

MLA Argument Paper (Sanghvi)

Sanghvi 1

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Preserving Winter Access:

Snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park

For a decade the National Park Service has debated whether to ban snowmobiles from Yellowstone National Park. In 2000, the Clinton administration decided to phase out all recreational snowmobiles in the park, a decision that angered snowmobilers and threatened the winter livelihood of many citizens living in the Yellowstone area. In 2002, the Bush administration overruled the Clinton decision, thereby angering environmentalists, who claim that the snowmobiles cause severe air and noise pollution and endanger Yellowstone's wildlife.

At issue is winter access to one of America's most popular national parks. Currently, thousands of visitors enjoy the winter beauties of Yellowstone each year. With a ban, access would be restricted to athletes hardy enough to travel on snowshoes or cross-country skis and tourists willing to board commercial snowcoaches and be led around in groups. Environmental concerns must of course be considered, and the Bush plan takes them seriously. The plan provides remedies for air and noise pollution and for the only threat to wildlife that can be clearly linked to snowmobiles. Because environmental concerns are adequately addressed under the Bush plan, we should resist any ban on snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park.

Sanghvi establishes credibility by presenting background information in a balanced way.

Sanghvi prepares readers for her thesis by framing the issue.

Thesis states the main point.

To address the problems of air and noise pollution, the Bush plan proposes restricting park access to snowmobiles powered by four-stroke engines, which are quieter and emit fewer harmful emissions than the older, two-stroke engines. Arthur Allen describes the older snowmobiles as operating with an engine that “sucks in an oil-fuel-air mixture and dumps up to one-third of it, unburned, into the engine’s boa constrictor-like expansion chamber, whose shape accounts for the engine’s migraine-inducing roar.” Environmentalists were right to protest allowing such machines into the park, for two-stroke engines have caused serious air and noise pollution. They have spewed hazy emissions so thick at park entrances that rangers have been forced to retreat to air-conditioned kiosks, and carbon monoxide fumes released by the machines have at times exceeded levels established by the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (Bluewater Network 2). As for noise pollution, it too has been a problem. Even some snowmobilers have complained about the loud buzz of the two-stroke engines.

In contrast to the two-stroke engines, reports William Booth, the new four-stroke machines “are much quieter and cleaner, producing 95 percent less hydrocarbons and operating at decibel levels that are more like a loud argument than a hysterical scream” (A3). When New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof rented one of the new four-stroke machines, he found that they were “quiet enough that you can have a conversation as several of them whiz by--and quiet enough that moose and bald eagles do not flee at the sound, as I can confirm.” Ironically, Kristof discovered that some of the park’s snowcoaches

Sanghvi builds common ground with environmentalists.

Sources are documented with MLA citations.

Sanghvi supports her claims with specific evidence.

were noisier and more polluting than snowmobiles with four-stroke engines.

Transition prepares readers for the next line of argument.

Air and noise pollution are not the only concerns raised by environmentalists who favor a ban on snowmobiles. Many have also argued that snowmobiles endanger Yellowstone's wildlife. Oddly, some haven't focused on the most obvious danger: the occasional hot-rodding snowmobiler who veers off marked trails in pursuit of elk and bison, chasing wild animals for the thrill of it. The proposed Bush plan wisely includes a provision to combat this danger. Most snowmobilers entering the park would be required to hire professional guides (Booth A3). This policy would sharply reduce the possibility of illegal behaviors such as straying from trails and harassing wildlife.

Sanghvi counters an opposing argument.

Other dangers to wildlife have not been substantiated. Although some environmentalists claim that the noise of snowmobiles upsets the animals, it's not clear that it does, even though the two-stroke machines currently in use are quite loud. In fact, a study funded by the park service to support its anti-snowmobile position concluded that it "was not the snowmobilers zooming past" that upset the animals, "but lone cross-country skiers, silently gliding up to them over the snow" (Allen). Researcher Amanda Hardy says, "Fear is all about habituation. Ironically, walking is the type of activity that the buffalo find most disturbing" (qtd. in Allen). In the study, researchers measured stress hormones in the feces of elk and wolves and found that the animals' stress levels were higher in parks allowing snowmobiles than in parks banning them. However, the study's leader, Scott Creel of Montana State University, admits that the

stress may not be harming the wildlife (Moore 22). Also, the studies don't prove that noise is causing the stress; many other factors, including the mating season or the weather, could account for it.

Debaters on both sides of the snowmobile issue argue in favor of a quality winter experience for park visitors. Those who favor a ban on the machines believe that visitors have a right to a peaceful, quiet experience: the "right," as William Booth describes it, "to hear wind in the pines, the rattle of a river and the creak of an eagle wing" (A3). And they point out that snowcoaches are available for anyone unable to ski into the park. Unfortunately, however, snowcoaches do not provide visitors with a quality experience. Reporter Nicholas Kristof explains why: "Taking a bus through a national park and trying to peer through fogged-up windows leaves you so removed from nature that you might as well rent a Yellowstone video instead." Currently, three-fourths of winter visitors ride on snowmobiles; only one-tenth choose snowcoaches, and an even smaller number ski into the park (Booth A3). If snowmobiles were banned from the park, winter access would be sharply reduced.

The snowmobile debate has been riddled with name-calling for far too long. Those who support a ban are not "environmental wackos" or "eco-fascists," as they have been called on some Web sites. Without pressure from environmentalists, new emission standards would probably never have been imposed. But, as Kristof points out, neither can snowmobilers be fairly described as "rabid rednecks roaring around the geysers, terrifying the elk and leaving even the bison in need of gas masks."

Sanghvi presents both sides of the debate.

Sanghvi builds common ground with environmentalists.

Sanghvi 5

Conclusion echoes
the main point.

What is needed is for both sides of the debate to calm down, stop their name-calling, and look at the issue fairly. When they do, most will realize that the Bush plan sensibly addresses the interests of both the environmentalists and the snowmobilers. Because it places restrictions on snowmobiles yet does not ban them outright, the Bush plan is a fair compromise.

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