



Facts and Myths About Snowmobiling and Winter Trails

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was developed by the American Council of Snowmobile Associations (ACSA) with funding provided by the Recreational Trails Program administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation – Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). It updates a similar booklet originally published by ACSA in 2009. The ACSA provides national leadership and coordination to advance the efforts of all organizations who promote responsible snowmobiling across the United States. Visit www.snowmobileinfo.org for additional information about snowmobiling safety and access.

Writing and photography were provided by Kim Raap/Trails Work Consulting; design, layout and printing were provided by L.B.L. Printing; and the cover photos along with numerous other photos were provided by the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA).

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Photo by Kim Raap

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ISMA Photo

Snowmobiling...

A PROVIDER OF MULTIPLE USE TRAILS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Snowmobiling is a favorite winter pastime for over two million people in the United States. Snowmobiling also helps provide a large number of recreation opportunities for other trail users since the majority of the 135,000 miles of snowmobile trails in the U.S. are open for multiple uses and help provide important winter access, services, and trailheads.

Snowmobiling provides opportunities for families and

friends to enjoy wintertime companionship while experiencing splendid scenery like no other season offers; opportunities for challenge, physical exertion and stress relief while recreating in the great outdoors; and opportunities to connect with nature in the solitude of secluded winter backcountry. These opportunities combine to help teach respect and conservation of the environment, while also instilling a strong appreciation for private and public lands.

Snowmobile trails are funded solely by snowmobile users through:

- ❖ Snowmobile registrations,
- ❖ Snowmobile trail or user permits,
- ❖ Snowmobile gasoline tax rebates, and
- ❖ An immense number of hours snowmobilers volunteer each year to clear, maintain, sign and groom trails.

The efforts by snowmobilers often provide a myriad of opportunities for other winter recreationists,

including cross-country skiers, backcountry skiers, snowshoers, dog sledders, winter hikers and bicyclists, and in some areas, winter ATV riders. All of this typically comes at no cost to the other winter trail users. Additionally, many snowmobile trails are also used by hikers, bicyclists, equestrian riders, OHV riders, and a host of other recreationists during the summer season. Contributions from snowmobilers help public land managers accomplish their goals for providing winter recreation opportunities – at little or no cost to the agencies.

Did you know...

The majority of the 135,000 miles of snowmobile trails are open for multiple uses.

Snowmobiling occurs on private and public lands across the northern tier of the country. It involves many different riding styles which include on-trail riding, cross-country riding off trails in powder and gentle open areas, boon-docking in forested areas, and hill climbing in mountainous regions. This wide range of riding styles requires an equally wide variety of recreation settings ranging from gentle on- and off-trail opportunities for families to challenging off-trail opportunities for experienced and expert riders.

A growing trend is that – particularly with the aging population – more elderly and people with disabilities are using snowmobiles to access

areas where they may have skied or snowshoed when they were more mobile. Snowmobiles also provide opportunities for disabled individuals and the elderly to experience the great outdoors in the winter in a way that would not otherwise be possible.

Snowmobile technology has dramatically improved to the point where today's snowmobiles bear little resemblance to snowmobiles produced ten or twenty years ago. They are tightly regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

and are consequently significantly cleaner and quieter than early models. As a result, multiple use trail sharing is more viable than ever before.



Photos by: (Clockwise from top left) Togwotee Winter Classic, Wyoming Stage Stop by Chris Havener, VermontVacation.com, ISMA

HYBRID MOTORIZED / NONMOTORIZED RECREATION IS GROWING IN POPULARITY.

Many backcountry skiers and snowboarders have embraced snowmobiling as a means to gain access farther into the backcountry or closer to nonmotorized opportunities at Wilderness boundaries. These 'hybrid users' value the ability snowmobiles give them to get 10 or 20 miles away from their vehicles – which is substantially farther than they could ski into the backcountry on day trips. These cross-over motorized / nonmotorized recreationists represent the ultimate 'multiple use' of public lands.

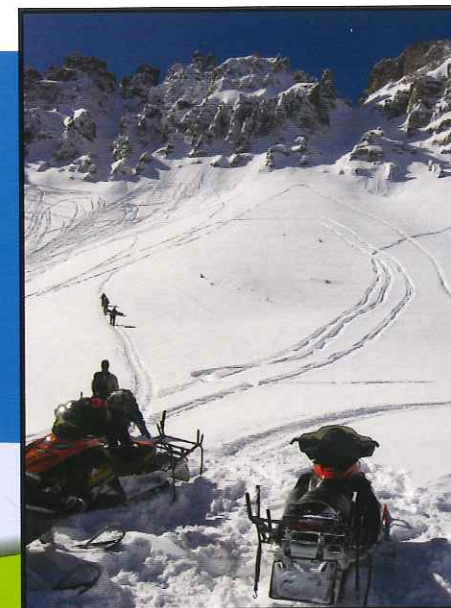


Photo by Shad Hamilton



ISMA Photo

Snowmobiling...

A CATALYST FOR WINTER ECONOMICS

Snowmobiling generates over \$26 billion in annual spending across the United States and is responsible for over 100,000 fulltime jobs in North America. Its overall economic impact is particularly important in many rural communities where snowmobiling-related tourism helps provide income and jobs during what otherwise would be an off-season. This helps many businesses keep their doors open and people employed year-round. This spending also generates important tax revenues for governments.

According to the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA Snowmobiling Fact Book 2013), the average snowmobiler is 43 years

old. Approximately 70% of all active snowmobilers are male; 30% are female.

There are 1.4 million registered snowmobiles in the U.S. The average snowmobiler rides their snowmobile 1,200 miles per year and spends \$4,000 each year on snowmobile-related recreation. The average annual household income for snowmobilers is \$68,000.

About 53% of snowmobilers usually trailer their snowmobiles to go riding. The other 47% either snowmobile directly from their primary residence or have a vacation home where they keep and use their snowmobiles.

Snowmobilers are also caring neighbors. They raise over \$3 million for charity each year – and this is above and beyond the fundraising and other volunteer work they do to provide public snowmobile trails.

Snowmobiling requires a substantial investment of tens of thousands of dollars for a snowmobile, clothing, trailer, and a tow vehicle. It also requires substantial daily trip costs for fuel, oil, repair parts, user fees, and other associated trip expenditures like food and often times lodging.

In comparison, it is much less expensive to participate in nonmotorized recreation. Cross-country skiers and snowshoers can get started in their sport for as little as

\$100 or \$200 – and even their most technologically advanced gear costs thousands of dollars less than \$6,000 to \$14,000 for snowmobiles. Additionally, daily trip costs for nonmotorized recreationists are next to nil compared to snowmobilers' trip costs.

Many States have commissioned studies to determine their specific economic impacts from snowmobiling. A complete listing of available economic studies can be found at www.snowmobileinfo.org/research-studies-snowmobiling-impact-economics.html. Economic benefits vary based upon ratios of local/resident snowmobile riders (lower total spending) versus levels of non-resident and non-area riders (higher total trip expenditures). A sampling of state survey results includes:

ALASKA: The economic impact of snowmobiling in the Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough was found to be over \$35 million annually (Anchorage Economic Development Corp. 2000).

IDAHO: The winter economy of Valley County Idaho, which includes the communities of McCall and Cascade, heavily depends upon the \$7.5 million spent annually by snowmobile visitors (University of Idaho 2006).

IOWA: Snowmobiling generated \$65.4 million in annual economic activity, resulting in 899 jobs (Iowa State University 2005).

MICHIGAN: The average snowmobiler spends \$4,218 annually on snowmobiling activity, equipment, and vacationing within the state of Michigan. Additionally, over \$1 billion in economic impact is generated and

over 6,455 full time jobs are created (Michigan State University 1998).

MINNESOTA: The snowmobile industry generates substantial tax revenues at the state and local level. Over \$51 million in taxes were paid at the local and State level directly related to snowmobiling activity (University of Minnesota Tourism Center 2005).

NEW YORK: The economic impact of snowmobiling in New York State was estimated to be over \$860 million annually, with the average rider spending more than \$3,000 per year on snowmobile-related activities. (SUNY Potsdam 2012).

PENNSYLVANIA: The annual economic impact of snowmobiling in Pennsylvania was estimated to be approximately \$161 million per year (Lebanon Valley College of Pennsylvania 2000).

SOUTH DAKOTA: The snowmobiling industry generates \$131.6 million in annual economic impact while supporting over 1,400 jobs; \$58 million is related to snowmobile retailers and distributors and over \$15 million is generated by trip-related spending for lodging, meals and gaming. (University of South Dakota 2011)

UTAH: Total annual expenditures resulting from snowmobiling are about \$52.6 million; 31% of Utah riders have college or technical training and an additional 31% have a B.A. or Graduate degree; and about 87% of Utah riders have not experienced any conflicts with other types of

winter recreationists (Utah State University 2001).

WASHINGTON: The annual economic impact of snowmobiling in Washington is \$92.7 million (Washington State University 2001).

WYOMING: The annual economic impact of snowmobiling in Wyoming is \$175.8 million, which supports 1,300 jobs and generates \$7.4 million annually in state and local government revenue. Gasoline was cited as the largest trip cost for snowmobilers, followed by lodging costs. (University of Wyoming 2013)



ISMA Photo

Fact:

Snowmobiling generates over \$26 billion in annual spending across the United States, and much of this spending occurs in rural areas.

Snowmobiling...

COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Snowmobilers have developed cooperative partnerships that provide many multiple use winter trails. They are also heavily involved with local community service projects. Through their funding and volunteer labor efforts, snowmobilers provide multiple use winter recreation opportunities and management that includes:

- ❖ Trail grooming
- ❖ Trail signing
- ❖ Trail clearing and maintenance
- ❖ Trail monitoring

- ❖ Law enforcement
- ❖ Avalanche forecasting, education, and weather monitoring equipment
- ❖ Safety and ethics education
- ❖ Search and rescue equipment
- ❖ Trailhead and trailside facilities
- ❖ Land use planning input

Snowmobilers work closely with land managers. The national snowmobile community entered into a service-wide Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the USDA Forest Service in 2005 to help promote cooperative partnerships. The snowmobile groups who signed this MOU included the American Council of Snowmobile Associations (ACSA), the International Association of Snowmobile Administrators (IASA), and the International

Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA). These three 'cooperators' represent the organized snowmobiling public/industry and are recognized leaders in establishing snowmobile ethics, safety standards, volunteerism, and fostering appropriate land use management on federal and non-federal lands.

Top Photos and Bottom Right by Kim Raap



Bottom Left Photo by Bridger-Teton National Forest Avalanche Center

Examples of equipment provided for partners by snowmobilers: (clockwise from top right)

Trail grooming equipment, safety shelter, weather monitoring equipment for avalanche forecasting, snow ambulance for search and rescue

This MOU noted a need to actively promote public-private partnerships that encourage responsible use of public lands by visitors participating in snowmobile travel and recreational activities. It established a general framework of cooperation upon which mutually beneficial programs, work projects, and snowmobile activities may be planned and accomplished on National Forest System lands. It also recognized that such programs, projects, and activities complement the Forest Service mission and are in the best interests of the public.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE MOU OUTLINE THAT SNOWMOBILE GROUPS/ COOPERATORS WILL:

- ❖ Provide technical assistance to land managers and communities involved in work projects, educational activities, and snowmobile opportunities.
- ❖ Encourage its members to work with local Forest Service officials to discuss and identify opportunities for cooperative work on mutually beneficial projects or activities.

- ❖ Promote Tread Lightly! ethics by providing training and instruction to its members.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE MOU OUTLINE THAT THE FOREST SERVICE WILL:

- ❖ Provide the cooperators information regarding the development and presentation of training materials related to snowmobiling safety and ethics, and the availability of snowmobiling opportunities on National Forest System lands.
- ❖ Encourage local Forest Service officials to participate with snowmobile clubs and associations in the development of mutually beneficial work projects, educational activities, and snowmobile opportunities.
- ❖ Make National Forest System lands available for the furtherance of this MOU, subject to applicable Federal laws, regulations, Forest plans, and other management direction.

Examples of volunteer work provided by snowmobilers for partners:

(clockwise from top left)

Safety shelter construction, Wilderness boundary signing, fall trail maintenance, firewood cutting for shelters

Sweetwater Sno-Pokes Photo



Wyoming State Trails Program Photo



(Bottom) Oregon State Snowmobile Association Photos



Snowmobiling...

SOIL AND VEGETATION COMPACTION



MYTH:
Snowmobiles compact soil and damage vegetation.

pound of pressure is further reduced by an intervening blanket of snow.

Numerous studies looked at potential compaction when snowmobiles first started growing in popularity in the 1970s and concluded that potential impacts were minimal; these conclusions remain valid today. Visit www.snowmobileinfo.org/research-studies-snowmobiling-impact-vegetation.html to view all research related to this topic. A summary includes:

- ❖ A study of the effects of snowmobile traffic on bluegrass (Foresman 1976) concluded that 'early growth was slower but summer yields were the same; no soil compaction was detected in the treated plots.'
- ❖ A study in Maine (Wentworth 1972) concluded that 'compaction of the snow cover had little effect on average soil temperature under the different treatment areas.'
- ❖ A research symposium report published by Michigan State University (1974) stated that 'where snow cover exceeded 3 inches in depth there were no detrimental effects on grass or vegetation stands, their vigor, or yield; high-grade grasses recover naturally from heavy snowmobile traffic; and snowmobile traffic caused no stand reductions, but did cause a slower recovery in early spring.'
- ❖ A study of snowmobile traffic on several forage species and winter wheat (Ryerson 1977) over a 3-year period showed no detrimental effects on four forage species and that winter wheat yields were not reduced. It concluded that trail use rather than open,

FACTS:

Snowmobiles exert dramatically less pressure on the earth's surface than other recreational activities (i.e., just one-tenth the pressure of a hiker and one-sixteenth the pressure of a horseback rider, as shown in the table below). Additionally, a snowmobile's one-half

Pressure Exerted by Various Travel Modes

Object	Pounds of Pressure exerted per square inch
Four-Wheel Drive Vehicle	30
Horse	8
Man (hiking)	5
All-Terrain Vehicle	1.5
Snowmobile	0.5

Fact...

Numerous studies have concluded that 'there were no detrimental effects' to soil or vegetation from snowmobiling.

uncontrolled use would be most appropriate in crop vegetation environs.

- ❖ A study in Nova Scotia (Keddy 1979) concluded that 'marsh vegetation showed no significant effects of snowmobile treatment' since its roots are under solid ice cover during the winter.

Given adequate snowfall and responsible operation, all evidence of snowmobile operation generally disappears when the seasons change and snow melts.

The photos to the right show the same locations in both winter and summer; the top photo set is of a heavily used trail while the bottom set shows a heavily used off-trail location adjacent to a busy parking area.

Additionally many snowmobile trails are located on snow over the top of roadways or hardened trails, where the impact on vegetation is zero.



Photos by Kevin Dreyer



Photos by Kim Raap

Did you know...

A man hiking exerts 10 times more pressure per square inch than what a snowmobile does.

Snowmobiling...

EMISSIONS AND AIR QUALITY

MYTH:
Snowmobile emissions cause air pollution and harm the environment.

FACTS:

Snowmobile engines are dramatically cleaner than portrayed and they do not cause unacceptable air pollution.

High numbers of snowmobiles entering Yellowstone National Park (YNP) through its West Entrance during the

mid-1990's through 2003 likely represents some of the most concentrated snowmobile use ever experienced in one location at one time. This time period was also prior to when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) first regulated snowmobile engine emissions. As a result the YNP West Entrance clearly represented a worst-case scenario in respect to snowmobile emissions, prior to implementation of a new YNP winter use management plan in late 2004. Consequently the issue of snowmobile emissions and air quality was studied more intensely in YNP than

anywhere else in the world during the early 2000's. Despite all the concerns and negative rhetoric regarding snowmobile use in Yellowstone, very intensive studies confirmed that, despite high levels of unregulated snowmobile use, National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) were never close to being exceeded in YNP due to snowmobile use. NAAQS thresholds have also never been exceeded elsewhere due to snowmobile use.

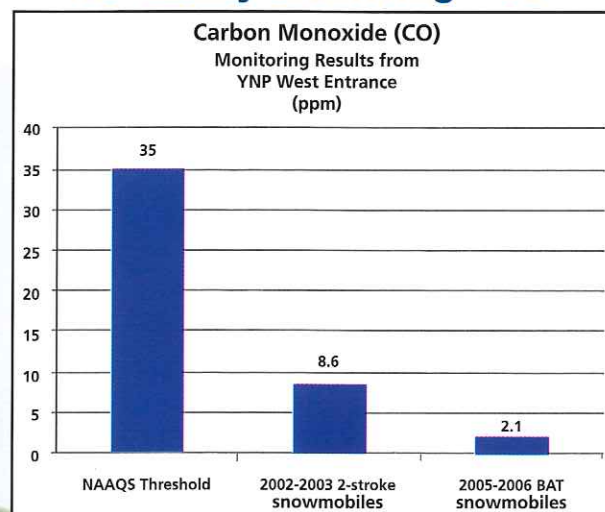
The NAAQS 1-hour threshold for Carbon Monoxide (CO) is 35 parts per million (ppm). The winter season of 2002-2003 represents the 'highest snowmobile visitation levels' for the most recent years when 'any snowmobile model' (primarily 2-strokes) could be used in YNP; monitoring showed the 1-hour average for CO at the YNP West Entrance was 8.6 ppm (about one-fourth the

NAAQS threshold). In 2005-2006 the requirement for only Best Available Technology (BAT) model snowmobiles (all 4-strokes) was fully implemented in Yellowstone; monitoring showed the 1-hour average for CO dropped to 2.1 ppm (6% of the NAAQS threshold). CO emissions from both engine types were – and remain – significantly below the NAAQS threshold.

Air quality monitoring during the same time period at the YNP West Entrance also measured Particulate Matter (PM 2.5). The NAAQS 24-hour threshold for PM 2.5 is 65 micro-grams per cubic meter (ug/m3). The average 24-hour concentration observed during the 2002-2003 YNP winter season (primarily 2-stroke models) was 18.6, while the average during the 2005-2006 season (all 4-stroke models) was 7.2 ug/m3. PM emissions from

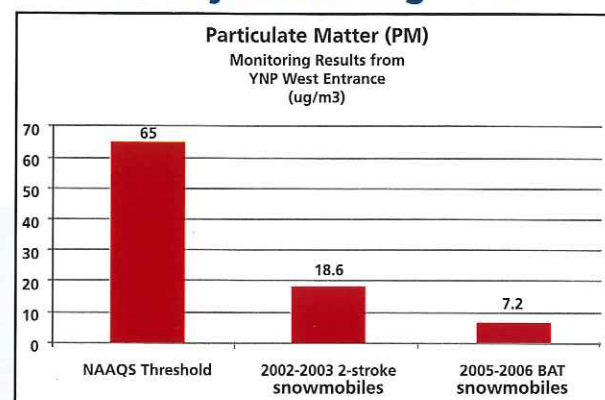
both engine types were – and remain – well below the NAAQS threshold (28% and 11% of the threshold, respectively).

Yellowstone National Park Air Quality Monitoring – CO



Source: NPS Winter Use Plans DEIS

Yellowstone National Park Air Quality Monitoring – PM



Source: NPS Winter Use Plans DEIS

EPA Snowmobile Emission Standards

Model Year	Emission Standards		% of Fleet Phase-In
	HC g/kW-hr	CO g/kW-hr	
2002 baseline 2-stroke snowmobile	150	400	NA
2006	100	275	50%
2007 – 2009	100	275	100%
2010	75	275	
2012	75	200	

The EPA issued the first-ever snowmobile engine emissions regulations in 2002 – something the snowmobile community had been requesting for several years. The result is that snowmobile engines now have significantly lower emissions and are much cleaner. EPA regulations target Carbon Monoxide (CO) and Hydro-Carbon (HC) emissions from snowmobiles on an engine family (fleet average) basis and apply to model year 2006 or newer snowmobiles. The final stage (2012 or newer

model years) reduced baseline emissions by a minimum of 50%.

New four-stroke engines and direct or semi-direct injection two-stroke engine technology has truly driven a major transformation in snowmobile engines. Additionally the use of low-emission synthetic engine oils has greatly reduced snowmobile emissions.

Visit www.snowmobileinfo.org/research-studies-snowmobiling-impact-air-quality.html to view all research related to this topic.

A summary of key findings includes:

- ❖ A two-year air quality monitoring study was conducted by the USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station (Musselman 2007) at the Green Rock snowmobile staging area in the Snowy Range of Wyoming. It found that snowmobile emissions did not have a significant impact on air quality at this extremely busy snowmobiling area located in a high-elevation ecosystem. The study measured levels of nitrogen oxides (NOx, NO), carbon monoxide (CO), ozone (O3) and particulate matter (PM10 mass); air quality data during the summer was also compared to winter data. It determined that pollutant concentrations were generally low both

winter and summer, and were considerably lower than maximum levels allowed by NAAQS.

- ❖ A Comparability Assessment of Snowmobile and Snowcoach Transportation Event Impacts in Yellowstone National Park (NPS Winter Use Plan/SEIS, 2013) determined:

- One mode of transportation is not conclusively cleaner, quieter, or less harmful to wildlife than the other.
- One mode of transportation does not provide for higher quality visitor experiences than the other.
- One mode of transportation is not conclusively more harmful to health and safety of visitors and employees than the other.

CLEAN SNOWMOBILE CHALLENGE

A wide range of local and national snowmobiling groups plus the four snowmobile manufacturers have been strong supporters of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Clean Snowmobile Challenge since it was founded in 2000. This Collegiate Design Series event requires students to re-engineer an existing snowmobile to reduce emissions and noise. A total of 20 universities from across the United States and Canada participated in the 2013 event, indicative of its annual strong support from Snowbelt universities.

The 200-plus students, advisors and sponsors who take part in this annual event are making a difference for the future of snowmobiling. Several dozen technical papers have been produced as a result of this event as it continues to be a prime driver in lowering snowmobile emissions and sound levels. Many student competitors have been hired as engineers by snowmobile manufacturers upon graduation.

KRC/Clean Snowmobile Challenge Photo



Snowmobiling...

SNOW AND WATER QUALITY

MYTH:
Snowmobile engines deposit gasoline, oil, and other contaminants on snow, which leads to ground and surface water quality degradation and subsequently impacts aquatic life.

FACTS:

Scientific monitoring has proven that snowmobiles do not emit gasoline and

other contaminants directly into the snowpack or have a negative effect on water quality. A summary of key study findings are noted below. Visit www.snowmobileinfo.org/research-studies-snowmobiling-impact-water.html to view all research related to this topic.

- ❖ The effect of snowmobile emissions on the chemistry of snowmelt water was extensively studied by Yellowstone National Park's Center for Resources (Arnold/Koel 2006) over consecutive winters. This long-term research study represents the most extensive and accurate body of scientific information available on this topic.

The monitoring project was conducted in 2003 and 2004, when pre-EPA regulated two-stroke snowmobile visitation was around 75,000 units per year. Snowmelt runoff samples were collected from four sites along the heavily traveled road corridor connecting Yellowstone's West Entrance at West

Yellowstone, Montana, and the Old Faithful area. Three sites were located immediately adjacent to the roadway in the vicinity of the West Entrance, Madison Junction, and Old Faithful. The fourth site was used as a control and was located near Madison Junction approximately 100 meters from the roadway, away from

the effects of snowmobiles. Each site was visited on 9–10 different days during the spring sampling period, with visits dependent on having a daily temperature >5 degrees Celsius for good potential to obtain snowmelt runoff. Water quality measurements related to water temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, specific conductance, and turbidity were collected at each site and analyzed for nine volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

All water quality measurements were within acceptable limits and the concentrations of all VOCs detected were considerably below the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's water quality criteria and guidelines for VOCs while also being well below

levels that would adversely impact aquatic systems.

- ❖ A USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station study (Musselman 2007) in the Snowy Range of Wyoming measured water chemistry and snow density from snow samples collected on and adjacent to a heavily used snowmobile trail. Snow on the trail was denser than it was off-trail, which would stand to reason since it had been compacted by trail grooming.

Snow chemistry was significantly different between on- and off-trail locations. On-trail snow was more acidic with higher concentrations of sodium, ammonium, calcium, magnesium, fluoride, and sulfate than what was found in snow off

the trail, especially early in the season. However since the trail followed a roadway, researchers felt the higher early-season concentrations may have likely been affected more by roadway chemistry conditions than by snowmobile traffic. However all levels were within acceptable limits and well below levels that would adversely impact aquatic systems. The study also found that snowmobile activity had no effect on nitrate levels in snow; they were the same both on- and off-trail.

- ❖ A study of snowpack chemistry on heavily traveled snowmobile trails in Vermont (VHB Pioneer 2010) indicated no detectable levels of VOC or total petroleum hydrocarbons in surface waters located immediately down gradient (downstream) of snowmobile trails. Soil chemistry monitoring also indicated no detectable levels of VOC or total petroleum hydrocarbons.

Photo by
Kim Raap

Photo by Ron McKinney

Fact...

VOC concentrations of snowmelt runoff were well below EPA criteria and well below levels that would adversely impact aquatic systems. – Arnold 2006

Snowmobiling...

SOUND LEVELS

MYTH:
Snowmobiles are noisy and pollute natural soundscapes.

FACTS:

Snowmobiles produced since 1975 are certified to emit no more than 78 decibels from a distance of 50 feet while traveling at full throttle. Comparatively pre-1969 snowmobiles emitted sound levels as high as 102 decibels. Since sound levels are logarithmic, this means sound levels for snowmobiles have been reduced 94% from early models. Consequently, it would take 256 78-decibel snowmobiles operating together at wide open throttle to equal the noise level of just one pre-1969 snowmobile. Examples of comparative sound levels are shown in the table; in addition normal conversation at three feet produces approximately 70 decibels.

Snowmobile sound levels have continued to decline. According to a Michigan Technological University (MTU) study (Blough 2009), 'exhaust noise has long been considered to be the primary noise source on a snowmobile. Historically most snowmobiles have been powered by 2-stroke engines which require a tuned exhaust to produce maximum power. This tuned exhaust is composed of a tuned expansion chamber and a "can" or muffler. In the past, the muffler was not always designed to provide significant noise attenuation. However, in the last 5 to 8 years modern snowmobiles have significantly modified this approach to their exhaust system designs. Many snowmobiles are now powered by 4-stroke engines which do not require a tuned expansion chamber to produce maximum power, leaving the muffler as the only exhaust system component besides the requisite downpipes and piping. The newer 2-stroke snowmobiles still require the tuned expansion

Examples of Comparative Sound Levels

Sound Source	Sound Level dB(A)
75-piece orchestra	130
Car horn, snow blower	110
Pre-1969 snowmobile	102
Blow dryer, diesel truck	100
Electric shaver, lawn mower	85
Garbage disposal, vacuum cleaner	80
Post-1975 snowmobile (full throttle at 50 feet; maximum allowed by law)	78
Alarm clock, city traffic	70
Dishwasher	60
Leaves rustling, refrigerator	40

chamber however they are now fitted with a very significant muffler, like the 4-stroke snowmobiles, which provides a very significant reduction in exhaust noise. These advances in the reduction of the exhaust noise can clearly be heard on the modern snowmobiles. In many cases, under many operating conditions the dominant noise source now appears to be the track system.'

The MTU study also found that 'snowmobile manufacturers are employing nearly all of the state of the art noise reduction technologies that the automotive and heavy equipment manufacturers use. The snowmobile industry has spent a large sum of money over the last 7 to 8 years to modernize

and upgrade both the facilities and software capability to deploy these technologies throughout the design and manufacturing of their snowmobiles. They use finite element analysis, rigid body dynamics, boundary element analysis, modal analysis, transfer path analysis, sound intensity and near-field acoustic holography to optimize their designs. In every new product release by the snowmobile manufacturers the snowmobiles have been heavily optimized and tested for noise and in many cases hard decisions have to be made between weight, cost, performance, and noise. Upon listening to a new snowmobile it is very evident that in the tradeoff situations, noise has become much more important and driven the final design decisions much more often than in the past designs.'

Immense public discussion regarding snowmobiling in Yellowstone National Park over the past decade has resulted in numerous sound monitoring projects being completed to compare sound levels between different snowmobile models and snowcoaches. A summary of key findings are noted below. Visit www.snowmobileinfo.org/research-studies-snowmobiling-impact-sound.html to view all research related to this topic.

- ❖ Natural soundscapes monitoring by the National Park Service (Burson 2011) found that 'although on average snowmobiles were audible for more time than snowcoaches (because there were significantly more snowmobiles than snowcoaches in the park), snowcoaches in general had higher sound levels, especially at higher speeds.'
- ❖ An earlier Park Service report (Burson 2005) concluded that 'the sound level and percent time oversnow vehicles were audible remained substantially lower than oversnow vehicle sounds from the 2002-2003 winter use season.' This reflects the regulation change whereby only Best Available Technology (BAT) snowmobiles with a maximum sound level of 70 decibels are allowed into the park.
- ❖ A State of Wyoming study (Daily 2002) concluded that 'the sound levels of many late model snowmobiles overlap or are quieter than snowcoaches under the same or similar testing conditions. The quietest snowmobile at 20 mph produced less sound than any of the snowcoaches at the same speed. The loudest stock over-snow vehicle at a steady state speed was a Bombardier snowcoach.' The report recommended that 'any regulations written should reasonably consider that over-snow vehicle sound levels are not attributable to just engine sounds, but also must factor in the other mechanical sounds (clutch, track and skis) associated with tracked vehicles.'

Protocol for SAE test J2567 was issued in January 2004 and has since been adopted as a sound enforcement tool by several states. This new test established a sound level threshold of 88 decibels at 4 meters (13 feet) which, due to the logarithmic nature of sound levels, corresponds to the '78 decibels at 50-feet' sound law. The result is that illegally altered exhaust systems can now be identified with an enforcement tool that is safe to administer in the field and will also hold up in court.



Photo by Kim Raap
A snowmobile's sound level is being measured by a law enforcement officer using the SAE J2567 stationary sound test.

Fact...
Snowmobile sound levels have been reduced 94% as compared to early models.

Problems with excessive noise levels do occur when irresponsible riders modify their snowmobiles' exhaust systems or substitute factory systems with aftermarket racing exhaust systems. In most states this practice is illegal. It also grossly misrepresents responsible riding habits practiced by the vast majority of snowmobilers. The snowmobile industry worked with the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) and State DNR agencies to address this issue by developing a new, stationary sound test for snowmobiles.



Researchers monitoring wildlife/human interactions in Yellowstone National Park

Photo by Kim Raap

Snowmobiling...

WILDLIFE IMPACTS

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK STUDIES

The most recent snowmobile/wildlife related studies were conducted in Yellowstone National Park and represent some of the most intensive winter monitoring ever conducted. This body of scientific research includes:

- ❖ The Scientific Assessment of Yellowstone National Park Winter Use (YNP SEIS 2011) concluded that 'collectively, wildlife studies conducted to date suggest effects of over-snow vehicles (OSV) on individual animals have not had measurable detrimental effects. Any behavioral or physiological reaction to disturbance associated with OSV use qualifies as an effect on an individual animal. Studies of ungulate physiology suggest habituation to predictable

disturbances like those associated with OSV use in YNP. Observations of bison, elk, trumpeter swans, and bald eagles, which evince awareness of passing OSVs but typically are not displaced, do not suggest substantial energetic costs. Elk and bison near roadways do not appear to exhibit elevated levels of stress hormones attributable to OSV traffic. Effects of OSV use on the dynamics of intensively studied species clearly are subsidiary to effects of ecological processes.'

- ❖ A National Park Service study in Yellowstone (White 2006) concluded that 'human disturbance did not appear to be a primary factor influencing the distribution and movements of the wildlife species studied; there was no evidence that snowmobile use during the past 35 years

adversely affected the demography or population dynamics of bald eagles, bison, elk, or trumpeter swans.'

- ❖ A previous Yellowstone study conducted by the Park Service (White 2005) concluded that 'responses by these wildlife species to over-snow vehicles were relatively infrequent, short in duration, and of minor to moderate intensity; ungulates habituated somewhat to motorized recreation; there was no evidence of population-level effects to ungulates from motorized winter use because estimates of abundance either increased or remained relatively stable during three decades of motorized recreation prior to wolf colonization in 1998. Thus, we suggest that the debate regarding the effects of motorized recreation on wildlife is largely a social issue as opposed to a wildlife management issue.'
- ❖ A workshop sponsored by the National Park Service, which included

experts from federal agencies, state agencies, and universities, was held in 2001 to summarize the state-of-science on monitoring the effects of snowmobiles on wildlife in national parks and surrounding lands. The report from this workshop (Graves 2001) states that 'experts in the field of wildlife (and wildlife reactions to disturbance) are uncomfortable passing judgments on whether snowmobiles adversely (or, for that matter, positively) affect wildlife. Even under circumstance with the best available information, the question of when an impact becomes serious enough to warrant taking action is a subjective value judgment, and many respondents recognized this. The majority felt that insufficient data exist to even begin to understand the issue.'

- ❖ A study of bison and elk responses to winter recreation in Yellowstone (Hardy 2001) found



National Park Service Photo

that 'both species behaviorally responded more often to people off-trail than to people on trails, and these activities prompted more behavioral responses than activities on roads. The predictability and frequency of OSV activities facilitated habituation to the majority of the winter recreation activities. Despite varying responses to increased winter visitation since the late 1970s, bison and elk return to winter in the same area each year, coexisting with

- ❖ Older Yellowstone studies (Aune 1981) concluded that 'winter recreation activity was not a major factor influencing wildlife distributions, movements, or population sizes.' Prior to that it was observed (Chester 1976) that 'variation in the intensity of human use did not appear to be responsible for shifts in wildlife distribution.'

- ❖ A study of elk responses to disturbances by cross-country skiers in Yellowstone (Cassirer 1992) found that 'elk in this study had a low tolerance for disturbance by people on foot or skis. Disturbance caused temporary displacement of the elk.'

MYTH:
Snowmobiles disrupt and harm wildlife populations.

FACTS:

Throughout the years numerous studies have been done regarding the impact of snowmobiles on wildlife. These studies cover a wide spectrum of time – from the early

1970s when snowmobiling was an emerging winter activity to those completed within the past few years. Whether one looks at early studies (whose results remain valid today) or new ones recently completed, the conclusions are the same: real impacts are minimal or can at least be managed. Snowmobilers and wildlife populations can coexist very well; they actually have done so for over 50 years.

Did you know...

Numerous studies have concluded that wildlife species are disturbed more by cross-country skiers and people on foot than by snowmobiles.



National Park Service Photo

FACT:
Researchers have concluded that 'the debate regarding the effects of motorized recreation on wildlife is largely a social issue as opposed to a wildlife management issue.' – White 2005

Wildlife Impacts...

OTHER WILDLIFE STUDIES

There are over 100 wildlife studies which conclude snowmobile conflicts are non-existent, nominal, or at least can be managed. Visit www.snowmobileinfo.org/snowmobiling-access-resources.aspx#Research-Studies-Related-to-Snowmobiling-Impacts to review them. While many of these studies are 20 to 40 years old, their results are still applicable – and impacts are either the same or even substantially lower given the significant decrease in snowmobile sounds and exhaust emissions compared to 1970- and 1980-era snowmobiles when some studies were originally conducted. It is important to note that these studies have not been updated because scientists have not felt

the need to spend current research funds to simply reconfirm old conclusions. Consequently these studies still represent the 'best available science.' A summary of key wildlife studies, by impact species, includes the following:

DEER, ELK AND MOOSE

- ❖ A Montana study of ungulates (Canfield 1999) concluded that 'snowmobiles appear less distressing than cross-country skiers.' The report also stated that 'big game hunting has more immediate effects on ungulate population densities and structures than any other recreational activity.'



deer-pictures.com photo

- ❖ A Colorado study (Freddy 1986) found that 'mule deer were disturbed more by persons on foot than by snowmobiles.'
- ❖ A Wisconsin study (Eckstein 1979) states 'data showed that snowmobile activity had no significant effect on home-range size, habitat use, or daily activity patterns of white-tailed deer wintering in Wisconsin.' Additionally it concluded that 'deer appeared to react more to a person walking/skiing than on snowmobiles.'
- ❖ A Maine study (Richens 1978) concluded that 'white-tailed deer response to snowmobiles seemed dependent on the deer's apparent security. Animals in the open or in hardwood stands tended to run when approached by snowmobile. Deer in softwood stands, which provide more cover, showed a greater tendency to stay

when approached. A significantly greater number of deer ran from a person walking than from a person on snowmobile.'

- ❖ Another Maine study (Lavigne 1976) found that 'disturbance of deer by snowmobiles did not cause them to abandon preferred bedding and feeding sites. Snowmobile trails enhanced deer mobility and probably reduced their energy expenditure.'
- ❖ A Montana study (Aasheim 1980) concluded that 'animals accustomed to humans are less affected by snowmobiles than animals in more remote areas.'
- ❖ An Alberta study (Ferguson 1985) regarding the influence of Nordic skiing on distribution of elk and moose determined 'cross-country skiing influenced the general over winter distribution of moose but not of elk. Both species, however, tended to move away from areas near heavily-used trails during the ski season.'

- ❖ A Wyoming study (Ward 1980) fitted elk with heart rate monitors and determined that 'elk responded most strongly to sonic booms, gunshots, and people on foot. Elk seldom reacted when approached by an OSV.'
- ❖ Another Wyoming study (Colescott 1998) found that 'the frequency of snowmobile traffic did not seemingly affect the average percent of moose active, or the numbers of moose present in the study areas.'
- ❖ A study of the effects of snowmobile noise on deer and rabbits (Bollinger 1974) indicated that 'the deer and rabbits were not forced to move out of their normal home ranges, nor did they seek shelter or remain



Yellowstone Tour & Travel photo

stationary with fright while snowmobiles were being operated.'

- ❖ A study of the impact of snowmobile tracks on animal mobility in Maine (Hubbe 1973) found that 'snowmobile tracks were helpful' since they help animals save energy in powder snow.

REINDEER

- ❖ A study in southern Norway (Reimers 2003) determined that, 'overall provocations by skiers and snowmobiles revealed similar behavioral responses.'

CARIBOU

- ❖ According to Natural Resources Canada (cfs.nrcan.gc.ca, 2013), Woodland Caribou do not migrate long distances between



moose-pictures.com photo

seasons like those that inhabit the tundra, and instead stay in the forest, either alone or in small groups. Their main threat is habitat deterioration, either from fragmentation, degradation or loss. Habitat fragmentation can also contribute to an increase in predation.

Caribou range in Canada is heavily used for snowmobiling with no major conflicts. While they appear to co-exist quite well,

snowmobile trail locations need to be sensitive to potential habitat fragmentation.

MOUNTAIN GOATS

- ❖ A Greater Yellowstone Area assessment (Olliff 1999) concluded that 'because mountain goat winter range is inaccessible and precipitous, goats and recreationists are not often coming into conflict.'

Fact...

Numerous scientific studies have concluded that snowmobile activity has no significant effect on wildlife populations; in some situations snowmobile trails have been found to enhance wildlife mobility and help animals save energy in deep powder snow.

Wildlife Impacts...

OTHER WILDLIFE STUDIES

BIGHORN SHEEP

- ❖ A Greater Yellowstone Area assessment (Olliff 1999) concluded that 'skiing, snowmobiling, mountaineering, and snowshoeing will most likely only affect bighorn sheep wintering at higher elevations. The encounters between these recreationists and the bighorns may be infrequent enough that there would be little or no impact to the animals.'

Wikimedia Commons Photo



RABBITS

- ❖ A study of the effects of snowmobile noise on deer and rabbits (Bollinger 1974) concluded 'the research team was unable to detect a severe or negative animal reaction to noise generated by vehicles. Conclusions of the study indicate that the deer and rabbits were not forced to move out of their normal home ranges, nor did they seek shelter or remain stationary with fright while snowmobiles were being operated.'

BIRDS

- ❖ A Washington study (Skagen 1980) found that 'eagles were found to be more sensitive to disturbance while feeding on gravel bars than while perching, and to approaches by humans on foot and concealed than by people in vehicles.'
- ❖ An Iowa study (Sodja 1978) found 'no effects of snowmobiling on pheasant movements or behavior.'

LYNX

- ❖ The Canada Lynx was listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act in
- ❖ The FWS determined many original 2000

2000, at which time a Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) was established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to guide lynx conservation and management. The LCAS was most recently updated in 2013 to address the substantial volume of new information on lynx, hares, and their habitats and distributions that has accumulated from more than a decade of continuing research. Notably, the 2013 LCAS deemed it appropriate to abandon the use of prescriptive measures initially established by the 2000 LCAS.

- ❖ The FWS determined many original 2000



USGS Photo by Kim Keating

LCAS 'risk factors' were actually not negatively affecting the lynx population as a whole. Most important in respect to snowmobile management, after evaluating two studies in particular (Bunnell 2006 and Kolbe 2007), it determined that the best information available did not indicate that compacted snow routes increased competition from other species to levels that adversely impact lynx populations.

Consequently the 2000 LCAS standard which prescribed 'no increase in snow compaction' was determined to be a flawed recreation management premise.

- ❖ The 2013 LCAS takes a new management approach which established two tiers of potential anthropogenic influences related to lynx population dynamics. The first tier of influences includes four factors: climate change, vegetation management, wildland

fire and fragmentation of habitat. Each of these situations can directly affect both snowshoe hare (the primary lynx food source) and lynx population dynamics. Consequently first tier influences will be the prominent drivers for future lynx conservation and management efforts.

- ❖ The second tier of anthropogenic influences include six activities that were previously identified as 'risk factors' in the 2000 LCAS: incidental trapping, recreation, minerals and energy exploration

and development, illegal shooting, and forest/backcountry roads and trails. These six activities have been lowered to being a 'second tier' influence since subsequent research or management experience since 2000 has shown they are not likely to have substantial effects on lynx or their habitat. Consequently, while snowmobiling in lynx habitat should be 'considered' in future land use planning, it is not precluded from occurring (or growing) given that it's proven to not have substantial effects on lynx conservation. Likewise trails have not proven to negatively affect lynx.

In response to a lawsuit filed by the Washington and Wyoming snowmobile associations over a proposal to designate critical lynx habitat in parts of Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Maine and Minnesota – the lead lynx biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service in Helena, Montana said his agency hasn't identified snowmobiling as a problem in lynx habitat. He specifically stated,

"We haven't identified trail maintenance as being a problem for critical habitat, and we don't expect trail maintenance to be a problem for critical habitat. And we don't see new trails as being a problem for critical habitat. So we don't see that there's a basis for those fears."

Wikimedia Commons
Photo by Michael Zahra



Fact...

A lead lynx biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says "the agency doesn't consider snowmobiling to be a problem in lynx habitat."

– S. Sartorius 2009

Wildlife Impacts...

OTHER WILDLIFE STUDIES

SUBNIVEAN (UNDER-THE-SNOW) ANIMALS – SHREWS AND VOLES

A California study for the USDA Forest Service (Wildlife Resource Consultants 2004) represents the most current information regarding the effects of winter recreation on subnivean mammals. Study conclusions include:

- Snowmobiles and cross-country skiing may affect the amount of subnivean space, but both snow depth and vegetation are also strong influences.
- Winter recreationists would be unlikely to affect the early season

formation of subnivean space over woody shrubs or large woody debris. Until there is a deep snow cover, recreationists tend to avoid woody shrubs as they are difficult to move through and logs can be difficult to cross because of breaking into the subnivean space. Later in the season as snow depth increases, recreational use of these sites probably has a minimal effect due to the snow depth.

- Wet meadows at low elevations with low snow depth probably have the most subnivean space. This study's findings

were not as conclusive regarding the effects of recreational use on subnivean space. But there is some suggestion that winter recreation may impact subnivean space at low elevations. Winter recreation probably has the greatest effect at low snow depths.

Earlier Studies Concluded:

- ❖ Skiers may do more damage to the snowpack than snowmobilers because narrow skis cut deeper into the snowpack and because skis have a greater foot load (amount of weight per surface area) in comparison to a snowmobile track. For both ski tracks and

snowmobile tracks, multiple passes over the same track will have more impact than a single pass. (Halfpenny 1989)

- ❖ An early Minnesota study (Jarvinean 1971) suggested there 'may be increased winter mortality of small mammals beneath snowmobile compacted snowfields.' However the report concluded that 'more information is necessary.' Given the dramatic evolution of snowmobiles over the nearly 40 years since this study was conducted, it is likely this report has no tangible relevance today even though it is still cited by snowmobiling critics.

Did you know...

Skiers may do more damage to the snowpack than snowmobiles because narrow skis cut deeper into the snowpack and have a heavier foot load.

– Halfpenny 1989

WOLVERINES

The wolverine is one of the rarest animals in North America, and the least known of large carnivores (Banci 1994). It has emerged as one of the latest species of concern in respect to winter recreation.

- ❖ Recent research on wolverines (Copeland 1996, Copeland et al. 2007, Squires et al. 2007) indicates that wolverines are wide-ranging, inhabit remote areas near timberline, and are sensitive to human disturbance at natal and maternal den sites.
- ❖ Researchers only recently began learning about wolverines' habits and how they may interact with winter recreation. The Greater

Yellowstone wolverine monitoring program (Inman 2007) was the first to document wolverine/winter recreation interaction that observed an active natal den site with snowmobiling occurring in close proximity to the den. This represented some of the first real data documenting wolverine/snowmobile interactions, and the female wolverine was not displaced from its den.

- ❖ Snowmobilers have partnered with researchers to help gain better information about potential winter recreation/wolverine issues. The Central Idaho Wolverine and Winter Recreation Research Study has recreationists using snowmobiles, skis, and

snowshoes carrying small GPS data loggers, so their travels can be compared to travel data from GPS-collared wolverines in the same areas. (Wolverine Foundation 2009-2012)

The project identified large areas that encompass 'wolverine home range.' It then overlaid data derived from GPS tracking of winter recreation uses to estimate that about 14% of the identified wolverine home range area is also documented to have some level of winter recreation use based upon the GPS sampling. While this research is still in progress, early findings have documented a wide range of interaction levels – with some individual wolverines being exposed to relatively high levels of winter recreation use and many others being exposed

to very little recreation use. The levels of recreation use documented thus far across the various wolverine home ranges varies dramatically – from 1% up to 46% of individual areas.

Because these rare animals have such large home ranges, this research is challenged by a small sample size of wolverines and particularly of animals exposed to higher levels of winter recreation across a notable portion of their home range. Consequently future efforts will focus on trying to identify additional study areas which host the elusive wolverine and which also have relatively high levels of winter recreation. (Heinemeyer & Squires 2012)



Sierra Nature Notes photo

FACT:

The first real data documenting wolverine / snowmobile interactions found that the animal was not displaced from its den site. – Inman 2007



Photo by Kim Raap

Snowmobiling...

SOCIAL CONFLICTS

MYTH:

Conflicts require that multiple use management practices be abandoned.

FACTS:

It is important to recognize that 'user conflicts' are really 'social conflicts' based upon the collision of different ideals and expectations – with the degree of conflict ultimately influenced by varying degrees of intolerance for those

who choose differently. Public land managers are not the 'social police' since their missions are primarily grounded upon multiple use management principles. Consequently resolution of social intolerance is an issue outside agency missions. Public lands management should instead focus upon reasonable sharing versus yielding to society's growing intolerance for those who think, act, or recreate differently.

While every acre is certainly not suitable for every use, abundant Wilderness and a growing push for more segregated nonmotorized 'quiet-use' areas continues

to diminish snowmobilers' freedom of choice across public lands. In particular the quiet-use movement has forced snowmobilers out of open terrain like meadows and creek bottoms and into less safe and more avalanche-prone riding areas. While steep areas are attractive to some snowmobilers, the result of losing open terrain close to roads and parking areas is that family-friendly snowmobiling terrain continues to erode away – which is not an acceptable or desired condition. More emphasis must be placed on ensuring snowmobiling areas are available close to parking areas for families and novice riders.

Divvying up public lands often unnecessarily and inappropriately pits user groups against one another – and doesn't solve the root issue of growing intolerance within our society. Instead, more emphasis should be placed on requiring all user groups to 'play together in the sandbox.'

Increased 'demand' doesn't always correlate to not having an 'adequate supply' of nonmotorized quiet-use areas. All too often this position is pushed as a social/moral change agenda versus being based upon factual on-the-ground needs. Any thoughts of eliminating multiple use should first ensure nonmotorized users are fully utilizing existing 'exclusive use' nonmotorized areas since they can already travel everywhere motorized recreationists are allowed if they so choose.

Unfortunately even though they essentially already 'have it all,' groups continue trying to close more areas to snowmobiling while pushing their narrow agendas. Consequently a local 'needs assessment' (and not a 'wants assessment') should be conducted in targeted areas before considering any reallocation of lands for winter recreational uses.

MYTH:

Separating uses is always the best way to manage winter recreation on public lands.

FACTS:

Separating uses (segregation) is a poor option for managing public lands. It is an extremely polarizing premise that often leads to long-term ill-will and decreased support for agencies. Consequently land managers should be cautious about embracing it as a suitable or sustainable management principle.

Segregation has proven to be poor public policy for this country in many respects. A synonym for the word 'segregation' is discrimination. Therefore it is unlikely that 'segregating recreational users' based upon motorized and nonmotorized uses – as is often purported to be a 'fix' for public lands conflicts – will be deemed any more appropriate or successful when evaluated over the long-term.

It is interesting that federal agencies preface land use planning documents with a statement like what is used by the Forest Service:

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program."

Recreation conflict – which is really social conflict – is often addressed at length in these land use plans. Since many social conflicts are in reality connected to differences in political beliefs, age, sex, religion, and/or race – and persons with disabilities and the elderly are more dependent upon motorized vehicles for their recreational outings than younger or more able-bodied persons – it would seem that 'segregating' recreational users based upon their class of use would be a violation of this anti-discrimination standard that prefaces all planning.

MYTH:

Pristine untracked terrain for skiers and snowshoers is rapidly disappearing under the tracks of snowmobiles.

FACTS:

Reality is that untracked terrain is important to motorized and nonmotorized winter recreationists alike – so education directed at both groups as to how to 'share the powder' is likely to gain more ground than enacting large closures to snowmobiling under the pretense of 'saving powder.'

Complaints that 'snowmobilers traveling freely are tracking up the landscape' are illogical since the vast majority of

skiers and snowshoers never get beyond a '3- to 5-mile radius' from where they park their car – so what difference does it really make if lands beyond that zone are tracked up or not? Efforts to provide untracked terrain for skiers are important but should be focused only close to their access areas. At the same time experience shows these set-asides don't really solve all conflicts because it often just shifts rifts to being within like user groups (skiers complaining about skiers).

For nonmotorized and motorized recreationists alike the question really becomes 'who gets to track up the terrain first?' The answer is that this is not an agency's issue to solve – it's rather a case of 'the early bird gets the worm' (powder) – and everyone else gets the leftovers until the cycle repeats itself after the next snowfall.



Photo by Kim Raap

Snowmobiling...

PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE USE WINTER RECREATION

MYTH:

Snowmobiling creates conflicts, so it is best managed by reducing or eliminating snowmobile access on public lands.

FACTS:

Public land managers are sometimes reluctant to expand or even continue snowmobiling access due to concerns about 'conflicts' between winter recreationists. However oftentimes these situations can be addressed with better multiple-use management rather than by closing areas to snowmobiling.

Since trailheads and parking areas are where

conflicts between snowmobilers and nonmotorized winter recreationists most typically begin – if they are going to occur – addressing conflicts at their origin is the single best management tool for land managers and recreationists to consider.

Parking is truly the 'root stressor' for winter recreation. While a nonmotorized family of four can easily park their vehicle in about 20 feet or less, a motorized family of four needs close to 60 feet of room to park their 4-place trailer and

tow vehicle. Plus they need extra room for loading and unloading their snowmobiles, as well as room to pull in and out with their extended length vehicle. And some snowmobilers travel with even longer trailers – for six or more snowmobiles – which increases their needs for adequate parking and maneuverability even more.

The result is that, if parking is not designed and managed well, winter recreationists (motorized and nonmotorized alike) can begin to become

stressed the minute they turn into poor parking areas. And their stress and 'conflict' can build from that point on, for the remainder of their outing, due to their initial hassle getting parked.

Winter 'conflicts' oftentimes are really just a need for 'more and better winter parking,' which typically requires project-specific NEPA analysis to address. This type of conflict can also sometimes be addressed by simply separating uses for only a short distance out of trailhead areas.

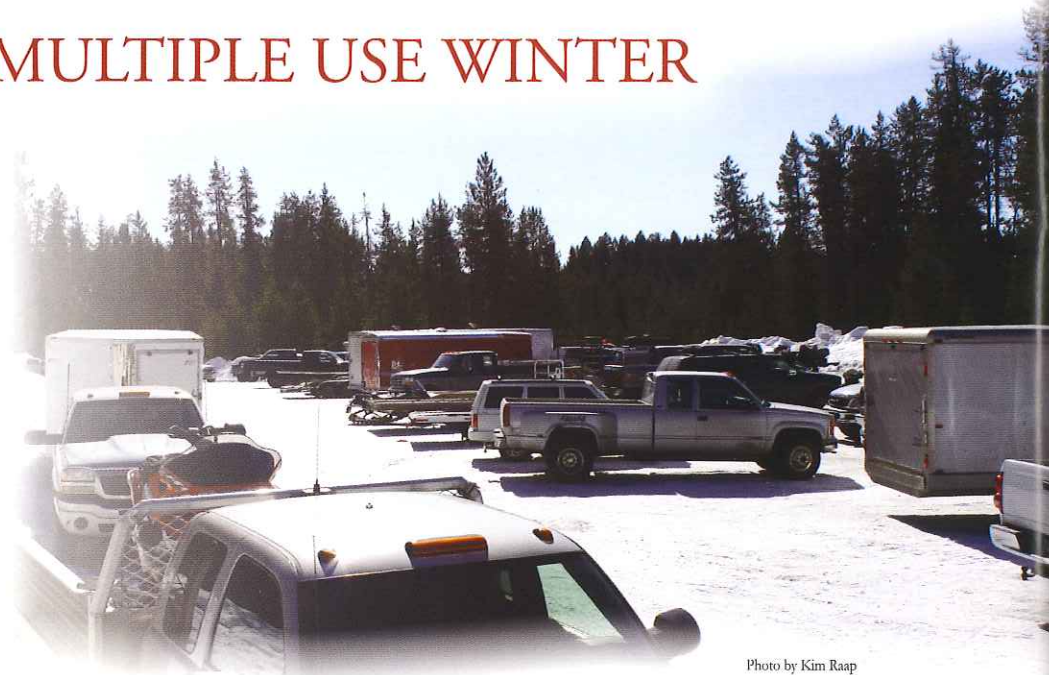


Photo by Kim Raap

THE FOLLOWING PLANNING PRINCIPLES CAN BE INSTRUMENTAL TOWARD ADDRESSING WINTER CONFLICT ISSUES WHERE THEY MOST OFTEN ORIGINATE – IN THE PARKING AREAS:

- ❖ When space allows, it can be beneficial to provide separate parking areas for motorized and nonmotorized recreationists to eliminate interaction between the groups while loading and unloading. When this is done, good on-the-ground signing is critically important to help guide recreationists to the staging area appropriate for their recreation choice. If possible, egress and ingress routes should also have some degree of separation between user groups to minimize interaction versus immediately placing them together in the same areas or onto the same trail routes.
- ❖ If available space does not allow for separate parking areas, staging areas should be zoned for nonmotorized and motorized parking areas. Again, good on-the-ground signing is critical to help guide recreationists to their designated parking zones.
- ❖ When designing and/or zoning winter parking and staging areas, it is critical to remember that the space required for maneuvering, parking, and unloading vehicles with trailers is significantly more than the space required by most nonmotorized users – so parking zones should be arranged and allocated accordingly.
- ❖ If possible, have motorized and nonmotorized egress/ingress routes depart from separate sections of parking areas, correlating to the separate parking zones. If topography or ultimate destinations for

both groups make it necessary to depart staging areas from the same location, still designate separate motorized and nonmotorized routes and delineate them with on-the-ground snow poles and signing – and enforce it.

- ❖ If feasible, it is often advantageous to route nonmotorized users along or slightly into the tree line (if adjacent to open areas), while simultaneously routing snowmobile traffic either along the opposite side of openings or through the middle of open areas. If access routes must be located entirely within woods, consider cutting two trail routes with a degree of separation between them if possible.

- ❖ When designing or zoning staging areas for snowmobilers, it is important to recognize the need for snowmobile 'warm-up' areas close to parking areas. Oftentimes, older snowmobiles that have been hauled any distance on trailers tend to have their carburetors 'load-up' (flood), which requires that the machines be run a bit to clear their engines. While newer sleds with fuel injection have fewer problems with this, cold weather conditions can still create needs to warm up all snowmobiles. It is therefore important to have either open areas or extra trail space adjacent to parking areas so snowmobiles can be properly 'warmed up' prior to groups departing.

Did you know...

Poor parking is the root stressor for winter recreation.



Snowmobiling...

PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE USE WINTER RECREATION

This can cause difficulties and confusion if travel planning is conducted simultaneously due to substantively different impacts. Therefore

summer and winter travel planning is generally the most successful when conducted separately since snow is a temporary medium and winter tracks over snow disappear from the landscape.

While trails are important to get from one place to another, they are not the only focus of snowmobiling activities in many areas of the country; consequently both on- and off-trail opportunities are very important. This is distinctly different from summer motorized travel planning.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN CONDUCTING WINTER TRAVEL PLANNING

Motorized winter recreation generally encompasses large areas and its participants are often quite mobile. By comparison most nonmotorized over-snow recreation takes place within 3 to 5 miles of trailheads. An exception is that a growing number of nonmotorized recreationists are using snowmobiles to access distant areas for backcountry skiing or snowboarding.

Modification of current winter travel management plans should be undertaken only when changing resource issues clearly indicate that adjustments are needed. Any modifications should consider both motorized and nonmotorized activities, examining how adequately existing plans are meeting public needs. Existing closures should be re-evaluated to see if

they are still serving the public interests and are still needed, and whether the mix of uses should be modified in view of changing demands and/or resource issues.

It is also important to assure a level playing field for both motorized and nonmotorized activities when approaching winter recreation management. If wildlife issues are driving area closures, it is likely that all forms of winter recreation may need to be excluded. While animals can be stressed by all human activities, they are often more likely to be stressed by nonmotorized recreationists since their 'more quiet' approach can resemble predator behaviors and ultimately elicit threat responses from animals.

The issue of managing 'conflict' must work both ways since – if those asserting conflict are regularly rewarded at the expense of other users – their incentive to continually push conflict as an issue becomes

more appealing and can essentially become an unending enterprise. All too often these types of conflicts are inappropriately elevated to decision-determining levels when the issues are actually very minor or isolated. When considering allocating exclusive use for one group or another, all uses should stand equal chances to be excluded. For example, if skiers insist that snowmobiling is incompatible with their desires, they should in turn be excluded from areas open to snowmobiling; otherwise the unending conflict enterprise continues to repeat itself.

Past winter travel management has largely allowed nonmotorized users to have their exclusive areas, plus free and unfettered access to all snowmobile areas – so the question has typically been 'how much more area should the motorized

community give up'. This simply is not a satisfactory approach to winter travel planning; rather all users should have something to win or lose to help reach more effective and equitable compromises.

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES FOR WINTER TRAVEL PLANNING:

- ❖ Evaluate the unit's entire land base – including areas currently closed to specific uses – to determine which areas are currently suitable or unsuitable for various winter recreation activities. While Congressionally-designated Wilderness is not available for motorized recreation, it is exclusively available for nonmotorized recreation and should be considered as such in determining the mix of uses. When performing this evaluation, consider new information, new science, and

changes resulting from natural forces such as wildfires, diseases or other factors which may have changed the landscape.

- ❖ Determine – with the assistance of various user publics: where do people recreate on the public lands unit, and where would they go if given the opportunity to do so; what are the primary access locations and trails; where are the current loop opportunities, and where can new ones be developed; where are the play areas; what parking and trailheads are currently available, and what new ones

are needed; and what attributes of the winter experience are truly important to the different user groups.

- ❖ Evaluate the amount of use taking place currently by various user groups and examine likely trends in future demands for each.
- ❖ Use collaborative efforts between agencies and all user groups with a stake in the outcome early in the planning process. This collaboration should be used to help develop formal alternatives or proposals which the agency can duly consider during its planning analysis.



ISMA photo

MYTH:

Summer and winter travel planning is very similar and is best conducted simultaneously to address conflicts.

FACTS:

It is important to recognize there are significant differences between summer and winter motorized activities.



Photo by Shad Hamilton

Did you know...

A growing number of nonmotorized recreationists are using snowmobiles to access distant areas for backcountry skiing or snowboarding.

Snowmobiling...

PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE USE WINTER RECREATION

❖ Fully evaluate potential economic impacts of various proposals on surrounding counties, communities, and the region.

❖ Use adaptive management to ensure decisions can be adjusted in the future in response to changing conditions, such as new science, new trends, or large fires that modify native vegetation and wildlife habitats.

❖ Consider both direct and indirect management actions to help manage winter visitor use. This may include actions such as: trail grooming, trailhead snow removal, developing or expanding existing parking areas, providing loop opportunities, establishing access routes from

communities, construction of warming huts, and/or placement of restroom facilities.

❖ Consider how improvements are to be funded and maintained. Snowmobiling largely pays its own way via gas taxes and registrations or trail use fees. Evaluate how other winter users can also help pay their way for facilities they share with motorized users or for services such as ski trail grooming that may have historically been provided solely by agency funds.

❖ All restricted areas should be evaluated periodically to ensure clear justification

remains for the restriction. Closure areas should be manageable, enforceable, and easily recognized on the ground.

❖ Designated linear travel routes, through restricted areas that provide access to open use areas beyond the restriction, should be considered and accommodated whenever possible.

❖ The final step in travel planning should be development of detailed yet user-friendly maps that clearly identify boundaries of areas appropriate for over-snow vehicle travel,

along with areas designated for only nonmotorized uses.

❖ Once travel planning is completed, agencies should continue to work closely with user groups to ensure implementation of the management plan is working as intended. They can provide valuable assistance with plan implementation, including the maintenance and construction of facilities, trails, parking lots, and signage, along with providing education/enforcement, maps and informational brochures.



Photo by Kim Raap

MYTH:

There should be substantially more miles of groomed trails allocated for cross-country skiing since it is a more popular winter activity.

FACTS:

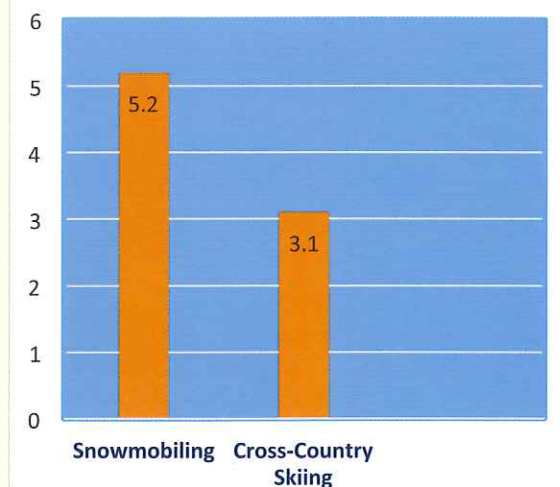
The USDA Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) program provides the best available information regarding the relative popularity and participation levels for snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. This long-term monitoring shows that overall participation levels are actually quite similar and continually fluctuate due to varying snow conditions across the country.

NVUM monitoring shows that snowmobilers spend

an average of 4.8 to 5.2 hours per recreation visit engaged in snowmobiling, while cross-country skiers spend an average of only 2.6 to 3.1 hours skiing per visit. Consequently, even though the popularity of the two activities may be similar, their needs for space are actually quite different. Since snowmobilers spend 40% to 45% more time on the snow during an outing, it is important to recognize when planning for winter trails and overall winter access that snowmobilers travel much further and subsequently require significantly more miles of trail for their day trips than what nonmotorized recreationists do.

Numerous state studies have shown that snowmobilers typically ride 60 to 120 miles per day in the West, and up to 100 to 200 miles per day in the rest of the country. In comparison research has shown cross-country skiers typically travel no more than a 3- to 5-mile

Average Hours Spent per trip



radius from where they park, resulting in no more than five to ten miles being traveled during an entire outing.

It is important to recognize there is a much greater actual need for snowmobile trail grooming than there is for ski trail grooming. Since snowmobile traffic has a tendency to create heavy moguls on trails, it requires much more frequent trail grooming to help keep them smooth and safe. Conversely cross-country skiing doesn't create this same heavy moguling effect.

The other extremely important factor to recognize is that a large number of cross-country skiers and snowshoers actually do not desire (or require) groomed trails for their outings. Since the purpose of snowshoes in particular is to provide flotation for travel across the top of uncompacted snow, having groomed trails is often deemed to be undesirable.



Photo by Kim Raap

MYTH:
The designation 'multi-use' is a misnomer and is rather de facto 'single use motorized' because the opportunity for human-powered recreation experiences are often lost on lands designated as multi-use since those lands are often dominated by motorized use.

FACTS:
 Concerns about multi-use and single-use can cut

both ways. Snowmobilers usually pay 100% of the cost to groom their trails and then allow them to be used for other 'multi-uses' like cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding or winter biking. So if it were not for the generosity of snowmobilers allowing the multiple-use of trails they fund, there would often be no groomed trail opportunities for nonmotorized recreationists.

On the other hand, as nonmotorized trail users continually try to whittle away at snowmobiling access with more closures to motorized uses, a growing number of snowmobilers are starting to advocate for single-use (snowmobiles-only)

Snowmobiling...

PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE USE WINTER RECREATION

on groomed snowmobile trails. So a prime issue for continued multi-use is self-generated funding – or the lack thereof in respect to nonmotorized.

The reality is that closures to snowmobiling which extend farther than a 3- to 5-mile radius from plowed access areas – and are in non-Wilderness settings – are for all intents and purposes unnecessarily closed to all uses since they are too remote to be accessed by most cross-country skiers and snowshoers. The focus for nonmotorized use areas should therefore be within zones that are close to parking areas. Beyond those zones multiple use – or even 'domination' by snowmobiles – should be acceptable since no one else (or very few) will likely be there.

MYTH:
Substantially large areas should be closed to snowmobiles to create more areas for nonmotorized winter recreationists in every national forest.

FACTS:
 Those pushing this agenda are inappropriately twisting the truth and applying global statistics to issues that are best considered at local landscape levels. While there are always localized situations where motorized and nonmotorized recreationists can benefit from working better together to resolve concerns, the situation on

national forest lands is not as bleak or as one-sided as is often portrayed.

There are no credible reasons to support wholesale and widespread additional closures to snowmobiles on national forest lands; it simply is not justified or needed since land management plans have already zoned areas as 'open' or 'closed' to motorized recreation. Rather solutions should start by addressing conflict issues with plowed winter parking and dispersal of uses from trailheads. Poor parking is truly the root of most all 'real' versus 'contrived' conflicts and should receive the highest attention during winter planning processes.

In some cases access and uses may be able to be separated, but it will more likely need to continue being shared. There is no disagreement that nonmotorized users need areas designated for them close to parking. However 'cherry stem' routes may also need to be provided to move snowmobilers through and beyond nonmotorized zones – so that de facto 'no-use zones' are not unnecessarily created.

A growing number of skiers and snowboarders are also using snowmobiles to access backcountry areas. These hybrid users represent multiple use principles at their best and are one more reason why large blocks of forests should not be closed off to motorized access. The bottom line is that public lands are simply best managed for multiple uses.

MYTH:
There is disparity in the total miles of groomed trails provided on Forest Service lands, particularly in the West where some complain there are over 18,000 miles of groomed snowmobile trails and only 1,700 miles of groomed 'nonmotorized-use-only' trails.

FACTS:
 First and foremost, there are over 18,000 miles of groomed snowmobile

trails on national forests in the West – and 135,000 miles of snowmobile trails nationwide – only because snowmobilers have chosen to tax themselves through state snowmobile registrations, user fees, and gasoline taxes they pay to fund the grooming of these trails. And nearly all of these 18,000 miles of groomed trails in the West (and the vast majority of the 135,000 miles across the country, depending upon landowner permission) are open to all winter nonmotorized recreation uses.

In no instance is the Forest Service unilaterally paying for the grooming of snowmobile trails with Forest Service funds. In contrast, the grooming that occurs on the majority of the 1,700 miles of nonmotorized trails on these forests is

either funded directly by the Forest Service or is subsidized with state Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant funds – which are derived from the federal fuel tax paid on fuel used in snowmobiles, ATVs, off-road motorcycles and light duty trucks used off-road; all RTP funds are from motorized users. If there is an inequity it is that nonmotorized winter recreationists need to bring their own funding to the table, as the snowmobilers have done, if they want more miles of groomed trails.

Second, a large percentage of cross-country skiers and snowshoers do not desire nor require groomed trails for their backcountry recreational experience. Thus the alleged disparity is misconstrued and overstated.

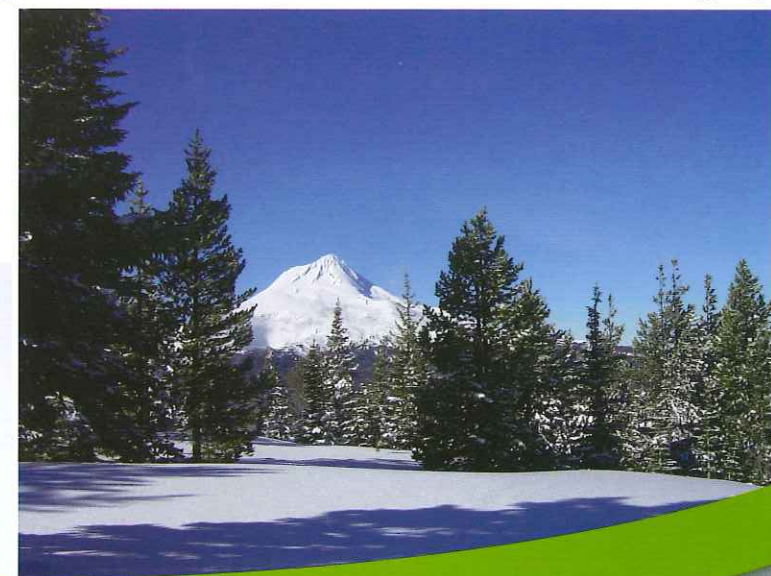


Photo by John Vogel

Snowmobiling...

PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE USE WINTER RECREATION



ISMA photo

Third, snowmobilers require significantly more miles of trail for typical day outings than what nonmotorized recreationists do. Numerous research studies have found that the average distance traveled by snowmobilers in a day ranges from 60 to 120 miles in the West, and is around 100 to 200 miles per day in the Midwest or New England. In comparison, cross-country skiers and snowshoers generally state they are hard pressed to cover more than five to ten miles on ungroomed snow in a day's time. Additionally,

national forest planners commonly use a '3-mile radius (6-mile round trip) from a trailhead' as the distance traveled 'by the average skier or snowshoer' during a typical day trip.

Thus snowmobilers require 6 to 24 times more miles of trail and open riding area than what cross-country skiers and snowshoers do for an 'average' daily outing. Therefore, this 10 to 1 ratio is not an inequality but rather what is needed to provide a reasonable range of opportunities for snowmobiling.

MYTH:
70% (81 million acres) of USDA Forest Service lands in the western continental U.S. are open to snowmobiles.

FACTS:
While up to 81 million acres of forest lands may technically be 'open to snowmobiles,' a significant amount of these acres often do not either have enough snow cover to support snowmobile use, or are too heavily timbered or too steep to be accessible by snowmobiles.

Therefore these lands, while technically 'open,' are often classified as 'unsuitable' or 'not practical' for snowmobiling in agency land use planning processes.

While the exact number of total 'unsuitable' or 'not practical' acres on national forests is unknown, it is a substantive portion which generally exceeds at least 25 to 50 percent of individual forest lands. At least 10 percent (over 8 million acres) of western forest lands are located on the fringe of the Snowbelt and host zero miles of snowmobile trails.

Some forests have determined through travel planning processes that their total 'suitable'

snowmobiling acres are really quite minimal. For example, the White River National Forest in Colorado – a heavy snow area extremely popular for all winter sports – determined only 7.3% of its lands (168,000 acres out of a total of 2.3 million acres) were 'practical' for snowmobiling due to a combination of heavily forested areas and extremely steep topography (WRNF Travel Management Plan and Draft EIS, 2006). This scenario is common across the West.

MYTH:
Only 30% (35 million acres) of USDA Forest Service lands in the western continental U.S. are managed as 'nonmotorized' recreation areas.

FACTS:
Nearly 100% of National Forest lands are managed as open to all nonmotorized winter recreation uses. The only exceptions are small areas where crucial wildlife winter range or other sensitive habitats have been closed to all human

presence. Otherwise nonmotorized recreation can – and does – occur everywhere.

MYTH:
More areas should be closed to motorized uses since about two-thirds of the '35 million acres' managed as nonmotorized recreation areas in the West lie within designated Wilderness areas – so they shouldn't really count since they are often inaccessible to skiers and snowshoers

given long distances from plowed roads and trailheads to reach many of them.

FACTS:

Just because some Wilderness areas may not be easily accessible due to their remoteness does not warrant advocating for more areas to be closed to snowmobiling. Motorized access has already been removed from Wilderness areas. Therefore nonmotorized recreationists should work with land managers to make better use of lands they already have exclusive use of – versus being quick to say 'we can't access them easily so we want other (closer) areas set aside for us.'

To a large degree, all lands greater than a three-mile radius from plowed parking areas are equally 'inaccessible' to nonmotorized uses irrespective as to whether they are within designated Wilderness areas or not – since they would be too far for the average person to access under human-power.

This position should be resisted since it is a pretense to push principle-based set-asides (which realistically would be used by none or very few) versus set-asides that are logical and practical for nonmotorized recreational access, i.e. within three miles of a trailhead.

Photo by Kim Raap



Twelve Principles

FOR MINIMIZING CONFLICTS ON MULTIPLE USE TRAILS

These 'Twelve Principles' are recommendations from Conflicts on Multiple Use Trails: Synthesis of the Literature and State of the Practice, written by Roger Moore (1994). The American Council of Snowmobile Associations supports them as a way to maximize winter recreation opportunities while simultaneously managing public and private lands to minimize real conflicts.

1. RECOGNIZE CONFLICTS AS GOAL INTERFERENCE

Do not treat conflict as an inherent incompatibility among different trail activities, but rather as goal interference attributed to another's behavior.

2. PROVIDE ADEQUATE TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES

Offer adequate trail mileage and provide opportunities for a variety of trail experiences.

This will help reduce congestion and allow users to choose the conditions that are best suited to the experience they desire.

3. MINIMIZE NUMBER OF CONTACTS IN PROBLEM AREAS

Each contact among trail users has the potential to result in conflict. So, as a general rule, reduce the number of user contacts whenever possible. This is especially true in congested areas and at trailheads.

4. INVOLVE USERS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

Identify the present and likely future users of each trail and involve them in the process of avoiding and resolving conflicts as early as possible, preferably before conflicts occur.

5. UNDERSTAND USER NEEDS

Determine the motivations, desired experiences, norms, setting preferences, and other needs of the present and likely future users of each trail. The 'customer' information is critical for anticipating and managing conflicts.

6. IDENTIFY THE ACTUAL SOURCES OF CONFLICTS

Help users to identify the specific tangible causes of any conflicts they are experiencing. In other words, get beyond emotions and stereotypes as quickly as possible, and get to the roots of any problems that exist.

7. WORK WITH AFFECTED USERS

Work with all parties involved to reach mutually agreeable solutions to these specific issues. Users who are not involved as part of the solution are more likely to be part of the problem now and in the future.

8. PROMOTE TRAIL ETIQUETTE

Minimize the possibility that any particular trail contact will result in conflict by aggressively promoting responsible trail behavior.

9. ENCOURAGE POSITIVE INTERACTION AMONG DIFFERENT USERS

Trail users are usually not as different from one another as they believe. Providing positive

interactions both on and off the trail will help break down barriers and stereotypes, and build understanding, goodwill, and cooperation.

10. FAVOR 'LIGHT-HANDED MANAGEMENT'

Use the most 'light-handed approaches' that will achieve objectives. This is essential in order to provide the freedom of choice and natural environments that are so important to trail-based recreation. Intrusive design and coercive management are not compatible with high-quality experiences.

11. PLAN AND ACT LOCALLY

Whenever possible, address issues regarding multiple use trails at the local level. This allows better flexibility for addressing difficult issues on a case-by-case basis.

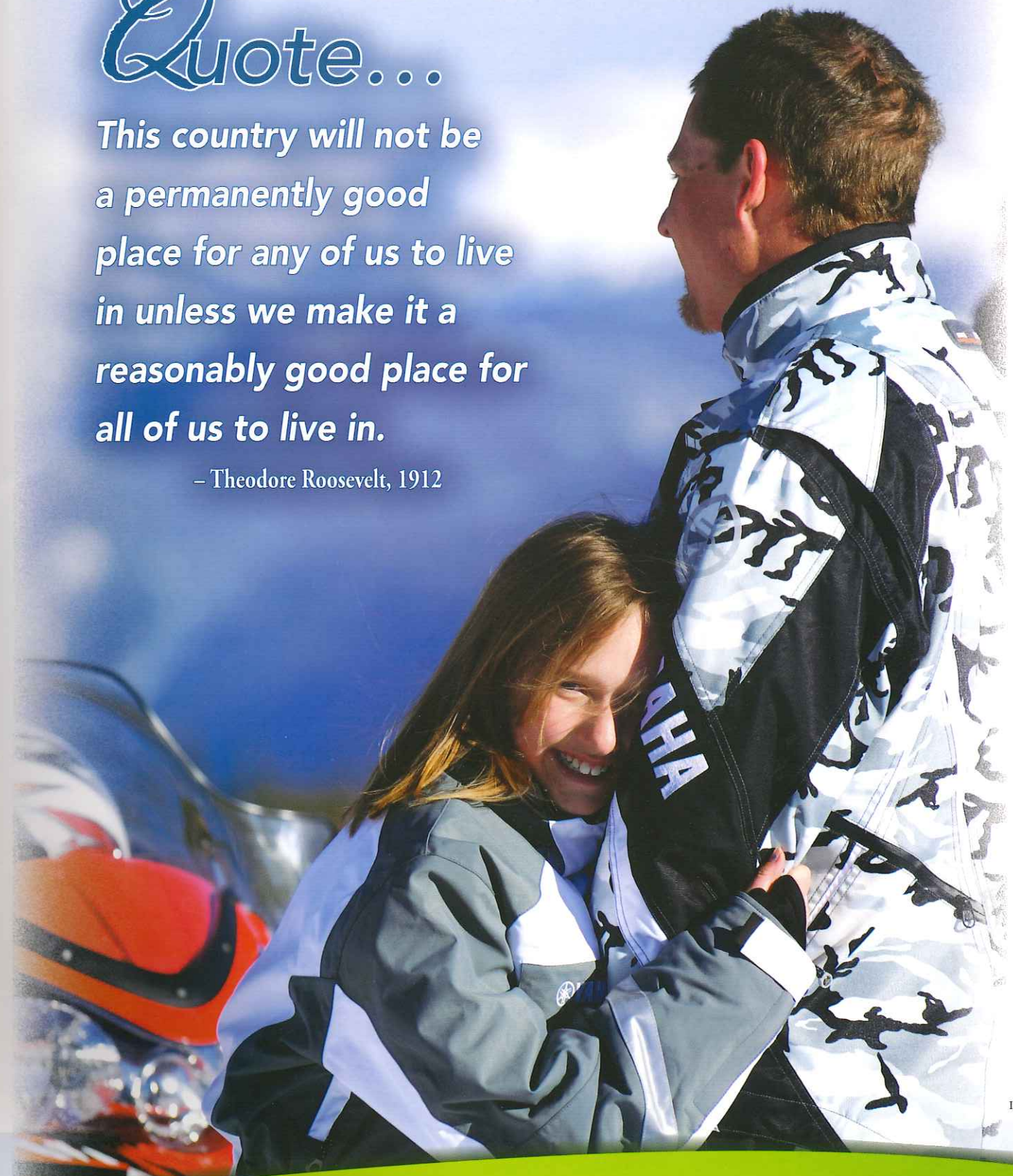
12. MONITOR PROGRESS

Monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the decisions made and programs implemented.

Quote...

This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in.

– Theodore Roosevelt, 1912



ISMA photo



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