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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Mount Jumbo South Zone closure extended through March 31

To protect wintering elk and mule deer, much of Mount Jumbo is closed to recreational use during the winter months. Mount Jumbo's South Zone will remain closed through Monday, March 31. The extended closure includes the "L" Trail, Hidden Trail in East Missoula, the US West road above I-90 and the Backbone Trail.

The Jumbo winter closure has been expanded due to record snowfall in the Missoula valley in recent weeks. The extra snow has forced Jumbo's herd of about 60 to 70 elk to remain on Jumbo's lower elevations where forage is more plentiful. During harsh winter months, when food is scarce, elk and mule deer must strike a balance between the reduced calories they consume and the energy they expend to stay warm and move through the deep snow. Even during mild winters, the food available at Jumbo's lower elevations is crucial to the elk's survival. Human disturbance causes elk to flee, thereby expending energy at a time when they need to conserve it the most.

Parks and Recreation's volunteer Elk Spotters counted 63 elk on Jumbo's southern flank earlier this week. Officials from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the City of Missoula have determined the closure extension will give the herd time to move to higher elevations and away from people and dogs.

Parks and Recreation has also learned, through the Elk Spotters program and last month's avalanche that some citizens are ignoring the closure and most of these trespassers appear to be accessing the mountain via the "L" Trail. The department is working with its open space advisory boards and the Missoula Police Department to develop options on better educate citizens and prevent trespass on Jumbo during the elk winter range closure. Please call 911 to report trespassers during the closure.

The Saddle Road and all points south of the road will re-open to the public on Tuesday, April 1. North Mount Jumbo (areas north of the Saddle Road) remains closed until May 1. The Saddle Road is located at the north end of Lincoln Hills Drive.

For more information, call 721-PARK or visit the Parks and Recreation website at www.missoulaparks.org.