



Breaking News

As the world's first national park, Yellowstone occupies a unique place in history and in the hearts and minds of people around the world. In 1988, wildfires burned across the western United States in other parks and forests, but the fires in Yellowstone dominated the headlines because of its name recognition. The intense media attention and simmering debates about how national parks should be managed often put pressure on Yellowstone to respond with immediate answers to a variety of audiences.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Information. Yellowstone has a public affairs staff to handle the thousands of requests each year from the media and public for information about current events. Reporters may call to check simple facts and dates, or to ask for detailed information on complex issues and expect that park staff are available to be interviewed on or off camera, sometimes immediately. Park rangers and managers, seldom trained to deal with such publicity, are put on the spot to explain park news in effective sound bites. Two full-time public affairs officers and an administrative assistant respond to many of the media requests for information and interviews, and facilitate hundreds of interviews with the park staff who are responsible for high-visibility programs such as wolf restoration, bison management, and lake trout control.

When news is breaking, the public affairs specialists write and issue press releases, call international, regional, or local media with updates; and arrange and conduct press conferences. They provide film footage, slides, and photographs to accompany news stories, and to assist reporters, researchers, and advocacy groups they must often be on call at all hours, seven days a week. They handle 25 to 50 requests made each year under the Freedom of Information Act, which can take hundreds of hours to research and respond to. The demand for information has grown tremendously over the past decade.

Answering other audiences. The public affairs staff works closely with national and state legislators, providing prompt information to respond to constituents' concerns and inform elected officials about park-related issues. They are the park's primary means of keeping other government officials, including those in regional and Washington offices of the NPS, the Department of the Interior, and sister agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, informed on Yellowstone issues. The public affairs staff also make an effort to keep Yellowstone's own staff informed on current events affecting the park, especially employees stationed in remote parts of the park where radio reception is limited and newspapers are not delivered.



CELEBRATING THE WORLD'S FIRST NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1997, the proud “mother” of thousands of parks and reserves that have sprung up in the United States and other countries around the world since 1872. Special events planned and hosted by the public affairs staff included a birthday party and stamp cancellation held at Yellowstone’s post office, a visit by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf,

and a special radio broadcast of “A Prairie Home Companion,” live from Old Faithful by Garrison Keillor. Park staff also produced *A Yellowstone Album*, a commemorative book of historic and previously unpublished photographs; developed a special anniversary poster; and issued weekly news releases about historic happenings.

A highlight of the year-long celebration was a salute to the protectors of Yellowstone—the early civilian superintendents, the U.S. Army, financial contributors, volunteers, and park rangers—attended by a number of dignitaries including Vice President Al Gore and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt.



TENDING YELLOWSTONE’S IMAGE

In the marketplace. Each year, 250 to 300 private companies request permission to conduct commercial filming or photography in Yellowstone for everything from feature films and television documentaries to advertisements and game shows. The public affairs staff decides which of these requests can be reasonably accommodated and issues 60 to 90 permits annually. They also work to ensure that during the filming activities park resources are not harmed or misrepresented in the results, and that visitors are not inconvenienced. Regulations require that filmmakers cover the costs involved when park staff provide special services such as security, traffic control, or monitoring to prevent resource impacts. In 1998 Yellowstone recovered \$69,360 in costs associated with commercial filming activities.

While Yellowstone has traditionally shied away from marketing itself, it has become a huge attraction to travelers from around the world and critical to the economic welfare of the region. As a result, park managers need representation when plans for promotion and growth of tourism in greater Yellowstone are discussed. Public affairs staff attend chamber of commerce meetings and special events in surrounding communities to facilitate cooperation between private and public interests affecting Yellowstone's resources and visitors.



Special events and visitors. The superintendent and public affairs staff host heads of state and other visiting dignitaries, park managers, and 30 to 40 international delegations each year, arranging foreign language interpreters and providing special tours and interviews with park managers and scientists.



Program Needs

Addressing the media's continual "need to know" takes up at least 70 percent of the public affairs specialists' time, while the continual stream of other calls to provide timely facts, host special events, greet and assist national and international guests, and provide other visitor services occupies the rest. With added staff the park could be more proactive when Yellowstone issues hit the news.



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

STEWARDSHIP GOALS



Professional public affairs staff maintain proactive efforts to provide the media, visiting dignitaries, and other audiences with timely and accurate information, photo images, and other assistance to enhance appreciation of Yellowstone.



Staff plan and conduct special events to support the conservation and education objectives of the park and surrounding ecosystem; they also represent the park's interests in efforts by other groups to promote tourism in the area.



Media activities, commercial filming, and other special events are conducted safely and with minimal impact on park resources and other visitors' enjoyment of the park.

CURRENT STATE OF PROGRAM



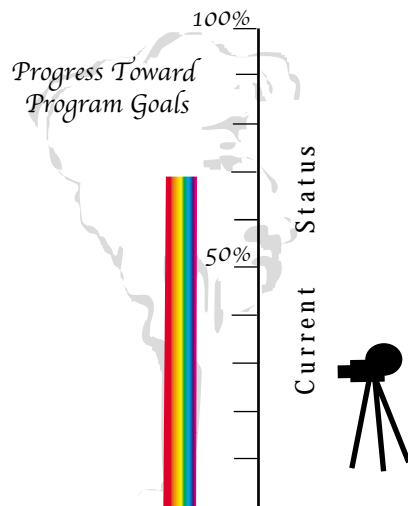
Most media contacts are reactive rather than proactive in nature. Public affairs specialists prepare news releases and handle requests for interviews, information, photo images, and other assistance from news media and other groups and individuals in a timely manner.



Staff have limited contact with neighboring communities, tourism officials, and chambers of commerce regarding promotion of park use and its relationship to Yellowstone's mission.



Media activities, commercial filming projects, and special events are conducted safely with well-coordinated logistics and staff to protect resources and avoid disrupting other visitors.



1998 FUNDING AND STAFF

Recurring Funds	
Yellowstone N.P. Base Budget	\$ 178,700
Cost Recovery/Special Use Fees	\$ 69,900
Staff	4.0 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.