

Yellowstone Science

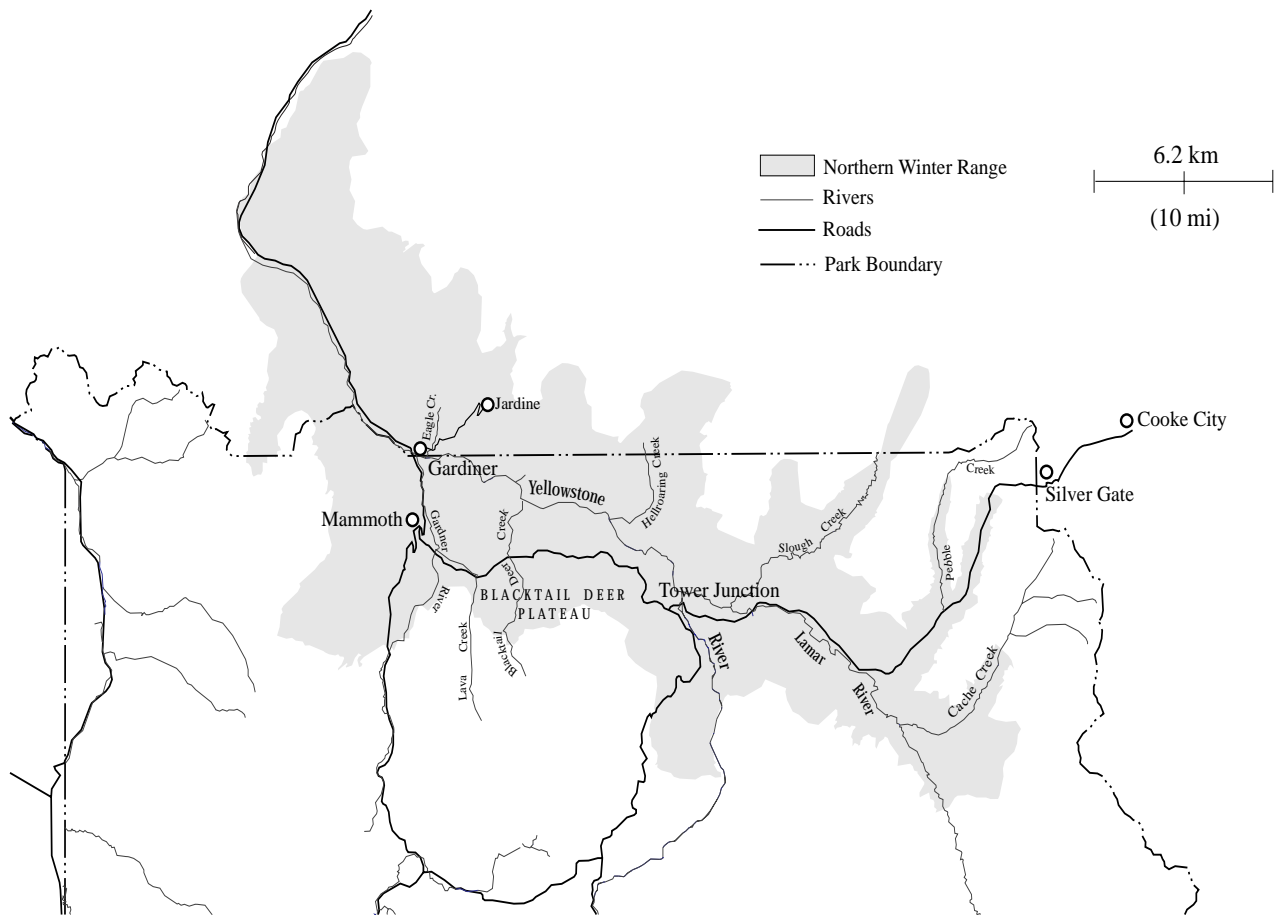
A quarterly publication devoted to the natural and cultural resources



Ungulate Management in Yellowstone
A National Academy of Sciences Review Begins

Volume 7

Number 3



No Ambivalence Here

Never let it be said that we shy away from controversy in Yellowstone. As if we could... Controversy over management of the park, particularly the elk of the northern range, has existed since at least the earliest decades of the 20th century, and likely will be with managers well into the next millenium. The debate is tinged by a number of factors, not just science—as legitimately debated by professionals of varying expertise, but also by land managers, recreationists, ranchers, and others representing a wide spectrum of backgrounds, philosophies, and beliefs.

During the smoldering aftermath of the fiery summer of 1988, park staff were inundated with angst-filled letters and endless emotive phone calls, some accusing whoever was on the receiving end of carelessly, callously destroying Yellowstone. It was a great strain to have lived through the sky-reaching flames and the smoke and the stress of watching our own big backyard burn hotter and farther than we ever could have imagined, whether or not we believed in the “naturalness” of fire. At the end of a particularly exhausting day in which I had personally heard one too many phone complaints and somewhat lost my patience with a caller, a fellow worker reminded me that we could never doubt that Americans cared about Yellowstone.

The same lesson might be taken from the perennial disputes over the northern range. A major scientific review of ungulate management in the park, requested by the U.S. Congress, is underway. In this issue, we feature six viewpoints presented to the National Academy of Sciences at their opening session in January 1999. In a subsequent issue, we will present a series of recently transcribed interviews with survivors of the 1960s-era controversy, done as part of an oral history project. We hope to inform thought-provoking discussion around your table and ours, always keeping in mind that whatever the disparate opinions, all the players are expressing their concern for the resources of Yellowstone.

SCM

