

UPPER YELLOWSTONE SNOWMOBILE CLUB



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Year Round Plowing of Highway 212 (The Plug)

This letter is written in opposition of Year-Round Plowing of Highway 212 “The Plug”. As some will notice, this letter is virtually the same as the one written in 2021 on the same subject. The reason is nothing has changed. We are still at the same logistical impasse as we were in 2012, all the years previous and in years to come. There is not a viable plan to make the “Plowing of the Plug” make sense.

The UYSC grooms approximately 33 miles of trails and areas. These groomed areas include Highway 212 from the east side of Cooke City, West to the Wyoming state line. The Cody Country Snowmobile Association takes over from there to Pilot Creek Parking Area and beyond. These areas are traveled by snowmobiles and tracked vehicles during the season. The UYSC was incorporated on February 15th 1972. The UYSC has 62 total paid business memberships with 23 being Cooke City businesses, as of 2021-22 season.

As of the last survey with snowmobilers, Cooke City was ranked in the top 10 snowmobiling destinations in the US. Every business that is open in the winter, during snowmobile season, benefits in one form or another from snowmobilers. They eat, drink, purchase fuel, supplies, sled parts, and stay in hotels/cabins/VRBO's. They often stay for several days and they come from all areas of the lower 48, Alaska and even Canada. This is not including the local Montanans that spend all their extra time here. They come for the steep and deep riding of Cooke City plus the “something for everyone” type of riding. One of largest draws for snowmobilers and skiers is that they can ride right from their lodging to restaurants, bars, and most especially direct access to some of the greatest snowmobile riding areas in the US. Part of the draw to Cooke City is that once here, they do not have to reload their sleds. They unload and ride.

If the *few* have their way, year around plowing of Hwy 212 will ruin the draw of snowmobilers, skiers that snowmobile, backcountry enthusiasts and others to Cooke City in the winter. Cooke City is known as the “Coolest little town in America” for a reason...it's a cool little town. It is cool because it's the last stop on the map in Montana heading east from Yellowstone National Park. It is at the end of the road in the winter where only those that care to brave the winter conditions that Montana and only Cooke City can bring, to those that enjoy the solitude

and the small-town feel. You don't have to be a snowmobile enthusiast to enjoy Cooke City's end of the world feel, although to many....it's why they come here to ride. Cooke City will never be a Cody Wy, a Jackson Hole nor a Vail and we love it that way.

We have researched previous meetings about the plowing of HWY212 with the latest being "HWY 212 Plowing Summit" in 2011/2012. We read through the pros and cons and in the end, the result was to "Do Nothing". To "Do Nothing" meant to not take any action. The only thing that has changed from that meeting is a few faces. The logistical issues have yet to be remedied...i.e., Parking or funding. (We have these meeting notes for those that would like them).

We feel that if HWY212 is to be plowed, the main street of Cooke City will be plowed down for travel of all vehicles, which means bare pavement that sleds are not made to travel on and is very destructive. We will not be able to access the gas station while on sleds. We will not be able to cross the highway to access the restaurants or be able to get to the hotels. If you have not gathered yet, this means we must keep sleds on the trailers and haul to trail heads. What is the attraction to stay in Cooke City? If, we come to ride, we will travel back home or to other more accommodating destinations. Cooke City will lose significant hotel and restaurant business and will lose its draw of being able to ride right from your hotel room.

The UYSC has heard the rumors and read the "secret" letters that state that sled trailer parking would be available. So, let us talk parking. Rumor is that there could be a parking lot built at the Lulu Gravel pit. We would have to trailer to the parking lot and then back into town. Then where will we park to dine or visit the businesses? Especially with all these new visitors to town? There are upwards of 75 to 100 rigs that can be parked at Pilot Creek (Wyoming Parking area) at any given time. That means 75-100 rigs that could potentially try to pull into Cooke City, instead of parking at Pilot Creek. The Dump parking...holds maybe 10 rigs not counting full time campers? There is not significant room for trucks and trailers to safely turn around and when there is a large dump of snow...who is going to get these people in and out so the lot can be plowed? Who is responsible? If the businesses are supposed to be open, year-round...where are they going to put the snow that is in their parking areas? Where are the lots that could be plowed for parking?

The UYSC depends on a FWP State grooming grant to maintain our snowcat and pay our groomers. Our groomers are responsible for maintaining HWY212 from December 1st to April 15th. We have an agreement with USFS that allows us to start before December 1st, if conditions allow and we get permission. We could possibly lose significant funds from our groomer grant, and this will of course affect other grooming areas. If the plowing of HWY212 comes to fruition, our groomer will have to cross a bare highway with vehicles traveling at speeds upwards of 55-60mph. Our groomer will cross the bare highway twice just to get to a groomable trail. (Miller Trail from town was only groomed once this year) They will cross at Republic Street Road and proceed to the Soda Butte Creek Trail, then down the trail to emerge at HWY212 at the Lulu Trail head. Then cross the highway again. However, everyone reading this knows that Cooke City is generally known for 200 plus inches of snow, right? How big will this berm be that our groomer must now navigate down to the highway with fast moving vehicles coming through? Remember again that Lulu Trail head is now a parking lot, according to plan. Once again, our snowcat must travel on plowed roads which is damaging

to our snowcat, the highway and dangerous to our groomer drivers with adding in vehicle traffic.

It is now obvious that **certain** businesses have little to no desire to entertain snowmobilers in Cooke City any longer or so the Cooke City Chamber of Commerce board wants us to believe. They see other winter visitors as being more beneficial to their financial agendas. The UYSC can boast almost every open winter business in Cooke City is a paid member of the Upper Yellowstone Snowmobile Club and benefits from snowmobilers. So, do most of these businesses just join us as a front? We don't believe that, and we would like to believe that the majority want the snowmobile/skiing community to continue coming to Cooke City to help the winter businesses thrive.

Letter's that were sent in 2021:

The "Plug" Explainer is one of three letters secretly sent to Cody, Wyoming. One paragraph state, and I quote "Our membership base has changed tremendously in the previous decade: snowmobile businesses have contracted while skiing and wildlife watching boom." This is a false statement as the snowmobile industry has grown exponentially over the last years. This is evident in the lack of parking in Cooke City on any given day of the week when snow is falling and the lack of snowmobiles to purchase. We have pictures and video that we can show that were it not for snowmobilers, Cooke City would be mostly a ghost town during the winter.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has shown the US many challenges and people are understandably worried about the future of our country. We believe that the Cooke City Chamber of Commerce board is acting irrationally in trying to take action to open HWY212 during the winter months when snowmobile season thrives. The Cooke City Chamber Board does not seem to inquire about opposition to their ideals. They have not even sent so much as a letter to the Upper Yellowstone Snowmobile Club, and we were a paid member. The UYSC was never acknowledged nor were we solicited for renewing our membership. We were also approached about several Cooke City businesses have now dropped their Chamber memberships. The Cooke City Chamber seems to only represent a few, regardless of what their website would like you to believe. These are without a doubt sketchy moves with dire consequences for the snowmobiling and skiing communities.

In ending, the Upper Yellowstone Snowmobile Club currently opposes any changes in the opening of HWY212 as it poses significant dangers to our visiting sledders, dangers to our groomer operators and snowcat, and puts our top 10 snowmobile destination, in jeopardy of losing valuable backcountry riding. It also creates many logistical issues that have not even been touched on. It has become a "we have to open the road" with no plans in place to accommodate the people that have the most to lose. Opening of the "Plug" is without a doubt the worst idea that could possibly happen to the Cooke City Area.

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