

COOKE CITY &
SILVER GATE AREA
RECREATION ACCESS

WINTERVISITOR

Kara Grau, Melissa Weddell

Winter visitors to Cooke City/Silver Gate and their thoughts on winter recreation access to the area



ABOUT OUR WORK

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research (ITRR) has partnered with RRC Associates, a Colorado-based consumer insights and consulting firm specialized in providing services to destination management organizations (DMOs), local governments, and other tourism-focused organizations, to study recreation access in Montana and Wyoming's Cooke City/Silver Gate area.

Historically, Highway 212 east of Cooke City has remained unplowed during the winter.

As a result, road access to Cooke City and Silver Gate is limited to the west, via Yellowstone National Park.

Varying ideas exist among area residents regarding the plowing of the eastern road, known as the "Plug," during winter—some advocate for its maintenance, while others prefer it to stay unplowed.



RESEARCH PHASES

The study consists of three stages: first, a survey to gauge resident sentiments (local residents, fall 2023; regional residents, winter 2024); second, a survey on summer visitor recreation access (summer 2023); and third, a survey focused on winter visitor recreation access (winter 2024). The final report is slated for delivery in the summer of 2024. This report highlights the results of the 2024 winter visitor recreation access survey.

WINTER VISITOR SURVEY & METHODOLOGY

In order to provide information about visitors' views of recreation access to the Cooke City/Silver Gate area, ITRR conducted surveys of people in Cooke City during the winter season. Over the course of eight days throughout March 2024, three ITRR surveyors spoke with 154 individuals at two gas stations (Cooke City Exxon and Cooke City Sinclar). Eightyfour percent of those approached agreed to participate in the survey. Respondents who lived at least 50 miles outside of Cooke City/Silver Gate were eligible to take part in the visitor survey; the winter visitor survey had an eligible sample size of 117 respondents.

WINTER VISITOR SURVEY INSTRUMENT

ITRR collaborated with RRC
Associates and the project Steering
Committee, comprising community
members, to develop the survey
instrument. It comprised questions
about respondents' visits to the area
and their participation in
recreational activities, as well as
their thoughts on winter access via
US 212. Formatted for tablet use via
Qualtrics survey software, the survey
allowed surveyors to navigate
seamlessly, posing questions and
accurately recording respondents'
answers with efficiency.



RESULTS

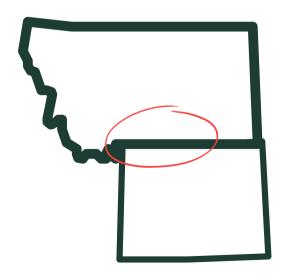
RESIDENCE

The initial inquiry from surveyors involved asking about the location of a visitor's permanent residence. If it fell within 50 miles of Cooke City/Silver Gate, the individual was not considered a visitor for the purposes of this project, and would have been eligible to participate in the previously conducted resident survey.

Of visitors who live outside of the 50-mile radius, 92% reside in the US (n=109), and 8% in Canada (n=9).

Montana (n= 51, 43%) and Minnesota (n=20, 17%) were the two most highly represented states among US residents.

Montana	43%	Colorado	1%
Minnesota	17%	lowa	1%
North Dakota	13%	Manitoba	1%
Saskatchewan	7 %	New Hampshire	1%
Michigan	5%	New York	1%
California	3%	Oklahoma	1%
Wyoming	3%	South Dakota	1%
Utah	2%	Texas	1%
Arizona	1%	Washington	1%



Those who reside in Montana or Wyoming were also asked what community they live in. Of the 51 Montana residents, most came from Bozeman (n=13), Livingston (n=7), or Billings (n=5). Varying communities representing 1 or 2 responses make up the remainder of Montana and Wyoming residents who were surveyed.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The plurality of travel groups were friends (43%), followed by groups of friends and family (25%).

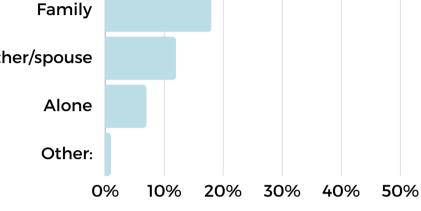
Friends

Friends and family

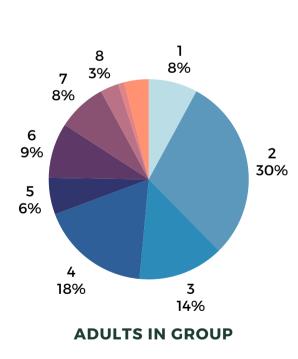
Family

Significant other/spouse

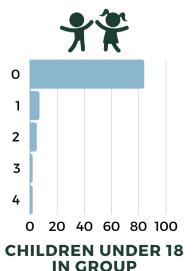




WHAT TYPE OF GROUP ARE/WERE YOU WITH ON YOUR VISIT TO COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE?



Overall, groups averaged 4.2 people

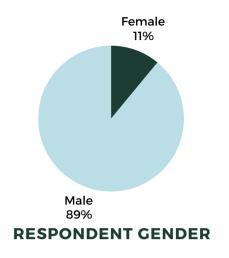


Average group size was 4.2 people.

The most commonly reported group size of 2 (25%), was followed by groups of 4 (22%) and 3 (20%).

The vast majority of groups included no children under 18 (84%), though 16% of groups included 1 to 4 children.

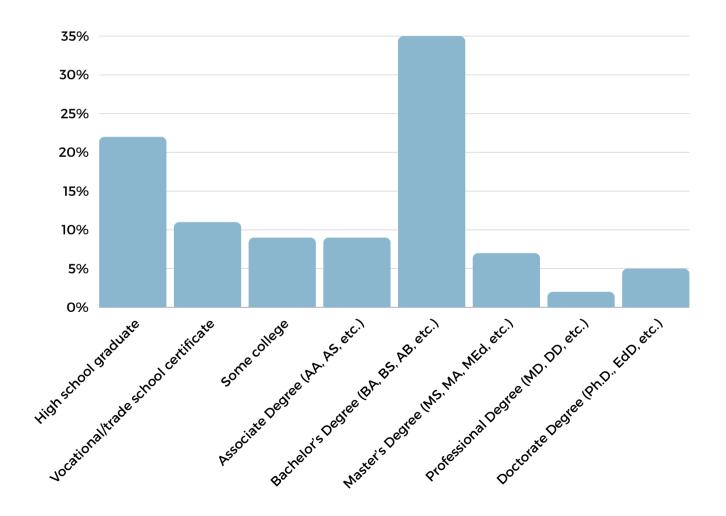
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS CONT.



Survey respondents were more often male (89%) than female (11%).

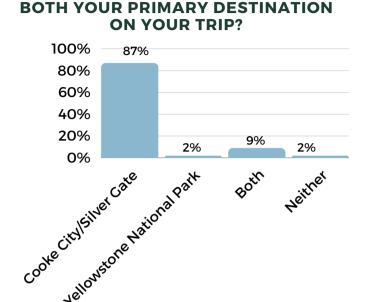
Respondents most often reported having earned a Bachelor's Degree (35%) or High school diploma (22%). Respondents' gender was more likely to be male (89%) than female (11%).

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST DEGREE OR LEVEL OF SCHOOL YOU HAVE COMPLETED?

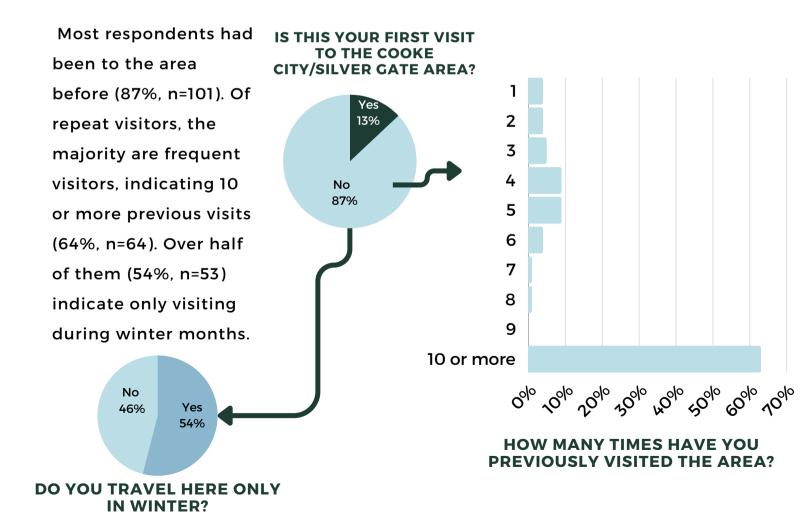


CURRENT VISIT TO THE AREA

When asked about the primary destinations for their trip, approximately 87% (n=102) of respondents indicated Cooke City/Silver Gate area, 2% (n=2) were visiting Yellowstone National Park, and 9% (n=11) specified both the national park and community areas as their primary destinations. Two percent stated that neither Yellowstone nor Cooke City/Silver Gate was their main trip destination.

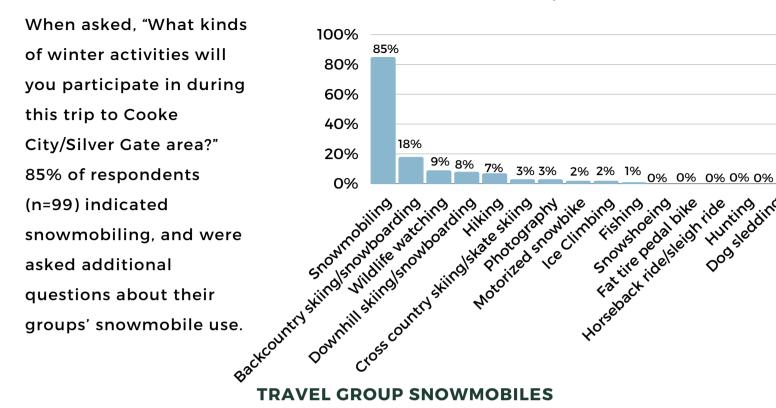


WAS COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK. OR



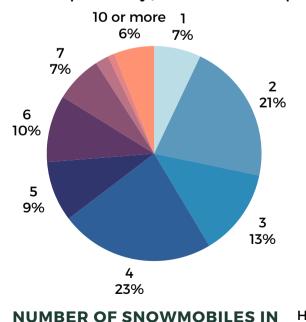
Dog sledding

WINTER ACTIVITIES & SNOWMOBILING IN COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE AREA



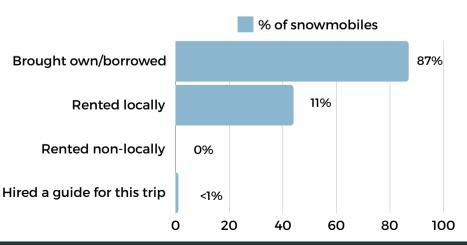
TRAVEL GROUP SNOWMOBILES

Those visitors who were snowmobiling were asked about the number of snowmobiles in their group (defined as the travel group with whom expenses were shared on the trip), as well as if the machines were owned, borrowed, or rented. The majority of groups comprised 2, 3, or 4 snowmobiles (21%, 13%, and 23% respectively), and 6% of respondents had groups of 10 or more snowmobiles.



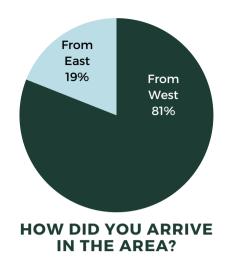
TRAVEL GROUP

413 total snowmobiles are represented in this sample. Most of them (87%) were owned (or borrowed) and brought on the trip.

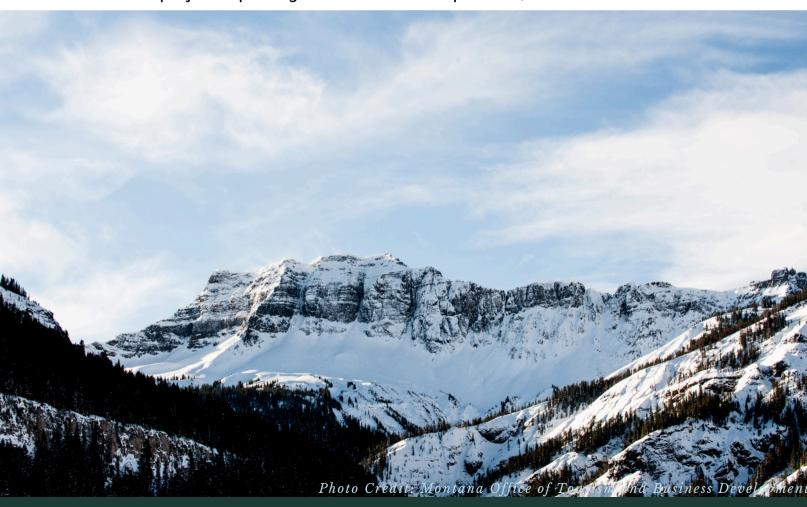


WINTER TRAVEL TO COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE AREA

Respondents could have arrived in Cooke City/Silver Gate area either by driving from the west through Yellowstone from Gardiner (81%), or by driving to the parking area on US 212 and riding their snowmobile(s) on groomed trails on/near the unplowed roadway (19%) from the east.

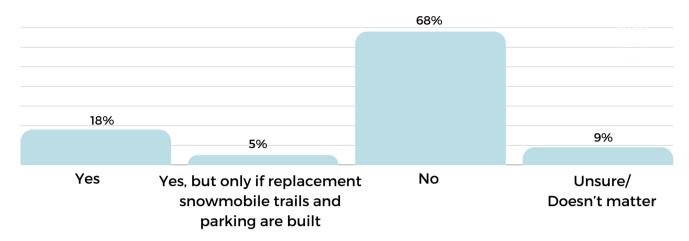


*It should be noted that visitor surveys were not collected to the east of the unplowed section of US 212, due to difficulty in accessing the region along with hiring limitations. The regional resident survey, also conducted during Spring, 2024, captured information regarding recreation access sentiment, and those findings are included in project reporting from our research partners, RRC Associates.



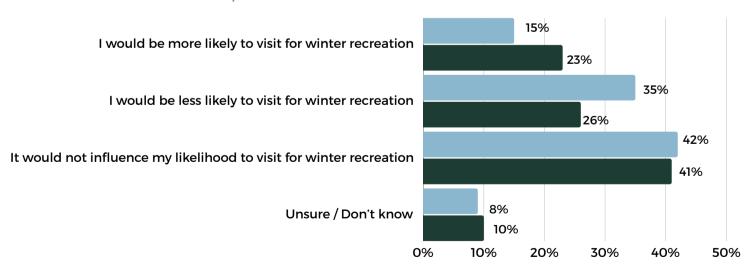
WINTER TRAVEL TO COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE AREA

AS A VISITOR TO THE AREA, WOULD YOU PREFER TO HAVE US 212 EAST OF COOKE CITY PLOWED DURING THE WINTER SEASON?



In an effort to guage visitor sentiment regarding winter access to Cooke City/Silver Gate, respondents were asked their preference for winter plowing, as well as the influence of plowing on their likelihood to visit for winter recreation. Results of this survey indicate a visitor preference for US 212 to remain unplowed during winter. Two follow-up questions ask about respondents likelihood to visit given two different plowing scenarios.

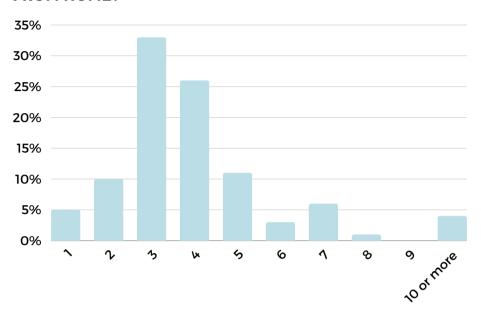
HOW WOULD PLOWING US 212 EAST OF COOKE CITY, WITHOUT ADDING ANY REPLACEMENT TRAILS OR PARKING, INFLUENCE YOUR LIKELIHOOD TO VISIT COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE AREA FOR WINTER RECREATION?



HOW WOULD PLOWING US 212 EAST OF COOKE CITY, WITH THE ADDITION OF REPLACEMENT TRAILS AND PARKING, INFLUENCE YOUR LIKELIHOOD TO VISIT COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE AREA FOR WINTER RECREATION?

THIS TRIP TO THE AREA TIME IN COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE & REGION

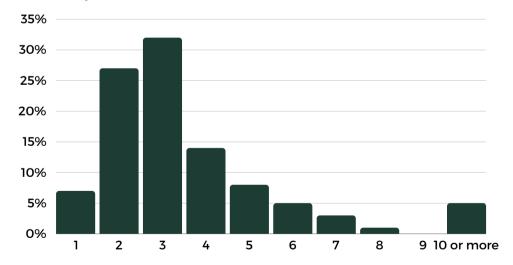
HOW MANY DAYS DO YOU PLAN TO SPEND IN COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE ON THIS TRIP AWAY FROM HOME?



The most common trip length among respondents was 3-4 days in Cooke City/Silver Gate area.

Those staying more than one day were asked how many nights they were staying in the area, and in line with reported days, 2 or 3 nights were most commonly reported.

HOW MANY NIGHTS ARE YOU STAYING IN COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE?



The visitors were also asked about additional days they plan to spend outside of the area but in Montana and/or Wyoming. The vast majority of respondents indicated zero days (89% said 0 additional days in Montana, while 98% said 0 additional days in Wyoming).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ITRR would like to thank those who facilitated this research:

The Steering Committee provided invaluable input in the framing of research questions and the survey instrument to help ensure the needs of the community can best be met.

Two gas stations, Cooke City Exxon and Cooke City Sinclar, generously allowed ITRR surveyors to spend time talking with their customers and visitors to conduct survey interviews.

We would like to thank the Cooke City and Silver Gate Communities for their friendliness, insight, and hospitality.

Several University of Montana students, Daniel Besel, Huntre Tillman, and Mason Wiggins, made it possible to successfully execute the data collection component of this project, and we extend our gratitude for their hard work, flexibility, and professionalism.

Melissa Weddell

ITRR Director & Research Faculty melissa.weddell@umontana.edu

Kara Grau

Assistant Director of Economic Analysis kara.grau@umontana.edu



FULL RESULTS - DATA TABLES

For full statistical output of data summarized in this report, please see the following pages.

Statistics

Hello, I'm ___ from the University of Montana. The Cooke City/Silver Gate/Colter Pass Area is a world-class recreation destination. We are working with local communities to understand their visitors a bit better so they can make informed decisions about how they want recreation and tourism to look in the area in the future. May I ask you a few questions?

Valid Yes	129	84.3
No	24	15.7
Total	153	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	154	

Do you live at least 50 miles outside Cooke City/Silver Gate?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid Yes	117	90.7
No - discontinue	12	9.3
Total	129	100.0
Missing System	25	
Total	154	

Where is your permanent residence? (US States and Territories)

Frequencialid Percent

	1 10940110	
Valid Arizona	1	0.9
California	3	2.8
Colorado	1	0.9
lowa	1	0.9
Michigan	6	5.6
Minnesota	20	18.5
Montana	51	47.2
New Hampshire	1	0.9
New York	1	0.9
North Dakota	14	13.0
Oklahoma	1	0.9
South Dakota	1	0.9
Texas	1	0.9

Utah	2	1.9
Washington	1	0.9
Wyoming	3	2.8
Total	108	100.0
Missing System	9	
Total	117	

In what Montana town do you live?

Frequencylid Percent

		-requenc	alia Perce
Valid	ANACONDA	1	2.0
	ARLEE	1	2.0
	BIG SANDY	1	2.0
	BIG TIMBER	1	2.0
	BILLINGS	5	9.8
	BOZEMAN	13	25.5
	BOZEMAN CANYON	2	3.9
	BUTTE	1	2.0
	CIRCLE	1	2.0
	COOKE CITY	2	3.9
	CUT BANK	1	2.0
	DILLON	1	2.0
	EMIGRANT	1	2.0
	GARDINER	3	5.9
	GLENDIVE	1	2.0
	HAVRE	1	2.0
	HELENA	1	2.0
	KALISPELL	1	2.0
	LIVINGSTON	7	13.7
	MANHATTAN	1	2.0
	MISSOULA	1	2.0
	RED LODGE	3	5.9
	WILSALL	1	2.0
	Total	51	100.0
Missing	System	66	
Total		117	

In what Wyoming town do you live?

Frequencialid Percent

Valid	Cody	2	66.7
	Douglas	1	33.3
	Total	3	100.0

Missing	System	114	
Total		117	

~or~ Where is your permanent residence? (Canadian Provinces and Te

Frequencylid Percent

Valid Manitoba	1	11.1
Saskatchewan	8	88.9
Total	9	100.0
Missing System	108	
Total	117	

~or~ Where is your permanent residence? (International, please enter of

Frequencylid Percent

Valid	na	na

Is Cooke City/Silver Gate, Yellowstone National Park, or both your prin

Frequencialid Percent

Valid Cooke City/Silver Gate	101	87.1
Yellowstone National Pa	_	1.7
Both	11	9.5
Neither	2	1.7
Total	116	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	117	

Is this your first visit to the Cooke City/ Silver Gate area?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid Yes	14	12.2
No	101	87.8
Total	115	100.0
Missing System	2	
Total	117	

How many times have you previously visited the area?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid 1	4	4.0
2	4	4.0
3	5	5.0
4	9	8.9
5	9	8.9
6	4	4.0

7	1	1.0
8	1	1.0
10 or more	64	63.4
Total	101	100.0
Missing System	16	
Total	117	

Do you travel here only in winter?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid Yes	53	53.5
No	46	46.5
Total	99	100.0
Missing System	18	
Total	117	

during this trip to the Cooke City/Silver Gate area?

(Chack all that apply)

Frequencylid Percent

Snowmobiling	99	85%
Backcountry skiing/snov	21	18%
Wildlife watching	10	9%
Downhill skiing/snowbo	9	8%
Hiking	8	7%
Cross country skiing/ska	4	3%
Photography	4	3%
Motorized snowbike	2	2%
Ice Climbing	2	2%
Fishing	1	1%
Snowshoeing	0	0%
Fat tire pedal bike	0	0%
Horseback ride/sleigh ri	0	0%
Hunting	0	0%
Dog sledding	0	0%
Total	117	

Surveyor observe and mark:

Frequencialid Percent

Valid	Respondent snowmobil	98	83.8
	Respondent NOT snow	19	16.2

Total	117	100.0
TOtal	111	100.0

How many snowmobiles are in your group? (Your travel group includes those with whom you are sharing expenses on this trip)

	10990110	
Valid 1	7	7.2
2	20	20.6
3	13	13.4
4	22	22.7
5	9	9.3
6	10	10.3
7	7	7.2
8	2	2.1
9	1	1.0
10 or more	6	6.2
Total	97	100.0
Missing System	20	
Total	117	

Of those snowmobiles, have you.... Brought your own (or borrowed) snowmobile(s) to ride - How many?

			4.5	_	
-	ragi	ILANC	וומ	Percent	t.
			211(1		

	requerio	
Valid 1	10	10.3
2	21	21.6
3	9	9.3
4	17	17.5
5	11	11.3
6	6	6.2
7	5	5.2
8	2	2.1
9	1	1.0
10 or more	6	6.2
0	9	9.3
Total	97	100.0
Missing System	20	
Total	117	

Rented snowmobiles from a shop the in Cooke City/Silver Gate Area - How many?

Fred	uenc	alid P	ercent
1 100	140110	ana i	OLOGIIL

Valid 1	5	5.2
2	4	4.2
3	3	3.1
4	2	2.1
7	2	2.1
0	80	83.3
Total	96	100.0
Missing System	21	
Total	117	

Rented snowmobiles and brought them to Cooke City/Silver Gate area - how many?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid 0	96	100.0
Missing System	21	
Total	117	

Hired a guide for this snowmobile trip in Cooke City/Silver Gate area - How many?

Frequenc	Percent	alid Perce	ulative	Percent
----------	---------	------------	---------	---------

Valid 1	2	1.7	2.1	2.1
0	94	80.3	97.9	100.0
Total	96	82.1	100.0	
Missing System	21	17.9		
Total	117	100.0		

# of snown Snowmobiles in group	Brought ov	Rented loc	Rented no	Hired a gui	de for this trip
0	0	0	0	0	
1	7 10	5	0	1	16
2 4	10 42	8	0	0	50
3	9 27	9	0	0	36
4 8	88 68	8	0	0	76
5 4	5 55	0	0	0	55
6	3 6	0	0	0	36
7 4	9 35	14	0	0	49
8 1	6 16	0	0	0	16
9	9 9	0	0	0	9
10 6	60	0	0	0	60

413	358	44	0	1
	87%	11%		0.2%
Valid Drove my car/truck thro	94	81.0		
Drove my car/truck to the	22	19.0		
Total	116	100.0		
Missing System	1			
Total	117			

How did you arrive in the Cooke City/Silver Gate area? - Other mode (P

	Frequenc	alid Percen
Valid	117	100.0

As a visitor to the area, would you prefer to have US 212 east of Cooke City plowed during the winter season?

F		LI: L	Percent
-100	menc	411(1	Percent
	100110	Alla	1 0100111

Valid Yes	21	18.1
Yes, but only if replacer	6	5.2
No	80	69.0
Unsure / Doesn't matter	9	7.8
Total	116	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	117	

How would plowing US 212 east of Cooke City, without adding any replacement trails or parking, influence your likelihood to visit Cooke

Frequencylid Percent

Valid I would be more likely to	17	14.7
I would be less likely to	41	35.3
It would not influence m	49	42.2
Unsure / Don't know	9	7.8
Total	116	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	117	

How would plowing US 212 east of Cooke City, with the addition of replacement trails and parking, influence your likelihood to visit Cooke City/Silver Gate Area for winter recreation?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid I would be more likely to	27	23.3
I would be less likely to	30	25.9
It would not influence m	48	41.4
Unsure / Don't know	11	9.5
Total	116	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	117	

Averages

	o you plan to spend in C	Cooke City	staying i	na (outsic	spend ii	GrpSz
N	Valid	116	110	115	108	115
	Missing	1	7	2	9	2
Mean		3.95	3.48	10.23	10.91	4.21

How many days do you plan to spend in Cooke City/Silver Gate on this

	Frequenc	alid Perce
Valid 1	6	5.2
2	12	10.3
3	39	33.6
4	30	25.9
5	12	10.3
6	4	3.4
7	7	6.0
8	1	0.9
10 or more	5	4.3
Total	116	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	117	

How many nights are you staying in Cooke City/Silver Gate?

F	requenc	alid	Perce	nt
	0		7.0	

-	10990110	x
Valid 1	8	7.3
2	30	27.3
3	35	31.8
4	14	12.7
5	9	8.2
6	5	4.5
7	3	2.7
8	1	0.9
10 or more	5	4.5
Total	110	100.0

Missing System	7	
Total	117	

How many additional days do you plan to spend in Montana (outside of Cooke City/Silver Gate) on this trip away from home?

Fred	uenc	alid I	Percent 2
	0.00		0.00

6	5.2
1	0.9
1	0.9
1	0.9
4	3.5
102	88.7
115	100.0
2	
117	
	1 1 1 4 102 115 2

How many additional days do you plan to spend in Wyoming on this trip away from home?

Frequencylid Percent

Valid 5	1	0.9
7	1	0.9
0	106	98.1
Total	108	100.0
Missing System	9	
Total	117	

What type of group are/were you with on your visit to Cooke City/Silver Gate? - Selected Choice

Frequencylid Percent

Valid	Alone	7	6.0
	Significant other/spouse	12	10.3
	Friends	50	43.1
	Family	18	15.5
	Friends and family	28	24.1
	Other:	1	0.9
	Total	116	100.0
Missing	System	1	

Total	117	

How many adults are in your travel group? (Your travel group includes

Frequencylid Percent

Valid 1	9	7.8
2	34	29.6
3	16	13.9
4	21	18.3
5	7	6.1
6	10	8.7
7	9	7.8
8	3	2.6
9	1	0.9
10 or more	5	4.3
Total	115	100.0
Missing System	2	
Total	117	

How many children (under 18) are in your travel group?

Frequencylid Percent

	requeric	allu i erce
Valid 1	8	7.3
2	6	5.5
3	2	1.8
4	2	1.8
0	92	83.6
Total	110	100.0
Missing System	7	
Total	117	

How many adults are in your travel group? (Your travel group includes those with whom you are sharing expenses on this trip)

Frequencialid Percent

	Frequenc	alid Perce
Valid 1.00	9	7.8
2.00	34	29.6
3.00	16	13.9
4.00	21	18.3
5.00	7	6.1
6.00	10	8.7
7.00	9	7.8
8.00	3	2.6

9.00	1	0.9
10.00	5	4.3
Total	115	100.0
Missing System	2	
Total	117	

How many children (under 18) are in your travel group?

Frequencialid Percent

Valid .00	94	83.9
1.00	8	7.1
2.00	6	5.4
3.00	2	1.8
4.00	2	1.8
Total	112	100.0
Missing System	5	
Total	117	

Group Size

Frequencylid Percent

-	10990110	
Valid 1	7	6.1
2	27	23.5
3	19	16.5
4	24	20.9
5	6	5.2
6	11	9.6
7	10	8.7
8	3	2.6
9	1	0.9
10	6	5.2
11	1	0.9
Total	115	100.0
Missing System	2	
Total	117	

	Group Size	Adults	Children
0			84%
1	6%	8%	7%
2	23%	30%	5%
3	17%	14%	2%
4	21%	18%	2%
5	5%	6%	0%

6	10%	9%	0%
7	9%	8%	0%
8	3%	3%	0%
9	1%	1%	0%
10	6%	4%	0%

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (Ma

Frequencylid Percent

Valid	High school graduate	25	21.6
	Vocational/trade school	13	11.2
	Some college	10	8.6
	Associate Degree (AA,	11	9.5
	Bachelor's Degree (BA,	41	35.3
	Master's Degree (MS, N	8	6.9
	Professional Degree (M	2	1.7
	Doctorate Degree (Ph.D	6	5.2
	Total	116	100.0
Missing	System	1	
Total		117	

Interviewer record observed gender

Frequencylid Percent

Valid Male	103	88.8
Female	13	11.2
Total	116	100.0
Missing System	1	
Total	117	