

March 26, 2007

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne:

We write to thank you for your efforts on behalf of our National Park System. Your requested increase in general funding for the national parks is striking and urgently needed. We are hopeful that Congress will approve your request and thereby significantly bolster the National Park Service's ability to preserve and interpret our common heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people.

We recognize that there are great strains on the federal budget. Your extraordinary support of a history-making operations increase for the national parks merits our enthusiastic support. You are absolutely right to emphasize that a pressing need exists for this significant increase in park operational funding. The eroding condition and health of irreplaceable natural, historic and cultural treasures is painful to witness, as is the decline in resource protection and visitor education programs. We admire your commitment to reverse these declines.

It was our privilege to be stewards of the National Park System. Collectively, our high-level management experience spans half a century. We were heartened when you reaffirmed the keystone of that stewardship, that the fundamental mission of the National Park Service is the conservation of park resources. Indeed, your strong declaration of support for the longstanding management policies that have governed the life of the parks reassured the American public and the Congress that you will insist upon the highest protection of park resources and values and will not allow uses and activities that conflict with this founding principle of the national parks.

Given this, we must express our alarm over a proposal in Yellowstone National Park that would radically contravene both the spirit and letter of the 2006 Management Policies. The proposal is to *escalate* snowmobile use as much as three-fold over current average numbers even though scientific studies have demonstrated conclusively that a two-thirds *reduction* in average snowmobile numbers during the past four winters is principally responsible for significantly improving the health of the park for visitors, employees and wildlife.

The latest National Park Service study illuminates in detail that allowing Yellowstone's current average of 250 snowmobiles per day to increase—to as many as 720 snowmobiles—would undercut the park's resurgent natural conditions. Specifically, the study reveals that snowmobile noise would return to areas of the park where visitors are currently able to enjoy natural sounds and quiet. It demonstrates that exhaust would increase in Yellowstone's air. It sidesteps a recent recommendation made by Park Service scientists: that in order to minimize disturbance of the park's wildlife, traffic should be kept at or below current levels, not expanded. The study also provides clear evidence that reducing snowmobile numbers still further—from 250 per day to zero—while expanding public access on modern snowcoaches, would further improve the park's health.

The development of four-stroke snowmobiles has brought reductions in air and noise emissions compared to traditional two-stroke snowmobiles. But emissions from the newer snowmobiles remain significantly greater than those of modern automobiles. Moreover, in the context of Yellowstone's

winter season, impacts from four-stroke snowmobiles are frequently accentuated by inversions, lack of breeze, the park's intrinsic quiet, and the fact that wildlife in a weakened condition tend to concentrate where thermally influenced rivers and thinner snow cover provide more accessible food. These areas are precisely where Yellowstone's roads are located. Enabling every 100 visitors to move through these sensitive areas requires ten modern snowcoaches or, by contrast, 80, 90, even 100 individual snowmobiles.

In each of four separate studies since 1998, costing a cumulative \$10 million, the National Park Service has verified conclusively that greater volumes of traffic required by an emphasis upon snowmobiling add dramatically to air and noise pollution and disturbance of Yellowstone's wildlife. On at least three occasions, the Environmental Protection Agency has independently corroborated that providing access by modern snowcoach and phasing out the use of snowmobiles will provide Yellowstone's visitors, employees and wildlife with dramatically healthier conditions. By 4-to-1 margins, the American public has said throughout these studies that it wants nothing less for Yellowstone than the best available protection.

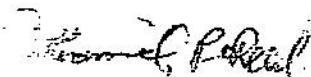
We admire your support of the 2006 National Park Service Management Policies and your declaration that upholding these policies is fundamental to the nation's commitment to preserve its national parks. It is our profound hope that in our country's oldest national park you will insist that your commitment be upheld—that the traditional conservation emphasis of the national parks will be continued. The current proposal to accommodate increasing snowmobile use in Yellowstone is at odds with these policies:

- *“...the Service will seek to perpetuate the best possible air quality in parks...”*
- *“The National Park Service will preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the natural soundscapes of parks.”*
- *“Where such use is necessary and appropriate, the least impacting equipment, vehicles, and transportation systems should be used.”*
- *“NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values.”*

We note that during the protracted discussion over winter use in Yellowstone, visitors adventuring to Old Faithful and other destinations in the park have increasingly been choosing modern snowcoaches as their means of access. These “least impacting” vehicles, which minimize “adverse impacts on park resources and values,” are also considerably more affordable for visitors than snowmobiles. Snowcoaches are more accommodating of older visitors and children than snowmobiles. And because they facilitate conversation between guides and visitors and among family members, they have given rise to a boom in visitor education. In all these respects, the growing popularity of snowcoaches has been enormously positive for Yellowstone and its visitors.

Mr. Secretary, we join as former stewards of the national parks in urging you to demonstrate in our country's oldest national park the wisdom and value of the 2006 Park Service Management Policies. You were right to call them the “lifeblood” of our country's commitment to its national parks. Ensuring that these policies are upheld in Yellowstone is one of the greatest contributions that you can make to the future of our National Park System.


Sincerely,



Nathaniel P. Reed
Assistant Secretary of the Interior
1971-1976



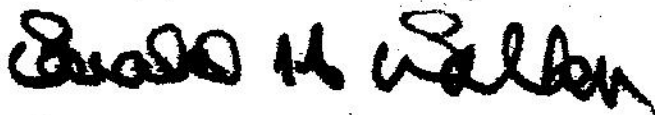
Roger G. Kennedy
National Park Service Director
1993-1997



George B. Hartzog, Jr.
National Park Service Director
1964-1972



Robert Stanton
National Park Service Director
1997-2001



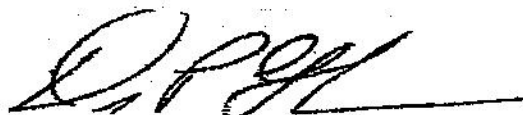
Ronald H. Walker
National Park Service Director
1973-1975



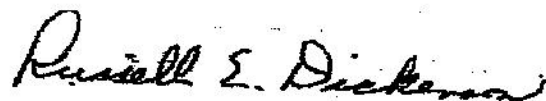
William J. Briggie
National Park Service Deputy Director
1975-1977



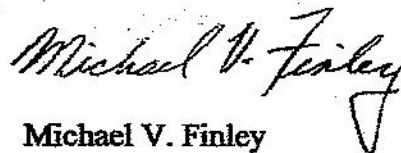
Gary Everhardt
National Park Service Director
1975-1977



Denis P. Galvin
National Park Service Deputy Director
1985-1989 and 1998-2002



Russell E. Dickenson
National Park Service Director
1980-1985



Michael V. Finley
Yellowstone National Park Superintendent
1994-2001



James M. Ridenour
National Park Service Director
1989-1993

CC: Sen. Jeff Bingaman
Sen. Pete V. Domenici
Rep. Nick J. Rahall
Rep. Don Young
Lynn Scarlett, DOI
Brian Waidmann, DOI
Mary Bomar, NPS
Mike Snyder, NPS
Suzanne Lewis, NPS