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- Editorials**
- Take back the park
  - Fair boundaries
  - Mass transit mania
  - End the confusion
  - Rushing to agree
  - The thumb
  - Utah's blue dog
  - Canal safety
  - Fair warning
  - Dinosaur dynamics

- Commentaries**
- Gitmo detainees' future best decided by judiciary
  - Free marriage counseling for Israel and U.S.
  - Jones: Time for a reproductivity tax
  - Rolly: Never let facts interfere with a good smear
  - Travel is the art form available to Everyman
  - Retired, not wealthy? Forget about insurance
  - Clean Energy and Security Act shifts wealth
  - Overpopulation: The elephant in the room
  - People from around the globe really much alike
  - The gifts of gaffes

- Letters**
- Try Obama plan
  - Autism coverage
  - The silly crowd
  - Laughable health care
  - Judicial travesty
  - Hatch's 'no'
  - Earning prosperity
  - Sensationalized crap
  - Hatch has overstayed
  - Arrogance tax
  - Paying to die
  - Property taxes

## Take back the park

Phase out Yellowstone snowmobiles

Tribune Editorial

Updated: 08/03/2009 06:00:46 PM MDT

The fewer snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park, the better. Better for wildlife, better for park visitors trying to escape noise and pollution, and better for the overall health of the fragile park.

We support a proposal by the Obama administration to cut by more than half the number of machines allowed each day this winter. There is no doubt that 318 -- the proposed daily limit -- is much better than 720 per day, the number allowed last winter under a Bush administration rule. But we prefer an even smaller number: zero.

Snow coaches have grown in popularity because more people -- including children, the elderly and disabled -- prefer them. Many tourist guides who once used a fleet of noisy snowmobiles have adopted the coaches instead. They are more comfortable and much quieter, so passengers get a chance to see bison, elk, moose and coyotes without causing the animals distress at a time of year when they are most vulnerable and most need quiet and solitude.

During last year's presidential election campaign, Americans were treated to an image of Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin shooting at moose from the seat of a snowmobile. While that image made a political statement and the practice might even be allowed in Alaska, scientific research clearly indicates that snowmobiles (or snow machines, as Palin called them) don't mix well with wildlife and the quiet, pristine air and natural wonders that national parks are created to

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A federal court last September rejected the 2008 plan from the Bush administration to allow 540 snowmobiles in the park, saying that, according to the National Park Service's own research, more snowmobiles would "cause major adverse impacts on the the natural soundscape in Yellowstone" and "exceed use levels recommended by NPS biologists to protect wildlife." So the Bushies petulantly reinstated an earlier limit: 720 per day.

We're encouraged that national park officials under President Obama will be able to consider their agency's own scientific reports as they work toward a more reasonable rule. It's a refreshing contrast to President George W. Bush's bullish determination to ignore science if it contradicted his philosophy of overusing and exploiting public lands, the

consequences be damned.

We join the hundreds of thousands of Americans who have told the NPS over more than a decade that snowmobiles should be phased out of Yellowstone. They want their park back, and President Obama should give it to them, since, after all, the parks belong to *all* Americans.

[Return to Top](#)

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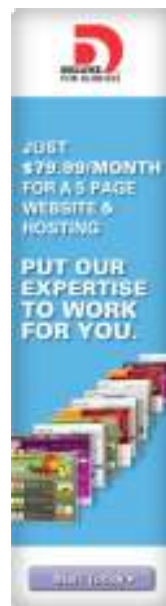
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