

7 of 8 Living former NPS Directors support change to Yellowstone snowmobile policy

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Former Leaders Praise Administration's Requested Park Funding Increase, But Caution That Allowing Additional Yellowstone Snowmobiling Would 'Radically Contravene' Kempthorne Pledge. Every living former director of the National Park Service (NPS) -- except one -- has joined in a letter to U.S. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne urging him to ensure a continued transition away from snowmobile use in Yellowstone National Park. [Snowmobiling in Yellowstone](#) â€“ NPS photo

Spanning every Democratic and Republican presidential administration from Lyndon Baines Johnson to Bill Clinton, the seven former NPS leaders say a proposal to allow a return of more snowmobile use in Yellowstone would undercut Kempthorne's commitment to emphasize conservation in the national parks and circumvent policies he endorsed last year that require the highest protection of air quality, visitor enjoyment of natural quiet, and other national park resources and values. Seven former directors of the National Park Service signed the letter: George B. Hartzog, Jr. (1964-1972), Ronald H. Walker (1973-1975), Gary Everhardt (1975-1977), Russell E. Dickenson (1980-1985), James M. Ridenour (1989-1993), Roger G. Kennedy (1993-1997) and Robert Stanton (1997-2001). Collectively, the seven led stewardship efforts in the national parks for presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton. Only Fran Mainella, who resigned last July as NPS director (2001-2006) and is constrained for one year by ethics rules, did not sign the letter. In the joint letter, the former leaders tell Kempthorne: "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 letter continues: "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 â€“ would undercut the park's resurgent natural conditions ... 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 letter notes that four National Park Service studies of snowmobile impacts in Yellowstone conducted since 1998 have cumulatively cost \$10 million and have produced consistent findings by the agency 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." The letter praises Kempthorne's requested increase in operational funding for the National Park System. Calling his request "history-making," the former park leaders state: "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." However, the former leaders direct their strongest words toward a proposal to allow more, not fewer, snowmobiles in the country's first national park saying the proposal ignores consistent and newly verified scientific findings, over 80 percent of the public comments received by the National Park Service, and specific park policies that Kempthorne has pledged to uphold. "You were right to call them the 'lifblood' of our country's commitment to its national parks," the eleven signers conclude. "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." Also signing the joint letter were Nathaniel P. Reed, assistant secretary of the Interior (1971-1976), William J. Briggles, NPS deputy director (1975- 1977), Denis P. Galvin, NPS deputy director (1985-1989 and 1998-2002) and Michael V. Finley, Yellowstone National Park superintendent (1994-2001). The full text of the letter is available online.

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