

Understand Yellowstone & Grand Teton

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The National Park Service arrives at its centennial more popular than ever, while Yellowstone navigates challenges from climate change to conservation.

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As the world's first national park, Yellowstone has set the standard for the nation and beyond. Yet that doesn't mean it has traveled an easy road over these last 140 years.

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A supervolcano on one of the earth's premier hot spots, Yellowstone's geology is as fascinating as it is complex. So what makes those geysers, hot springs and mud pots?

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Majestic herds of bison, packs of wolves and lone grizzlies are the stars, but even the humble lodgepole pine has some secrets.

CONSERVATION.....251

Understanding the complex interconnections within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem may be the key to protecting its future.

The Parks Today

Created by the **Yellowstone National Park Act (1872)** as a 'public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,' this mother of all national parks straddles a tense line between preservation and recreation, access and excess, encapsulating along the way the very best and worst of the national parks system.

Best in Print

Lost in My Own Backyard (Tim Cahill) Engaging, funny and our personal favorite.

Travels in the Greater Yellowstone (Jack Turner) Gorgeous nature essays; also check out Turner's *Teewinot*.

Walking Down the Wild (Gary Ferguson) Account of a local writer's 500-mile walk through Greater Yellowstone.

Free Fire (CJ Fox) Yellowstone thriller featuring Mammoth, Bechler, Grand Prismatic Spring and Old Faithful Inn.

Best Documentaries

Silence and Solitude (2003) Follows photographer Tom Murphy's journey into the Yellowstone backcountry.

The National Parks: America's Best Idea (2009) Ken Burns' engaging visual history.

Yellowstone (1994) IMAX big-screen movie shown daily at West Yellowstone.

Best Maps

Beartooth Publishing (www.bear.toothpublishing.com) 1:113,730 – *Yellowstone National Park*.

Trails Illustrated 1:63,360 – four hiking maps: *Mammoth Hot Springs, Tower/Canyon, Old Faithful, Yellowstone Lake*.

Trail Illustrated 1:78,000 – *Grand Teton National Park*, with a 1:24,000 inset of the Grand Teton climbing area.

Too Close for Comfort?

In a rare, wild place like this it's hard not to feel that you have come face to face with the eternal. But the truth is that the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is a dynamic, changing environment. Climate change is already having visible consequences, which are more pronounced in the park than in other regions. Human impact is another force that is shaping not only the environment but our experience of it.

Yellowstone and Grand Teton now attract more than three million visitors annually – a volume that writer Edward Abbey termed 'industrial tourism.' On Grand Loop Rd, grazing bison or elk regularly create mob scenes. Unattended picnics habituate bears to dangerous behavior. Wildlife selfies have become extreme, with bison butting the bold posers who got too close. Debate rages over how best to manage this human influx. While the democratic approach to public access remains the parks' greatest strength, we may be destroying the very assets that draw us to these wild places.

Seeking Balance

If you want to spark an argument in Yellowstone country, simply start a conversation on any of the following: wolf reintroduction, the park's fire policy, bison hazing, grazing rights, oil drilling or the health advantages of tofu over Angus steak. Fractured regional politics means that a cloud of legal challenges descends over almost every major wildlife policy decision made in Yellowstone. It also makes it hard for Yellowstone to pursue coherent policies.

The 1996 reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone has been considered a success story of restoring ecological balance and integrity to the park, and is wildly popular among park visitors. Yet recent debates among scientists question whether it has really righted the ecosystem,