

# **Yellowstone Ranger District Program Overview**

## **Custer Gallatin National Forest**

The Yellowstone Ranger District of the Custer Gallatin National Forest approximates one million acres within Meagher, Park, and Sweetgrass counties north of Yellowstone NP. The district stretches from the Gallatin Crest east of Bozeman, through the Absaroka, Beartooth, and Crazy ranges to the Bridger Creeks country south of Reedpoint. Communities regularly-served include Bozeman, Livingston, Big Timber, Emigrant, Clyde Park, Wilsall, and Reedpoint, as well as more distant communities such as Billings. The district is within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and is home to intact ecosystems, thriving wildlife populations, and neighbor to small towns and larger cities alike. As part of the cherished GYE, almost every action taken on the Yellowstone District landscape is subject to rigorous public scrutiny. The Yellowstone District was the product of a 2009 combination between the old Livingston and Big Timber Districts. Going back some 50 years, the country that now comprises the Yellowstone District was once the Absaroka National Forest headquartered in Livingston (it was later merged with the Gallatin NF). The Yellowstone District remains headquartered in Livingston and also consists of the Big Timber Work Center and the historic Main Boulder Station.

### **Recreation Programs and associated Public Services, including Special Uses** **(numbers are approximate, subject to periodic change)**

- 800 miles of non-motorized trail
- 100 miles of motorized trail
- 8 fee campgrounds
- 3 concession campgrounds
- 10 rental cabins
- 32 private recreation residences (under SUP)
- 2-300 miscellaneous SUPs (including water lines, fences, group events, commercial operations, roads, etc).
- 50 dispersed recreation sites
- 400,000 acres of designated wilderness or WSA (wilderness study area)
- 60 Outfitter-Guide permit businesses operating on the district (with Gardiner District)

- 42 trailheads
- 50 toilets
- 2 Day use sites
- RUA/HOA road agreements

### **Fire Protection & Incident Management**

- 1.2 million acres of fire protection responsibility, including adjacent and interspersed (inholdings) private property
- 4 fire engine modules (4-5 firefighters per module)
- Recent large wildfire incidents include the 2012 Pine Creek Fire (Type I) and the 2013 Miner Paradise/Emigrant Fire Complex (Type II)
- No lives were lost in these high complexity/high risk incidents

### **Prescribed Fire Fuels Reduction and Habitat Enhancement**

- Long Mountain Rx burn: 4,100 acres
- Average annual treatment through Rx fire: 1,000 acres

### **Range and Weeds Management**

- 2000 acres treated per year (avg.)
- CWMA partnerships
- Active Range Rescission schedule
- 120 range allotments
- District pack string stock program: Deep Creek Pasture and barns
- 8 horses & mules
- Annual organized weed spray days in partnership with Park and Sweetgrass counties
- Rebuilding Project (contract) of stock fences burned by the Derby fire

### **Vegetation Management and Timber: Recent and Ongoing Projects**

- Smith Creek Fuels Reduction Project: 800 acres, 300 of which is commercial
- East Boulder Fuels Reduction Project (in litigation): 800 acres
- Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project: 2,300 acres (Approximately 1,000 acres of unsold helicopter-units)
- Big Timber Canyon Fuels Reduction Project: 200 acres
- Suce Creek Aspen Restoration Project: 80 acres
- Sweetgrass Resiliency and Restoration Work: proposed ecologically-focused restoration, thinning, weed management, and revegetation work on up to 60,000 acres within the 200,000 acre Derby Fire burned area.

### **Minerals Management**

The Yellowstone District is home to the Stillwater Mining Company's East Boulder Mine, which is partially located on national forest lands used under special use permit. SMC is one of the largest employers in the state. The Yellowstone District also manages use and access issues related to numerous small mining claims, mostly located in the Paradise and Boulder valleys. In recent years, we have closed hundreds of abandoned mines that pose risk to forest users and are gradually working to mitigate all such existing hazards on this national forest.

### **Fisheries and Watershed Management**

Our fisheries work includes annual stream and lake habitat surveys as well as population monitoring. Our active emphasis, in conjunction with FWP and other partners, is the restoration of native salmonids such as Yellowstone Cutthroat trout. We also focus on preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species. Recent restoration projects have occurred and/or are ongoing on the following water bodies:

- Upper Boulder
- Deer Creeks
- Six Mile Creek (post-fire)
- Mill Creek
- Shields River Fish Barrier

### **Wildlife Management/Habitat Management/Botany/Ecology**

Our wildlife program includes a wide array activities that range from designing and implementing habitat-driven project work (such as the Suce Creek Aspen Project), to annual monitoring of species such as Goshawk, to coordinating with USFWS & MT FWP biologists, to supporting project work through analysis. We also undertake all land and resource management activities with an eye toward preventing harm to threatened and endangered species as well as healthy wildlife populations. This is part of the reason food storage rules, bear boxes in campgrounds, and targeted educational programs and partnerships exist. Due to the relatively intact state of the GYE's web of life, wildlife analysis and input plays into nearly every aspect of multiple use management on the Yellowstone Ranger District.

### **Heritage, Archeology**

In each of the last 3 years we have hosted the Crow Tribal Elders on the Yellowstone District, and had volunteers provide a meal to the Elders in conjunction with a field trip to a heritage site on the Yellowstone District. These sites have included the Crazy Mountains, where several luminary Crow leaders conducted their vision quests, as well as the Natural Bridge site, which is known to the Crow as "the Place Where the River Goes Under."

In addition, we consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer on all project work that may have an impact on heritage resources. In the long run, we hope to improve interpretive sites and opportunities on the district to strengthen public awareness of the rich and diverse human history on the landscape.

### **Partnerships, Volunteerism, Outreach, Education**

The district partners with numerous public agencies; schools; teachers; non-profits; and local businesses. Our staff actively engages communities through conservation education, special events, field trips, lectures, conferences, and more. Some highly successful long-term events include the Wildflower Poster Contest in local schools, as well as International Migratory Bird Day events. In 2014, more than 4000 hours were donated to aid in the Yellowstone Districts varied program of work.

### **Ongoing Challenges**

- Increasing complexity and challenge in a time of austerity and shrinking staff and budgets:  
Ongoing Unit and Office Consolidations
- Climate change-related impacts on the landscape
- Larger scale; more costly and dangerous wildfires
- Increasing development and use in the wildland-urban interface

- Private challenges and increasing challenge to historic public access to public lands
- High rates of litigation and appeals