

## Public: No snowmobiles

By Cory Hatch

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Seventy-three percent of people who commented on the winter-use plan for Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks said they favor eliminating recreational snowmobiling from the parks, according to a report released Friday.

The National Park Service collected 122,190 comments on the proposed plan from March to June. Of those, more than 88,900 said they want snow coaches to be the only form of transportation in the park during winter.

The Park Service is proposing to allow 720 snowmobiles per day in Yellowstone. That plan requires snowmobilers to hire a commercial guide and that the machines be equipped with the "best available technology," namely four-stroke engines that are considered quieter and less polluting than traditional two-stroke snowmobiles. The proposal would limit the number of snow coaches to 78 per day, and it would close Sylvan Pass during the winter.

Of the people who commented on the environmental impact statement, less than two-tenths of 1 percent, or 193 people, favored the park's plan. More than 3,200 people, or 2.7 percent, said they want a plan that expands recreational snowmobile use in the park.

The state with the highest number of people commenting on the environmental impact statement was California, with more than 21,000, followed by New York, Florida and Washington. In Wyoming, almost 3,500 people submitted comments. Of those, 167 came from people in Jackson and 462 came from residents of Cody.

Ninety-four percent of people who commented agreed that snowmobiling destroys the natural "soundscape." And slightly fewer, 93.8 percent, said previous studies have already evaluated snowmobile use in Yellowstone and that the current environmental impact statement is unneeded or a waste of money. National Park Service officials have commissioned four previous studies of snowmobile use in Yellowstone.

Yellowstone spokesman Al Nash said collecting comments from the public isn't a scientific process that gives a good representation of the opinions of the general population. He said Park Service officials will use specific comments that have unique viewpoints, rather than the consensus of opinions, to guide their decisions.

Tim Stevens, Yellowstone program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association, acknowledged that the process isn't a vote but said the Park Service should pay attention to what the majority of Americans want. Further, he said the majority of respondents expressed opinions that echoed scientific findings and National Park Service policies and mandates.

"This is the fourth time we've been through this process," he said. "Every time, Americans have weighed in support of a clean and healthy Yellowstone National Park. Americans cared enough to send in their comments on this issue. It's a shame that one would take that and say it's not good enough."

The final decision on the winter travel plan is expected by the time Yellowstone opens for the winter season in December.