

Greater Yellowstone

Yellowstone both influences and is influenced by the inhabitants and events of a much broader landscape than that which exists within the park's boundaries. The name "Yellowstone" is recognized worldwide, even if it is often confused with other parks and places. Jackson Hole, the Tetons, and other spectacular landscapes surrounding the park are often thought to be part of Yellowstone, and although they are not part of Yellowstone National Park, they are part of the same ecosystem.



In the last decade, increasing effort has been made to take a more holistic view of this greater Yellowstone. For ecologists, inflexible boundaries have long conflicted with their documentation of animals' herd movements, territory boundaries, and habitat requirements. Hydrologists work along lines of river drainages and topographic barriers, while ethnographers look for patterns among human tribes and cultures. Firefighters, law enforcement officers, and environmental educators are often called upon to cross jurisdictions in order to perform their jobs. And those who make a living in the region often express frustration that the opinions of citizens from around the nation can influence park policy as much as those who are geographically closer to the park.

As Yellowstone's neighbors have become more insistent about having a voice in how the park is managed, park managers and other government agencies have recognized the need to cooperate in the sharing of information, resources, and decision-making. In 1986, the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service formed the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee to provide a higher level of public service than they could offer separately. Interagency groups bring together park, forest, and state employees to discuss resources of mutual interest, whether trumpeter swans, grizzly bears, or air quality. Government workers join with owners of private lands and businesses to address management challenges such as weeds and garbage. Park representatives participate in tourism conferences and attend chamber of commerce meetings. And when emergencies strike, the park, other governmental neighbors, and local communities have cooperated—to rebuild after fire burned the school in Gardiner, Montana; to help prevent and clean up spring flood damage along the Yellowstone River north of the park; and to search for avalanche and drowning victims and downed planes in the adjacent forests.

Yet despite good deeds done neighbor-to-neighbor, there are plenty of unintended oversights and honest disagreements among those who want a say in how the park is managed. More needs to be done to build lines of communication and understanding across the park boundaries, even if consensus is not always an expected outcome. To maintain a greater Yellowstone for the future, those who care about it must continue to share their knowledge and discuss their views on goals, constraints, and options.

