt snowmobiles should be clearly designated as recreational vehicles, and others questioned why snowmobiles are treated as “off-road” vehicles.

**Response:**

The NPS has recognized that snowmobiles are not purely recreational vehicles; they offer a unique way to experience the park in winter. Under the levels proposed in the preferred alternative, with the commercial guiding and BAT requirements, visitors can have this unique experience while minimizing impact to park resources and values.

Snowmobiles are considered to be off-road vehicles pursuant to Executive Order 11644 and NPS regulation.

**GA3000 - Impact Analysis: General Methodology for Establishing Impacts/Effects**

**Concern ID:** 30032

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

Commenters requested more on-the-ground testing. In addition, one commenter suggested clarifying the fuel efficiency of snowcoaches.

**Response:**

The NPS conducts on the ground monitoring of air quality and soundscapes. The details of the monitoring locations, frequency of monitoring, and results are described in the “affected environment” portions of the EIS for air quality and soundscapes. The details of the monitoring are shared with the public through the publication of winter use monitoring technical reports posted on the Yellowstone Winter Use website.

A wide variety of factors affect snowcoach and snowmobile fuel efficiency and air pollutant emissions, including the specific vehicle type, operating conditions, speed, temperature, etc. The emissions factors used in the air quality assessment in the DEIS were based on past air quality and emissions testing, research studies, and data provided from vehicle manufacturers (EIS Appendix B).

**HS2000 - Health and Safety: Methodology and Assumptions**

**Concern ID:** 29987

**CONCERN STATEMENT:**

One commenter questioned why the NPS decided not to use howitzers in a park in 2008 but decided to allow using identical howitzers in Yellowstone.

**Response:**

Management tools used within each national park unit are a result of a decision-making process unique to that park unit. For Yellowstone National Park, this process is called Operational Risk Management Assessment (ORMA). For the operation of Sylvan Pass, the ORMA process was conducted in 2007 and updated for this winter use planning process in 2010. A copy of the updated ORMA report can be found at: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/upload/orma.pdf>.

This process evaluated the range of management options available at Sylvan Pass, including the use of helicopters and the use of howitzers. As stated on page 15 of the ORMA report, both of these methods have their advantages and disadvantages. For the howitzer, access to the platform can be problematic and require travelling below avalanche chutes. Use of the helicopter can be problematic during harsh winter conditions that change frequently; helicopters were used only two times in 2009 due to weather conditions. Each method has limitations, but the ORMA showed that using a combination of methods, rather than relying on one, provides management options that reduce the level of risk to NPS employees.

### ***HS4000 - Health and Safety: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives***

**Concern ID:** 29988

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters asked the park to consider previous comments about health and safety; one commenter suggested that the use of explosives at Sylvan Pass is an impairment to park resources.

**Response:** Use of explosives was identified as a tool to be used for avalanche control in the most recent ORMA. The ORMA was undertaken specifically to address safety concerns associated with keeping Sylvan Pass open. The actions anticipated under the ORMA are analyzed in the EIS under alternative 4. The preferred alternative has undergone an impairment determination, finding that no impairment to park resources or values will result from its implementation. In accordance with current NPS Impairment Guidance, that determination will be appended to the Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will also discuss appropriate use of OSVs in the context of winter at Yellowstone.

### ***ON1000 - Other NEPA Issues: General Comments***

**Concern ID:** 29991

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter suggested eliminating the term “public OSV use” from the DEIS because it is misleading.

**Response:** Whereas OSV use within the park is commercially-guided, these operations provide access for the public at large to the interior of Yellowstone. For this reason, “public OSV use” is an accurate term for the EIS.

**Concern ID:** 29992

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter felt that comments from previous planning efforts had not been considered and requested that the NPS publish all responses to substantive comments for this NEPA process.

**Response:** This EIS process is its own discrete planning process under the National Environmental Policy Act. Responses to all substantive comments are being published as part of the FEIS. In a number of responses to comments on the 2008 EA, the NPS did commit to considering a number of suggestions received from the public, and believes it has done so as part of this EIS. The comment responses on the 2008 EA were contained in the Finding of No Significant Impact, which is part of the administrative record for this process. The Finding of No Significant Impact is available on the park's winter use website.

### ***PN2000 - Purpose and Need: Park Purpose and Significance***

**Concern ID:** 29993

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that because OSV use impacts park resources, it is contrary to the mission of Yellowstone, and should be limited in the park.

**Response:** NPS *Management Policies 2006* Section 1.4.3 states, “NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest extent practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values.” This means that NPS managers must take reasonable, affirmative steps toward avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts, but it

does not constrain the NPS’s discretion to allow impacts that the NPS deems necessary and appropriate to promote the enjoyment or conservation of the park.

If the NPS is to provide for any practical visitor access to Yellowstone in the winter, motorized vehicle use is necessary, and NPS believes that use levels in the preferred alternative (up to 318 snowmobiles per day and 78 snowcoaches per day) effectively allows the agency to protect its resources while providing for visitation.

**Concern ID:** 29994

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that by prohibiting use in the park, alternative 1 is contrary to the park’s enabling legislation and the Organic Act, and therefore does not meet the purpose and need for this plan.

**Response:** Most national parks do not allow any motorized oversnow access; some close entirely in winter. The park’s enabling legislation and the Organic Act reserve ample discretion to the NPS to determine how best to promote the enjoyment of the park while protecting park resources. The suggestion that the park’s enabling legislation or Organic Act mandate some particular level or type of snowmobile use is incorrect.

**PN3000 - Purpose and Need: Scope of the Analysis**

**Concern ID:** 29995

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that the 20-year life of the plan is too long to take into consideration the environmental and ecological changes in the park.

**Response:** The preferred alternative in the EIS is intended to remain in place for one year. In general, for the long-term plan, the NPS believes 20 years is the correct timeframe to allow for certainty, monitoring, and development of new information that will allow for new decisions on winter use in the future. The NPS will prepare a supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 29996

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter recommended changing the baseline for analysis (alternative 1) to include the historic use of snowmobiles in the park.

**Response:** NPS chose “no oversnow vehicle access” as its no-action baseline, in accordance with guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality’s Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ’s National Environmental Policy Act Regulations. The NPS believes this is proper, because if the NPS were to take no action at all, there could be no oversnow vehicle use in the park. However, the NPS has included an analysis of recent historic use (alternative 3) and other historic use (alternative 4) in the range of alternatives that was fully evaluated.

**Concern ID:** 29997

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that the DEIS does not adequately address non-motorized uses in the park.

**Response:** During the scoping process, the NPS received a number of comments regarding non-motorized winter use. The alternatives in the EIS provide for a number of non-motorized uses such as skiing, hiking, and snowshoeing. Under the action

alternatives, there are more than 35 miles of secondary park roads available for non-motorized recreation. Under several alternatives, there would also be in spring (“shoulder” season) closures that would provide access for non-motorized users to entire parts of the park. Further, under two alternatives an additional 10 miles of secondary roads would be maintained exclusively for non-motorized use, for a total of 45 miles worth of secondary roads. NPS will consider this comment in more detail during the process to supplement the EIS.

**Concern ID:** 29998

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that because there is overlap between bison management and winter use management, these two issues should be considered in the same plan.

**Response:** The purpose and need for this plan are to determine whether motorized winter use is appropriate in the interior of the park and if so, in what manner. The EIS does disclose impacts to bison and discusses the extent that motorized winter use affect bison. However, bison management is its own separate planning issue that is beyond the scope of the winter use plan.

#### ***PN4000 - Purpose and Need: Park Legislation/Authority***

**Concern ID:** 30036

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that park legislation, including the Yellowstone Act and the Organic Act, allow for public access to the park as long as it does not result in an unacceptable impact. They further stated that the NPS legal mandate to maximize access is not achieved in alternative 7, which is in violation of park legislation.

**Response:** The park’s enabling legislation and the Organic Act reserve ample discretion to the NPS to determine how best to promote the enjoyment of the park while protecting park resources. The suggestion that the park’s enabling legislation or Organic Act mandate some particular level or type of snowmobile use or mandate maximum visitor use is incorrect.

**Concern ID:** 30037

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the level of motorized traffic proposed in alternative 7 impacts park resources and visitor experience and therefore violates the NPS Management Policies. They stated that the NPS is not required by their policies to permit a certain level of visitor use; conservation is predominate.

**Response:** The commenter is correct that conservation is to predominate, and that NPS is not required to provide a certain level of use. However, NPS believes some level of oversnow vehicle use is appropriate in the park, and the park may allow use that results in some adverse impacts to park uses, so long as that use does not cause unacceptable impacts or impairment to park resources.

**Concern ID:** 30039

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned if the park has the legislative authority to allow a non-conforming use inside the park boundary. Another commenter asked if Congress has the authority to change the winter use rules for Yellowstone.

**Response:** The NPS does not believe oversnow vehicle use in the park constitutes a non-conforming use, which is a specific term generally referring to wilderness. No

oversnow vehicle use in wilderness is considered in the EIS. Furthermore, based upon the impact analysis in the EIS, NPS believes oversnow vehicle use, at the levels described in the preferred alternative, including the requirements and restrictions, is an appropriate use of the park. The U.S. Congress does have the authority to change or mandate winter use rules in the park.

***PN8000 - Purpose and Need: Objectives in Taking Action***

***Concern ID:*** 30040

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** Commenters questioned objectives related to visitor use and experience. Some commenters expressed concerns that visitor experience could not be fulfilled from afar and the level of use proposed would not meet this objective. Others felt that the plan should focus on wilderness, not visitor experience.

***Response:*** In addition to preserving park resources and values, the NPS is also charged with providing for use and enjoyment of park resources and values. Use of snowmobiles provides a unique way to experience the park. The impact analysis in the EIS shows that use of snowmobiles, as well as snowcoaches would result in adverse impacts. The preferred alternative has undergone an impairment determination, finding that no impairment to park resources or values will result from its implementation. In accordance with current NPS Impairment Guidance, that determination will be appended to the Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will also discuss appropriate use of OSVs in the context of winter at Yellowstone.

As stated in chapter 2 of the EIS, under “Issues and Impact Topics Considered but Dismissed from Further Analysis,” the park contains proposed wilderness, but was not carried forward as its own impact topic because winter use would occur completely on roads outside of proposed wilderness. While wilderness was not carried forward as its own impact topic, impacts to wilderness are included in impact topics such as visitor use and experience, soundscapes, and air quality. In addition, impacts to wilderness are included in the objectives of the EIS.

While the commenter may disagree, the concept of enjoyment from afar is included in *NPS Management Policies 2006*.

***Concern ID:*** 30041

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** One commenter stated that wilderness is limited to the backcountry and wilderness values along travel corridors disappeared nearly a century ago.

***Response:*** The EIS acknowledges that the road corridors are not managed as wilderness, and that park visitors should not expect to have a wilderness experience along the road corridors.

***Concern ID:*** 30042

***CONCERN STATEMENT:*** One commenter disagreed with the finding that alternatives 1, 4, and 5 satisfy the purpose, need, and objectives of the plan; another commenter felt that none of the action alternatives meet the objective for wildlife.

***Response:*** The objective for wildlife management in the EIS is, “Manage winter use so that it does not disrupt the winter wildlife ecology, including sensitive species.” OSV use in the park may affect individual animals, but not all OSV use was found to disrupt overall wildlife ecology. *NPS Management Policies 2006* (Section 4.4.1) states that biological resource management will include, “minimizing human impacts on

native plants, animals, populations, communities, and ecosystems, and the processes that sustain them.” As shown in the intensity definitions for wildlife and wildlife habitat, impacts that are negligible, minor, or moderate would not impact the species at the population level. These findings are translated to table 11 (DEIS page 83), which shows how each alternative meets the plan objectives, including wildlife. As this table shows, although all alternatives meet the objective, some meet it to a better degree than others because there would be fewer impacts to wildlife. This also is the case with all other management objectives as well: all alternatives meet the objectives to different degrees, as detailed in the EIS.

**Concern ID:** 30043

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter felt that the development of the plan objectives lack transparency and public input.

**Response:** The plan objectives were developed by an interdisciplinary project planning team for the EIS. The objectives were released for a 60-day public review and comment from January to March 2010. During this time a number of public comment meetings were held, specifically to solicit comments on the purpose, need, objectives, and alternatives for the plan/EIS. The NPS changed the objectives based on the comments received.

#### ***PO2000 - Park Operations: Methodology And Assumptions***

**Concern ID:** 29999

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter asked if any mode of travel would help defray NPS costs of park maintenance and administration.

**Response:** As shown in the analysis of park operations and management, the cost associated with administrative travel is related to the amount of visitor use in the park. For those alternatives with more visitor use, the cost for OSV maintenance increases. The numbers in this analysis were based on the assumption that each snowmobile costs approximately \$2,516 per year to maintain, while snowcoaches cost \$5,000 each a year to maintain. Although snowmobiles cost less each year, snowcoaches can carry more passengers and may cost less per staff member to operate and maintain. However, both snowmobiles and snowcoaches are used for specific reasons within the park. Whereas snowmobiles can transport individual staff members from place to place, snowcoaches (or tracked vehicles) are needed to transport supplies into the park. Therefore, when considering the type of OSV that should be used by park staff, the decision considers cost and function of the OSV.

#### ***PO4000 - Park Operations: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives***

**Concern ID:** 30000

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter noted that plowed roads would improve emergency access, reduce the cost of transporting goods, and allow for easier repair and maintenance.

**Response:** NPS agrees there could be benefits to plowing roads, and has included the option of plowing certain roads as part of alternative 4. NPS notes, however, that there are also a number of potential safety issues that could arise, as detailed in the EIS.

**SE2000 - Socioeconomics: Methodology and Assumptions**

**Concern ID:** 30059

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter noted that the State of Montana resort tax information should include the contribution of taxes from the oil boom in eastern Montana.

**Response:** To clarify the text in the DEIS, the FEIS was revised to state “ Montana’s statewide lodging tax rose 17% during the same period; however, many other factors affect lodging tax revenues in different parts of the state. Therefore, the NPS is unable to draw conclusions or determine causality for differences throughout the state.”

**Concern ID:** 30060

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters asked for additional information about the East Entrance socioeconomic impacts, including information about Wyoming lodging tax collections and the relationship to other recreational opportunities in the area.

**Response:** Page 169 of the DEIS (table 33) provides information on the winter lodging tax collections in Park County, Wyoming, compared to total visitation in Yellowstone National Park. In general, taxes may go up or down in a county for a variety of reasons and it is difficult to determine how snowmobile management would impact these figures. Regardless of the figures, the NPS did not conduct a separate cost/benefit analysis for the East Entrance because the alternatives were analyzed as a whole, not by their individual parts, in order to gauge the full magnitude of the alternatives.

**Concern ID:** 30061

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested clarification of the costs for snowcoaches to meet new emissions standards.

**Response:** No snowcoach emissions standards are included in the preferred alternative. However, NPS could consider snowcoach emissions standards as part of supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan. If snowcoach emissions factors are included in the supplemental EIS, NPS will attempt to include expected costs.

**Concern ID:** 30090

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter suggested that reducing or eliminating snowmobile use in the park and relying on snowcoaches for oversnow travel would not negatively impact the local economy.

**Response:** The data on park visitation shows a clear decline in visitation after the number of snowmobiles entering the park was limited and the snowmobiles were required to be on guided tours. At this point in time, the increase in visitors riding snowcoaches has not offset the loss of snowmobile visitors. The reduction in visitation has reduced revenue for some local businesses that catered to snowmobile riders, and in particular to un-guided snowmobile riders. The estimated impacts of the change in visitation on the local region are presented in analysis.

***SE4000 - Socioeconomics: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives***

**Concern ID:** 30086

**CONCERN  
STATEMENT:**

Several commenters stated that a decrease in snowmobile access and use at Yellowstone would translate into a loss of revenue for both the park and the surrounding communities and businesses. Further, commenters stated that the economic viability of surrounding communities should be analyzed.

**Response:**

The preferred alternative is to allow oversnow vehicle use for the 2011/2012 season at the same levels as the past two years (2009 interim rule levels). Therefore, no loss in revenue is expected for the upcoming season. NPS will continue to look at the socioeconomic effects of changes to OSV use numbers in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 30087

**CONCERN  
STATEMENT:**

Commenters requested a more detailed analysis of non-motorized winter visits to Yellowstone.

**Response:**

NPS will address this comment further in the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 30089

**CONCERN  
STATEMENT:**

One commenter stated that alternatives 3 and 6 do not fully address the clear benefits of BAT snowmobile access, and that a more detailed socioeconomic analysis is needed.

**Response:**

NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. NPS will include an updated socioeconomic analysis as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

***VA2000 - Visitor Use and Experience: Methodology and Assumptions***

**Concern ID:** 30076

**CONCERN  
STATEMENT:**

One commenter had several logistical questions about snowcoaches, such as capacity and cost per rider.

**Response:**

There are multiple types of snowcoaches. The capacity of the snowcoach is determined by the type and model used by the operator. The current mix of snowcoaches used can hold between 12 and 30 passengers. For estimates throughout the document, an average of 9 passengers was assumed to account for times when snowcoaches do not operate at full capacity. Whereas there is some variation in the cost of snowcoaches, the average cost is approximately \$120 per seat. In general, the routes for snowcoaches and snowmobiles are the same, except for some sideroads that are designated for snowcoaches only during portions of the day (but still accessible to snowmobiles other times of the day). No preference is given to one mode over another.

**Concern ID:** 30077

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter suggested that the NPS does not have the legal obligation to provide mechanized travel in Yellowstone.

**Response:** The NPS agrees that it does not have the legal obligation to provide mechanized travel in the park. This option is reflected in alternative 1.

**Concern ID:** 30079

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the visitor activity numbers presented in the DEIS are incorrect and the document may not fully recognize the extent to which the preferences of the winter visitors have shifted toward snowcoaches. Commenters feel that the public has been misinformed by the DEIS.

**Response:** The NPS provides visitor use trends in the DEIS in multiple locations. As discussed on page 141, snowmobiles are the primary activity; however, the specific numbers for snowmobiles and snowcoaches through the 2009/2010 season are presented in table 24. Trends related to an increase in snowcoach use are reflected on page 140 of the DEIS, which states that this use has increased by 74% since the 1999/2000 season. Text also notes that snowmobile use decreased by 71% during the same period. The NPS believes that the EIS accurately reflects visitor use numbers and trends of snowmobile and snowcoach use.

**VA4000 - Visitor Use and Experience: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives**

**Concern ID:** 30066

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested that the proposed alternative would make visiting Yellowstone too expensive and too difficult—given the varying use levels—for the average visitor.

**Response:** NPS acknowledges the cost for oversnow access to the interior of the park can be expensive. However, with the exception of alternative 4, which allows private wheeled vehicles, costs and modes of transportation are substantially similar across all alternatives.

**Concern ID:** 30068

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the preferred alternative does not allow opportunities to experience winter quiet and natural sounds, which they claim results from too many snowmobiles in the park.

**Response:** The preferred alternative is to allow oversnow vehicle use for the 2011/2012 season at the same levels as the past two years (2009 interim rule levels). NPS will then supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan. NPS will consider ways to provide for additional opportunities to experience winter quiet and natural sounds as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 30069

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that by closing Fire Hole Canyon, Riverside Drive, and the north ridge of the Grand Canyon under the preferred alternative, visitors to Yellowstone have less opportunity to enjoy the unique experience of seeing Yellowstone in the wintertime.

**Response:** The preferred alternative is to allow oversnow vehicle use for the 2011/2012 season at the same levels as the past two years (2009 interim rule levels). NPS will consider the commenters point regarding the referenced closures, as part of the supplement to the EIS prior to making a decision on a long-term plan.

**Concern ID:** 30071

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that the DEIS does not address the majority of people that require transportation for park visitation, including those with mobility challenges.

**Response:** The DEIS recognizes the population of visitors with mobility impairments throughout the document. Page 26 of the DEIS briefly discusses the NPS's legal responsibility to these visitors. How mobility impaired visitors are accommodated in the park through motorized access is described on pages 150–151 of the DEIS. This section notes that snowmobiles and snowcoaches can be used for accessing the interior of the park. The degree to which the various alternatives allow for motorized access for visitors with mobility impairments is also described in the DEIS starting on page 274.

**Concern ID:** 30074

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that the NPS does not have a legal requirement to ensure that disabled persons (or able persons) can experience the interior Yellowstone National Park in the winter.

**Response:** The legal acts and mandates that the NPS is required to follow in regard to people with disabilities are briefly explained in the EIS. Based on these mandates, the EIS does not call for universal access to the park's interior, nor that all visitors are able to have the same experience. The analysis of the alternatives does not rank or select one alternative over another based on its ability to provide access to the interior of the park, but rather details the way that those with mobility impairments could access the park under all alternatives (including alternative 1, as mentioned by the commenter). Further, regardless of the legality of the issue, during the planning process, the NPS determined that providing universally accessibility was an objective of this plan. Because some alternatives in the plan provide for access to the interior by the public, the NPS evaluated what type of access would be available for the mobility impaired to meet this objective.

**Concern ID:** 30075

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter suggest that visitor accessibility for the very young, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities should be evaluated under impacts for visitor use and experience rather than visitor accessibility, because it appears to be a visitor preference rather than an accessibility impact.

**Response:** The DEIS recognized that those visitors with mobility challenges may wish to access the park in different ways and does include consideration of transportation mode preferences. As stated on page 289 of the DEIS, "For this analysis, it is assumed that the experience of visiting Yellowstone by snowcoach would be

available for the very young, elderly, and mobility impaired visitors. In addition, snowmobile use would be possible for some portion of those visitors with disabilities. Therefore, snowcoach and snowmobile use are considered in this analysis.” This statement was made in recognition that most visitors with accessibility concerns may use snowcoaches, but all visitors with mobility-related disabilities are not limited to this type of use. The NPS recognizes that access by the mobility impaired is not only about exposure to elements, but is also about the visitor experience for that segment of visitors.

The FEIS combines the Visitor Use and Experience and Visitor Accessibility sections of the document to show how these two elements are related.

***VQ4000 - Visual Quality: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives***

**Concern ID:** 29982

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated the haze created by warming huts should be addressed in the viewshed analysis.

**Response:** The analysis of air quality in the EIS includes impacts to visibility. This analysis includes all sources in the park, including the warming huts. The analysis found that, “No potential localized, perceptible, visibility impacts are predicted for any of the action alternatives”.

***WH2000 - Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: Methodology and Assumptions***

**Concern ID:** 29983

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter questioned information in the DEIS about a wolverine den near the East Entrance. The commenter asked for clarification of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listing status of the wolverine. Another commenter felt that the available science illustrates that lynx and wolverine are not being impacted.

**Response:** After further investigation, NPS has determined that the reference to a wolverine den near Sylvan Pass in the DEIS was erroneous. This reference has been removed in the applicable sections of chapter 3 and chapter 4 of the FEIS. However, the area still provides suitable wolverine denning habitat and therefore the discussion of potential impacts from OSV use has not changed.

As discussed in the EIS, the distinct population segment of wolverines in the contiguous United States are considered a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

As discussed in the lynx and wolverine affected environment and impact analysis section of the EIS, impacts to these species are difficult to determine because of limited information on population size or distribution of the animals in the park. The best available science indicates that these species are sensitive to human disturbance and wolverines actively avoid areas of human activity, including snowmobile activity. Based upon the best available science, impacts to these species as a result of implementation of the preferred alternative are expected to be minimal.

***WH4000 - Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives***

**Concern ID:** 29985

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters suggested that plowed roads provide beneficial impacts to park wildlife and asked if a study had been done to show these benefits. Some commenters stated

that the DEIS does not fully consider the impact of plowed roads on wildlife and how those roads impact the natural balance of Yellowstone.

**Response:** NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses, and will attempt to consider the impacts of plowed roads in greater detail.

**Concern ID:** 30045

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters felt the analysis illustrates that allowing more snowmobiles, rather than snowcoaches, has a greater impact on wildlife, suggesting that the preferred alternative should focus on snowcoaches. Some commenters questioned how vehicle noise would change animal behavior.

**Response:** In general, vehicle noise has the potential to impact animals by causing them to look, and in some instances by causing them to move away from the noise. However, impacts from groups of snowmobiles are similar to impacts from snowcoaches. NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new sound modeling and analyses that will be used to help NPS make that decision.

**Concern ID:** 30049

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters asked the NPS to compare wildlife numbers before and after regulated use. Some commenters suggested wildlife populations were higher before regulated use.

**Response:** Population trends for bison and elk in the park are discussed on pages 102–103 of the DEIS. Bison and elk numbers have fluctuated over time; however, population trends are attributed to drought, severe winter weather, hunting, and predation. Motorized winter use in the park has not been cited as a major reason for population or demographic trends.

**Concern ID:** 30050

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters expressed concern about the impact of Sylvan Pass operations on wildlife, including impacts from explosives, noise, and general disturbance. Commenters felt that the analysis of wolverines in the Sylvan Pass area is insufficient, and does not consider the role of global climate change or fragmentation and connectivity.

**Response:** Fragmentation and connectivity of habitat for wolverine are discussed in detail on pages 214–216 of the DEIS. Impacts were determined to be minor adverse because activities in Sylvan Pass are unlikely to impact more than one or two wolverines over the course of the winter season.

**Concern ID:** 30052

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters felt the impacts on lynx and wolverines are overstated because all snowmobile use occurs on trails.

**Response:** As discussed in the EIS, lynx and wolverines occupy large territories and researchers have found that radio-collared animals may cover vast distances between patches of optimal habitat. Thus, traveling animals likely cross snowmobile corridors and these species' peak daily activity periods likely coincide with periods of peak snowmobile usage on park roads. Therefore, it is likely that traveling lynx or wolverines could be exposed to the sights and sounds of OSVs despite OSV use being confined to road corridors. Impacts of such disturbance on lynx or wolverine distribution or propensity to travel are unknown. However, due to the observed sensitivity of wolverines to human disturbance, including areas of snowmobile use, it is likely that wolverines would actively avoid park roads during periods of OSV use.

**Concern ID:** 30054

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters felt the analysis is biased because it discusses the opportunities for peace and solitude for visitors, but not for wildlife, and suggested analyzing these opportunities for wildlife.

**Response:** Disturbing wildlife is generally prohibited by 36 CFR 2.1. Section 2.18 is similar and does not establish a different standard. The NPS generally regards a *small* amount of disturbance to individual animals as an unavoidable consequence of allowing visitors in national parks, which is therefore necessary and acceptable. To interpret these provisions otherwise would preclude any visitation in national parks, which is plainly not their purpose. Winter use will have some effects on wildlife, just like every other form of visitor access to the park.

Extensive studies of the behavioral responses of five species to over snow traffic showed that these animals rarely showed high intensity responses (movement, defense postures, or flight) to approaching vehicles. The responses that do occur do not rise to the level of "taking" or disturbance that is prohibited by NPS regulations.

**Concern ID:** 30055

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter requested further discussion of the Cassirer study.

**Response:** The Cassirer study did indicate increased heart-rate and flight responses by elk in Yellowstone to cross country skiers. Elk in the study were initially captured and tagged by researchers using cross country skis. Therefore, elk in the study were likely sensitized to cross-country skiers, and thus more likely to flee from something that had indeed been a serious threat to them in the past. This and other flaws in the research methodology are the reasons the Cassirer study is not discussed in detail. As discussed in detail in the EIS, non-motorized users accounted for very few high-level behavioral responses by wildlife during five winters of behavioral observations in the park. The vast majority of high level responses were due to OSV users. To limit the impacts of non-motorized users on wildlife, non-motorized use would be restricted when winter snowpack and weather conditions become severe and appear to be adversely affecting wildlife.

**Concern ID:** 30057

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated that the effects of alternative 6 on elk and bison are overstated.

**Response:** NPS has identified Alternative 8 as the preferred alternative for a one year implementation period. Once a Record of Decision is signed, NPS intends to supplement the EIS in order to make a decision on a long-term plan prior to the 2012/2013 season. In the supplement, NPS will complete new modeling and analyses. Should Alternative 6 be included in the supplement to the EIS, NPS will re-evaluate the impacts of alternative 6.

**SS4000 – Soundscapes: Impact of Proposal and Alternatives**

**Concern ID:** 29858

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter provided information about the impact of mufflers on snowmobile noise emissions.

**Response:** Mufflers are one of several noise reduction tools that are utilized in BAT snowmobiles. Under BAT requirements, all snowmobiles must meet the 73 dBA limit.

**Concern ID:** 29955

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters stated BAT snowmobile noise testing should retain the barometric pressure variance. Commenters also felt that vehicles should be tested at park speed limits, rather than full throttle.

**Response:** All OSV vehicle noise levels were measured by experts from Environmental and Energy Systems Center of Innovation at the John A. Volpe Transportation Center (Cambridge, MA). That group is responsible for the design, development, and deployment of internationally-recognized environmental analysis tools, including the FAA's Aviation Environmental Design Tool (AEDT), the FAA's Integrated Noise Model (INM), FAA's System for assessing Aviation's Global Emissions (SAGE), and FHWA's Traffic Noise Model (TNM). They are the most authoritative group for making vehicle measurements.

Measurements were made at a variety of speeds, and the noise models used in the EIS accounted for vehicle speed in computing the noise source levels.

**Concern ID:** 30062

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned the methods of conducting noise testing and modeling, including the type of snowcoaches that were modeled, whether GripTracs were modeled, and if testing differentiated between the noise frequencies of different types of OSVs.

**Response:** The goal of the EIS noise models was to capture representative snowcoach noise levels, rather than the attributes of any single vehicle. The EIS models used average noise spectra developed by the Volpe Transportation Center to represent three basic classes of snowcoaches: Mattracks, Fulltracks, and Bombardier. Volpe's methods were published in a recent, peer-reviewed scientific publication (Hastings, A. R., Lee, C., Gerbi, P., Fleming, G. G., and Burson, S. 2010. Development of a tool for modeling snowmobile and snowcoach noise at Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Noise Control Eng. J. 58: 591-600). The EIS analysis focused on the quietest of the three snowcoach classes that Volpe defined, which was the Mattrack

class. This snowcoach type represents a large fraction of current fleet at Yellowstone.

**Concern ID:** 30065

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters asked that the analysis use the term “quiet time” with quiet places, because there are many quiet places in the park, even when OSVs are allowed. Others noted that there is ample quiet time that should be considered in the analysis.

**Response:** The EIS uses the term “opportunities for solitude,” and addresses this issue in both travel corridors and backcountry areas. Opportunities for solitude are important in travel corridors – not just in backcountry areas – because many visitors spend the majority of their time within travel corridors.

**Concern ID:** 30083

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters questioned assumptions in the sound analysis, such as the expectation for quiet in developed areas and the comparison of sound in travel corridors with sound a quiet room.

**Response:** The National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995 and OMB Circular A119 call for Federal Agencies to utilize consensus-based standards in lieu of unique government standards unless their use is inconsistent with applicable law or impractical. NPS determined that exceeding the minimum acceptable background conditions for quiet indoor spaces – classrooms, auditoria, bedrooms – was a suitable criterion for major impacts in travel corridors. This standard was applied to the daily average noise level, which allows noise levels in the travel corridor to be substantially higher than the indoor standard for brief portions of the day. For example, the noise level in the travel corridor could be 10 dB higher than the indoor noise standard for up to 10% of the day. Note that the indoor noise standards are as much as 30 dB higher than the quietest natural ambient sound levels that can be experienced on calm winter days in Yellowstone.

**Concern ID:** 30081

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** Commenters expressed concern that under the preferred alternative, visitors would have to seek times of quiet. They felt this meant that the NPS is stating that during times of high use, the levels of quiet would not be acceptable and would reach major impacts.

**Response:** The highest traffic scenarios modeled in the EIS exhibited noise levels exceeding the NPS major impact criterion in about 10% of the of the travel corridor area. In these high traffic scenarios, substantial portions of the travel corridor had much lower noise exposures, and would offer opportunities to experience lower peak noise levels and longer intervals free from noise.

**Concern ID:** 30084

**CONCERN STATEMENT:** One commenter stated that the DEIS does not provide supporting evidence for a finding of major adverse impacts to soundscapes under alternative 6. The commenter further stated that the data show both alternatives 3 and 6 would have minimal intrusions into the backcountry.

**Response:** Alternative 6 was found to have major adverse impacts because it would have an 8-hour Leq of more than 35 dBA for greater than 10 percent of the travel corridor. (see DEIS, p. 273)

