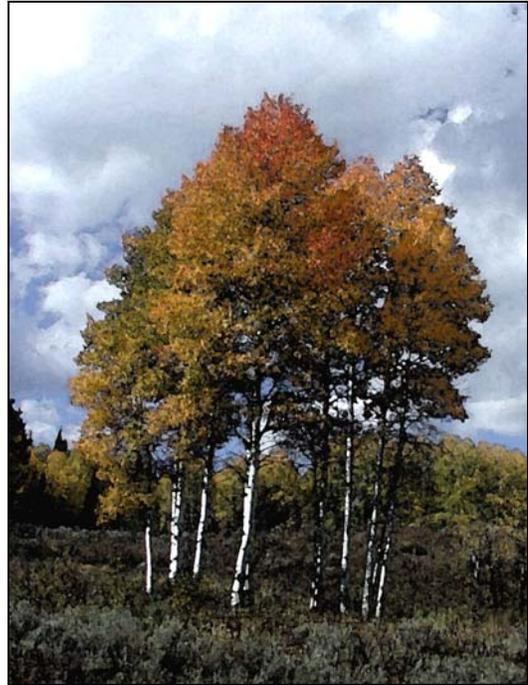


**RECREATION IN THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE AREA - TECHNICAL REPORT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



---

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

---

### **PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

---

The *Recreation in the Greater Yellowstone Area Technical Report* was developed to provide a consistent examination of existing and projected recreation uses within the land-base context of the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). This report looks at the spring, summer and fall recreation seasons. Information presented in this report includes outdoor recreation trends – past, present and future, visitor demographics, recreational settings and the landscape that supports these uses on the Madison Ranger District, of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Beartooth Ranger District, of the Custer National Forest, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Gallatin National Forest, Shoshone National Forest, Targhee division of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Grand Teton National Park, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, Yellowstone National Park, the National Elk Refuge, and Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. These management units comprise the bulk of federal lands in the GYA, accounting for 14 million acres.

The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC), whose members lead the management of the above mentioned federal land units, requested the development of this specialist's report. Aware of changing recreation demands, visitor demographics and the development and use of new recreation-related technologies, the GYCC asked for a summary report that systematically described pieces of the recreation equation – simply what are people interested in and what can public lands offer – now and in the future.

## GUIDING PRINCIPALS

---

The core team charged with summarizing these findings was asked to use existing data and to call upon the expertise of the existing recreation staff working on the forests, parks and refuges of the GYA. Several of these staff members have worked in the region for well over 15 years and have a substantial understanding of recreation visitor use and trends. This is not an interdisciplinary assessment as it lacks input from other natural and cultural resource professionals. This is a recreation specialist report that provides a snap shot of recreation trends and a recreation context for use in and along side of other planning and interdisciplinary assessments. There are no final results, nor recommendations made. Case studies are provided as one means of thinking how the information in this report can and have been applied to real, on the ground situations.

## HOW THE DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED

---

*Recreation in the Greater Yellowstone Area Technical Report* is organized into 5 chapters starting with an **Introduction** to the report, area being examined, methods used, key assumptions and general recreation goals and challenges. Chapter 2 outlines **Recreation Principles** that can help managers strive for desired conditions, address impacts and decide what mix of recreation opportunities can be provided, and where. Chapter 3 describes the **Land** of the Greater Yellowstone region. Using the USDA Forest Service national protocol for the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), a GYA-wide map of existing conditions as shown by the amount and distribution of the various ROS classes from the most primitive to the most highly developed was produced for the entire GYA. This tool was then used to provide a picture of recreation settings across the region. Next, the team reviewed the relationship between recreation supply and demand to produce a Recreation Condition Analysis map showing (1) areas where the existing level of recreation use is compatible with resource protection in what can be considered a state of equilibrium (the great majority of acres within the GYA); (2) areas where additional recreation use could occur without unacceptable deterioration of resource conditions; (3) areas where the setting is at risk for undesired change as a result of recreation; (4) areas where the threshold for acceptable change in the recreation setting or other resource conditions is already being exceeded. The region's unique attributes are considered as well as the particular contribution made by each land unit, both of which are presented as niche write-ups. Chapter 4 summarizes what is known about **Visitors** to the GYA and trends in recreation use and activities. Wherever possible, information that specifically applies to the GYA, the tri-state region, or the Rocky Mountain region is used, as well as peer-reviewed and referenced publications. Chapter 5 concludes with the compiled **Findings** of particular interest to management, as well as a series of case studies that give examples of how specific problems can be solved.

## **WHAT WAS LEARNED**

---

This document was created in response to the increase in recreational visitor use in the Greater Yellowstone region. It is meant to serve federal land managers as a compilation of current information, as a planning tool, and to provide each manager with a snapshot of the region as a whole. The GYA population increased by 61% between 1970 and 2000 and five counties accounted for much of this growth. Recreation use is projected to increase significantly, particularly in those counties experiencing rapid growth. Population growth, the extent and intensity and modes of recreation use are increasing, and environmental influences within and beyond the GYA are having an effect on the region.

Land classification schemes such as the recreation opportunity spectrum are part of a broader planning framework that describes desired conditions in terms of recreation settings and land character. ROS allows land managers not only to describe the land's current status but also to the potential desired conditions, if different from what currently exists. Application of recreation land classification systems like ROS can assist in achieving a desired character and experience.

ROS mapping of the federal lands in the GYA demonstrates that a full spectrum of recreational opportunities are available – from urban settings such as Old Faithful to primitive settings as the Washakie Wilderness to an abundance of semi-primitive motorized settings across the Targhee National Forest. The individual land units within the GYA fulfill distinct recreation niches while contributing to a sense of place and a distinctive recreation resource unique to the region. An abundance of facilities and businesses exist to enable visitors to partake of outdoor recreation. The vitality of the human and ecological communities of the region – as well as its recreational opportunities – is dependent on the combination of habitat, open space and recreation opportunities found on private and public lands in the Greater Yellowstone Area.

An estimated 16 million visits occur annually on national forests, parks and wildlife refuges within the GYA. The Parks draw visitors from across the nation and the world and cater more to family groups and vacationers visiting for the first time. National forest and refuge visitors live in the region and make frequent trips. Evolving technology is creating new recreation activities and new communication and navigational tools, making it easier for people to access remote areas. Fragmented leisure time is causing a rapid increase in day use. For vacationers, multi-day excursions are declining in favor of brief “do it all” trips that encompass a variety of activities. An active, though aging population will likely increase demand for easily accessible opportunities, particularly opportunities for walking, viewing scenery/wildlife, and learning about nature or history. Activities likely to have the highest volume of use by 2050 within the Rocky Mountain Region are walking, wildlife viewing/photography, sight-seeing, bicycling, and picnicking.

The combination of big country and roaded access makes the GYA what it is. The ways in which these two ends of the recreation spectrum combine and interact are important to people's enjoyment of the region. In conclusion, this report provides information, tools and examples, though case studies, of proactive management which has and will continue to be important to the maintenance and restoration of recreation opportunities and settings.