

Shoshone National Forest Travel Management
Request for Public Input
Comment Form

Ranger District:

Comments on Current Proposals

1. Which proposal are you commenting on?

- **NZ-03 and the consideration to amend the NZ-03 gate location**
- **NZ-12, 13, 14, 15**

2. Provide comments below on the proposal:

Please be specific and provide rationale for your position. In other words why do you like or dislike about the proposal.

NZ-03 proposes to move the seasonal closure gate above the switchbacks to the next plateau. After more than 20 years exposure to hiking, fishing and Search and Rescue efforts in the Canyon I am truly amazed by its beauty and wide diversity of plants and wildlife that find safe haven in this low altitude sanctuary. This is the lowest spot in the entire 3 state perimeter of the GYE and is a unique climatic zone and wildlife wintering area.

Over the years the Canyon has had many proposals to consume this incredible area; they ranged from dams to highways. Below is an article by Tom Bell of the High Country News in 1972 some 43 years ago that tells why the blacktop road was built to the mouth of the Canyon. It also speaks to the proposed Wild and Scenic Designation going through Congress at that same time. So from the anthropologic side, recognition of this national treasure and good decisions have preserved a very incredible area. And now we are here again with Travel Management reviewing more use and impacts.

Currently the open period for the Morrison Jeep Trail corresponds to when the big game migration up to higher altitude with the greening of the high altitude plateau in mid-July. The entire rest of the year we have traffic and impacts on the 4 miles of Wild and Scenic river corridor. NZ-03 proposes to move of the gate to the 6700ft elevation on the next plateau which would only increase motorized use just when the critical wintering is needed for the wildlife that use the first 4 miles of open bottom river corridor at the canyon mouth. This will disturb the existing seasonal balance and does not preserve this high value area.

Speaking for the wildlife who find safe haven to winter until the next summer and the non-motorized recreationist of all types, I see little benefit in allowing motorized use 12 months of the year on the 4 mile river corridor. Hence, I offer an alternative proposal. To be

consistent and fair I support moving the seasonal closure gate from the bottom of the switchbacks at 4800ft. to the Shoshone Line near the blacktop end of the Highway at the mouth of the canyon.

Whenever we hike through from Dead Indian Campground to the Canyon Mouth (about 8 miles) we are always astounded by the wildlife we see. Even those that only venture in the short hike to Bridal Veil Falls usually see Big Game.

CLARK'S FORK CORRIDOR

Canyon Highway A Disaster

by Tom Bell

Clarks Fork Canyon has to be seen to be believed. Either viewed from its mouth near Clark, Wyoming, or from many sites in Sunlight Basin, it is awe-inspiring.

Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River carved the canyon. The river has its beginnings near Cooke City, Montana, but soon flows into Wyoming and the famed Sunlight Basin. Two other larger tributaries, Crandall Creek and Sunlight Creek, swell it to a good-sized tributary of the Yellowstone.

The canyon is about 25 airline miles northwest of Cody, Wyoming. The Sunlight Basin is rather isolated from Cody. The nearest access is by way of a state highway (120) and a graveled section, mainly on the Shoshone National Forest. It is known as the Dead Indian Hill Road. The latter is an alternate route to Yellowstone Park from Cody, via the Sunlight Basin and Cooke City, Montana.

Travel promoters from Wyoming came up with the idea of routing traffic through Clarks Fork Canyon rather than over Dead Indian Hill. The idea was pushed by chambers of commerce, and actively promoted by C.E. Webster, an automobile dealer and Wyoming Highway Commissioner from Cody. His idea has since become known as "Webster's Folly."

The idea was promoted so well that a paved section was stubbed into the mouth of the canyon from Clark. It ended at the Shoshone National Forest boundary. Work then began on a connecting link off the Red Lodge-Cooke City Highway (U.S. 212).

It was then that conservationists began to take a look at what was happening. The beauty and ruggedness of Clarks Fork Canyon seemed too important to sacrifice to another high-speed highway. Residents of the Sunlight Basin first became perturbed. They soon called the matter to the attention of others in Wyoming, Montana, and Colorado.

Mrs. Allie Ritterbrown and Dr. and Mrs. Dewey Dominick spear-headed a drive to stop any highway through the Canyon. They helped enlist the services of the Sierra Club and Denver attorney Tony Ruckel. They also called for an environmental impact statement and a cost accounting of the whole project.

These have now been done and the Wyoming Highway Department has scheduled a public hearing. It will be held in Cody on November 10. Purpose of the hearing is to get public comment on the link-up from U.S. Highway 212 to Wyoming Highway 120. Shall it go through the Canyon or over Dead Indian Hill?

The alternatives are a \$22.8 million highway through the Canyon, a \$7.9 million new highway over Dead Indian Hill, or no new road at all. The present graveled road presents some snow removal problems in winter. The Highway Department says a paved Dead Indian Hill Highway would be no more difficult to keep open than many other state highways.

The cost of the Canyon route is much as the opponents predicted — \$1 million per mile. In one 3.5 mile section of the proposed route, it would be necessary to carve seven tunnels ranging in length from 200 to 400 feet and build seven bridges with spans ranging in length from 100 feet to 600 feet. The granite walls are so steep that the highway would have to be notched into them. This would require blasting of an estimated 1.5 million cubic yards of rock.

Obviously, the Canyon environment would be drastically altered and severely damaged. It should be noted that Wyoming Congressional Representative Teno Roncalio introduced legislation into the last Congress to designate the Clarks Fork River through the Canyon as a part of the Wild and Scenic River System. That will be pursued in the 93rd Congress.

The Wyoming Highway Department has done a very thorough and unbiased environmental impact statement. It is the first time the Department has been required to do such a job. It is a commendable effort which should draw plaudits from all environmentalists.

Conservationists say the Dead Indian Hill route is more acceptable in all counts. It costs one-third less to build, has far less environmental impact, and in some ways is more scenic and appealing than the Canyon route.

Those interested may comment to the Wyoming Highway Department, Box 1708, Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001 until November 20, 1972.

Continuing the existing motorized use for private access and the seasonal July 15 open to October for motorized Morrison Trail use seems to be working with respect to the big game use in the and around the canyon. Also consistent Federal land management preserving the ecological system has brought us to this date with Bald Ridge wintering area to the south (BLM & SNF) and the Beartooth Front to the north. It is all interconnected with complex migration corridors that we should not impact. The Wild and Scenic corridor is a U.S. treasure and we should continue this record of care and thoughtfulness to maintain the last intact eco-system in the lower 48 states.



The Clark's Fork enters the Basin at 4300ft with the Bald Ridge Critical Big game wintering area to the south (BLM). The Shoshone Bald Ridge area borders the lower altitude BLM land and has consistent winter closures. To the north is the tight N-S Beartooth Front wildlife corridor leading to the Montana Line.



Looking east and across the river is the existing closure gate at the switchbacks. Very rich wildlife habitat.



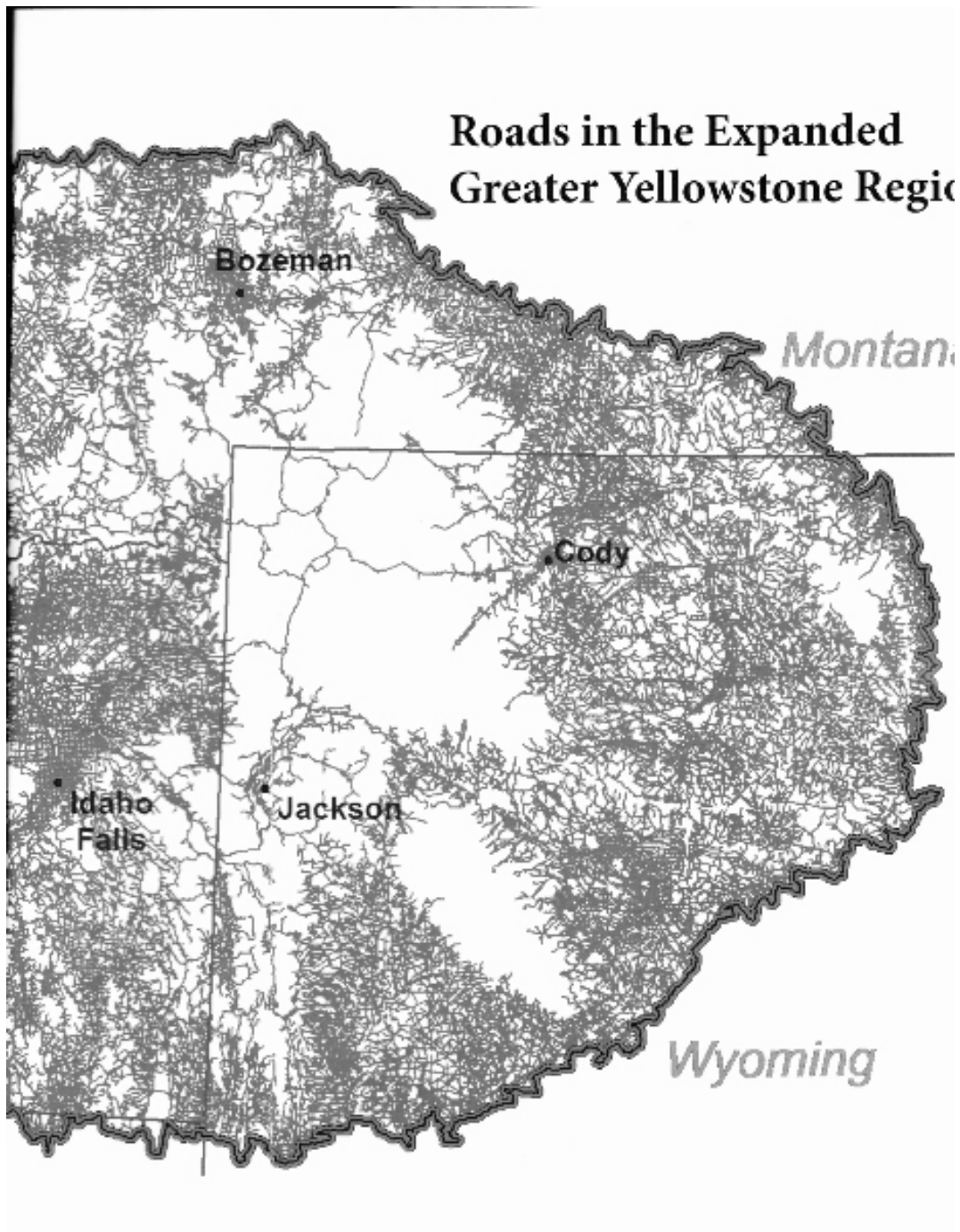
Lower switchback area. Looking west at the latest barrier to keep AVT's from continuing upriver. Switchbacks start at this point.



View of the Jeep trail switchbacks and first plateau. Maintaining the July through Oct usage period for the entire trail seems to serve both wildlife and the motorized users the best. Plus, this creates a better sense of balance by providing a period of time without motorized use in the only designated Wild and Scenic River in Wyoming that is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. (The other is the Upper Snake managed by the Park Service.)

Comments on NZ-12, 13, 14, 15

The Greybull, Timber Creek, Wood River, Gooseberry Creek and Grass Creek Drainages are all part of a vast and complex Big Game wintering and migratory corridor. The diversity of both ungulates as well as predators are without comparison. Between private land holders, State Land, BLM and the Shoshone it is a complex functioning system. I would be very hesitant about any increases in road density and motorized use with their associated additional impacts to this sensitive area. The system is working as is.



Above is visual validation and the reason why the GYE is the last intact ecosystem in the lower 48! A World Heritage site. This is a testament to thoughtful enlightened land management of the past and present. Non-consumptive activities and resource preservation for future generations will be far more important than what we can consume, alter and conquer today. Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the ongoing Forest Travel Plan.

Ken Lichtendahl