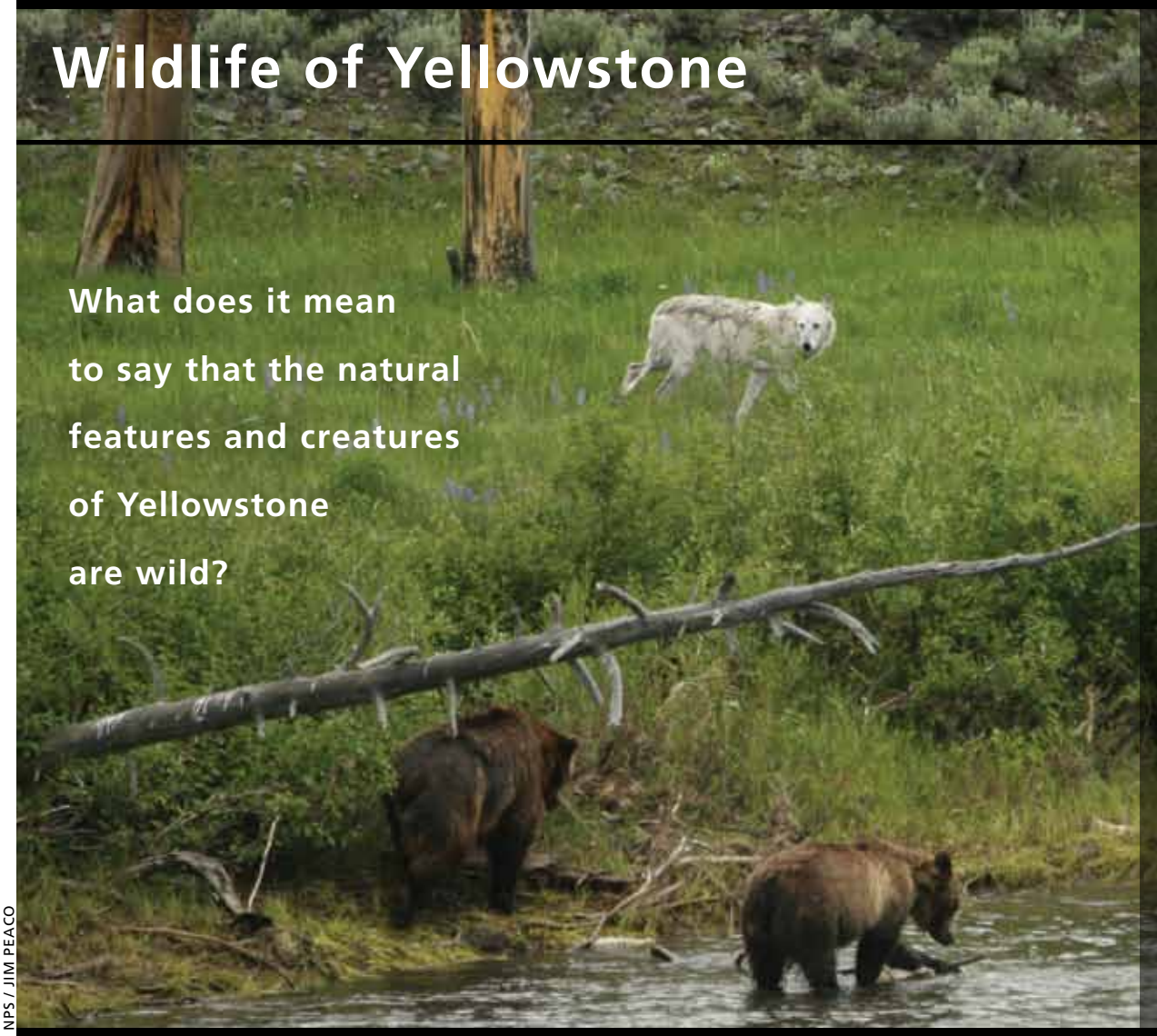
Wildlife of Yellowstone



NPS / JIM PEACO

What does it mean to say that the natural features and creatures of Yellowstone are wild?

As you enjoy park trails –

- **Hike with a group of three or more people.**
- **Make yourself heard in areas where you can't see far around you.**
- **Watch for bears and be alert for fresh tracks or scat.**
- **Carry bear spray and know how to use it.**
- **Do not run.**

Scan this QR code with a free app for your smartphone to link directly to information about bears on the park website.

http://**go.nps.gov/ynp-bear**

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• **Amphibians** six species • **Birds** 148 species nest here, 322 species seen • **Fish** 11 native species, five species not native • **Mammals** 67 species • **Reptiles** four species

Yellowstone animals are not tame. The park's 2.2 million acres of forests, meadows, river valleys, and lakes serve as an an important sanctuary for the largest concentration of wildlife in the lower 48 states. **By taking steps to assure your own safety here, you are helping to assure the continued well-being of the animals that know this place as home.**

Grizzly bears • The population of grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem was returned to the federal threatened species list in 2009. Researchers believe it is doing well at present. There are about 150 animals with home ranges, in part or whole, inside the park.

Black bears, by comparison, are considered common in the park. They are more adapted to life in forests and along forest edges.

Grizzlies can swim, run up and downhill, and sprint up to 40 miles per hour. Males can weigh 700 pounds, stand 3-1/2 feet at the shoulder, and live as long as 30 years.

Grizzlies can be effective predators, especially on vulnerable prey such as elk calves and spawning cutthroat trout. They scavenge meat when available. Long claws and strong shoulders enable them to dig efficiently for roots, bulbs, corms, and tuber and rodents and their caches. They also eat a variety of plants.

Grizzly track

Subadult bears just learning to live away from mother's protection are most vulnerable to danger from humans and other bears, and to becoming conditioned to human food. Food-conditioned bears must be removed from the park's wild population.

Grizzly Bear
Ursus arctos horribilis

- Shoulder hump
- Rump lower than shoulder

Black Bear
Ursus americanus

- No shoulder hump
- Rump higher than shoulder

What about color?
Both kinds of bears can be golden, dark brown, black, reddish, or combinations of all the above.

Keep your distance. You must stay at least 100 yards (91 m) from bears and wolves. A distance of 25 yards (23 m) is required from bison, elk, and other animals. Regardless of distance, if any wild animal changes its behavior due to your presence, you are too close.

Do not feed any wild animals, including birds. Consuming human food is unhealthy and encourages aggressive behavior that may require management action. All food, trash, coolers, and cooking tools must be kept secure in a bear-proof container unless in immediate use.

Give wildlife a brake. Unless posted slower, top speed throughout the park is 45 mph (73 kph). To assure yourself enough stopping distance if you encounter animals unexpectedly, please slow down.

Watch from pullouts. If you see an animal while driving, do not stop. Regardless of what other people may do, keep moving to the next paved pullout and park safely. If the animal is within a minimum distance described above, watch and take photographs from inside your car. If other visitors put you or wildlife in danger, leave the scene and notify a park ranger. Always comply with instructions of park staff on scene.

NPS / DOUG SMITH

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NPS / JEFF FOOTT

NPS / JIM PEACO

NPS / MARK MARSCHALL

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Elk • The most abundant large animal in the park, elk populations in summer can reach 15,000 animals across seven different herds. By mid-summer, elk are at high elevations seeking nutritous forage. Winter populations can be 70 percent less since most migrate outside the park. Bulls can weigh 700 pounds and stand five feet at the shoulder, comparable to an average horse.

Wolf • Reintroduced in 1995, wolf numbers in the park in December 2011 amounted to 98 animals across 10 packs. Males can weigh 130 pounds, stand 36 inches at the shoulder, and stretch six feet from nose to tail. A home range here can span 186 to 310 square miles (300 to 500 square kilometers) based on pack size, food availability, and season. Its leading natural cause of death is from wolves killing other wolves.

Beaver • Weighing 30 to 60 pounds and measuring 35 to 40 inches long, including tail, beavers eat succulent or herbaceous vegetation in summer and the bark of woody vegetation that they store next to their lodges in winter. A survey of the park in 2011 counted 112 colonies, which range from two to 14 animals. Six is considered average. Like wolves, beavers live in family groups. Fewer than five percent of mammals live organized like this.

Mule deer • Its big ears and bounding run distinguish it from the white-tailed deer, which is considered less common in Yellowstone. Males can weigh 250 pounds and stand 40 inches at the shoulder. Males grows antlers until September and sheds them in late winter or spring.

Bison • Yellowstone has the largest and most important herd of wild plains bison in the United States. Migratory wild bison are rare and their existence in modern society is considered tenuous. When they migrate seasonally too far beyond park boundaries, they compete directly with humans for occupancy of large, open spaces along river corridors The park population fluctuates between 2,500 and 4,500 individuals, and exhibits no evidence of interbreeding with cattle. Here, bison still face the full suite of natural selection pressures as their ancestors—predators, severe weather, and competition for food and mates.

Bald eagle • Monitored since the 1980s, the bald eagle was removed from the federal threatened species list in 2007. Eagles near Yellowstone Lake are experiencing declines due to a reduced cutthroat trout population. Others are losing nests because trees are falling as a result of the 1988 fires. Females are larger than males, as is true with most predatory birds.

Cutthroat trout • Considered a keystone species upon which many other species depend, cutthroat trout spawn in shallow water where they become an important food resource for other wildlife, including the grizzly bear. They require cold, clean water in streams or lakes and are at great risk from hybridization by rainbow trout and predation by non-native lake trout.

Moose • Recent research suggests the 1988 fires burned prime moose habitat which may have contributed to its population decline. Fewer than 100 may live in the park at present. A bull can weigh 1,000 pounds and stand more than seven feet at the shoulder. Despite its size, it can slip through woods without a sound. The principle staples of its diet are the leaves and twigs of willow shrubs, followed by aquatic plants and other woody browse species such as gooseberry and buffaloberry.

Coyote • Often mistaken for a wolf, a coyote is about one-third in size with a slighter build. It weighs as much as 30 pounds and can stand 20 inches at the shoulder. In Yellowstone, they live in family groups of up to seven animals. Also known as “song dogs,” coyotes communicate with each other by a variety of long-range vocalizations, especially during dawn and dusk.

Trumpeter swan • Considered the most imperiled species in Yellowstone, fewer than 10 trumpeter swans have lived in the park year-round in recent years due to a number of factors. Winter numbers vary from 60 to several hundred. About 46,000 exist across North America. The largest wild fowl on the continent, the trumpeter's nest is a large, floating mass of vegetation on slow moving rivers or quiet lakes. They tend to be easily disturbed by humans.

Anise swallowtail • A large and spectacular butterfly, the anise swallowtail occupies a variety of habitats including meadows of wildflowers and open forests. As swallowtails and other butterflies visit flowers to gather nutritious nectar, they incidentally transfer pollen from one blossom to another. Other major insect pollinators include bees, moths and flies.

Bighorn sheep • Before a chlamydia (pinkeye) epidemic in 1982, almost 500 bighorn sheep lived on the northern range. The population has been slow to recover to about 300 at present. Males can weigh 300 pounds. While both males and females grow horns, it can take seven years for a male to grow a distinctive full curl. The bottoms of its feet are concave, enabling it to travel across escape terrain more readily than its predators.

Great horned owl • Tufts of feathers on the head of a great horned owl provide camouflage. Its ears, located at the edge of the dark circle of feathers around its face, pinpoint the source of sounds made by the rodents and other animals upon which it preys. Extremely large eyes gather light for finding and capturing prey at dusk, dawn and throughout the night. Both male and female great horned owls hoot to establish and maintain their territory, but the females hoot at a higher pitch.

Marmot • One of the largest rodents in Yellowstone, up to 28 inches and 11 pounds, the yellow-bellied marmot hibernates up to eight months of the year. If conditions are dry and green vegetation is lacking, it may return to dormancy (known as estivation) in June and reappear to feed on seeds in late summer. Found from lowest valleys to alpine tundra, it lives in colonies that consist of one male, several females, plus young of the year. Vocalizations include a loud whistle, a "scream" used for fear and excitement, and a quiet tooth chatter that may be a threat.

Pronghorn • Not a true antelope, the pronghorn is among animals that evolved uniquely in North America during the past 20 million years. Adults developed a capacity to run 65 mph for several miles to outrun cheetahs, which have been extinct here for 10,000 years. While it has true horns, similar to bison and bighorn sheep, the outer sheaths are shed and regrown each year. Males can weigh 125 pounds, stand 40 inches at the shoulder, and have a black cheek patch. Newborns can walk within 30 minutes of birth and are capable of outrunning a human in a couple of days.

NPS / WILLIAM S. KELLER

Trumpeter swan

NPS PHOTO

Anise swallowtail

NPS / WILLIAM S. KELLER

Bighorn sheep

NPS / JIM PEACO

Great horned owl

NPS / CHRISTINE DUCHESNE

Marmot

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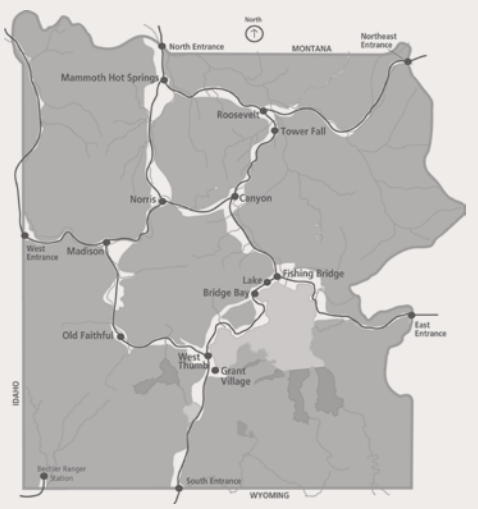
Pronghorn

A wild landscape

Since 1972, about 90 percent of the park has been managed so as not to preclude its formal designation as wilderness. Congress has yet to act on the recommendation, however. Areas near roads, centers of visitor services, ranger cabins and previously disturbed sites are not included.

You didn't just come here to see wild animals.

You came to see a place where it's still possible to see wild animals.



NPS / J. SCHMIDT

Wilderness has different meanings for different people. In areas now managed as wilderness, people can visit, but not remain.

YELLOWSTONE
PARK FOUNDATION
15TH ANNIVERSARY

The Yellowstone Park Foundation has been the park's official fundraising partner since 1996.

Its programs and projects help protect, preserve, and enhance the park's natural and cultural resources, as well as the experience of visitors.

Learn how you can get involved at

www.ypf.org

www.facebook.com/YellowstoneParkFoundation

www.twitter.com/YellowstonePF

Yellowstone Park Foundation
222 East Main Street
Suite 301
Bozeman, MT 59715
406 586-6303

Wildlife and Visitor Safety Program •

Yellowstone is one of the best places in the world to view animals in their natural habitat. Since more than three million people visit the park each year, bears, wolves, and other wildlife have frequent exposure to humans at relatively close distances. At least 1,000 traffic jams occur each year when wildlife is visible from the road. The combination of traffic jams and visitors getting too close to wildlife can create situations that are unsafe for both people and animals.

Funded through a grant from the Yellowstone Park Foundation, the Wildlife and Visitor Safety Program enables teams of rangers to be on-hand to manage these roadside viewing opportunities. The rangers direct traffic, monitor wildlife behavior, and help visitors learn about bears, wolves, and other wildlife while following safe viewing guidelines.

NPS / JIM PEACO

Yellowstone Youth Conservation Corps •

Forty girls and boys, between the ages of 15 and 18, are chosen each year to spend part of the summer working together on projects that protect and preserve the park's natural and cultural resources. Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) assignments range from hiking trail rehabilitation, to assisting research scientists, to helping preserve historic structures. Last summer, YCC crews installed bear-proof storage boxes in park campgrounds. The YCC program provides a valuable service to the park, but it is much more than just a work program; the teens participate in environmental education, leadership, and team-building activities. The experience of living, working, learning, and playing in the outdoors can be life-changing, and is helping to cultivate the next generation of national park stewards. This program is made possible by generous contributions to the Yellowstone Park Foundation from The Hershey Company and numerous individuals.

NPS PHOTO

Native Fish Conservation Program •

Yellowstone National Park is embarking on a major effort to restore native fish in the park ecosystem, and a $1 million funding commitment made by the Yellowstone Park Foundation (YPF) in February 2012 is supporting this effort. YPF's $1 million contribution is being matched dollar for dollar by federal funds.

The Native Fish Conservation Program is implementing a detailed strategy to ensure that native fish remain to support natural ecology, native biodiversity, and sport fishing purposes. The top priority of the plan is to decrease the number of predatory, non-native lake trout, which in recent years have dramatically reduced the number of native cutthroat trout and are threatening the entire Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The program also includes important fish conservation, restoration, and research activities.

COURTESY JAY FLEMING

Yellowstone Wolf Project • The 1995

reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone marked the first deliberate attempt to return a top-level carnivore to a large ecosystem. Although the Yellowstone Wolf Project is young, its impact has been significant. Most notably, wolves have affected the dynamics of the entire ecosystem. Understanding and monitoring their impact is one of Yellowstone's highest research priorities. Each year, the Yellowstone Park Foundation funds the Wolf Project's needs, including equipment – such as collars – for studying wolf packs, aerial monitoring, and the seasonal staff necessary to run long-term research projects effectively on a day-to-day basis.

NPS / BARRY O'NEILL