

The Human Dimensions of Migratory Wildlife: Documenting the Attitudes and Values of Gateway Community Residents in Greater Yellowstone

Peter Metcalf

Dr. Elizabeth Covelli Metcalf

(no relation)



Who Am I?

- Ph. D. student in Forestry and Conservation Sciences
- Work in the Metcalf Human Dimensions Lab
 - Human-wildlife interactions
 - Wildlife management issues
- M.S. in Environmental Studies

Acknowledgements

- Yellowstone Center for Resources
 - Rick Wallen
 - PJ White
- Dr. Wayne Freimund, University of Montana
- Thank you to the IBMP for the opportunity to share our research

The Problem

- Wildlife migrations from Yellowstone National Park bring animals into adjoining human communities
- Leads to both joy and conflict
- In Yellowstone, as in many protected areas, conserving viable migratory wildlife populations depends, in large part, on people's tolerance
- No previous social science work on the human dimensions of these populations has been conducted in the GYE

The Project: Goals and Objectives

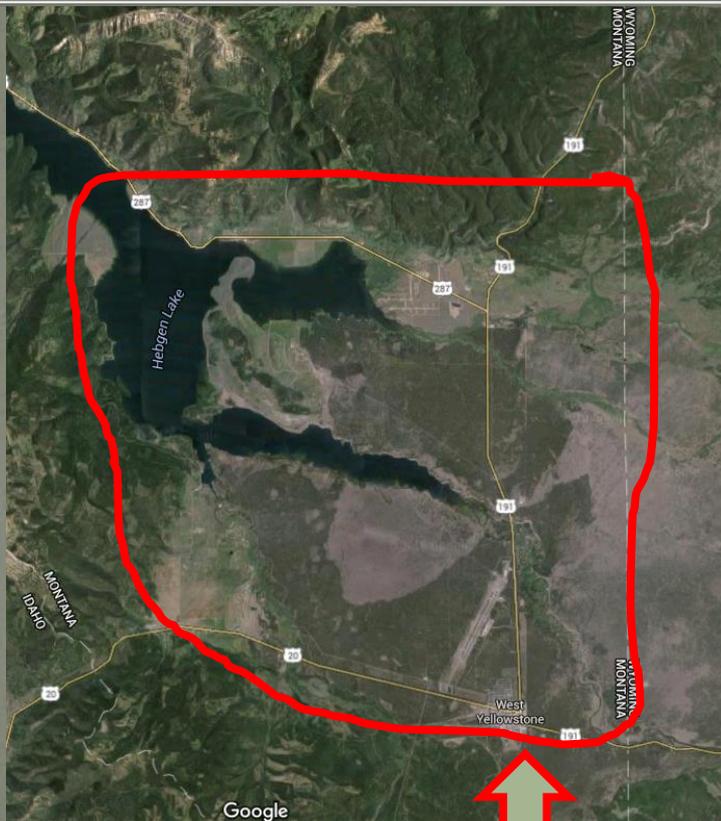
- An enhanced understanding of gateway community residents' attitudes toward migratory wildlife
- Inform IBMP's adaptive management of bison in the State of Montana
- Assist with outreach strategies in upcoming planning efforts
- Provide an opportunity for local residents to express their wildlife experiences and management perspectives
- Initiate relationship building with YNP and communities

A Focus on Bison

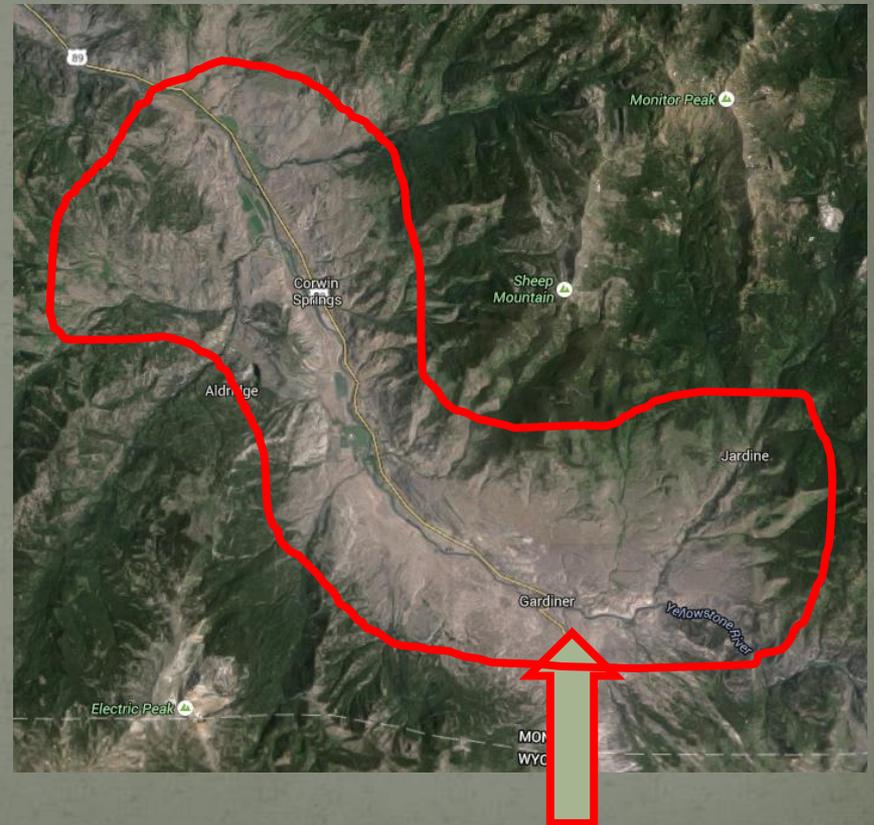


Study Sites

West Yellowstone, MT

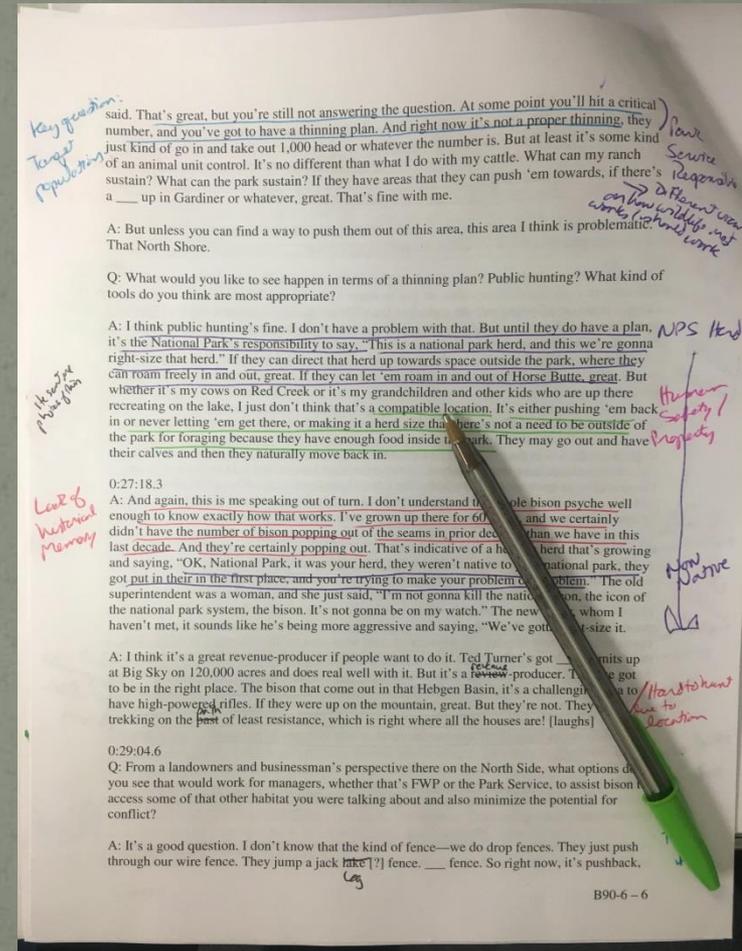


Gardiner, MT



Qualitative Interviews

- Exploratory research
- Emergent themes
- Depth of understanding of meanings
- Connections across content
- Contextual and nuanced
- Not quantifiable nor generalizable



The Sample

- Broad representation of both communities as possible
- Who are the non-dominant or absent voices?
- Four general subpopulations:
 - Landowners
 - Business owners
 - Community leaders
 - Residents
- Purposive, chain referral sampling techniques

The Sample

- 42 interviews with 50 people
- Gardiner
(N=24)
- West Yellowstone
(N=26)
- Age Range:
29 – 84
- Length of Residency:
1 – 61 years
- PHOTO

Results and Discussion

- Social Tolerance for Bison
 - Does it exist?
 - Mitigating factors
 - Management actions
- Community Perspectives on Bison Management
 - Current management actions contested
 - Problem definition contested
 - Shared desire for a solution

Results and Discussion

- Community Perspectives on Public Engagement
 - What's working and not working
 - Concerns about representation
 - Community preferences
- We'll finish with Management Recommendations

Social Tolerance for Bison

“I don’t mind seein’ bison outside the Park. There’s probably a lot of people out on Horse Butte who’d be pissed at me for hearin’ that. But I don’t really mind it. I think it’s kinda cool when I head into Bozeman, to see a few bison on the side of the road... It reminds you we live in a pretty damn cool place here. Look at what we got... It makes you a little bit appreciative.”

-- Father and Hunter, West Yellowstone

Social Tolerance for Bison

- Fascinating animal
- Character of community
- Economically beneficial
- Healthy ecosystem
- Quality of life



Not Without Challenges

“When bison come out , its hard. Its not like elk where you can just chase them away. Bison need a much bigger berth.”

-- Landowner, Gardiner



Photo Credit: West Yellowstone News

- Personal safety
- Damage to private property
 - Rubbing
 - Breaking fences
 - Eating grass
 - Feces
- Highway safety
 - HUGE Public Concern

Coexistence Strategies

“It’s a risk you take. Livin’ in town, even when you walk out and you walk between two houses, is there gonna be an elk standing right there, a buffalo? The bears come into town. But I’d rather take my risk with my kids with (wildlife) than I would with people.”

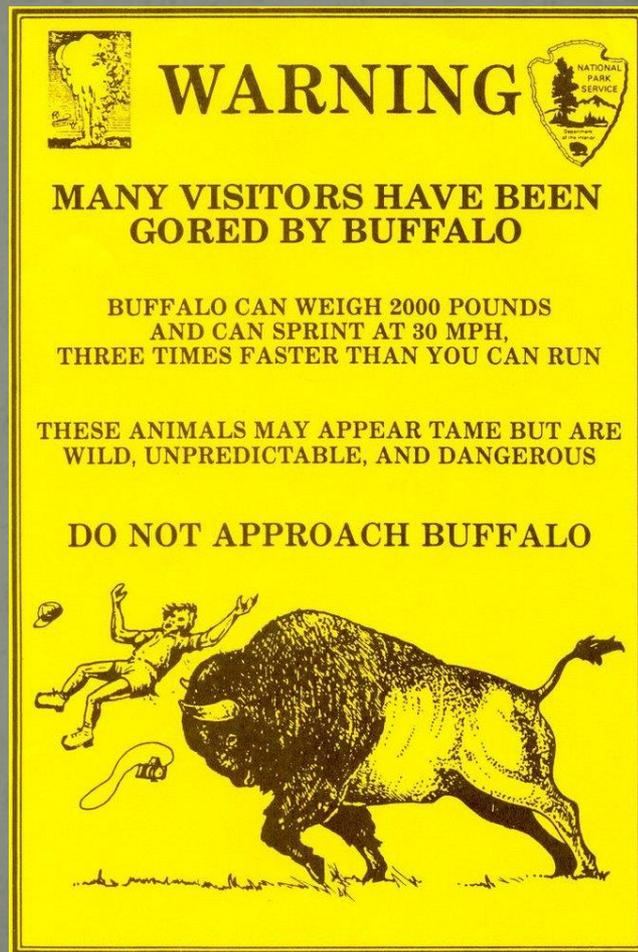
--Father of three, Gardiner

- Spatial awareness
- Alter travel patterns
- Social networks
- Harden property
- Non-lethal deterrents
- Lethal deterrents –
pressure relief valve



Challenges to Tolerance

- Vulnerability uneven
 - Livelihood
 - Personal resources and capacity
 - Geography of property
 - Number of animals
- Individual differences in:
 - Values
 - Beliefs about bison
 - Social norms
 - Risk perception



Management Action & Tolerance

- Positive Effects:
 - Fencing mitigation projects
 - Responsiveness to conflicts
- Negative Effects:
 - Lack of responsiveness
 - Lack of transparency
 - Lack of detailed plan

Numbers of Bison

“I’m just pointin’ out that there are quite a few of the residents out here who like seein’ (bison), but they don’t like dealin’ with the destruction that they cause to property and the safety issues that they raise. So I think, to me, that starts to begin to balance out to, let’s talk about numbers that are tolerable. What numbers can we tolerate out here?”

--Resident, West Yellowstone

Social Tolerance in the Communities

- Exists
- Nuanced
- Contextual
- Not dichotomous
- Likely improving



Perspectives on Bison Management



Hazing

“I get discouraged that there’s so much money spent on hazing, helicopters, four-runners, scads of people. Sometimes it’s a staff of, like four different agencies with one buffalo. It’s so ridiculous.”

–Resident, West Yellowstone



Lance Koudele 2009

- Ineffective
- Inappropriate
- Inefficient
- Concerns about:
 - Public safety
 - Private property

Ship-to-Slaughter

“Why is the Park Service slaughtering bison? Why? Why is there a trap inside Yellowstone National Park?.... The Park Service (is) representing the livestock industry, not the animals they are supposed to be taking care of.”

–Resident, West Yellowstone



Photo Credit: Jim Peaco

- Unethical & inappropriate
- Park Service criticized
- Reduces hunter opportunity
- Costs to taxpayer or hunters???
- Lack of awareness

State-administered hunting

“Let me shoot one of those bison! My wife loves buffalo meat... Hunting’s natural. It doesn’t go to waste. It’s that or let ‘em starve or ship ‘em off. I don’t know what they do with ‘em when they round ‘em up and ship ‘em. Open those tags up. First of all, the money people will pay for the tag goes right back into managing the wildlife... Money comes into the local community for hunting, the hotels, the restaurants, the outfitters. I think the economic benefits of hunting is the way to go, personally.”

-- Community Leader, Gardiner

State-administered hunting

- Insufficient space
 - Unsafe
 - Not Fair Chase
- Insufficient tags
 - Especially for locals
 - Affected landowners (<640 acres)
- Season misalignment
- Lost economic opportunity



Tribal Hunting

“I think it’s bad for business in town with all the tribes slaughtering these bison on the roadways. A lot of these people are coming here to wolf-watch and see Yellowstone, and then they see this, and I’ve had several people tell their friends they’re not coming back here because of the blood and gore. I think they could handle it in a different manner, a safe manner.”

-- Resident, Gardiner

- Supported in theory
- Criticized as currently managed
- Firing lines opposed
- Visibility and safety concerns with hunt and gut piles
- Frustration about hunter behavior
- Legal and cultural foundation misunderstood

Relocation

- Did not come up much in the interviews
- Generally supported *if*:
 - Animals disease free
 - Residents in the recipient location want bison and are prepared to live with them



Bison & Elk

“The difference between why this particular ungulate is managed differently than elk and deer, there really isn’t a very good explanation for that. To me, that’s at the core. Why are we treating them so much differently? It comes down to politics and money.”

--Community Leader, Gardiner

Bison & Elk

- Bison treated unfairly
- Manage bison as wildlife
- Authority belongs to FWP not DOL

“It shouldn’t be the DOL. They have no business up here.”

–Businessman, Gardiner

Current Practices Necessary



Photo Credit: Neal Herbert, NPS

- Some people expressed support for current management as “*a necessary thing to do*” to protect public safety, individual livelihoods and private property.
- Concerns about range conditions and competition with other ungulates

Park Service Blamed for Situation

“I think if the Park is the big motivator for maintaining this herd, that they should take responsibility... I think it’s horrific that the Park says, “Not in my backyard. If they go out of the Park, you deal with the problem I created.” That’s really the gist of that for people I associate with... Because they created the problem by sponsoring this non-native wildlife, and then we have to deal with it.”

--Landowner, West Yellowstone

A Plan Before Greater Tolerance

Detailed, long term plan and enforcement of population targets wanted in exchange for greater tolerance outside the Park

Greater Yellowstone Area Interagency Bison Management Plan



Summary Findings and Recommendations

Problem Definition Contested

- Disease risk widely challenged as sufficient justification for bison management
- Why manage bison differently than elk?

“I don’t buy the brucellosis story, because the instances where the cattle have gotten brucellosis, they’ve proven it’s been from elk, not bison. And that’s been the big worry, the brucellosis threat. And the truth is, you can vaccinate your cattle. It may be expensive, but that’s the cost of doing business. If you can’t afford it, you might be in the wrong business.”

--Landowner, Gardiner

Greater Local Concerns than Disease

- Even for interviewees who support current restrictions on bison migrations, disease risk was not a motivating reason *in the Basins*.
- Primary reasons cited were:
 - property damage and human safety
 - bison behavior

“The way bison move, their makeup, how they want to do things, is totally different than the elk and the deer. If bison had the same type of mentality, (greater tolerance) might work. But they don’t.” –Community Leader, West Yellowstone

Narrow Problem Misses Solutions

- Disease seen as an issue, not the issue
- Technical problem definition misses range of values and social issues involved, limits discovery of win-win solutions

Equitable Solutions Wanted

“Not to be all PC, but we have all got to get along, and we all have to find a compromise. We can’t get rid of the rancher to have the bison, and we can’t get rid of the bison to have the ranchers. We can’t.”

-- Business Owner, Gardiner

Solutions that respect private property, livelihoods and allow for natural migration sought

Want agencies to work together

Solve the Problem

“I feel like an armchair quarterback. It’s difficult to criticize what they’re doing when I’m not really that sure what they’re doing. But I can tell you this. The hazing that they do out here north of town makes no sense to me. It’s a lot of money. It’s a lot of time. It’s a lot of stress on the animals. And it’s not fixing the problem. If they were to put me in charge, I would say — I don’t know what the answer is.”

-- Businessman, West Yellowstone

Public Engagement Challenges

“Early on I went to some (public meetings), and I just couldn’t see where anything was being solved.”

--Landowner, Gardiner

- Current process ineffective
- Insufficient time to speak
- Lack of dialogue with officials
- Sense of not being heard
- *“Boring” or “Unproductive”*

Public Engagement Challenges

“So I haven’t gone to (public meetings), because I get tired of hearing the same old rhetoric. It doesn’t change. The same people feel the same way. You just know what they’re gonna say.”

--different Landowner, Gardiner

- Disrespectful behavior by public
- *“Grandstanding”*

Public Engagement Challenges

- Uncomfortable or unwilling to speak in front of peers
- *Pro forma* exercises
- Mistrust and exhaustion with the process
- Logistics can be discriminatory
- Negative experiences led to disengagement

Concerns about Representation

- Certain interests and residents feel shut out of the decision making process
- Who represents the local population?
- Who represents non-consumptive users and values?
- Concerns that management represents narrow interests, livelihoods and values

Who is Not at the Table?

“Wildlife issues are no longer simply about people who shoot at ‘em or hunt ‘em. It’s about everyone who wants to be involved with wildlife management. We don’t want to force hunters out of it per se, but we want to force ourselves into it.”

--Businessman, Gardiner

Implications Feared

“And I thought, that’s just the end of the sportsman’s part of wildlife, that path... That to me is somethin’ that goes against my core values of why people live in the Rocky Mountains. (Wildlife management) going towards special interests. But of course, the sportsman’s a special interest. The world, like you say, has changed.”

--Resident, West Yellowstone

Who is not at the table?

- Fear of disempowerment on all sides
- Lack of representation and meaningful engagement magnifies controversy, impedes learning
- Challenge is to add chairs, not replace people



What's working?

“It was very insightful for me to be sitting there at a table with a couple of young people with the Buffalo Nations and trying to get my head around their view of the world. And for them to do the same with me. We come from such different perspectives. I think that that type of symposium is really helpful.”

-- Landowner, West Yellowstone

What's working?

- Meetings held at night in local communities
- Informal engagement practices:
 - Assistance with wildlife
 - Coffee
 - Citizen science
 - Responsiveness
- Varied by agency with FWP receiving praise, NPS and DOL criticism

Management Recommendations

1. Assist the communities in living with bison
2. Meaningful public engagement
3. “Range Rider”
4. Tribal outreach
5. Emphasize standard wildlife management practices

Assist the Communities

- Partner with the communities to develop best practices
- Expand conflict mitigation programs
- Deal with the highway
- Create financial mechanisms for those most at risk



Meaningful Public Engagement

- Underrepresented populations
- Mediated meetings
- Listening sessions
- Local evening meetings
- Early involvement
- Informal interactions
- Shared field work

“Range Rider”

- Hire a community liaison officer for each community
- Point person to address conflict
- Available and responsive
- Relationship building
- Avoid jurisdictional issues



Photo Credit: The Missoulian

Tribal Outreach to the Communities

- With support of IBMP
- Increase awareness on:
 - Reserved Rights
 - Subsistence hunts
 - Cultural significance
 - Management
- Build relationships and breakdown legacy of mistrust and misunderstandings

Standard Wildlife Management

- Prioritize public hunting
- Improve fair chase
- Kill permits or preference tags for affected landowners
- Adaptation of elk management techniques
- Tribally-administered hunting supported too



Final Thoughts



THANK YOU

To everyone who participated!

