

Policy and Procedure

Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Department of
Natural Resources
State of Alaska

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Nancy Lake SRA & Willow Creek SRA

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Approval:

Ricky Gease

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Signature of Director

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Section Chiefs
Area Superintendents

District Rangers

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Winter Motorized Use Policy Nancy Lake State Recreation Area February 11, 2025

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy document is to provide guidelines for opening the park lands to the use of certain types of authorized motorized use including ATV and ORV vehicles as defined below. The policy allows for these types of motorized access to private lands within and bordering Red Shirt, Lynx and Butterfly Lakes during times of low snow with ice requirements as described below. Such access would otherwise be prohibited until the entire park is formally opened with sufficient snow cover to protect underlying vegetation.

Provided that the activity is compliant with the criteria outlined for each category listed below, permits will be required once an opening has been announced. Permit fees are \$100.00 per vehicle. This opening will remain in effect during any "full openings" or "restricted openings" of the park to snowmobile use. Permits are VOID once sufficient snow opens the park areas up to winter motorized use, OR park roads re-open to highway vehicles, OR December 31 of current year, whichever is sooner.

Category 1: Ice Only Openings

During times of year when ice will support vehicle traffic, but snow cover is insufficient to open areas to snowmobile use, authorized off-road motorized vehicles may be allowed on designated water bodies (see below) only. This determination will be made by the director when there is at least six (6) inches of ice at predetermined locations.

Ice Only Opening Criteria

- Ice cover shall be of sufficient thickness to support the weight-bearing load of the authorized vehicles (typically about 6 inches minimum), but this determination will be made by the user. Refer to the latest snow condition report. State Parks will make no recommendations as to the safety of travel on the ice.
- There shall be no off-road vehicles or equipment operated in the open (unfrozen) waters of any specified lake, river, or stream under this authorization; and
- The use of snow or ice bridges, access ramps, or cribbing to cross any specified river or stream is prohibited unless specifically approved, in writing, by the Department of Fish and Game, Division of Habitat AND Alaska State Parks; and
- No fuel shall be stored, nor vehicles fueled or serviced while located on the frozen surface or below the ordinary high-water line (vegetation line) of any specified lake, river or stream; and
- See also additional criteria in the Department of Fish and Game, Division of Habitat, Fish Habitat Permit FH-09-IV-0008-GP Vehicle Movement on Frozen Water Surfaces with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Designated Water Bodies¹

- 1 Nancy Lake
- 2 Red Shirt Lake
- 3 Lynx Lake
- 4 Butterfly Lake
- 5 Skeetna Lake

All other frozen water bodies will remain closed to vehicle use until authorized below.

Designated Trails for Special Purpose Openings:

East Red Shirt Lake Trail-Motorized Off-road vehicle (Motorized ORV) use of the Nancy Lake Parkway from the Winter Trailhead gate at Mile 2.1 or from the South Rolly Overlook to the East Red Shirt Lake Trail (ERSLT) to Red Shirt Lake ONLY. This is a multi-use trail, and motorized users must respect and accommodate other park users on the trail. Temporary barricades and reflective markings may indicate where the cutoff to the ERSLT begins. Off-road vehicles MUST remain on the designated trail corridor. Violators will be cited. Permits are revocable at will.

Red Shirt Lake Winter Trail- Off-road vehicle (Motorized ORV) use of the Nancy Lake Parkway from the Winter Trailhead gate at Mile 2.1 or from the South Rolly Overlook to South Rolly campground to Red Shirt Lake ONLY. This is a multi-use trail, and motorized users must respect and accommodate other park users on the trail. Off-road vehicles MUST remain on the designated trail corridor. Violators will be cited. Permits are revocable at will.

¹ Access to these Designated Water Bodies via motorized vehicle as defined herein, is only allowed on specified trails as allowed under the policies herein. Access to select water bodies through private lands or lands outside of the NLSRA is not covered or authorized under this policy directive.

Lynx Lake and Butterfly Lake Access- Off-road vehicle (Motorized ORV) use of the Lynx Lake Rd. to Lynx Lake via the unimproved boat launch on the northeast side of Lynx Lake and the canoe portages to Echo ponds, Candlestick Lake, Buckley Lake, and Butterfly Lake ONLY. This is a multi-use trail, and motorized users must respect and accommodate other park users on the trail. Off-road vehicles MUST remain on the designated trail corridor. Violators will be cited. Permits are revocable at will.

Category 2: Special Purpose Openings

During shoulder seasons and mid-season instances of low snow levels, authorized motorized vehicles will be restricted to designated (see below) trails only. Park Rangers will closely monitor conditions and resource impacts including but not limited to rutting, trail widening and damage to surrounding vegetation. Permits will be required. Permits are revocable at will.

Special Purpose Opening Criteria:

- **Category 1: Ice Only Opening:** all criteria **must** first be satisfied; and
- **Soil Frost:** Sufficient to show no deflection upon passage of vehicles (3-4 inches of frost required); and
- **Snow Cover:** No minimum; and
- **Ranger Discretion:** Rangers may close any trail or area of the park for other resource protection or public for safety.

Designated Trails for Special Purpose Openings:

East Red Shirt Lake Trail-Motorized Off-road vehicle (Motorized ORV) use of the Nancy Lake Parkway from the Winter Trailhead gate at Mile 2.1 or from the South Rolly Overlook to the East Red Shirt Lake Trail (ERSLT) to Red Shirt Lake ONLY. This is a multi-use trail, and motorized users must respect and accommodate other park users on the trail. Temporary barricades and reflective markings may indicate where the cutoff to the ERSLT begins. Off-road vehicles MUST remain on the designated trail corridor. Violators will be cited. Permits are revocable at will.

Nancy Lake Parkway/South Rolly Campground Roads/Willow Creek Parkways - Motorized ORV on the Nancy Lake or Willow Creek Parkways while harnessed to dog teams for the purpose of early season dog team training. Category 1 Opening is not required. Authorizations are issued only when roads are closed to highway vehicles due to lack of road maintenance.

Red Shirt Lake Winter Trail- Off-road vehicle (Motorized ORV) use of the Nancy Lake Parkway from the Winter Trailhead gate at Mile 2.1 or from the South Rolly Overlook to South Rolly campground to Red Shirt Lake ONLY. This is a multi-use trail, and motorized users must respect and accommodate other park users on the trail. Off-road vehicles MUST remain on the designated trail corridor. Violators will be cited. Permits are revocable at will.

Lynx Lake and Butterfly Lake Access- Off-road vehicle (Motorized ORV) use of the Lynx Lake Rd. to Lynx Lake via the unimproved boat launch on the northeast side of Lynx Lake and the canoe portages to Echo ponds, Candlestick Lake, Buckley Lake, and Butterfly Lake ONLY. This is a multi-use trail, and motorized users must respect and accommodate other park users on the trail. Off-road vehicles MUST remain on the designated trail corridor. Violators will be cited. Permits are revocable at will.

Permits are VOID once sufficient snow opens the park areas up to winter motorized use, OR park roads re-open to highway vehicles, OR December 31 of current year, whichever is sooner.

Special Stipulations

1. ORVs may only be used when harnessed to dog teams, and obviously being used for training purposes. Free riding is prohibited.
2. Wheeled vehicles only are authorized under this permit.
3. All ORVs must be 4 stroke engines, if engines are to be used during training.
4. ORVs may only be operated directly between the designated parking areas and roadways closed to highway vehicles.
5. ORVs must give right-of-way to other users on roadways.
6. There shall be no "loose leader" training as all animals must be leashed and under control at all times.
7. The only available areas open under this permit are:
 - a. Nancy Lake Parkway from the Winter Trailhead Gate to and through the South Rally Lake Campground roads.
 - b.
 - c. Unplowed portions of the Willow Creek Parkway from the junction with Crystal Lake Road to the Willow Creek Campground and Susitna River.
8. ORVs may NOT be used on any other trails, roads or park areas other than described above under this permit. Vehicle MUST remain on the drivable road surface.
9. Permit must be carried with operator and be presented upon request.
10. All straw used for bedding will be bagged and removed from the park.
11. All required safety equipment on the OHV must be operational and in good working order.
12. Day use fees or annual Day Use Pass are required for each CALENDAR day of park use.
13. All other general park rules and regulations shall be followed.
14. Permits are revocable at will.
15. Failure to comply with any stipulations above may result in citation and permit revocation.

Category 3: Restricted Snowmobile Openings

During the shoulder season of low snow levels, snowmobiles will be restricted to designated (see below) trails only in accordance with 11 AAC 12.335, closures and use management. **No permits will be required.** Park Rangers will closely monitor conditions and resource impacts including but not limited to rutting, trail widening and damage to surrounding vegetation. Trail condition reports and closures will be posted on the Alaska State Park website. Motorized ORV and highway vehicles are not allowed.

Restricted Snowmobile Opening Criteria:

- Category y 1: Ice Only Opening: all criteria **must** first be satisfied; and
- Soil Frost: Sufficient to show no deflection upon passage of vehicles (typically 2-3 inches of frost); and
- Snow Cover: Minimum of 1-inch snow-water equivalent (Typically 6-12 inches of snow depth). This will be strictly enforced; and
- Ranger Discretion: Rangers may close any trail or area of the park for other resource protection or public safety reasons.

Designated Trails for Restricted Openings:

East Red Shirt Lake Trail – The Nancy Lake Parkway from the Winter Trailhead gate at Mile 2.1 to the East Red Shirt Lake Trail to Red Shirt Lake. Temporary barricades and reflective markings will indicate where the cutoff to the ERSLT begins.

Butterfly Lake Summer Trail – The summer trail is the extension of the Lynx Lake Road that starts at the southern boundary of the Midnight Sun Bible Camp's (MSBC) property and proceeds southerly to the northern side of Butterfly Lake. The MSBC is private property. Users must obtain permission to travel across MSBC property. State Parks does not authorize trespassing across private property. Authorized vehicles **MUST** remain on the designated trail corridor all the way to Butterfly Lake.

Use of all other motorized vehicles including ORVs, highway vehicles, and large double-tracked vehicles will be prohibited on the above described trails during a Category 3 opening. Vehicles must remain in the designated corridor. Violators will be cited.

Category 4: General Snowmobile Openings

A full opening south of the Nancy Lake Parkway for snowmobile and other vehicle use, including as allowed in Category I: Ice Only Openings. The non-motorized area of Nancy Lake State Recreation Area north of the Nancy Lake Parkway will remain closed to all motorized uses.

General Snowmobile Opening Criteria:

- **Category y I: Ice Only Opening:** all criteria **must** first be satisfied; and
- **Soil Frost:** Sufficient to show no deflection upon passage of vehicles (typically 2-3 inches of frost); and
- **Snow Cover:** Minimum of 1.5 inches of snow-water equivalent (typically 18 - 24 inches of snow depth) will be required for openings; and
- **Ranger Discretion:** Rangers will reserve the right to close any trail or area of the park for other resource protection or public safety reasons.

Spring Closing Criteria:

- **Snow Cover:** Once the criteria of a Category 4 Opening can no longer be met, special openings may be downgraded to a **Category 3 Restricted Opening along the Nancy Lake Parkway, ERSLT, Butterfly Lake Winter Trail, and Butterfly Lake Summer Trail ONLY**. This will be strictly enforced to prevent natural resource degradation. A minimum of 90% of trails must remain snow covered, small, exposed soil patches are acceptable unless they begin to show signs of water transport erosion, flowing waterlogged soils, soil rutting, exposed plastic geo-grid on trail structures, unavoidable exposed asphalt on the parkway, or other natural resource degradation at the park ranger's discretion; OR
- **Category y I: Ice Only Opening:** Once this criterion is no longer satisfied, **all areas will close to motorized use** with the exception of highway vehicles on public roads, and the use of motorized boats and airplanes as allowed in 11 AAC 20.

Use of all other motorized vehicles including ORVs, highway vehicles, and large double tracked vehicles will be prohibited on the above described trails during a Category 4 opening.

To Apply for a Permit:

WHERE TO GET:	Online through Parks Permitting HERE
AVAILABLE TO:	Anyone applying
FEES:	\$100.00 Special Use Permit Directors Order

Permittee will be required to:

- Follow Vehicle size restrictions as defined below
- Carry a copy of their signed permit with them while in use Provide name, address, contact info
- Provide vehicle make, model, VIN, color
- Operate ONLY on designated trails or areas
- Avoid damaging trail improvements, i.e., geo-block or bridges
- Sleds discouraged, avoid damage to geo-block or other trail structures (wheeled trailers pref) Give right-of-way to non-motorized trail users
- Compliance with all other state laws

Public Notifications: Notice of openings and closures will be sent out in regular email distributions to all interested parties and on the Alaska State Park website. Please contact the park staff for inclusion or removal from this list. *Whenever possible during the low snow times of year, restricted motorized openings will be posted such that the public will have trail access to maximize typical weekend use. Closures will occur in a similar manner, and unless unusual conditions warrant an emergency closure, park rangers will try to invoke closures on Mondays.*

Methodology:

Snow-Water Equivalent Measurements - Snow-Water Equivalent (SWE) is a common snowpack measurement used primarily for stream flow forecasting.

Two specific locations have been identified for snow-water equivalency tests. Each one has been located by map, OPS coordinates, and in locations that provide some wind protection where snow will be relatively undisturbed. They are also readily accessible without the use of snow vehicles. In the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, samples will be taken at two sites and averaged between them. This will allow an accurate measurement and still allow openings and closure determinations if there is an unexpected change at one sample site. These sites are at the Nancy Lake Office maintenance yard - SWE Site #1 (61° 41.788'N, 150° 1.767'W) and in a clearing near the Nancy Lake Public Use Cabin Trailhead- SWE Site #2 (61° 41.279'N, 150° 1.598'W)

SWE Definition provided by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS): Snow-Water Equivalent is the amount of water contained within the snowpack. It can be thought of as the depth of water that would theoretically result if the entire snowpack was melted instantaneously.

To determine snow depth from SWE one needs to know the density of the snow. The density of **new** snow ranges from about 5% when the air temperature is 14° F, to about 20% when the temperature is 32° F. After the snow falls its density increases due to gravitational settling, wind packing, melting and recrystallization.

To determine the depth of snow using snow water equivalent and density, use the following formula:

$[SWE] + [Density] = \text{Snow Depth}$
(Density must be in decimal form. For example: 25% = 0.25)
Alternatively, $SWE = \text{Snow Depth} \times \text{Density}$

Definitions & Regulations

11 AAC 20.555. Snowmobiles. If the director finds that the snow depth is adequate to protect underlying vegetation, the director shall open Nancy Lake State Recreation Area to the use of snowmobiles south of the Nancy Lake Parkway.

11 AAC 20.990 (26) "snowmobile" means a self-propelled vehicle

- (A) intended for off-road travel on snow;
- (B) having a maximum width of 50 inches and a curb weight of not more than 1000 pounds;
- (C) driven by one or more tracks in contact with the snow; and
- (D) steered by one or more skis in contact with the snow;

11 AAC 20.990 (21) "off-road vehicle"

- (A) means a motorized vehicle
 - (i) designed or adapted for cross-country operation over irregular terrain;
 - (ii) consisting of more than one drive wheel or track;
 - (iii) having a gross vehicle weight less than 1,500 pounds or exerting less than eight [8] pounds per square inch ground pressure; and
 - (iv) that is 64 inches wide or less;
- (B) does not include snowmobiles;

"Sufficient" snow depth is currently defined as approximately 18 inches undisturbed snow, but also depends on snow density, lake ice conditions, ground hardness and weather forecast (to rule out freak snowstorms, etc.).

"Restricted Openings" are defined as allowing authorized motorized use by the public only on designated (signed) trails or corridors with the exception of lake ice (unrestricted). Users are asked to voluntarily avoid patches of minimal or no snow coverage on trails to minimize resource impacts (typically in spring). Restricted Openings are subject to rapid closures should conditions suddenly change or abuses occur.