

Bison © Jonathan Eden



Courtesy of
NPCA Archives

Yellowstone

— The World's First National Park —

In 1872, boiling cauldrons of mud, steaming springs, and the earth's largest collection of geysers inspired Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant to found Yellowstone. It became the world's first national park and spurred more than 100 countries to found some 1,200 similar preserves. But there's much more to Yellowstone than the spectacular 100-foot-plus show of Old Faithful that caught senators' eyes.

The health and survival of Yellowstone National Park depends on the health of the lands that surround it.

This is a mountainous Eden roamed by some of America's most iconic wildlife: bison, elk, wolves, grizzly bears, and pronghorn antelope, to name a few. Visitors come from all over the world to hike, bike, camp, fish, and take in the legendary scenery, which ranges from a 1,200-foot-deep canyon to the largest collection of petrified trees in the world. They also come to witness the place where conservation took a foothold in the American ethos.

Few visitors realize that Yellowstone is the 2.2-million-acre pinnacle of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, which stretches across 20 million acres of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. It also encompasses Grand Teton National Park, John D. Rockefeller Memorial Parkway, six national forests, the Wind River Indian Reservation, Bureau of Land Management lands, and private property. Even fewer visitors realize that the health and survival of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks depend on the health of the lands that surround them.

A Host of Threats

The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is one of the nation's last complete temperate landscapes. To the casual visitor, it appears pristine, but there are beneath-the-surface threats to this landscape.



Pronghorn © Jonathan Eden

Yellowstone's northern pronghorn antelope herd is the last remaining herd in the world's first national park. Pronghorn participate in a rare long-distance migration to find snow-free winter habitat in Montana's Gardiner Basin. Yet, fencing and development near park boundaries isolate pronghorn, leaving them at risk for disease, harsh winters, and harassment from predators.

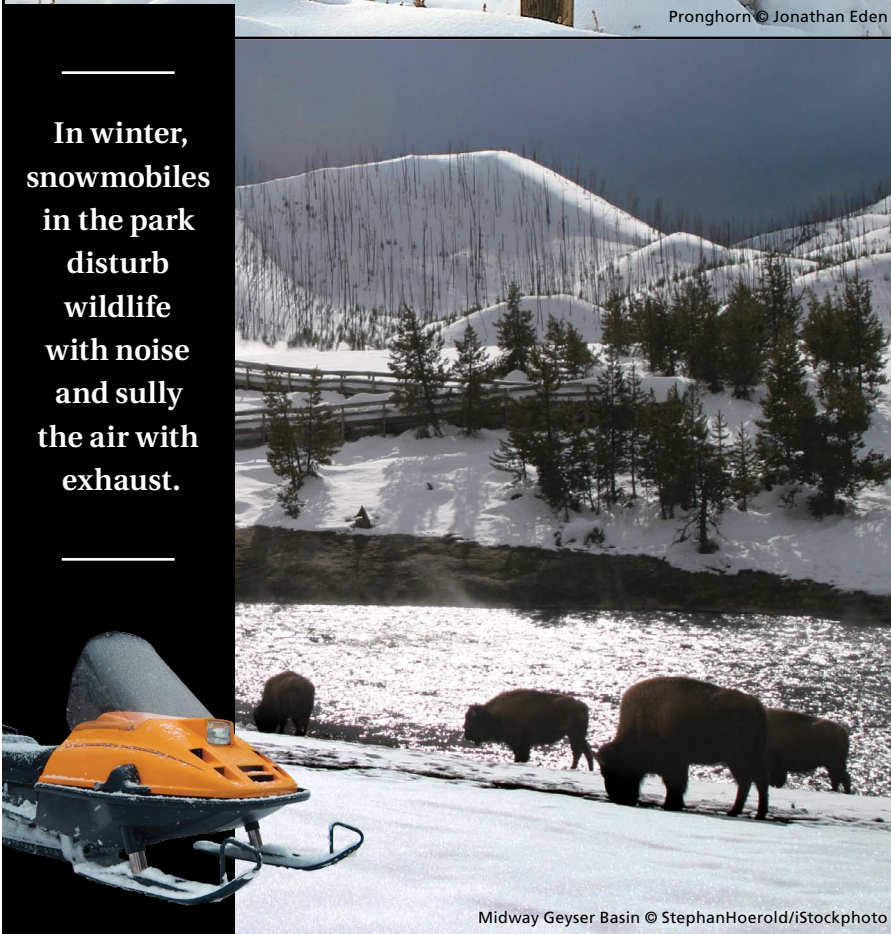
Meanwhile, bison suffer from an image problem. Some people believe bison transmit the disease brucellosis to cattle, even though there have been no documented cases of contagion between species in the wild. As a result, bison have historically not been allowed to leave the park and have been hazed back into the park during winters. Others have been sent to slaughter. Similar threats, with the addition of oil and gas leasing, are being faced by Grand Teton's pronghorn herd.

In winter, snowmobiles in the park disturb wildlife with noise and sully the air with exhaust.

Invasive species like lake trout are impacting native fish, such as the Arctic grayling, westslope cutthroat trout, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout, which support some 40 species, from grizzlies to bald eagles.

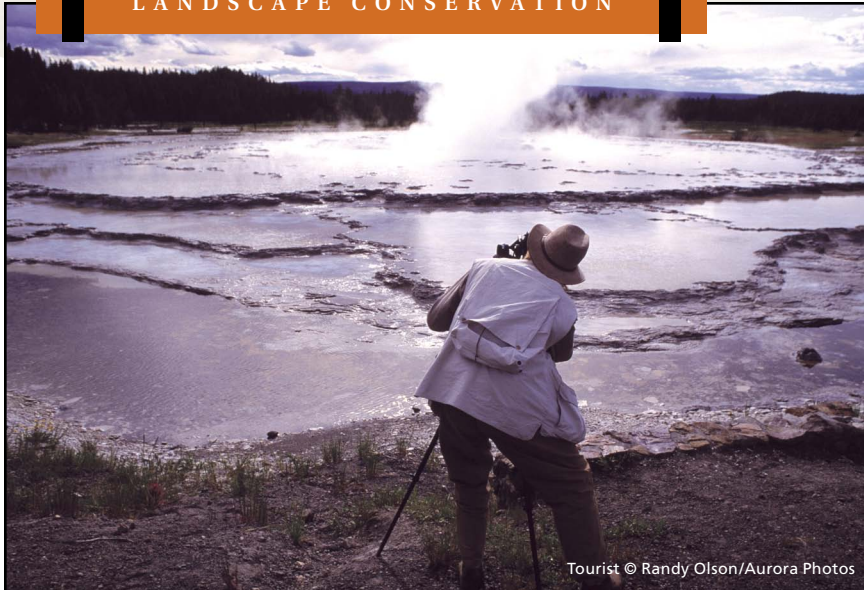
Like many parks, Yellowstone also has an astounding budget shortfall—nearly \$23 million annually—that affects the park's ability to do basic maintenance, provide visitor services, and complete conservation projects.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is climate change, which will have many unforeseeable effects. The best way to prepare for this inevitability is to make Yellowstone, the greater ecosystem, and the species that live there as resilient as we can—and that is exactly what we're doing.



Midway Geyser Basin © StephanHoerold/iStockphoto

In winter, snowmobiles in the park disturb wildlife with noise and sully the air with exhaust.



Tourist © Randy Olson/Aurora Photos

Innovative Solutions

N PCA takes a three-tiered approach to conservation in Greater Yellowstone. We guide public policy, such as environmental impact statements and federal laws that will have long-lasting influence on park management. Second, we work with landowners, media, our members, volunteers and coalitions of conservation organizations to rally support for important issues. Third, we roll up our sleeves and organize on-the-ground restoration projects. It all adds up to a comprehensive approach that has achieved notable successes.

Wolves

In 1994, there were no wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, due to a long history of hunting that nearly wiped the species off the continental United States; the last wolf in Yellowstone Park was killed in 1926. Now, after a successful reintroduction program in 1995 and 1996, there are some 500 wolves in the greater ecosystem. Wolves often capture visitors' imaginations and are fun to watch. Wolves hunt in packs of six to ten animals, roam as far as 12 miles in a day, and prey on huge animals like elk, consuming as much as 20 pounds of meat in a sitting.



Wolf © Mike Cavaroc/Tandem

How Your Gift Will Make a Difference

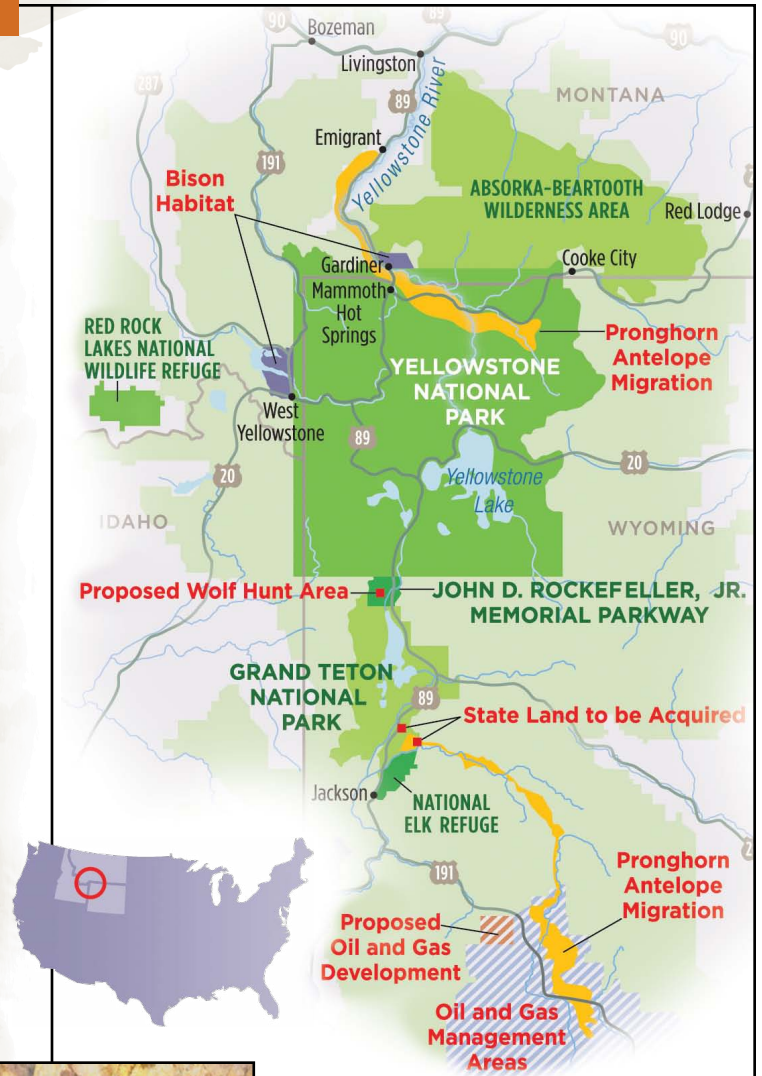
Donor gifts are crucial and will help us do all of the daily tasks of conservation that add up to success, such as meeting with landowners, organizing volunteers to take down fences so pronghorn can migrate, writing editorials for the local newspaper, and participating in public hearings, among many other things.

- Restoring seasonal migration routes for both Yellowstone and Grand Teton's pronghorn herds. We are coordinating with dozens of volunteers and landowners to remove fences, which has already improved the antelope's access to snow-free winter habitat.
- Connecting the northern Yellowstone pronghorn herd with the Cabella herd farther north to improve genetic diversity and restore historical pronghorn migration routes.
- Working to ensure that the park's bison—the largest wild, genetically pure herd on the continent—have access to winter habitat. Already we've achieved great success. In early 2011, we helped secure 75,000 acres of National Park Service, Forest Service, state, and private land in Montana's Gardiner Basin for bison. We meet individually with landowners to help people and bison coexist.
- Continually monitoring how the Park's budget shortfall is directly impacting visitors' experiences and the health of wildlife and plants. Then we lobby Congress to increase funding for Yellowstone and all national parks.
- Working with Park Service staff and a coalition of conservation groups to ensure that the park phases out snowmobile use in favor of snowcoaches, which are quieter, more efficient, and don't stress wildlife, according to numerous studies.
- Removing non-native lake trout from Yellowstone Lake and restoring native cutthroat trout populations, with the assistance of hired commercial fishermen, park biologists and coalition partners.
- Working to ensure that wolves living in the John D Rockefeller Parkway are protected from hunting.
- Ensuring that the funds necessary to complete acquisition of state lands within Grand Teton are secured.

Why Act Now?

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks protect important wildlife and a historic American landscape, and it fuels the local economy with more than 5,000 sustainable jobs. In 2010, Yellowstone park brought \$345 million in visitor spending to the region.

There are numerous imminent big decisions, such as the park's winter-use plan, that will affect Yellowstone for years to come. Now is a crucial time for donors to help. "The stars are aligning in Yellowstone," says Patricia Dowd, NPCA's program manager for the Yellowstone Field Office. "There are decisions being made today that could lead to significant results soon."



Though he may not be a household name, artist Thomas Moran changed the course of American history. In 1871, he accompanied a U.S. Geological Survey expedition to the Yellowstone area. While there, he sketched sites that would one day become renowned: the Gardiner River, Liberty Cap, the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, and Mammoth Hot Springs. Moran's works later circulated around the offices of Congress, helping fuel the fervor to establish a park. In 1916, they again helped inspire Congress to create the National Park Service to look after the parks in perpetuity.

