

Sylvan Pass 'compromise' possible this week

By Carole Cloudwalker, Cody Enterprise

About 20 Cody area leaders were interviewed last week by a facilitator hired by the Park Service to investigate possible Yellowstone winter use options.

Facilitator Carl Moore of Santa Fe, N.M., "was a good listener," said Carol Armstrong, co-chairman of Shut Out of Yellowstone, a citizens' group opposed to the NPS preferred alternative for winter use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks.

That preference includes closing Yellowstone's East Entrance in winter months and reallocating its over-snow traffic to other entrances.

"I have some ideas, based on the interviews" Moore said Monday. "There is potential that my report could have some influence on the Record of Decision."

While he declined to say what the ideas might be, Moore said he would release copies of his report after he hands it over to the NPS, likely late this week.

Meanwhile, Moore said he will meet with regional NPS and Yellowstone representatives Tuesday in Denver to give a verbal report on some of his findings.

As of Monday, Moore said he had not completed his interviews.

He said pressure is on to submit a report prior to the Nov. 5 target date for completing the ROD.

"The process continues, is active and is moving forward," Moore said. Earlier he said the process, not the Park Service, would be his client, even though payment for his services comes from the NPS.

"It was positive, and good suggestions were made," Armstrong said of Moore's in-person Cody interviews.

"He went away feeling like he had a positive solution."

Shut Out and others maintain the proposed closure will do irreparable harm to Park County's winter economy, pointing out it already has forced the winter closure of the once-thriving and once year-round Pahaska Tepee Resort.

Pahaska will be closed this winter, as it was last year after delays in avalanche-triggering on the pass because of a broken helicopter and a refusal to use the traditional howitzer caused a loss of business.

Armstrong said those interviewed included Mayor Roger Sedam, state legislators, chamber of commerce officials and affected businessmen from the North Fork, including Pahaska owner Bob Coe.

In addition, Armstrong said, representatives of Copperleaf Subdivision and the Nielson family, which plans to exercise its option to purchase the Sleeping Giant Ski Area and operate it as a nonprofit corporation, were interviewed by Moore.

Several years ago, the ski area thrived as families of snowmobilers boosted business, with some wives and children opting to go skiing while men toured Yellowstone on snowmobiles.

Armstrong also took the facilitator up the North Fork where they looked around Pahaska Tepee.

"He saw a big black bear," Armstrong said, adding that Moore was impressed with the beauty of the

North Fork valley.

At Pahaska, Armstrong pointed out Buffalo Bill's legacy to the area.

"I gave him a big history lesson - I said we have a real connection to Buffalo Bill and Yellowstone," she said. "He was thrilled to have seen the country."

Moore also planned to conduct telephone interviews with NPS officials including Yellowstone Superintendent Suzanne Lewis, park planner John Sacklin and regional NPS director Mike Snyder of Denver, Armstrong said.

Armstrong was tasked with scheduling the approximately 20 interviews Moore conducted at a rented office on Sunshine Avenue.

She said she was not allowed to sit in on the interviews, nor did Moore explain what was discussed or what "positive solution" he might arrive at in his report.

The report is due to be presented to the Park Service before the early-November signing of a Record of Decision finalizing winter use plans.

Snyder will sign the final document, and it could change the preferred alternative as long as the change is related to an alternative the Park Service already has examined, Yellowstone spokesman Al Nash said.

Park County commissioner Tim French, who was interviewed by Moore along with the other four commissioners, said earlier he planned to suggest the NPS retain its preferred alternative, but agree to postpone action on it for up to a decade.

Meanwhile the NPS would pledge to examine possible compromises that could increase avalanche safety - the most recent concern of the Park Service regarding Sylvan Pass winter use.

Sylvan and the East Entrance will remain open this winter, but may close beginning next year if the current NPS preferred alternative is not modified.