

# Jackson agencies pick up plow tab

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JACKSON HOLE DAILY

Members of the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board on Thursday pledged \$56,000 to plow the roads into Yellowstone National Park.

Matched with another \$14,000 from the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, the money will cover the estimated \$70,000 price tag for state transportation workers to operate snow-removal equipment and clear the roads from the park's south entrance.

The fundraising is expected to avoid a two-week delay in opening the national park and stave off potential economic impacts to Jackson businesses.

It also could change the way people are talking about the fallout of federal sequester budget cuts, several officials said Thursday.

"The PR that would come out of this kind of story, I don't think you can buy that," Chamber Executive Director Jeff Golightly said.

Cody Country Chamber of Commerce leaders also announced a campaign Thursday to raise \$100,000 to plow from Yellowstone's eastern entrance. Half of that — \$50,000 — will be raised from donations, which the chamber will match, director Scott Balyo said in a press release.

Two weeks ago, Yellowstone Superintendent Dan Wenk opted to delay the opening of the park until May 17 to manage federal budget cuts related to sequestration.

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## PLOW

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In response, Gov. Matt Mead said earlier this week that WYDOT crews and equipment would be available for plowing if town and county governments or community organizations would pay for the work.

Both Jackson Town Council members and Teton County commissioners declined to contribute. During a retreat Tuesday, elected leaders raised concerns about having to step in for a federal agency and what the effects might be of sending WYDOT's plows so far away from the Jackson area.

The contribution from the lodging tax board still is being reviewed by county attorneys, who asked the Wyoming Attorney General's office to weigh in. Deputy County Attorney Keith Gingery said they want to make sure it's legal for the lodging tax board to contribute to the effort.

The board isn't allowed to spend money on capital construction. Its bylaws state that board members can spend money on promotional materials, such as radio and television advertisements, as well as "other specific tourism objectives."

Gingery asked for a formal opinion to determine whether the contribution would be considered a tourism objective.

As approved, WYDOT trucks are expected to start plowing from the south entrance on April 8. If plows start on that date, they should meet Yellowstone crews approximately eight miles south of Grant Village.

The south gate would open as normal on May 3.

WYDOT officials estimated that plowing the park's roads would cost \$4,400 per mile, although snow conditions over the next few weeks could change that cost.

The Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board and Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce are committed to cover any extra costs.

Golightly said delaying opening the park would be detrimental to Jackson businesses. Approximately 18,500 visitors use the south gate in the two weeks immediately after it opens. Those visitors spend an average of \$135 per day, which adds up to a total of \$2.5 million in spending in Jackson, he said.

"Two weeks doesn't sound like a lot of time," Jackson Mayor Mark Barron said. "Unless you're the guy trying to make payroll or a rent or mortgage payment."

Barron said he had a text waiting on his phone addressed to WYDOT District Engineer John Eddins and Cody Mayor Nancy Brown telling them to send the plows.