



Foundation Document Overview

Yellowstone National Park

Wyoming, Montana, Idaho



Contact Information

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Park Description



Yellowstone became the world's first national park on March 1, 1872, set aside in recognition of its unique hydrothermal features and for the benefit and enjoyment of the people. With this landmark decision, the United States Congress created a path for future parks within this country and around the world; Yellowstone still serves as a global resource conservation and tourism model for public land management. Yellowstone is perhaps most well-known for its hydrothermal features such as the iconic Old Faithful geyser. The park encompasses 2.25 million acres, or 3,472 square miles, of a landscape punctuated by steaming pools, bubbling mudpots, spewing geysers, and colorful volcanic soils. Filled with the smell of sulfur and described in 1856 by Jim Bridger as a "place where Hell bubbled up," Yellowstone is still recognized as a place of wonder. The park contains more than 10,000 thermal features, including the world's greatest concentration of geysers. A large underground volcanic system fuels these hydrothermal features, and has shaped the park's landscape over centuries.

Yellowstone is the heart of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), a vast landscape of 28,000 square miles populated by a wide variety of wildlife and geologic wonders. Surrounded by six national forests, private and reservation lands, and over 2 million designated wilderness acres, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is one of the last, largest, mostly intact temperate-zone ecosystems on earth. Ninety percent of the acres within park borders are managed as wilderness where human intrusion and intervention into natural processes are minimized. These lands support a wide variety of wildlife, including bison, grizzly and black bears, gray wolves, elk, bighorn sheep, coyotes, otters, cutthroat trout, and other species. In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) named Yellowstone the first area in the United States to be designated as a Biosphere Reserve, and in 1978 the park was declared a world heritage site.

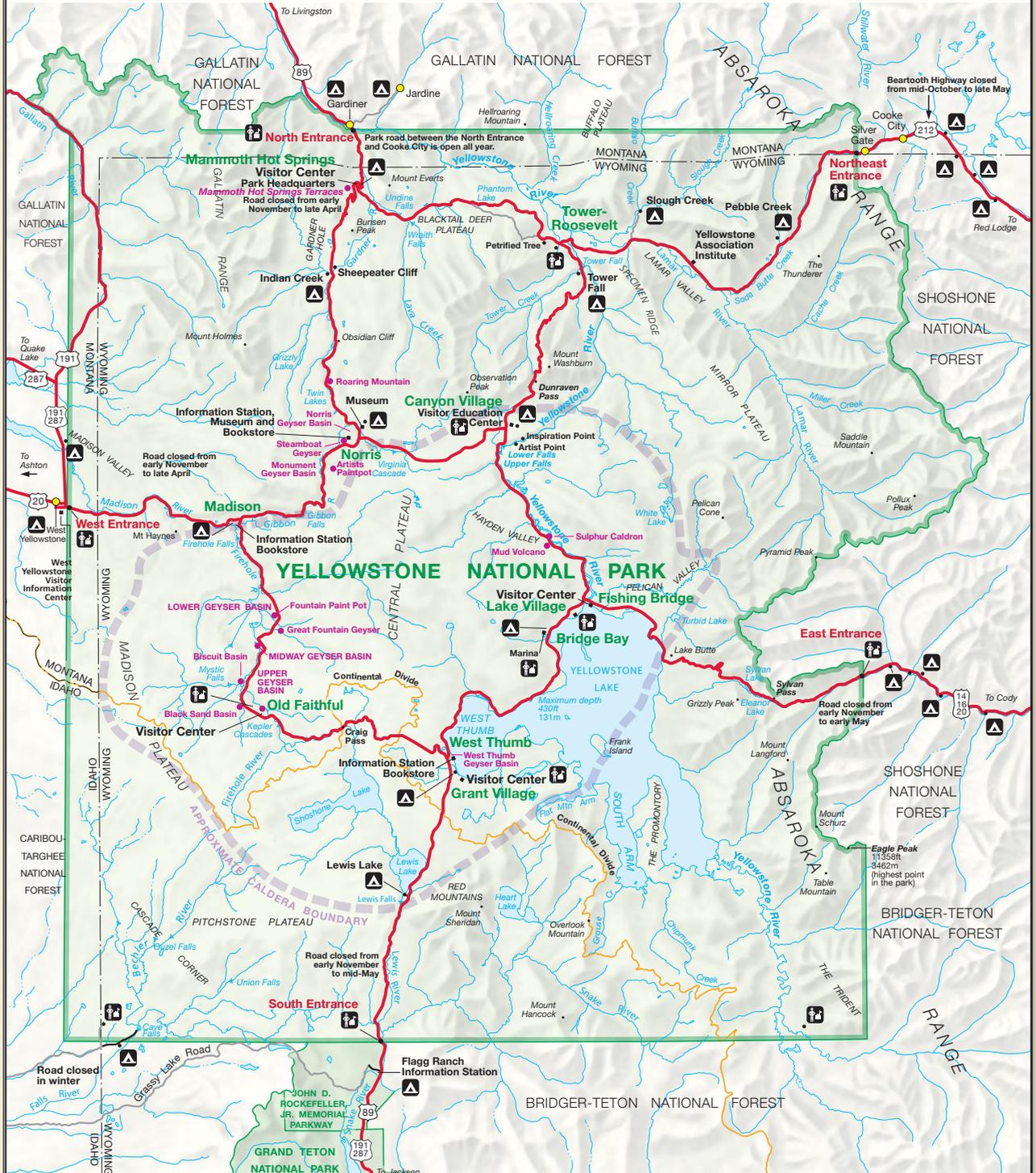
This vast landscape contains the headwaters of several major rivers. The Firehole and Gibbon rivers unite to form the Madison, which, along with the Gallatin River, joins the Jefferson to create the Missouri River several miles north of the park. The Yellowstone River is a major tributary of the Missouri, which then flows via the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. The Snake River arises near the park's south boundary and joins the Columbia to flow into the Pacific. Yellowstone Lake is the largest lake at high altitude in North America and the Lower Yellowstone Falls is the highest of more than 40 named waterfalls in the park.

Yellowstone has been important to people for thousands of years. The park preserves resources associated with over 11,000 years of human history, which provide insights into a variety of cultures and values, including those of American Indians, trappers, explorers, miners, U.S. Army personnel, National Park Service (NPS) and private sector concession staff, neighboring communities, and over 140 years of park visitors. Today, millions of people travel from around the globe to visit Yellowstone and take advantage of its rich recreational opportunities, including hiking, camping, fishing, and horseback riding. Many visitors come to see Old Faithful geyser or search for bears, wolves, and other wildlife, while others pass on family memories and traditions as they travel through remembered landscapes. The historic Old Faithful Inn and other lodging, museums, and visitor centers serve overnight and day use guests while representing Yellowstone's rich human history. The park is an economic force providing benefit to surrounding communities.

While most people visit Yellowstone during the summer, other times of the year also offer outstanding visitor opportunities, including the springtime display of newly born wildlife and the autumn combat between bull elk. Winter offers a unique opportunity to observe wildlife and recreate in Yellowstone's extreme cold and snow-covered landscape. The park is entirely different during this frigid time, when bison clear snow looking for dried grasses and geysers steam in the freezing air.

Park Map

North	
0 1 10 Kilometers	
0 1 10 Miles	



Purpose

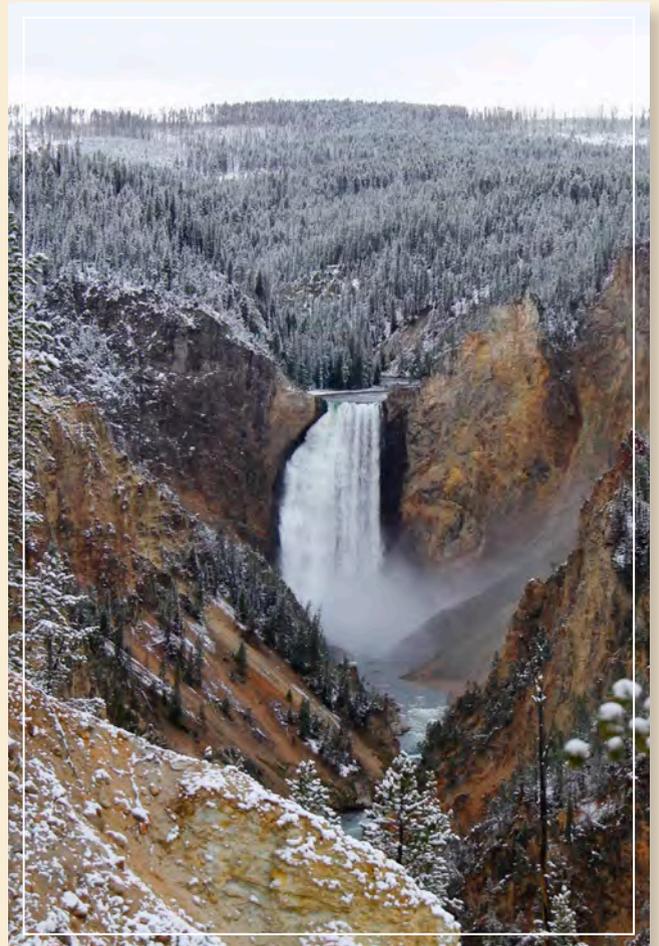


YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, the world's first national park, was set aside as a public pleasuring ground to share the geothermal wonders and preserve and protect the scenery, cultural heritage, wildlife, and geologic and ecological systems and processes in their natural condition, for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Significance

Significance statements express why Yellowstone National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Yellowstone National Park is the world's first national park—an idea that has spread throughout the world.
- Yellowstone National Park was set aside because of its geothermal wonders—the planet's most active, diverse, and intact collection of geothermal, geologic, and hydrologic features and systems and the underlying volcanic activity that sustains them.



Significance



- Yellowstone contains a unique and relatively pristine tapestry of cultural resources that span over 11,000 years. The archeological, architectural, historical, and material collections constitute one of the largest and most complete continua of human occupation in the western United States, including the association of 26 American Indian tribes with the landscape. More recent cultural resources represent the material embodiment of the birth of the national park system and the U.S. conservation movement.
- Yellowstone visitors have unparalleled opportunities to experience unique geothermal wonders, free-roaming wildlife, inspiring scenic views, cultural heritage, and spectacular wilderness character.

- The park is the core of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, one of the last, largest, mostly intact, natural ecosystems in the temperate zone of Earth. It preserves an exceptional concentration and diversity of terrestrial, aquatic, and microbial life. Natural processes operate in an ecological context that has been less subject to human alteration than most others throughout the nation—and indeed throughout the world. This makes the park not only an invaluable natural reserve, but a reservoir of information valuable to humanity.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

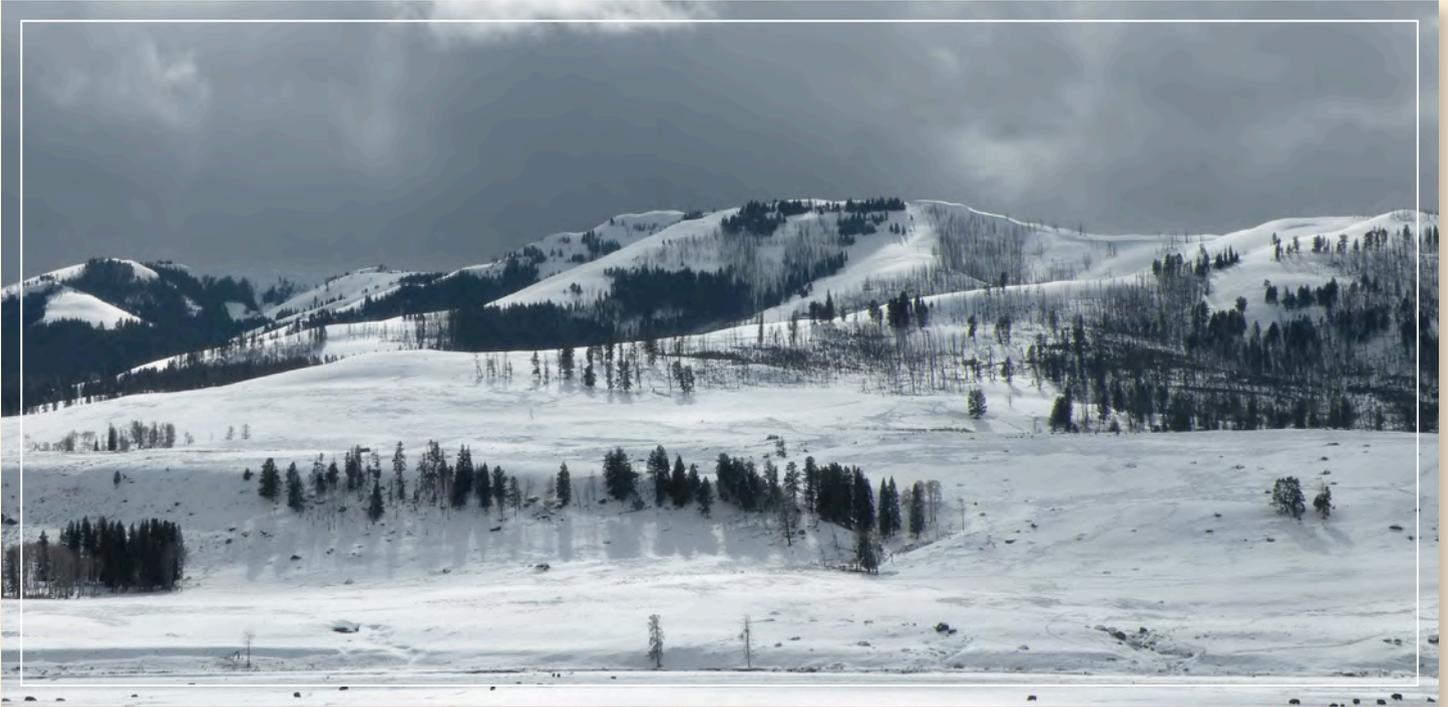
- **Geothermal wonders.** Yellowstone contains an unparalleled collection of over 10,000 thermal features, including geysers, hot springs, mud pots, and fumaroles, which are fed by underground geothermal and hydrothermal systems. They provide habitats for microorganisms and other wildlife, and unique opportunities for research.
- **Dynamic geologic processes and features.** Yellowstone's dramatic landscapes, including the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Overhanging Cliff, and Obsidian Cliff, were shaped by volcanism, glaciations, erosion, and seismic activity. These processes have resulted in exposed and hidden geology and produce a varied landscape that provides unique habitat for many species.



- **Hydrologic systems.** Yellowstone's rivers, lakes, and underground waters are fundamental to the ecosystem and sustaining its wildlife, as well as the geothermal system. The park contains the headwaters of the Snake River and is home to one of the largest high elevation lakes in North America.
- **One of the largest, mostly intact temperate ecosystems in the world.** The park is the core of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, which is one of the largest mostly intact temperate ecosystems in the world. The park preserves environmental integrity, which allows natural processes to shape ecosystem functions, resulting in outstanding wilderness character. Bears, wolves, bison, trumpeter swans, cutthroat trout, and elk are some of the many wildlife species that inhabit Yellowstone's vast landscape.



Fundamental Resources and Values



- **Enduring connection to Yellowstone.** Yellowstone’s cultural resources, protected since 1872, represent one of the West’s most pristine material records, spanning 11,000 years, including ongoing connections to the park’s 26 traditionally associated tribes. The park’s museum, library, and archive collections; archeological sites; and historic buildings, landscapes, and structures represent and convey Yellowstone’s lasting cultural and natural history heritage.
- **A park for the people.** Park staff, artists, educational media, visitor centers, trails, boardwalks, and viewing areas provide park and virtual visitors with a wide variety of opportunities to enjoy the park, inspire people’s quest for knowledge, build a deeper understanding of Yellowstone’s global significance, and motivate preservation and stewardship of the park.
- **A “wild” experience.** Yellowstone’s vast western landscape is unlike any other. Visitors have opportunities to experience natural wonders, unspoiled scenery, the smell of geothermal features, natural sounds such as the howling of wolves and the thundering of the Lower Falls, solitude, unpolluted air, dark night skies, and Yellowstone’s wildness.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Geology.** Yellowstone lies on a restless part of the earth. Physical evidence of the park's geologic history spans at least 2.7 billion years, and geologic forces continue to shape the land and the patterns of life on the landscape today.
- **Geothermal Features.** Yellowstone has more active geothermal features (geysers, hot springs, mudpots, and fumaroles) than the rest of the world combined; they are a product of underlying geological activity, and their heated waters are habitat for diverse thermophilic life forms that we are only beginning to understand.
- **Natural Resource Preservation.** The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem preserves a world-renowned biological reserve that includes mostly intact wildlife communities and rare and endangered species.
- **Wildlife.** Yellowstone is home to abundant, diverse, and free-ranging wildlife in a largely undisturbed setting. Their survival depends on sufficient and healthy habitats, the preservation of biological diversity, and minimal human interference and impact. Yellowstone's wildlife provides outstanding opportunities to experience and appreciate the diversity of life.
- **Ecosystem.** The greater Yellowstone area is one of the largest and most intact temperate ecosystems in North America. It supports an exceptional concentration and diversity of terrestrial and aquatic life.
- **Human Culture and History.** Yellowstone preserves resources associated with more than 11,000 years of human history, which provide insights into a variety of cultures, values, and perceptions, including those of American Indians, trappers, explorers, miners, U.S. Army personnel, National Park Service and private sector concession staffs, neighboring communities, and, for more than 140 years, park visitors.
- **First National Park.** Yellowstone is the world's first national park, and it continues to be a model for preservation and enjoyment of park resources.
- **Wildness.** Yellowstone is an extraordinary place in which to experience wildness.
- **Laboratory.** Yellowstone's diverse resources, ecological processes, and cultural history provide important opportunities for research and education.
- **Climate Change and Sustainability.** As Yellowstone's climate changes, habitats are also changing, affecting continued survival of native species. Engaging in sustainable practices decreases human contributions to climate change.
- **Management.** Effective park management requires the protection of resources, promotion of sustainable public use, involvement by and cooperation among interested individuals and groups, and the support of the American people for their national park system.

