



PRESS RELEASE

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Federal Judge Orders National Park Service to Issue New Winter Use Rules that Will Protect Yellowstone Wildlife

WASHINGTON (June 30, 2004)—In a decision issued today, U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan has ordered the National Park Service to issue, at least 30 days prior to the initiation of trail grooming, new rules for winter recreation in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, which must be consistent with his December 2003 opinion that the Park Service has failed to adequately address the adverse environmental impacts of snowmobiling and trail grooming. The Fund for Animals and the Bluewater Network hailed the decision, which will prevent a repeat of last year's fiasco, in which the Bush Administration issued its winter use rules just days before the opening of the snowmobile season, creating a difficult situation for all interested parties.

In ordering his timetable for the issuance of the new rules, Judge Sullivan wrote today, "The government is admonished that its enactment of rules literally hours prior to the commencement of the winter season does little, if anything, to properly inform the public of agency decisions, erodes the public's confidence in the rule-making process, and casts innumerable aspersions on the legitimacy of that process." Today's order prohibits the government from issuing new rules at the last minute as it did in 2003, and thereby provides all interested parties with an opportunity to challenge the rules in court if necessary.

Michael Markarian, president of The Fund for Animals, stated, "Although we reached a winter use settlement with the National Park Service nearly a decade ago, snowmobiling and trail grooming continue to devastate Yellowstone's air, water, and wildlife. We hope that today's ruling is the beginning of the final chapter in this debate, and that this winter Yellowstone and its wildlife will be protected, not subjected to continued abuse."

Judge Sullivan ruled last December that the National Park Service must further study the environmental impacts that the packing of 25-foot-wide roads for snowmobiles and snowcoaches has on bison and other park wildlife. While some environmental groups suggest replacing snowmobiles with snowcoaches (large passenger vans), The Fund and Bluewater point out that packing roads for either type of vehicle facilitates bison movements outside the park where they are slaughtered by the state of Montana and the National Park Service. Road packing also causes adverse impacts to imperiled species such as grizzly bears, gray wolves, and Canada lynx.

"The Park Service has been through this process twice before and the science, the public, and the law have all said that snowmobiling is inappropriate in these parks," said Carl Schneebeck, spokesman for Bluewater Network and a former Grand Teton National Park ranger. "Hopefully the third time will be the charm."

"Yellowstone is a national treasure, not a privileged playground for snowmobilers and others who engage in recreational abuse," said D.J. Schubert, wildlife biologist with The Fund for Animals. "If the Park Service intends to comply with its protectionist mandate and engages in an objective analysis of the impacts of road packing on bison and other wildlife, it must conclude that road packing activities should be terminated."

A copy of today's decision is available online at:

http://bluewaternet.org/reports/rep_snow_6-30-04ynpruling.pdf

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*Bluewater Network is a national environmental organization dedicated to reducing dependence on fossil fuels & eradicating other root causes of air and water pollution, global warming, & habitat destruction.
More than 20,000 members in all 50 states and four nations have already joined.*

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