

Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee

Project Completion Report

FY 2008

Unit: Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson and Buffalo Ranger Districts
Project Name: Winter Use Monitoring (and Patrol Program)
Project Description: Monitor winter recreation use to assess trends including trends associated with snowmobile use on the National Forests. Provide field presence to promote responsible use, enforce regulations, and assist visitors.
GYCC Funding Received: \$6,000 Partner Funding/In-Kind Received: Key partners included Wyoming State Trails (approximately \$20,000 contribution for patrol and monitoring), a coalition of groups lead by the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance for the “Don’t Poach the Powder” media campaign (newspaper, radio, brochure), PAWS, an organization dedicated to responsible pet ownership (media campaign regarding dogs and wildlife – “Tails of Success” and “Don’t Be the One Who Ruins it for the Many”), and Friends of Pathways (approximately \$10,000 contribution for Teton Pass Ambassador program).
Status of the Project: Funding was used to purchase a trail counter for monitoring, pay for installation and data collection, and compile reports from all patrol personnel
Products that can be shared across the GYA: (GIS data layers, maps, new protocols and methods) Educational products developed for the “Don’t Poach the Powder” campaign (see attached brochure) Educational products developed to promote responsible dog ownership and compliance with leash requirements (see attached newspaper notice) Teton Pass Ambassador program (see attached magazine article)
Project results: (Information worth sharing on methods, results, partnerships, etc) The winter of 2007-2008 was highlighted by exceptional snow (the season ended with over 600” of snow recorded). This made for happy skiers and snowmobilers but the deep snow was tough for wintering wildlife. Wildlife issues dominated patrol attention around Jackson. Congestion issues dominated Teton Pass with new conflicts emerging due to people trying to get in ski runs within tight time frames (see attached sign developed to address issues). Conflict between motorized and non-motorized uses is increasing with the Forest getting more pressure to update the winter travel map. Snowbikes emerged as a new technology on the groomed trails causing consternation about how much shared use should occur on traditional “snowmobile” trails and how to share the costs of grooming equitably among all users. Avalanche awareness continues to be key concern in all winter recreation areas. The “Don’t Poach the Powder” media campaign has been on-going for many years. The clear, consistent message delivered by local skier/snowboarder “celebrity” locals has been well received by the community and has been credited with helping reduce wildlife winter range intrusions. The “Don’t Be the One Who Ruins it for the Many” joint message from both the Forest Service and PAWS resulted in greatly improved compliance with the dog leash requirement in Game Creek. The Forest Service was considering prohibiting dogs entirely from the drainage but due to the improved compliance, did not have to take this step. The Teton Pass Ambassador program is increasingly considered a positive proactive program that addresses many emerging issues with backcountry skiing (ethics and safety) at a premier destination. The program is receiving wide media attention from magazines.

Note: You may expand and reduce size of blocks.

Trail Counter

The counter was only functional in March. Three locations were monitored focusing on popular snowmobile trails.

Mosquito Creek (growing concern about snowmobile use in WSA): counter malfunctioned briefly due to large snowflakes. More reasonable readings show average of 17.5 events/day

Hatchet snowmobile trail: Readings show average of 35 events/day

Togwotee snowmobile trail (across from Lodge): Readings show average of 281.5 events/day

Patrol Program

Patrol staff included Rick Taylor, Brad Koeckeritz, and Ken Alberg for the Buffalo Ranger District, and Ken Alberg and Lesley Williams for the Jackson Ranger District with assistance from David Cernicek, Jessica Shaw, David Wilkinson, Dale Dawson and Deidre Witsen. Jay Pistono served as the Teton Pass winter ambassador. Narrative reports from some of the patrollers are attached. The most consistent data recorded was trailhead vehicle counts.

Buffalo District – 68 patrol days.

Areas covered included Blackrock, Togwotee, Toppings Road, and Squaw Basin.

Average number of vehicles observed at one time = 12.5. Maximum of 61 vehicles (Togwotee)

An average of 92 snowmobiles observed/day

Violations = 23 citations (1 for trespass into closed wildlife winter range, 22 for lack of state permit)

Jackson District –131 patrol days

Rank order of selected trailhead vehicle counts (from highest to lowest use)

Teton Pass: average vehicles observed at one time = 45. Maximum of 77 vehicles (N=103)

Cache Creek: average vehicles observed at one time = 16.5. Maximum of 43 vehicles (N=32)

Gros Ventre: average vehicles observed at one time = 14. Maximum of 26 vehicles (N=28)

Granite Creek: average vehicles observed at one time = 12. Maximum of 36 vehicles (N=18)

Mosquito Creek: average vehicles observed at one time = 5. Maximum of 22 vehicles (N=30)

Game Creek: average vehicles observed at one time = 4. Maximum of 14 vehicles (N=46)

Shadow Mountain: average vehicles observed at one time = 2. Maximum of 5 vehicles (N=6)

Violations = 42 citations (est 20 for dog off leash, 14 for lack of state permit, 7 for trespass into closed wildlife winter range, 1 for filming without authorization)

Project contact: (include phone number, email)

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Report Date: 2/2/2009

Submit to Virginia Kelly: vkelly@fs.fed.us 406-587-6704. Contact Virginia with questions.

Attachments:

1. Narrative reports from four winter patrollers
2. “Don’t Poach the Powder” brochure
3. “Don’t Be the One Who Ruins it for the Many” newspaper notice
4. Teton Pass Ambassador – article from Jackson Hole Magazine
5. “Chill Out” winter recreation sign developed for Teton Pass