

Accommodating Visitors



When Yellowstone was established in 1872, no tourist services of any kind existed in the park, but it was soon recognized that such amenities would be needed to make Yellowstone a place people want to visit. As the first NPS Director, Stephen Mather, pointed out, “Scenery is a hollow enjoyment to a tourist who sets out in the morning after an indigestible breakfast and a fitful sleep on an impossible bed.”

Among Yellowstone’s first visitor attractions were its grand hotels—the National Hotel (1883), the Fountain Hotel (1891), the Lake Hotel (1891), the Old Faithful Inn (1904), and the Canyon Hotel (1910). Accommodations in the Old Faithful Inn and the Lake Hotel are more in demand than ever, while the other hotels have succumbed to the ravages of time and been replaced with less ambitious architectural structures. Although some visitors would prefer a totally undeveloped landscape, the park’s historic hotels have a constituency as devoted as that for wildlife or geysers.

The consensus on what constitutes necessary or appropriate visitor amenities has changed over time, with an overall trend in the last 30 years toward elimination of activities that do not directly contribute to the visitor’s enjoyment of the park’s natural or cultural features. Consequently, the type and quantity of visitor conveniences and activities available today reflect both the park’s traditions and what the long line of park administrators has been able to build or eliminate in a sometimes contentious political climate.

Although an application to build an elevator to the foot of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone was denied in the 1880s largely because it would be “a very unsightly structure,” many small and often unattractive buildings were put on the canyon rim and across the park landscape prior to the 1920s. But some magnificent structures were also built; the third Canyon Hotel was considered the equal of the Old Faithful Inn when it was built in 1910. Yet due to its construction on

unstable soils and a trend toward modern architecture in the 1960s, the Canyon Hotel fell into disrepair and was removed. Canyon Village, which was constructed in the early 1960s as part of a broad effort to improve visitor facilities throughout the national park system, was widely regarded as too “suburban” in appearance by the 1980s. In the 1990s, most new park structures were returning to the more rustic look of the 1930s in their design.

In keeping with Yellowstone’s Master Plan, visitor accommodations and services have been consolidated into areas at Canyon, Lake, Grant Village, Old Faithful, Mammoth, and Tower-Roosevelt, and Fishing Bridge/Bridge Bay. However, these areas can become congested during the peak season, and give an impression of near-urban development in contrast to the park’s natural aesthetic values.

THE ROLE OF CONCESSIONERS

Yellowstone has four primary contracts with concessioners to provide food and lodging, merchandise, service stations, guided tours, and medical care. More than 100 other businesses have contracts or permits to offer activities such as outfitted backcountry trips, guided fishing expeditions, guided snowmobile and snowcoach tours, guided photo safaris, cross-country ski trips, and research expeditions with paying participants. All enterprises authorized to conduct business in the park are required to pay some type of annual fee; the four major concessioners are also responsible for all maintenance of and improvements to the government-owned facilities assigned to them. The services that concessioners provide and the rates they charge are subject to approval by the park, and all commercial operations are subject to close monitoring to ensure that visitors receive quality services with minimal effect on park resources and other visitors.

The concessioners employ about 3,500 seasonal staff each year. Because of their large number and the nature of their work, these employees have far more contact with most park visitors than do NPS staff. They receive training from both their employers and NPS staff about Yellowstone’s mission and resources.

LODGING AND RESTAURANTS

During the summer, overnight lodging is provided at six locations throughout the park; rates in 1998 ranged from rustic cabins at Roosevelt for \$35 a night to a very nice room at the historic Yellowstone Lake Hotel for more than \$135. The Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel and Old Faithful Snow Lodge are also open from mid-December until early March. In or near the hotels, meals are available at snack shops and restaurants, but more food service facilities are needed to accommodate the large number of visitors without long waits.



THE CARE AND FEEDING OF VISITORS

During 1998 Amfac's staff of 125 year-round and 2,600 seasonal employees accommodated guests who:

- spent 569,000 nights in 2,188 hotel rooms and cabins; and
- ate 1,916,000 meals in 16 food service facilities—dining rooms, snack shops, fast food counters, cafeterias, and the popular Roosevelt Cookout reached by horseback or stagecoach ride into Pleasant Valley.

The three other major concessioners employ 50 year-round and 900 seasonal employees. Most concession employees live in housing provided for them within the park. (See "Employee Housing," page 7–24.)



Under a 10-year contract that will expire in 2001, Amfac Parks and Resorts manages all of the park's overnight guest lodging (2,188 units), restaurants, and hotel gift shops, as well as four campgrounds, an RV park, three corrals that offer horseback riding, the Bridge Bay marina (for fishing and sightseeing tours and dock and boat rentals) summer bus tours, and winter transportation via snowcoach. Amfac is currently one of the largest concessioners in the NPS, with contracts in seven national parks.

To conduct its operations, Amfac is assigned the use of nearly 800 government-owned buildings. Most of the lodging facilities are historic structures that are in need of constant preservation maintenance as well as updating to current codes for safety, public health and accessibility. Each year of its contract, Amfac is required to reinvest 10 percent of the current year's gross in new construction and capital improvements to these buildings, and 10 percent of the prior year's gross receipts for cyclic maintenance of the buildings and equipment. In 1998, when its gross revenues in Yellowstone were about \$46.5 million, Amfac returned \$9.6 million to the park in cyclic maintenance and improvements.

Amfac's current contract has also required them to make an additional \$18.2 million investment for the following improvements by 2001:

- ➔ \$8 million for restoration of the Old Faithful Inn and construction of an employee dorm;
- ➔ \$3 million to upgrade computers for guest reservations and improve telecommunications systems;
- ➔ \$3.5 million to replace lodging and install a new boiler at Canyon Village;
- ➔ \$0.6 million for infrastructure improvements in the campgrounds such as registration offices, reservation systems, and bathroom facilities; and
- ➔ \$3.1 million toward replacement of the 100-room Old Faithful Snow Lodge.

CAMPGROUNDS

Camping in Yellowstone has long been a matter of preference or economy—an activity undertaken by visitors wanting to get closer to nature as well as those needing inexpensive accommodations. The first efforts to establish permanent tent camps were resisted because of fears that they would be, in the superintendent's words, "a desecration to the park," and the struggle between practicality and preservation of the natural setting has continued in various forms to this day.



In addition to the question of whether the park could reasonably accommodate more campsites, controversies have arisen regarding campground locations. Although the first camping was done wherever people most wanted to be—right next to the geyser basins and at the edge of Yellowstone Lake—as time passed it was found that the tents and trailers detracted from scenic views and compacted the vegetation. At places like Fishing Bridge and Old Faithful, where the locations favored by campers were also attractive to bears, the campgrounds had to be removed. But the park intends to maintain campgrounds at appropriate locations for these visitors who want to camp.



Most Yellowstone campgrounds are in old-growth lodgepole pine forests where wind-thrown trees have caused property damage and can pose a constant risk to human safety. Park staff have been working with Amfac Parks and Resorts to identify and remove these hazard trees before they fall. The longer-range goal is to revegetate the campgrounds with young, uneven-aged trees that are more resistant to insect and diseases, provide better screening between campsites, are less subject to windthrow, and cause less damage when they

do fall. Of the campgrounds located in lodgepole forests, only Indian Creek, and to a lesser extent Canyon and Grant Village, currently approach this condition; Bridge Bay in particular lacks vegetative screening between some of its sites.

Campground use. About 22 percent of park visitors spend at least one night at the Fishing Bridge RV Park or one of the 11 campgrounds which provide a total of 2,201 sites. The campgrounds range in size from 29 to 429 sites, with daily fees in 1998 ranging from \$10 (campgrounds without flush toilets) to \$24 (sites with RV hook-ups). Only the Mammoth Campground is open all year; the others operate from between May 1 and November 1. In 1998, campers spent a total of more than 700,000 nights in park campgrounds, most of them typically staying for two or three nights in the park.

The Fishing Bridge RV Park and the four largest campgrounds (Canyon, Grant, Madison, and Bridge Bay) are managed by Amfac Parks and Resorts, which is required by its contract to reinvest 20 percent of its gross receipts from the campgrounds in campground improvements. Amfac uses a computerized system in which visitors can reserve a site in advance by mail or phone; all of its campgrounds are fully booked months in advance for the peak summer period. The other seven campgrounds, which are maintained by the National Park Service, are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Amenities. Although visitors generally accept the idea that camping in a national park must be confined to areas suitable for that purpose, some object to the lack of amenities. None of the campgrounds has hot water, and showers and laundry facilities are either inconveniently located or non-existent. Only the RV park has water, sewer and electrical hookups; four other campgrounds have facilities for RVs to dump their waste; however, they are in a serious state of deterioration and must be replaced. Sites at most campgrounds are in need of leveling and better screening with vegetation. Tent pads need to be developed and parking spaces should be more clearly defined. However, the park expects to keep the five smallest campgrounds “undeveloped,” without flush toilets or showers.

STORES AND SERVICE STATIONS

Food, beverages, and merchandise (including sporting goods, clothing, non-prescription drugs, souvenirs, books, postcards, and film) are sold in 13 stores under a 30-year contract with Hamilton Stores Inc. (HSI) that expires in 2000.



HSI, a family owned business that has operated in the park since 1915, originally built or purchased all of the stores and retains a compensable interest in them. They are also a joint owner with NPS of Yellowstone Park Service Stations (YPSS), which includes seven service stations, four of which provide vehicle towing and repair service. The service stations are jointly operated by HSI and Amfac, which manages the government's interest.



From their gross revenues plus their share of service station profits, each year HSI is required to pay 2.75 percent to the U.S. Treasury in franchise fees and to invest 0.5 percent in improvements to the government-owned areas that surround the stores, including landscaping and accessibility. In 1998, when HSI gross revenues were nearly \$23 million, they paid about \$660,000 to the U.S. Treasury in franchise and building use fees, and returned \$115,000 to Yellowstone in park improvements.

MEDICAL CARE

The medical clinics at Mammoth Hot Springs and Old Faithful and the hospital at Yellowstone Lake are operated under a contract with Yellowstone Park Medical Services (YPMS), which is affiliated with the West Park Hospital in Cody, Wyoming. The Mammoth Clinic operates year round, the Old Faithful Clinic and Lake Hospital are open from May to September, and the Old Faithful Clinic has very limited hours during the winter. West Park Hospital serves as the medical sponsor for the park's emergency medical services and works closely with the NPS ranger staff to ensure proper training and certification.

Although YPMS pays no franchise fee, during their current 10-year contract which will expire in 2002, they are required to:

- ⇒ make an annual payment for capital improvements and cyclic maintenance for the park facilities they use (\$43,290 in 1998);
- ⇒ invest \$851,500 in medical facilities improvements and the purchase ambulances and other equipment; and
- ⇒ assist in training the park's emergency medical staff.

Ranger medical services. The park ranger staff includes certified emergency medical technicians, first responders, park medics, and paramedics (see “Protecting Visitors,” page 6–52). In addition to their other responsibilities, they are qualified to provide



basic or advanced life support care to sick or injured people, and ambulance or air ambulance transports to hospitals outside the park. Two oversnow emergency transport vehicles were available in the park for the first time during the winter of 1996–97.

Growing visitation, longer seasons, and higher public expectations have placed additional demands on the medical staff and services. Because of traffic congestion and rough roads, rangers must increasingly rely on air ambulances for emergency response and rapid transport of seriously injured patients to hospitals outside the park.

The new ranger station and clinic that was completed at Old Faithful in 1995 has greatly improved the quality of emergency service available to visitors in the park’s busiest location.



WORKING WITH PARK CONCESSIONERS

The concessioners’ responsibility for maintenance of and improvements to the facilities they use has saved the government millions of dollars over the years. In addition to funding the preservation of historic buildings and the construction of new lodgings, the concessions contracts have helped pay for new fire alarm systems, the replacement of underground fuel tanks to meet EPA regulations, and renovations to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Along with the large sums invested in the park each year by the four major concessioners (Amfac Parks and Resorts, Hamilton Stores, Inc., Yellowstone Park Service Stations, and Yellowstone Park Medical Services), the smaller businesses that provide tourist services in the park are also required to give something back. The 26 operators of guided snowmobile and snowcoach tours, whose 1997–98 revenues totaled \$590,870, paid \$23,635 in annual revenue-based fees that went toward improvement of government-owned facilities associated with winter operations. The 49 outfitters who are authorized to conduct guided saddle/pack trips into the backcountry, whose 1997 revenues totaled \$692,392, paid annual fees of \$28,658 that went to the U.S. Treasury. Another 127 businesses that hold permits for a variety of commercial ventures such as guided fishing, photo safaris, cross-country skiing, and hiking trips paid approximately \$26,000 in fees to the park.

IS THE DOCTOR IN?



Yellowstone's first medical facility was a small wooden cabin staffed by the Army medical corps, established in 1886 at Camp Sheridan near the Mammoth Terraces. The first hospital was set up in 1887 when Louis C. Pettit, a civilian doctor, arrived. In 1894, the cavalry built Army Hospital No. 14 at its newly relocated post, Fort Yellowstone. This ten-bed facility provided medical services until a new hospital was built in 1891 next to the

Mammoth Chapel; it provided most of the area's medical services for the next 40 years. Many residents of Gardiner, Montana, entered the world at Mammoth Hospital. It was staffed primarily with civilian physicians from Livingston, Montana, who in the early 1920s took over the contract for medical services in the park. Dr. Alfred Lueck operated the hospital from 1920 until 1974, was its chief surgeon from 1945 until 1963, and founded Yellowstone Park Medical Services.

During the Hebgen Lake earthquake in 1959, many park buildings, including the hospital, were damaged. In 1963, Mammoth Hospital was torn down and replaced with an outpatient clinic which is still staffed by a physician who operates a year-round family practice for employees, visitors, and local residents. A more centrally located hospital was established at Yellowstone Lake, where employees and visitors could receive a full range of hospital services, including surgery. With the advent of "Life Flight" helicopter services, surgical services have been phased out, but health-care professionals from across the country still rotate through one of America's favorite vacation spots, providing medical care to approximately 6,000 patients from May to September.



Contract administration. Eight park employees, including a U.S. Public Health Service inspector, are responsible for working with the concessioners to ensure that the park's objectives are met. Each year concessions staff conduct about 275 formal and informal inspections of concession-operated facilities, identify needed cyclic maintenance and capital improvement projects, and take follow-up action when necessary to ensure correction of any problems noted. Prior to their approval, all construction and renovation designs are reviewed by the concessions staff and checked for compliance with NEPA

and the Historic Preservation Act; the staff also audits all expenditures of funds set aside by concessioners for park improvements and checks for comparability with rates charged in the private sector.

Planning for the future. Although the park's lodgings and campgrounds have often been filled to capacity during the peak season since the 1960s, the past consensus has been that adding many more hotel rooms or campsites would not contribute to the overall quality of the Yellowstone experience and would push the impact of human activity on the park's resources beyond an acceptable level.

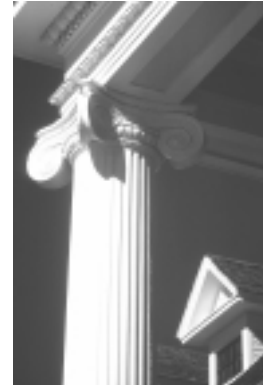
Looking toward the future, the park staff is preparing a commercial services management plan to outline standards for services and activities that are considered necessary for the visitor to have a quality experience yet are consistent with the park's mission. Once finalized, the objectives of this plan, including improvements in guest facilities and infrastructure, will be implemented through new concession contracts as the existing contracts expire.

Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998. This new law will make significant changes in Yellowstone's financial relationship with its concessioners. As new contracts go into effect (Amfac's expires in 2001, and Hamilton Stores, Inc. in 2000), they will be subject to these provisions:

- ⇒ The application of "leasehold surrender interest" will enable concessionaires to gain a financial interest in facilities to which they make capital improvements; the interest will appreciate according to the consumer price index. This is of serious concern in Yellowstone, where the government now owns almost all the buildings.
- ⇒ All fees paid by concessioners at national parks will be deposited in the U.S. Treasury. Twenty percent of each fee will go into a general account to be used as the Director of the National Park Service sees fit; the remaining 80 percent can be used by the park where the fee was collected for providing visitor services and certain resource management operations. Currently at Yellowstone, all Amfac fees remain in the park to maintain government-owned facilities assigned to the concessioner; this provided \$9.6 million in 1998. Not only will Yellowstone lose 20 percent of this money, but use of fees deposited in the Treasury will not earn interest and must be managed through the government contracting process.

Program Needs

- **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS.** Even though the existing concession contracts provide substantial sums each year for cyclic maintenance and capital improvements, the large number of buildings involved makes it impossible to bring them all up to a satisfactory standard and keep them there. The estimated backlog of needed capital improvements and cyclic maintenance is \$500 million. This includes renovation of warehouses in Gardiner, Montana; restoration of the columns at Lake Yellowstone Hotel; total renovation of the Mammoth Hot Springs hotel and guest cabins; reconstruction of Bridge Bay Marina docks/slips; and construction of support facilities such as employee housing and dining facilities.



- **BETTER CAMPING CONDITIONS.** Most of the park's campgrounds require improvements such as:

- ⇒ major revegetation efforts and campground redesign to reduce crowding and increase privacy;
- ⇒ installation or upgrades of comfort stations, hot showers, nearby laundries, dump stations, and sewage disposal systems;
- ⇒ more accessible camping sites and restroom facilities; and
- ⇒ repair, replacement, or installation of picnic tables, food storage boxes, fire grates, bumper logs, and tent pads at many sites.

- **ADDITIONAL STAFF.** The additional workload created by the new Concessions Management Improvement Act, which puts the administrative burden of contracting, procurement, construction oversight, and tracking of leasehold surrender interest on the park rather than the concessioner, will require a larger staff to handle.





CONCESSIONS MANAGEMENT

STEWARDSHIP GOALS



Yellowstone visitors are satisfied with the availability, accessibility, diversity, and quality of commercial facilities, services, and activities provided in the park.



Government-owned facilities and equipment are maintained to the highest standards, and the historic integrity of structures is preserved.



Management of contracts and capital accounts benefits the taxpayer and park visitors; the activities offered and the uses of park facilities are compatible with protection of natural and cultural resources.



Basic and emergency public safety and health needs are provided for park visitors and employees.

CURRENT STATE OF RESOURCES/PROGRAMS



Visitors are generally pleased with the range of services available, but more food service and budget lodgings are needed; campgrounds and infrastructure need major renovations.



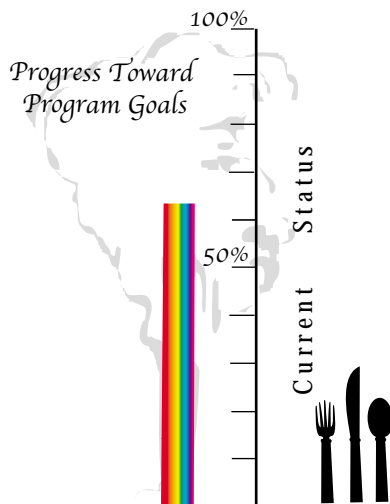
Concessioner services, facilities, and equipment are regularly evaluated to identify deficiencies and set priorities for correction, but funding is inadequate to meet needs. All projects are carefully planned to preserve natural and cultural resources.



Amfac's contract has reinvested about \$130 million in park facilities since 1979; close monitoring ensures protection of natural and cultural resources. New legislation could significantly reduce the funds available for these projects.



Emergency medical services are provided by concessioner-provided medical staff and trained park rangers as needed; the public health inspector position is only partially funded.



1998 FUNDING AND STAFF

Recurring Funds	
Yellowstone N.P. Base Budget	\$ 435,190
Cost Recovery/Special Use Fees	\$ 26,000
Non Recurring Funds	
One-time Projects	\$ 27,500
Staff	9.0 FTE

The human resources and funding necessary to professionally and effectively manage the park to stewardship levels will be identified in the park business plan.