

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

Testimony of Teri Manning, President Wyoming State Snowmobile Association Given before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands of the U. S. House Committee on Resources Representative James V. Hansen, Chairman Given at the House Hearing held in Washington, D.C., May 25, 2000

Mr. Chairman, Committee members and guests, Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

My name is Teri Manning. I am the President of the Wyoming State Snowmobile Association. My home is Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the southern gateway to Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park.

My husband, our three children, my husband's parents, and I moved to Jackson in 1972, some 28 years ago, from the East Coast. We wanted a different lifestyle in which to raise our family. We started our family business and established our roots in the community. I began snowmobiling 28 years ago with my husband and our children. We are still riding, but with our grandchildren now.

As President of the Wyoming State Snowmobile Association I represent organized snowmobiling in the State of Wyoming. There are approximately 18,000 registered snowmobiles and 23 clubs in Wyoming. There are over 2,500 snowmobile clubs across the United States. Locally I belong the Jackson Hole Snow Devils. I have volunteered in many facets of this club from Secretary/Treasurer to assistant tech director at the World Championship Snowmobile Hill Climb. There are over 150 members ranging in age from three months to 77+ years young. Many members have been enjoying snowmobiling since its inception and now their children and their childrens' children enjoy snowmobiling as a recreation. Contrary to popular belief I am representative of the average snowmobiler. I am a baby boomer and enjoy spending a day of leisure in the winter on a snowmobile. I also snowshoe and cross country ski.

Because my husband and I are fortunate enough to live in Jackson Hole, we have visitors throughout the year. Our winter visitors always want to include a snowmobile trip through Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone is a unique experience in the summer months, but unless you have actually been there in the winter you can't imagine how spectacular it is. Grand Teton and Yellowstone are beyond compare in my estimation and they are in my backyard. Now my access is threatened. Access that we have enjoyed for nearly 30 years now is proposed to be banned or restricted. Restricted to the point of severely limiting access to the average American citizen.

Current access allows all Americans to enjoy "their" Park. Winter access is now available by snowmobile, snowcoach and cross-country skiing. The average visitation over the last seven years clearly indicates the access of choice is snowmobiling. That visitation was approximately 80,000 snowmobiles, 10,000

snowcoach visitors and a few hundred cross-country skiers. According to the statistics published by the National Park Service, Yellowstone saw 14,408 Snowmobile visitors in December 1998. This can be compared to the 80 cross-country skiers visitors noted for the same period. The year continued in a like manner with 23,395 snowmobile visitors compared to 193 cross country skier visitors in January 1999, 28,204 snowmobile visitors compared with 155 cross country skier visitors in February 1999, and 10,264 snowmobile visitors compared with 84 cross country skier visitors in March 1999. Snowcoach visitation is stronger but still does not compare, with 2,591 visitors in December 1998, 3,054 visitors in January 1999, 3,610 visitors in February of 1999, and 1524 visitors in March of 1999. Yet snowmobiling, the mode most popular and easily accessible by the average American, is about to be banned by executive order. Using these figures Yellowstone National Park, by banning snowmobile entrance into the park, will lose \$1.2 million dollars in gate entry revenues not to mention any amounts spent by the visitors in the park for food, gas, and other necessities. This does not even begin to consider the figures that the surrounding gateway communities will lose in supporting business to this industry.

Yellowstone National Park is Wyoming's top tourist draw. For Jackson, Dubois, Cody and virtually all communities in Wyoming, winter access is crucial to our survival. 48% of Wyoming is comprised of Federal lands. Wyoming is the 9th largest state in the USA and the least populated. An economic study by the University of Wyoming completed in 1995, "Wyoming Snowmobiling Assessment", conducted by David Taylor and Robert Fletcher of the University of Wyoming's Agriculture Department, indicated that snowmobiling generated \$170 million in tax revenues. For our sparsely populated state, we are currently at 453,388 people, this is a tremendous amount and that was 5 years ago. Snowmobiling has boomed in popularity in the last 5 years. This number is indicative of both locals and visitors. Snowmobilers generate money needed to build trails, parking lots and maintenance, and to pay the wages of the park rangers stationed in Yellowstone during the winter months.

Snowmobilers have always paid their own way. In Wyoming we have always been self-supporting. Funding to support our trails program are raised by registration fees, gas taxes and volunteer efforts. We work closely with our legislators. The Wyoming State Snowmobile Association receives no federal grant money in support for any of its activities.

This ban, if allowed, will turn Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks into "elitist's" Parks, available only to those who are physically capable to cross country ski or snow shoe the great distances to reach park services or to those who can afford the high cost of snow coach service in the parks. Is that what these parks were created to be? According to the official web page for Yellowstone national park, the park was created "[b]y Act of Congress on March 1, 1872" and "was 'dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people' and 'for the preservation from injury or spoilation, of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders... and their retention in the natural condition.'" Did congress in 1872 mean for the park to be available for only some people, or was is that fine body's intention that the park be available to all the people? Even, especially, those who would be incapable to see these natural wonders any other way than by motorized transportation.

Historically Yellowstone opened officially for winter use in 1972. This was the first year of groomed trails. However locals were riding the park all the way back to the early 1960s. At that time the roads were unplowed from Colter Bay in Grand Teton National Park. This adds another 18 miles to the trip into Old Faithful. There were no services so they hauled food, fuel and spare parts on their journey to West Yellowstone, 60 miles past Old Faithful. Total time....12 to 16 hours. Snowmobile guides play the roll of unofficial ambassadors to the many novice snowmobilers. They have the chance to educate the first time

visitor on the history, geology and wildlife they love so well.

Visitors come from all walks of life and from all over the world. People come to the park specifically to see the park or because it is an alternative to other vacation activities available in the area. Typically snowmobile guides lead skiers, drawn to the park as an alternative to skiing in Jackson's resorts, on excursions through the park. The other communities surrounding the park, Cody, Dubois, and West Yellowstone MT derive their entire winter tourism industry from winter snowmobile visitation.

The distance from Jackson to the South entrance to YNP is 55 miles. From the south entrance to Old Faithful, the most popular site and the ONLY place with winter services, is 42 additional miles. How many individuals are capable of cross-country skiing that far? Of course then you have to make the return trip. That makes a round trip of 84 miles to visit Old Faithful in the winter. What about the elderly or physically challenged? What about our children? At the most crucial time in our history for the family unit we are denying their access and opportunity to recreate in the most majestic and beautiful parks. Further, would a ban of motorized access to the park be in compliance with Congress' intentions as evidenced by the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Yellowstone National Park covers an area of 2.2 MILLION acres. Snowmobiles have always been restricted to the roadways. Our access is 0.02%. Two one-hundredths of One percent of Yellowstone. This is contrary to the belief that anywhere you look, even the hillsides, are covered by snowmobiles. That is patently untrue. Non-motorized users have access to the remaining 98.98% of Yellowstone. Non-Motorized users have minimal restrictions beyond registering. Is it unreasonable for us to want to maintain our .02% of winter access?

Snowmobilers are also very generous and caring. They have always been very charitable. Across the country over \$3,000,000 was raised this last year for charities like Easter Seals, MS, Cancer, Hospice, Special Olympics to name a few. In Wyoming alone over \$25,000 was raised. That is considerable for our "small" state.

Recreation is not the only use for snowmobiles. Search and rescue of lost individuals are a natural use for snowmobiles. Snowmobiles allow for fast access to victims. There are few modes of winter transportation that are as dependable as snowmobiles. Today's technology has allowed snowmobiles to withstand the extreme temperatures and conditions of a western winter. They are dependable in such extremes as sub zero temperatures and deep snow. They are not antiquated as anti-snowmobilers would have you believe. Vast strides in creating cleaner quieter snowmobiles are being made as were demonstrated in YNP last winter. We are aware of the possibility of limiting the number to a manageable carrying capacity and are willing to live with yet another restriction along with the need to use the technology necessary for the cleaner and quieter machines.

As snowmobilers we enjoy the incredible beauty of winter. We choose to live in areas like Yellowstone country because we WANT to not because we have to. Our winters range from mid October until mid April on average. In the mountains snow pack can be as deep as 1000 inches! In order to enjoy this extended winter season the choices of recreation include snowmobiles, skiing, snowshoeing, and snowboarding. No single use should be banned! We can all share our public lands.

On behalf of the snowmobiling community across the nation, please help us maintain access to public lands for all users.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, Thank You. I appreciate the opportunity to share my views and will be happy to try to answer any questions.

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