



Wireless Communication Services Plan Environmental Assessment

Comments Sought on Future Wireless Communications Services

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act to help guide future decisions about wireless communication services in Yellowstone National Park. Input is being sought from all interested parties during the public scoping process to identify the issues, impact topics, and scope of the alternatives to be analyzed in the EA.

The NPS will look at current and anticipated wireless communications systems that require some form of infrastructure. These communications technologies will be reviewed in light of their impacts and suitability in the park's developed areas, along existing road corridors, and in backcountry areas.

Potential impact topics to be addressed include but are not limited to the following:

- Health and human safety
- Visitor use and experience
- Park operations
- Commercial services
- Research permittees
- Wilderness
- Viewsheds/visual impacts
- Natural resources
- Cultural resources



The NPS will address the following issues when developing the alternatives:

- Development of criteria for types of services, levels of coverage, identification of locations in the park for the services and coverage areas, and associated impacts
- Reduction or increase in the level and type of existing services and coverage areas

Results of the public scoping process and NPS analysis will be used to help formulate the alternatives addressed in the EA .

Types of wireless communication services to be addressed in the EA include:

- Public health and safety monitoring and alert systems
- NPS two-way land mobile radio systems
- Cooperating/partnering agencies radio systems (local law enforcement, wildland fire, concessioners, and outfitters)
- Contractor radio systems (e.g. road work)
- Cellular phone service
- Internet services
- Wireless internet services (WiFi)
- Web cams
- Research-related data transmitters (Natural & Cultural Resources)
- Geothermal and seismic monitoring
- Weather information data transmitters and weather band radio service

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the wireless communications plan is to identify the appropriate level of wireless communications services and infrastructure in Yellowstone National Park.

The need is to provide necessary communications services in Yellowstone that do not result in unacceptable levels of impacts to park resources and values and comply with the 1996 Telecommunications Act and other applicable guidelines and regulations.

Message From the Superintendent

The pace of technological change can be mind boggling. Perhaps you or your parents remember a time not that long ago when:

- Telephones came in one color—black—and had a rotary dial. You paid extra for a private line or shared a “party line” with your neighbors. Calling “long distance” involved the assistance of an operator or two.
- Television was a novelty enjoyed by a handful of people who lived in or near big cities. If you moved the “rabbit ears” just right, you might be able to watch two or three different channels, in glorious black and white.
- The only way to send a message faster than U.S. Mail was by telegram.
- Only a few major universities had computers. They were the size of a house. Engineers and mathematicians relied on wooden slide rules to make complex calculations.

Now, flash forward to the present. You probably have a cell phone, two-way pager, PDA or Blackberry(tm) device with you in your pocket, purse, belt or backpack. You have more than one television in your home, and receive over a hundred channels by cable or satellite. You probably have both e-mail and a personal computer at work and at home and don't know how you'd get along without either one.

Being connected 24/7 is a way of life for many people. However, some see places like Yellowstone National Park as a welcome escape from the constant connectivity of everyday life.

The challenge Yellowstone National Park faces is how to respond appropriately to visitor expectations and how to weigh the benefits and impacts of wireless technologies which may enhance visitor safety and resource protection while protecting the historic, rustic, outdoor experience of a visit to the world's first national park. We need to determine the acceptable and unacceptable limits of change regarding the full range of wireless technologies in the park.

During this public scoping period, Yellowstone National Park asks you to consider the possible benefits and impacts of current and future wireless technologies upon Yellowstone National Park. Please take a moment to share both your ideas and concerns so we may develop a sustainable framework to guide the decision-making on wireless communications issues in the years ahead.

Suzanne Lewis
Superintendent

Current Wireless Facilities in Yellowstone

Although bordered by three states, three counties and several gateway communities, the 2.2 million acres bounded by the park are isolated for electrical, water, sewer, and emergency services such as fire, medical, and law enforcement response. During the summer, Yellowstone often hosts in excess of 25,000 overnight visitors and residents. The park staffs nine developed areas, five park entrances, 466 miles of roads and 1,000 miles of backcountry trails. Life flights occur an average of 120-125 times during each summer season. Concessionaires and construction contractors manage multi-million dollar contracts during the summer season. Communication is essential to all park operations.

To facilitate these essential communications the park currently has a number of wireless services available within its boundaries. The park maintains a two-way land mobile radio system that is used for park operations and emergency services. Other federal agencies and local county and state governments maintain their own equipment in the park to assist in their operations. Park concessionaires and partners also maintain two-way radio systems in the park.

A wide variety of health and safety, and resource monitoring and research-related communications equipment (wildlife, geothermal, seismic, air quality, noise, weather, streamflow, photographic/video) exist to transmit data to park staff, universities, government agencies, and the public.

Land line telecommunication cables both underground and overhead, as well as microwave transmitters and reflectors, provide telephone and data connectivity services to park offices, lodging facilities, campgrounds, park residences and businesses. These facilities exist throughout the park, on both mountaintop sites and within developed areas or along/near road corridors.

Five sites are presently used to provide cellular telephone service within the park—Elk Plaza and Bunsen Peak near Mammoth Hot Springs, Mt. Washburn near Canyon Village, and sites near Grant Village and Old Faithful.

The National Weather Service maintains weather monitoring and broadcast sites near Mammoth Hot Springs and Grant Village. The Gardiner/Mammoth FM Association maintains rebroadcast radio stations near Mammoth Hot Springs. Approximately five “web cams” and their associated telecommunications devices exist throughout the park for scientific and educational purposes. The web cams in the park receive in excess of 3 million unique visits per year, equating to more than 219 million individual hits.

A wide variety of other wireless devices exist associated with typical year round residences found in the park—mostly associated with housing such as satellite TV and radio, Internet, and wireless Local Area Network (LAN) services.

Yellowstone National Park



Timeline for the wireless communications EA

- Public scoping period open through midnight August 31, 2006.
- NPS will hold three open houses in August 2006 to solicit public input

August 8, 2006	Idaho Falls, ID	6:00-8:00 p.m.
August 9, 2006	Bozeman, MT	6:00-8:00 p.m.
August 15, 2006	Cody, WY	6:00-8:00 p.m.

- The EA should be available for public comment during the winter of 2006/2007.



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How to Comment on the Scope of the EA

Suggestions and comments from the public are being solicited during the public scoping period. This is the time when any interested individual, organization or agency can provide thoughtful, relevant, information or suggestions for consideration by park managers.

Three open houses have been scheduled to give interested groups and individuals an opportunity to learn more about this process and provide input to help identify the range of issues and alternatives to be considered in the EA. Each open house will begin with a short presentation followed by an opportunity to meet with park staff. These open houses will be held in the following locations:

Idaho Falls, ID: Tuesday, 8/8 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Best Western Cotton Tree Inn, 900 Lindsay Blvd.
Bozeman, MT: Wednesday 8/9 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Comfort Inn, 1370 North 7th Avenue
Cody, WY: Tuesday 8/15 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Park County Courthouse, 1501 Stampede Avenue

Written comments may be submitted through the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>, in person at the Mammoth Hot Springs park headquarters, or by mail to Wireless Communication Services Plan EA, Planning, Compliance and Landscape Architecture, Yellowstone National Park, PO Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, WY, 82190. Comments will not be accepted by phone, by fax, or e-mail. We strongly encourage you to submit your comments through PEPC. Simply select “Yellowstone National Park” from the drop down box and follow the link for this EA.

All public comments regarding the issues and alternatives identified through scoping must be received or postmarked by midnight, Friday, August 31, 2006.

Our practice is to make comments, including names, home addresses, home phone numbers, and email addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their names and/or home addresses, etc., but if you wish us to consider withholding this information you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. In addition, you must present a rationale for withholding this information. This rationale must demonstrate that disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy. Unsupported assertions will not meet this burden. In the absence of exceptional, documentable circumstances, this information will be released. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.