

For many decades **Yellowstone National Park** was the place where visitors came to feed the bears. People got hurt and bears got killed, but in the early years of the National Park Service (NPS) and Horace Albright's Yellowstone superintendency, park managers tended to believe that the negative results of feeding were far outweighed by the pleasure that visitors derived from it. People fed bears on roadsides and in campgrounds, and the NPS fed bears at the park's dump sites, where they accommodated visitors with seating and interpretation for the "bear shows."

When Horace Albright arrived in Yellowstone in 1919, he faced two major tasks: managing the park and establishing precedents for what a national park should be and do under National Park Service management. As a devotee of what has been called "aesthetic conservation," Albright believed the park's primary purpose was to serve as a pleasuring ground "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." To this end, Albright built aesthetic conservation into the Yellowstone landscape by establishing several wildlife viewing areas where visitors could easily get a close-up view of the park's charis-

Wrestling with Horace Albright Edmund Rogers, Visitors, and Bears in Yellowstone National Park, Part I



matic megafauna. In addition to a buffalo corral and a short-lived zoo (home to a pair of bears named Juno and Pard), these included the formalization of Yellowstone's famed "bear-feeding grounds," a series of dumps located in close proximity to the park's major hotels where visitors had been gathering to watch grizzlies feed since before the turn of the century. Under Albright, the dumps were equipped with seating, and the entire happening became a bona fide show, complete with ursine actors who entered and exited as if through theater wings each night. The NPS also tacitly encouraged visitors to feed bears

themselves along the roadside, even featuring a photograph of them doing so on the cover of the park's 1922 Rules and Regulations pamphlet; visitors reading the brochure might have been surprised to learn that to do so was against park rules.¹

Albright helped set in motion a pattern of behavior between Yellowstone's bears and visitors that would take decades to undo; a steady stream of injury reports and property damage claims led later managers to bemoan the park's "bear problem" as one of their most vexing dilemmas. However, even after Albright left Yellowstone to become NPS director in 1929, Yellowstone's managers were slow to remediate the situation, at least in part because they were loathe to change the ideal tourist experience as Albright conceived it. Suggestions that the park reduce the number of bear shows, move the shows farther from human habitation, eliminate artificial feeding in order to reduce the artificially inflated population, actively prohibit tourists from feeding bears, tell them that bears were dangerous, and change the system of bear feeding so that visitors would have to expend effort to see bears fell on deaf ears. As Albright told biologist Joseph Dixon in 1931, "Yellowstone has always been the 'bear park.' I would rather see bears not appear at all in other parts of the [national park] system than see any material change in the bears shows at Yellowstone." Instead, Albright supported the practice of removing individual bears after they caused trouble.²

For several years, both as superintendent and NPS director, Albright insisted that the NPS tell visitors that the act of feeding bears could be dangerous, instead of telling them that bears were dangerous, lest their enjoyment be lessened by fear.³ In this, Albright purposefully chose to tell the public one story over another, and in so doing, he helped to create a narrative of the bear in Yellowstone—a story told to visitors about the nature of bears and how people should interact with them. Over the past hundred years or so, this narrative has undergone many changes, as bear-related interpretation, signage, and other official communications such as brochures and even enforcement or non-enforcement of bear-feeding regulations have changed. In the end, the story told by the NPS about the Yellowstone bear has been the result of collaboration by NPS managers from the level of Yellowstone superintendent up to regional director to NPS director (and sometimes including the Office of the Secretary of the Interior) and visitors' response to it. That story, and the process by which it was created from the 1930s to the 1950s, is the focus of this article.

by Alice K. Wondrak



Haynes Foundation Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

Since before the turn of the twentieth century, visitors to Yellowstone National Park watched bears feed at a series of dumps located near the park's major hotels. Sanctioned by the National Park Service (NPS), the entertainment value of bear feeding won out over the dangers to people and bears alike. Park photographer F. Jay Haynes documented the decades-old practice, picturing the bruins at the Canyon-area dump with an unconcerned-looking audience (left), probably transported there by a concessioner.



In 1938 NPS director Arno Cammerer (below, standing to the left of Yellowstone superintendent Roger Toll in a July 1934 photograph) announced a regulation forbidding visitors to feed bears. Toll's successor, Edmund Rogers (seated far left in September 1940 with new NPS director Newton Drury) agreed with the prohibition but opposed enforcement because of the expense.

Both photographs by Jack E. Haynes, Haynes Foundation Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena



In what is frequently the all-Albright, all-the-time world of Yellowstone history, it is relatively unusual to hear about superintendent Edmund Rogers, who succeeded the park's second superintendent, Roger Toll, at the helm of the park from 1936 to 1956. In addition to having to labor under Albright's shadow in the annals of history, the dates of Rogers's superintendency have also doomed him to relative obscurity. With visitation reaching its all-time nadir in 1943, when only 64,144 people passed through the park's entrances, and the NPS stripped down to bare bones staffing, historians have tended to overlook vital management decisions that would forever shape the park world of bears and people. The low profile that the era afforded the NPS opened the door for some extraordinary philosophical and managerial changes, especially when it came to bears and people in Yellowstone. Edmund Rogers was at the forefront of those changes.

In March 1938 a letter arrived at Rogers's office from NPS director Arno Cammerer, indicating that the secretary of the Interior had "approved a system-wide regulation forbidding the public to feed bears in any manner."⁴ To varying levels of degree and circumstance, it had been ille-

gal for visitors to feed bears in Yellowstone almost since the arrival of the army in the 1886. Prior to the Rogers administration, however, the park's NPS superintendents had wrangled over exactly what the rule should say, and it had never been enforced. Both previous NPS superintendents, Horace Albright and Roger Toll, believed there was a right and a wrong way to feed bears, and visitors so liked to feed the bears that the rule vacillated between being an outright prohibition and telling visitors that they could not feed from the hand, or prohibiting "molesting" but not feeding. Albright and Toll had also subscribed to a three-pronged, self-fulfilling prophecy: visitors had a right to see the bears, bears would not be seen unless they were fed, and it would be impossible to stop visitors from feed-

1. Donald Swain, *Wilderness Defender: Horace M. Albright and Conservation* (Chicago, 1970); U.S. Department of the Interior, "Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming," 1922, in Yellowstone National Park Broadides: NPS and Concessions, 1922–Present file, box K-2, National Archives, Yellowstone National Park, Mammoth, Wyoming (hereafter NA, YNP).

2. Joseph Dixon, "Report on the Bear Situation in Yellowstone, September 1929," 1929, in Joseph Dixon file, Mammals-Ursidae section, Vertical Files, Yellowstone National Park Library, Mammoth, Wyoming (hereafter YNP Library); Horace Albright to Joseph Dixon, November 9, 1931, file 1, Bear (Yellowstone NP) Jan 1, 1929–Dec 31, 1931, box N-48, NA, YNP (hereafter Bear (Yellowstone NP) 1929–1931).

3. Horace Albright to Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, June 8, 1932, file 715.02 pt. 3, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, no dates (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, no dates), box 481, entry E7,

Record Group 79 (hereafter RG 79), Records of the National Park Service, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NA, College Park).

4. Arno B. Cammerer to Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, March 28, 1938, file 715.02 pt. 4, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, August 3, 1933 to November 18, 1940, box 1749, entry E7, RG 79, NA, College Park (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1933–1940).

5. *Ibid.*

6. Joseph Joffe to Director, National Park Service, December 23, 1930, file 715.02 pt. 2, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, August 28, 1930 to December 28, 1931, box 481, entry E7, RG 79, NA, College Park (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1930–1931). Of course, many such images survived in spite of Albright's efforts, not only in park archives but also in the collections of countless individuals who had visited the parks.

ing them. Neither was even sure that feeding should be prohibited, and so for years, ambiguity, rather than “Do not feed,” was the rule.

Cammerer was determined that the rule be “No feeding, no how.” Declaring that “It is now up to the Service to do its part in acquainting park visitors with this prohibition,” Cammerer outlined his plan for succeeding in the most difficult task ahead: convincing the public to reconceive their notions of what to expect from the bears of Yellowstone. The first task was to get visitors to change their behavior, which he proposed to accomplish by “initiating a publicity campaign stressing the desirability and necessity of treating the wild animals in the parks as such.” Cammerer recognized that getting people to abandon feeding would require getting them to change their attitudes and that the public’s attitudes about bear feeding were at least partially based in their desire to see bears. Thus, he ambitiously proposed that the NPS reteach visitors how, literally and conceptually, to see bears: “There is a need for a gradual education of the public away from the idea of a staged show and toward a better appreciation of animals observed in natural conditions. . . . It has been suggested that an appeal to a photographer’s sporting instincts would be useful here; that is, point out how much more pride he would have in a photograph attained with difficulty in natural surroundings as against a photograph taken of a bear eating candy which could just as well be duplicated in any city zoo.”⁵

This memo is notable for its acknowledgement of the importance and utility of visual imagery in the intensified educational effort—imagery as both viewed and created by the visitor. In essence, Cammerer advocated two things: an

attempt to control bear imagery used outside the national parks and the promotion of a new visual aesthetic. The attempt to control imagery had precedent, including a rather startling 1930 memo from then-director Horace Albright ordering several park superintendents to destroy all visual evidence that people fed bears in the national parks. (Ironically, many of these were photos of Albright himself feeding the bears.) Subsequent correspondence from various park officials shows a general administrative purging of photographs, negatives, lantern slides, and motion picture film, which would have the effect not only of diluting the historical record, but more immediately of frustrating magazine reporters and other culture-makers who wished to obtain copies of such photos to illustrate their articles.⁶

Encouraging visitors and photographers to appreciate animals in their natural surroundings, and appreciate the fruits of hard-won efforts for the fact that they were hard-won, would prove challenging ideals to instill in visitors accustomed to readily visible animals. Although simply enforcing the new blanket prohibition of feeding might have seemed an easier strategy, the issue of whether and how to police bear feeders confounded park officials. Superintendent Rogers, who personally believed that feeding should be prohibited in all instances except at the park-sponsored feeding grounds, opposed enforcement of the regulation because of the expense. In a 1937 letter to Cammerer, Rogers argued that in the midst of the Depression, the park was already having trouble enough dealing with arrests made for other reasons and acceded that “the lack of funding is evident in the continuing bear problem.” Rogers also explained why enforcing the bear-

Cammerer wanted to control bear imagery used outside the national parks and promote a new visual aesthetic. This was not the first time such a plan had been tried. NPS director Horace Albright had, eight years earlier, ordered destruction of all evidence that people fed bears in national parks. Ironically, countless photographs of him feeding bears, such as the one at right taken in 1923, survived the purging.



National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park



“[E]veryone upon reaching the park wants to feed a bear sooner or later, members of the Presidential party and visitors from our Washington office not excluded,” noted Superintendent Rogers in a 1937 letter. At left President Warren G. Harding feeds a treed bear in 1923.

feeding regulation would be more emotionally problematic than enforcing, say, the speeding regulation, noting that “part of [the] problem is that feeders believe they are doing an act of kindness.” This idea would be cited again and again as a potential source of frustration to visitors who might find the park’s ungrateful rejection of their benevolence befuddling and infuriating. Finally, Rogers pointed out that crowds assembled at “bear jams” already tended to “get caustic” with rangers who tried to get the lanes moving and concluded that enforcement “would not have popular support [because] everyone upon reaching the park wants to feed a bear sooner or later, members of the Presidential party and visitors from our Washington office not excluded.”⁷

7. Edmund Rogers to Director, National Park Service, December 7, 1937, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1933–1940, NA, College Park.

8. Mrs. Emil Swanson to U.S. Representative Frank Barrett, [1943?], file 715.02 pt. 5, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, January 1941 to December 1943, box 1749, entry E7, RG 79, NA, College Park (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943); Edmund Rogers to W. E. Sanderson, July 21, 1943, file 715.02 pt. 4, folder 2, *ibid.*

9. James S. Pritchard, *Preserving Yellowstone’s Natural Conditions: Science and the Perception of Nature* (Lincoln 1999), 86–87, 146. The division was transferred to the Bureau of Biological Survey in 1939.

Changing ideals and personnel and the relative lack of park tourism in the 1930s and 1940s, however, provided an opportunity to experiment with different ways of attacking the so-called “bear problem.” Helpful citizens wrote to suggest that “excess” and dangerous bears could be killed and utilized in the war effort for their fat and edible flesh. Technology was suggested as a possible fix by W. E. Sanderson of the Audubon Society, who visited the park in summer 1943 to test the effectiveness of an electric cattle prod as a bear deterrent. Olaus Murie and Victor Cahalane, biologists from the NPS’s Wildlife Division agreed, however, that technology in this form was probably not the solution.⁸ (The primary mission of the Wildlife Division, a group of biologists organized under the leadership of George Wright in 1929 and based in Berkeley, California, was to survey and contribute to scientific knowledge about national park wildlife. Throughout the division’s approximately ten years of influence in the NPS, improving Yellowstone’s bear problem remained on its list of priorities.) The solutions that proved appealing, however, were controlling media imagery, dividing territory between people and bears, and, after the war, demolishing landscapes of memory.⁹

Along with Newton Drury, a former executive secretary of the Save-the-Redwoods League who succeeded Cammerer as NPS director in 1940, Rogers also started to rethink the park’s purpose regarding wildlife and visitors. Drury stressed the importance of creating a more natural atmosphere in the parks, and one of the first orders of business under his administration was to close Yellowstone’s last remaining bear-feeding ground, located at Otter Creek, a short drive from the Canyon developed area.

10. Christine Whitacre, *Otter Creek Bear-Feeding Station* (Denver, 1998).

11. Arthur E. Demaray to Superintendents, Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks, July 8, 1940, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1933–1940, NA, College Park.

12. Whitacre, *Otter Creek Bear-Feeding Station*.

13. Newton Drury to Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, May 27, 1942, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park; Paul Schullery, *The Bears of Yellowstone* (Worland, Wyo., 1992), 106.

14. *Livingston (Mont.) Enterprise*, August 17, 1932, copy in Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, no dates, NA, College Park; Drury to Superintendent, May 27, 1942; Newton Drury to Edmund Rogers, May 27, 1942, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park.



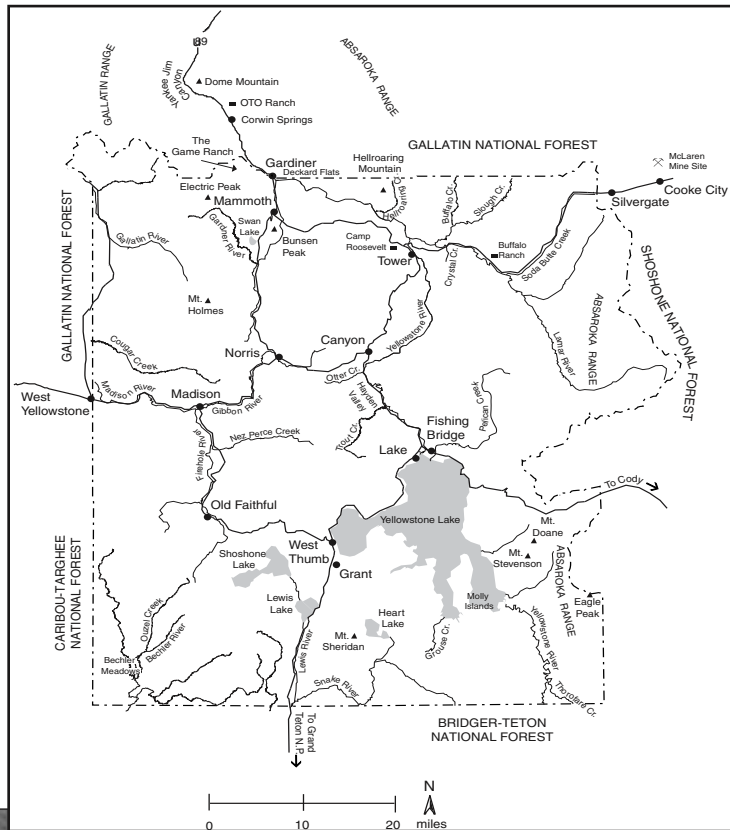
The Otter Creek feeding grounds were by far the most elaborate of three such areas in the park (the others were at Old Faithful and Lake). There, in 1931, park employees built an eighteen by forty-foot feeding platform made of reinforced concrete to serve as a stage for the bears. The platform was equipped with running water for cleaning, made possible through the construction of a small concrete dam built on a spring about 450 feet away. Solid log benches with seating for 250 rose high up the side of a hill overlooking the dump, but the bear shows were often standing-room-only affairs, as more than six hundred cars crowded the specially built parking lot. By the mid-1930s the Otter Creek feeding ground was attracting from fifty to seventy grizzly bears each evening.¹⁰

In its conception and concretion, the Otter Creek feeding facility was a monument to Horace Albright's philosophy of aesthetic conservation. But since the late 1930s NPS officials had wanted to close Otter Creek. By summer 1940 managers in other national parks were complaining that the continued operations at Otter Creek were generating complaints from visitors to parks such as Sequoia that had already eliminated their bear shows.¹¹ The problem was that the Otter Creek shows were still wildly popular with the park's visitors and its main concessioner (which transported visitors to and from the shows).

Ironically, World War II both provided the practical circumstances to allow the park to close the feeding grounds and slashed the NPS's budget for research such as that which helped foster the desire to eliminate the bear shows. At the end of the 1941 summer season, neither the NPS nor its visitors knew

that Yellowstone had staged its final formal bear show. The Japanese attack of December 7, however, changed everything in the United States, and in Yellowstone it resulted in a personnel shortage, closure of some of the park's visitor facilities, and an expectation of slight visitation in summer 1942.¹² It was the perfect time to end the feeding shows for good.

The park's announcement in spring 1942 that it would not reopen Otter Creek for feeding shows was immediately opposed by park concessioner William Nichols, who had counted the shows among the Canyon area's chief attractions and transported tourists to the feeding grounds



Sarah Broadbent Stevenson, cartographer; National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park



National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park

The last remaining bear-feeding ground at Otter Creek near Canyon was closed in 1942. Built in 1931, it had a concrete feeding platform and seating for 250 tourists on the hillside overlooking the feast.

on a nightly basis. With a push from the NPS's Washington office, however, Nichols's spirit of patriotism ultimately prevailed over his spirit of profit. At a meeting between Nichols, NPS officials, and the director of the Office of Defense Transportation, it was agreed that all sight-seeing trips in the national parks, including Nichols's trips to the feeding grounds, would be eliminated for that summer due to gasoline rationing. With Nichols on board, the closure became a reality. Garbage that would have been deposited at Otter Creek was either incinerated or dumped at several areas out of public view.¹³

Having had the benefit of the insights of the Wildlife Division for several years, park officials were not so naïve as to believe that they could expect the grizzlies that frequented the dump to simply understand that they were no longer wanted there; even at that time, it was well known (and obvious) that bears became habituated to human foods very quickly, and that once habituation occurred, it was exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to correct. Instead, park officials anticipated that they might seek food in the campgrounds and other developed areas. Drury asked Rogers to keep him apprised of such incidents and to monitor the bears' dispersal as well as any adverse effects of the sudden cessation of feeding. He also counted on the superintendent to "use ingenuity when ever possible to avoid shooting troublesome bears."¹⁴

Per Drury's instructions, Rogers submitted a preliminary report of bear incidents for the 1942 season on August 20. According to his final report for that year, submitted after the season's end a couple of months later, visitation that summer (191,830) decreased 68 percent from what it had been in 1941. The number of bear-related injuries (twenty-nine) dropped proportionately. Perhaps in response to the dump closure, however, the number of incidents of property damage increased slightly from 102 in 1941 to 118 in 1942, representing an increase of 72 percent when placed in the context of a 68 percent drop in visitation.¹⁵

The NPS anticipated that such a rise might occur as bears attempted to replace the food that was no longer available to them at Otter Creek. What is sobering, however, is that by August, the park had responded with a 242 percent increase in the number of bears "controlled" (a euphemism for "problem bears killed by rangers" that the NPS had started using "to avoid the appearance of slaughter") compared to the total number for the previous

season, perhaps giving rise to the question of how much ingenuity rangers were using. Rangers had killed sixty-three bears by August 20, compared to the previous year's total of twenty-six. Although Rogers specified that twenty-one of those killed were grizzlies, six of which were shot at Canyon (near Otter Creek), he offered no explanation for his rangers having killed more bears in a single season than it had since 1935. Whether truth or folklore, one NPS staffer claimed, many years later, that Rogers had had a few rangers under his command who were "especially efficient in the shooting of grizzlies."¹⁶

Yellowstone's rangers were about to get a whole lot more efficient. On August 23, three days after Rogers submitted his preliminary report to Drury, visitor Martha Hansen, a forty-five-year-old nurse from Twin Falls, Idaho, left her cabin at Old Faithful at around 1:45 A.M. to make a trip to the lavatory. According to varying reports, Hansen was either attacked from the front or from behind, by a black bear or a grizzly. The effect, however, was the same; she died five days later from the severe mauling.¹⁷

Soon after the incident, Ellen Hansen, Martha's sister, sought reimbursement from the NPS for the expenses incurred in caring for her dying sister. Visitors had been filing reimbursement claims for decades, always unsuccessfully, for bear-related medical costs and property damage, and NPS Regional Director Lawrence Merriam responded to Ellen Hansen with a standard letter indicating that he was sorry about her sister but that "all funds appropriated by Congress . . . are made available for specific purposes, and the funds that have been allotted to the National Park Service cannot be used to pay claim." Merriam's lesson in civics, however, failed to convince Ellen Hansen, and she eventually succeeded in obtaining recompense in 1944 when President Franklin Roosevelt signed a bill whose attached rider granted the family \$1,894.95 in damages for Martha's death. Ellen Hansen was the first but would not be the last grieving family member to win such a judgment.¹⁸

On the list of problems created for the NPS by Martha Hansen's death, Ellen Hansen's \$1,895 was very near the bottom (although the notion that the NPS could be held financially liable for costs incurred as the result of

15. Yellowstone National Park, "Final Environmental Impact Statement Grizzly Bear Management Program," October 1982, p. 44, in Final Environmental Impact Statement: Grizzly Bear Management Program, Yellowstone National Park, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming/United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service file, Mammals-Ursidae section, Vertical Files, YNP Library.

16. Acting Superintendent Emmert to Director, National Park Service, December 22, 1939, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1933-1940, NA, College Park; Edmund Rogers, "Memorandum for the Director,"

August 20, 1942, *ibid.*; Jim Reid to Glen F. Cole, November 1, 1973, Bear Management 1973, Vertical Files, Yellowstone National Park Bear Management Office, Mammoth, Wyoming.

17. D. H. Bremer, "Individual Bear Injury Report," August 23, 1942, in Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941-1943, NA, College Park.

18. Lawrence C. Merriam to Ellen A. Hansen, September 10, 1942, *ibid.*; Paul Schullery, "Historical Perspectives on Yellowstone Bear Management" (paper presented at Grizzly Bear Symposium, Casper, Wyoming, April 28, 1984), 16.



Feeding put bears, as well as people, at risk. Trapping bears (left), marking them (below), then moving them from areas of human concentration was one of several nonlethal measures the NPS adopted after several years of “controlling”—killing—bears.



bear misbehavior almost certainly alarmed park managers). The death itself was a public relations and political nightmare, and based on the events that followed, it ratcheted the “bear problem” up to an unprecedented level of urgency. The violent death of a woman innocently answering nature’s midnight call could not be explained away as the result of her own foolish desire to get too close to a bear or as one of the simply unavoidable by-products of the park’s normally commendable goal of providing visitors with the opportunity to see wild bears (though Merriam tried this latter tack). It blew a hole through the fiction that bears and people could peaceably coexist on common ground while on a common diet if people only behaved themselves (as had long been the claim) and was traumatic enough to require action.¹⁹

In 1942 park personnel lacked the technology that today is used to identify problem bears nor was there such a thing as an Endangered Species list to remind them of the import of prudence. Accordingly, the bear death toll suggests they responded to the Hansen attack by essentially declaring war—twenty bears were shot dead between August 20, when Rogers had submitted his preliminary report, and the end of the 1942 tourist season one month later, for a seasonal total of eighty-three—the highest total in park history to that date.²⁰

In addition to engendering a violent campaign against local bears, Martha Hansen’s death also served as the catalyst for a series of reevaluations of the park’s bear management policies. There was little consensus, though, about what exactly should be done. In a confidential memo to Superintendent Rogers, Regional Director Merriam dismissed out-of-hand several “less drastic” measures such as electric fences, improved visitor education, and re-

location of offending bears, and instead zeroed in on “controlling”—killing—the bears, arguing that as visitation continued to fall during the war, rangers would have more time to devote to bear-control operations. Merriam’s idea was that making the older generation of bears suffer for their offenses would deter the younger generation from following in their footsteps. He was aware, however, that such wanton killing would be unpopular with the public and so advocated secrecy: “In the spring of the year . . . before the general public arrives, a ‘scare campaign’ . . . should be initiated in an endeavor to cause bears to fear human beings. Torture methods are not advocated but anything short of that should be tried. The incurables should then be trapped and disposed of as quietly as possible, the object being to instill a fear of human beings . . . as well as reduce the bear population which is probably the major contributing factor to the current bear problem.”²¹

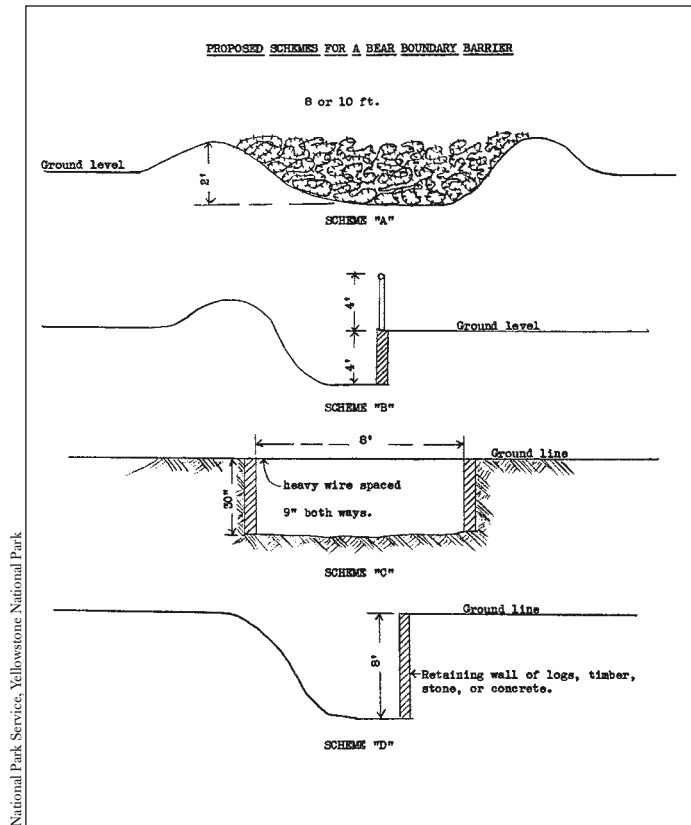
Merriam’s recommendations demonstrate adherence to long-established policies that identified the bear itself as the primary problem rather than the set of connected human behaviors and institutions that had grown up

19. Merriam to Hansen, September 10, 1942; Horace Albright and Frank Taylor, *Oh, Ranger! A Book about the National Parks* (1928; reprint, Golden, Colo., 1986), 33-35.

20. Edmund Rogers, “Superintendent’s Annual Report,” 1943, p. 1, in YNP Library.

21. Lawrence Merriam to Edmund Rogers, September 11, 1942, file 715-02, Bears vol 1: November 1939 to December 31, 1947, box N-339, NA, YNP (hereafter Bears vol 1: 1939-1947).

22. Newton Drury to Lawrence Merriam, September 15, 1942, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941-1943, NA, College Park.



Other proposed nonlethal methods of dealing with bears included fencing them out of campgrounds, trapping them in dry moats (diagramed left), and adverse conditioning, but Superintendent Rogers preferred to change visitors' attitudes toward bears by emphasizing their wildness and unpredictability.

[sic] in preference to the visitors you invite to the park you had better plug up the geysers & make a feature of them. . . . It would seem to me that your board could . . . fence in the tourist camps." A year later Superintendent Toll received a petition signed by eighty-seven campers at the Fishing Bridge campground asking that Toll either dispose of the bears raiding the campground, "reserving a few for exhibition purposes," or fence the campground. The idea had been consistently rejected, however, on the grounds that such an enclosure would be expensive, unsightly, unnatural, confining, and frightening by implication to visitors who might think that they were unsafe when outside it. Just as the administration had been hesitant to warn people that feeding the bears was dangerous, so was it reluctant to establish the appearance of safe and unsafe zones within the park. The Wildlife Division was opposed to

the idea in principle but periodically acknowledged the fence as a possible solution to campground problems.²³

around the bear and influenced its behavior. In a response to Merriam, Director Drury acknowledged that the situation was critical but demonstrated the new management's faith in science rather than conventional wisdom when he reminded Merriam that the Wildlife Division had repeatedly stated that "overpopulation" was not the problem. In that letter he also made it clear that he desired to study the situation carefully rather than embark on a hasty campaign of pain and slaughter, and he asked Merriam for a complete report and evaluation of the measures that had been taken thus far to protect visitors from bears, including reductions in artificial feeding, removal of bears from areas of human concentration, visitor education, warning signs, ranger patrols, and elimination of problem bears.²²

Despite this apparent lack of enthusiasm, an employee of the NPS's Branch of Plans and Design apparently drew a map of the Fishing Bridge area, dated January 1, 1939, upon which the outline of a proposed fence was drawn in red pencil.²⁴ This enclosure would surround not just the campground but the entire developed area at Fishing Bridge. With Pelican Creek forming a natural border on the south, the fence would extend approximately a thousand feet north to surround the area's incinerator and a thousand feet to the east of the Fishing Bridge developed area. The design included four road gates and three hand gates that could be opened to provide human passage in and out of its confines. In theory these gates could be used as outlets for errant bears who might somehow breach the barrier and find themselves stuck on the inside rather than the outside of the fence. The specter of a panicked and/or enraged grizzly bear charging up and down the chainlink, searching frantically for a way out

23. Frank Field to U.S. Department of the Interior, September 14, 1931, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1930-1931, NA, College Park; Campers to Roger Toll, July 27, 1932, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, no dates, *ibid.*; Roger Toll to Joseph Dixon, February 5, 1932, *ibid.*; George Wright to Roger Toll, July 19, 1933, file 2, Bear (Yellowstone NP) 1929-1931, NA, YNP.

24. National Park Service Branch of Plans and Design map, 1939, box 1750, entry E7, RG 79, NA, College Park.

25. Edmund Rogers to Lawrence Merriam, May 15, 1943, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941-1943, NA, College Park; Carnes to Comment on Bear Fences, April 19, 1945, file 715.02 pt. 6, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, January 1944 to June 1949, box 1749, entry E7, RG 79, NA, College Park (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944-1949).

ultimately proved to be another major argument against the enclosure's construction.

Martha Hansen's death, however, gave prolonged life to the fence idea. Though Merriam initially rejected it in favor of his "scare campaign," Superintendent Rogers included fencing for consideration in his 1943 bear management plan. By spring 1945 project construction proposal M-44, for a fence around the Fishing Bridge campground, went out for comment from NPS staff, some of whom still disapproved of the idea.²⁵

Drawing on recent horrors on the world scale, one employee stated that fencing a campground would be tantamount to confining visitors in "concentration camp stockades." Ironically, given the context of his allusion, he suggested that the NPS try new, more torturous forms of deterrence. Bears could be "stabbed with a goad, lashed with a bull whip, sprayed in the eyes with ammonia, turpented you-know-where, or given a whiff of some chemical which made breathing difficult, or produced sneezing" each time they came in contact with a ranger, in order to instill a fear of people in them over the course of two or so generations. Rather than acquiesce to repeated suggestions that bears be taught to associate the sight of humans with intense physical pain, Victor Cahalane, who collected the comments and was a reluctant

supporter of the fence, recommended that the fence plan be approved by the director and "given detailed study by the Park Superintendent."²⁶

Though unpopular with park staff, the fence solution seemed likely to happen. As such, when asked to comment on project M-44, the NPS's landscape architects and engineers developed creative design alternatives to make

the idea more palatable. One such design called for a fence rigged with a series of trapdoors. When a bear approached the fence, a spring would be tripped and the animal would drop into a pit, where it would remain until rangers came to relocate it (just how the bear would be extracted from the pit was unclear). Acting Chief Engineer A. W. Burney, cognizant of the aesthetic objections to fencing, submitted four drawings of a "dry moat" scheme that could be made attractive and inconspicuous through landscaping.²⁷

The fence idea, however, reached its apex with the M-44 proposal, and although it continued to be discussed over the next few years, the project never found enough support to make it viable. In fact, no one had even been able to even agree on where it should be built. There was not enough money to fence all the campgrounds, and even though Martha Hansen's death at Old Faithful had vitalized the idea, the Fishing Bridge area was initially thought to be easier to fence than Old Faithful. In 1948 Merriam told Drury that West Thumb would be a better place than Fishing Bridge for the experiment, but NPS officials were still unable to concur on whether fencing would be anything but an extravagantly expensive, short-term solution that would be too geographically specific to make any overall difference. In September 1949 the project was tabled and doomed to

eventual obscurity in favor of directing the funds into other areas of more urgent need, such as the construction of overnight accommodations (a need that would soon spawn Mission '66, the most massive, ambitious, and controversial construction project in NPS history). The fence idea would never quite go away and was held in the background as an option even into the 1990s.²⁸



MHS Library, Helena

To reform tourists' notions of cute tame bears, the Park Service had to overcome generations of literary misrepresentation. Johnny Bear in Ernest Thompson Seton's *Lives of the Hunted* (New York, 1901, p. 159) was one such creation.

26. Carnes to Comment on Bear Fences, April 19, 1945; Victor Cahalane to Director, National Park Service, June 6, 1945, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944-1949, NA, College Park.

27. A. W. Burney to Director, National Park Service, June 8, 1945, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944-1949, NA, College Park.

28. Lawrence Merriam to Edmund Rogers, November 12, 1948, Bears vol 1: 1939-1947, NA, YNP; Lawrence Merriam to Newton

Drury, May 17, 1946, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944-1949, NA, College Park; Howard Baker to Director, National Park Service, September 30, 1949, file 715-02, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948-, box N-339, NA, YNP; Mark Biel, conversation with author, Mammoth, Wyoming, February 2, 2002.

29. Edmund Rogers, "Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region Two Headquarters," October 6, 1942, Bears vol 1: 1939-1947, NA, YNP.

As the fence idea sorted its way through evaluation committees, Superintendent Rogers continued to pursue the innovative, ambitious idea of changing visitor attitudes toward the park's bears. In a 1942 report Rogers described moderate progress in some areas but indicated that his biggest problems stemmed from misconceptions about bears that had been planted in the minds of visitors both by their own past experience of watching bears at the feeding grounds and by visual and textual media they encountered outside the park, such as schoolbooks, magazines, newspapers, and children's bear stories. Rogers argued that the combination of these influences inculcated the typical visitor with "erroneous ideas [about the bear], which they do not have concerning other animals" and suggested that perhaps the park should attempt to introduce its own message into externally produced and disseminated travel literature and try to correct the existing misinformation.²⁹

Concomitant with his concern about the influence of media representations on the park's visitors was Rogers's idea that the park needed to revise its own primary message about bears. Rogers felt that the park had mistakenly overemphasized the idea that the act of feeding bears was dangerous rather than that bears themselves were dangerous. His recognition of this fine conceptual line demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of two of the most nagging aspects of bear feeding that had inhibited enforcement of the regula-

tions against it: the notion that the bears were cuddly and tame and that people were doing them a benevolent service by feeding them.

Both ideas had been institutionalized under Superintendent Albright decades ago. In fact, telling people that the bears were dangerous, rather than that feeding them

was dangerous, represented a direct reversal of Albright's 1932 directive instructing Roger Toll to tell people that feeding, rather than bears, was dangerous. If visitors could be taught to look at Yellowstone's bears and see wild, potentially threatening bears instead of zoo bears or pets, then the bear's frustrating and confusing historical duality as both wild and tame would cease to be a problem. No one would respond to an admonishing ranger with, "Oh, how could feeding a cute, cuddly tame bear be dangerous?"

Rogers recognized that the way people treated and responded to the bear was different than the way they treated and responded to any other form of wildlife in Yellowstone because they came to the park already influenced by a cultural history of ambivalence about the bear—as both ferocious predator and Teddy. What they saw when they got there—bears eating from people's hands—reinforced the latter ideal, and they were not inclined to believe that feeding Teddy could be dangerous. Rogers sought to eliminate this ambivalence by emphasizing the wild and unpredictable side of the bear's presumed personality,

thereby eliminating the potential for confusion and changing the sight of people feeding bears into a source of shock rather than appeal. If he could unravel the complex tangle

DON'T FEED THE BEARS



Bears at a distance are "safe" bears



Bears fed or fooled with are dangerous bears

For your protection: The feeding, molesting, touching or teasing of bears is prohibited.

MHS Museum, Helena

Messages to the public took several years to evolve from telling people that "bears at a distance are 'safe'" (above) to emphasizing that all bears are dangerous, regardless of whether they were fed or how people behaved around them.

30. George Walker to Lawrence Merriam, October 16, 1942, ibid.

31. Rogers, "Memorandum for the Regional Director"; Edmund Rogers to Lawrence Merriam, April 21, 1943, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park.

32. Lawrence Merriam to Edmund Rogers, April 24, 1943, Bears vol 1: 1939–1947, NA, YNP; Yellowstone National Park, *Motorists Guide* (n.p. 1940); Edmund Rogers to M. S. Benedict, July 2, 1943, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park.

33. Paul Schullery and Lee Whittlesey, "Greater Yellowstone Carnivores," in *Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience*, ed. Tim Clark et al. (New Haven, Conn., 2000), 32.

34. Olaus Murie, "Progress Report on the Yellowstone Bear Study," March 15, 1944, in Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park.

35. Albright and Taylor, *Oh, Ranger!*, 33; Horace Albright to Dr. Barton Warren Evermann, March 20, 1931, file 1, Bear (Yellowstone NP) 1929–1931, NA, YNP.

of emotional connections that people had developed with the bear by convincing them that it was a wild animal like any other, rather than a wild-tame hybrid that was in need of and appreciative of human handouts, then opposition to enforcement should end and bear feeding cease to be a problem.

Predictably, not everyone was convinced that Rogers's was the correct way to approach that task, or even the right thing to do. For instance, Rogers's suggestions encountered internal resistance from an employee named George Walker who showed allegiance to older ways of thinking by suggesting that visitors should be warned that bears were dangerous but "carefully," so as not to scare them. Walker also stated that it was "natural" for visitors to want to feed the bears because that was how they "showed their appreciation for seeing them." He reiterated Regional Director Merriam's recommendation that the park initiate a "scare campaign" to get bears to fear humans.³⁰

Director Drury, on the other hand, seemed to understand that unless the old ambivalence was obliterated, Rogers's ideas would not work. He ordered that "signs and literature . . . be revised to acquaint the public in the plainest terms with the necessity for treating the bears as wild animals. . . . [A]ny public information material not conforming to this principle will be discarded" and stipulated that his office should review all material before its public dissemination. In time for the 1943 season, all park literature bore this rubber-stamped message in bold print and red ink:

WARNING
BEARS ARE DANGEROUS WILD ANIMALS.
YOUR SAFETY AND PARK REGULATIONS
PROHIBIT FEEDING, MOLESTING, OR
APPROACHING BEARS.
KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE FROM BEARS.³¹

Regional Director Merriam described this warning as brief, to the point, and almost certain to be read by visitors. More important, it was an unequivocal statement; a departure even from old assertions that "Bears at distance are safe bears; bears fed or fooled are dangerous," as the 1940 *Motorist's Guide* had stated. Now all bears were dangerous, regardless of how people behaved around them. That summer visitors also received informational sheets titled "Bears Are Wild Animals."³²



From Ernest Thompson Seton, *The Biography of a Grizzly* (New York, 1900, p. 12), MHS Library, Helena

It was not so much the safety of Yellowstone's visitors, however, as the welfare of its bears that was beginning to concern the larger scientific community. In May 1943 Chief Naturalist C. P. Russell reported that a group of scientists at a conference he had recently attended in St. Louis had castigated the park for its apparent policy of killing every bear that caused problems in Yellowstone, absent any knowledge about the bear itself or whether such a reign of terror was really an effective deterrent to injury and damage. In July of that year wildlife biologist Olaus Murie began the first true study of the "life history" of Yellowstone's bears.

Murie and his brother Adolph, also a wildlife biologist, were born and raised in turn-of-the-century Moorhead, Minnesota. By the 1920s both were established scientists who often worked jointly on wildlife studies in national parks under the auspices of both the Biological Survey and the NPS's Wildlife Division. Adolph Murie served in the Wildlife Division from 1934 to 1939 and during that time conducted a ground-breaking study of the ecology of the coyote in Yellowstone. He found that coyote predation had only minor effects on ungulate populations, which proved influential in the fight to end predator control in the national parks.³³

The main focus of Olaus Murie's study was the food habits of Yellowstone's bears. He determined, contrary to previous beliefs, that garbage comprised but a small percentage of their intake; that even bears that made a habit of raiding campground garbage cans gained only 10 percent of their sustenance through those efforts and acquired the rest of their caloric intake from natural foods. In another contradiction of entrenched belief, Murie found that punishing individual bears for their misdeeds was ineffective, or at least offered no "permanent help." Finally, Murie stressed that in order to understand the life history of the bear it was not only necessary to observe the habits and mental characteristics of bears but also to understand the habits and characteristics of tourists "as they impinge upon the bear problem." Murie identified part of the bear problem as being that "Over a period of years the bears of the Yellowstone have been publicized, not as a wild animal in a wilderness setting, but as a picturesque "highwayman" begging from automobiles. . . . It seems to me this is conducive to a viewpoint that the bear of the Yellowstone is almost a domestic animal, not to be feared. The bear becomes more or less associated with the humanized Three Bears of nursery days, safe within the covers of a book."³⁴



Wildlife biologist Olaus Murie, at left with gray jay, when asked to address the public's expectations to see wildlife in national parks, responded, "It is a question of whether we are justified in sacrificing some of the main purpose of a park, and endangering lives and property, in order to maintain a special display, furnish cute bear antics, however stimulating."³⁶

Drury supposed that the answer was no and requested Victor Cahalane to ask Olaus Murie to ruminate on the theoretical conundrum posed by "the inalienable right assured in some quarters to see at least one bear" in conjunction with the NPS's mission of preserving natural conditions. Cahalane did so, writing that he suspected Murie would "enjoy sinking [his] teeth into the 'inalienable right' of every park visitor to see all of the larger species of wildlife."³⁶

In an eloquent missive Murie responded that "It is a question of whether we are justified in sacrificing some of the main purpose of a park, and endangering lives and property, in order to maintain a special display, furnish cute bear antics, however stimulating this may be to the public." Murie wrote that he had observed visitors who seemed to have become bored with the bear on account of its omnipresence and concluded that "I think the quality of a national park experience can be improved if we do not try to hand the visitor his recreation on a platter, but let him make at least a little exertion to find it . . . and the resulting deeper satisfaction that comes from some form of personal achievement."³⁷

If Murie's thoughts evoke Edward Abbey's contention that "a man on foot, on horseback, or on a bicycle will see more, feel more, enjoy more in one mile than the motorized tourists can in a hundred miles," it may be because Murie and Abbey were not all that far apart when it came to their beliefs about recreation and wilderness (if not in the tactics they believed necessary to preserve it).³⁸ That Murie's views about wilderness were relatively purist was a matter of public record by 1944. Olaus Murie had been a key figure in the Wilderness Society since its organization in 1935 and would soon become its director.

The Wilderness Society had been originally organized under the joint auspices of wilderness preservation and social activism by forester and philanthropist Bob Marshall, who felt that wilderness could improve the lives of people from all walks of American life, especially factory workers and others who might otherwise have the least access to and experience with its recreating salve. However, when Marshall's progressive views opened him up to red-baiting in the late 1930s,

Like Rogers, Murie maintained that it was not the bear but the human conception of the bear that was the root of the "bear problem" in Yellowstone. In his 1928 book *Oh, Ranger!*, Horace Albright had pointed out the power of nursery tale imagery such as that of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" but felt no need to fight it because visitors seemed to derive pleasure from seeing Yellowstone's bears as storybook characters. Murie, Rogers, and Drury, however, thought it was time to dispense with the bedtime stories, as well as with the objectives that had perpetuated them. In particular, they wanted to rid the NPS of the Albrightian assumption that one of its primary duties was "to present wildlife as a spectacle."³⁵

The degree of ideological upheaval occurring in the 1940s is evident in that even this sacred tenet was being questioned. The park's zoo was gone, its feeding grounds were closed, and roadside feeding had been declared not only dangerous but also "unnatural." If eliminating roadside feeding would cause bears to naturally disperse into the backcountry and become less visible, was it really congruous then to assume that the NPS had a duty to ensure that visitors saw certain animals? Was presenting wildlife as a spectacle really consistent with preserving natural conditions in this new era?

36. Newton Drury to Victor Cahalane, March 4, 1944, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941-1943, NA, College Park; Victor Cahalane to Olaus Murie, March 11, 1944, *ibid*.

37. Olaus Murie to Newton Drury, March 24, 1944, file N16, Management of Natural Resources and Areas #1 1982, box N-130, NA, YNP.

38. Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York, 1968), 45-67.


39. Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring* (Washington, D.C., 1993), 17-18.

Wilderness Society director Robert Sterling Yard sought to erase the social progressive aspects of wilderness advocacy from the society's mission. He tapped Olaus Murie to pen an essay disavowing the "democratic wilderness" concept. Murie wrote that "wilderness is for those who appreciate' and that if 'the multitudes' were brought into the backcountry without really understanding its 'subtle values,' 'there would be an insistent and effective demand for more and more facilities, and we would find ourselves losing our wilderness and having these areas reduced to the commonplace'"—much as he posited that the bear had been reduced to the commonplace by tourists' over-exposure to it.³⁹

Drury likely knew, then, what Murie would produce: a treatise that supported the NPS's recent policy changes and disavowed it of any obligation to guarantee the public an animal sideshow. Murie's response accomplished this goal and also echoed Arno Cammerer's suggestions that the NPS try to convince the public that a bear encounter that required some effort was more valuable than one supplied on demand. In combination with efforts to change its image from that of plaything to preda-

tor, requiring people to seek out the bear would increase its status as a subject to be dealt with rather than a symbol to be consumed. As such, the success of the new message would necessitate a reformulation of people's ideas about nature—a shift from human-oriented conservation thinking to the "nature-oriented" preservation thinking that posited that wildlife had the right to live life separate

from human domination. This introduction of the values espoused by the emergent modern wilderness movement (and recommended for bear management purposes as early as 1929) represented a pivotal moment in modern NPS history—a philosophical and narrative shift from

making nature accessible to the people to encouraging the people to seek reward from effort. 

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Seton, *The Biography of a Grizzly*, p. 35



Feeding grounds in Yellowstone quickly habituated bears to eating garbage and handouts and caused unnatural behavior in grizzlies—they would rarely gather in numbers or share food in the wild. Below, grizzlies feed and spar with each other at Otter Creek in 1937. Beginning in the 1940s the NPS strove to undo decades of animal and visitor behavior perpetuated by entertaining park-goers with these feedings.



Jack E. Hayes, photographer, Hayes Foundation Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena





Wrestling with Horace Albright Edmond Rogers, Visitors, and Bears in Yellowstone National Park, Part II

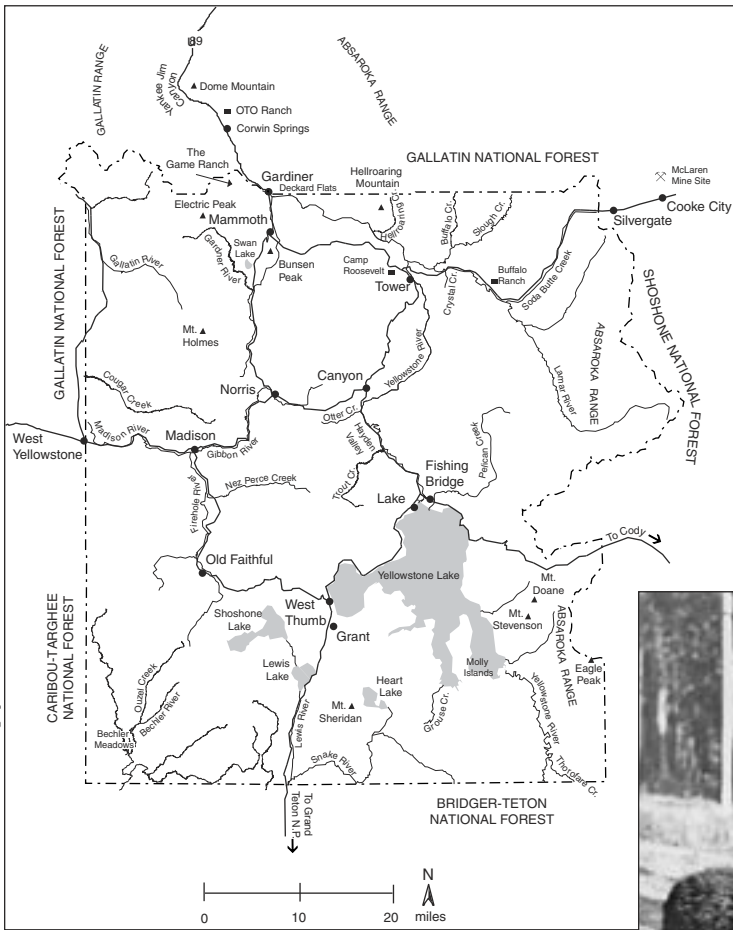
by Alice K. Wondrak

Jack E. Haynes, photographer, Haynes Foundation Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

As Part I of this article, which appeared in Autumn 2002, explained, Yellowstone National Park was for many decades a place where visitors expected to have close encounters with bears. Under the superintendency of Horace Albright, the “bear-feeding grounds,” a series of dumps located near the park’s major hotels, became headliner entertainment. The hundreds of incidents and injuries that resulted each year from interactions between bears and visitors came to be known as the “bear problem” to the park personnel who succeeded Albright after he left the park to become National Park Service (NPS) director in 1929.

The severe mauling and death of Martha Hansen in late summer 1942 ratcheted the “bear problem” up to an unprecedented level of urgency. In response, NPS officials began to fashion a new bear-management message emphasizing that close encounters between visitors and bears was bad for both. This new policy represented a pivotal moment in Yellowstone history—a philosophical and narrative shift away from making wildlife easily accessible to visitors to encouraging people to seek reward through effort. It was a shift not achieved without great difficulty.

For decades visitors to Yellowstone National Park expected to encounter bears panhandling along park roads and providing evening entertainment at the feeding grounds, including Otter Creek pictured here. But the 1940s brought changes to bear-management policies. The new message: Bears are dangerous wild animals that should not be in close contact with people.



A champion of the public's desire to see bears, former superintendent Horace Albright (below, 1930) fervently defended the feeding of bears, but Superintendent Edmund Rogers and National Park Service Director Newton Drury envisioned the park as a place to see nature in operation, not a forum to view the "humanized" antics of animals.

George Grant, photographer, Haynes Fnd. Coll., MHS Photograph Archives, Helena



In the mid-1940s Horace Albright, despite his retirement from the NPS, remained influential in the agency and in the conservation movement.¹ In April 1945 he came out with guns blazing to oppose the NPS's closure of the Otter Creek bear-feeding grounds and the suggestion that visitors should be prohibited from feeding bears marshmallows and other human foodstuffs along roadsides with a rather alarmist essay published in *The Backlog*, the journal of the Camp Fire Club.²

In "New Order for National Park Bears" Albright pled the case for a democratic conservation in the face of what he saw as an exclusionary turn in NPS thinking. In part, Albright fought the changes because he felt the NPS had been built on the principle of "aesthetic conservation," a brand of conservation that fell somewhere between the traditional utilitarian conservation of Gifford Pinchot and the kind of preservation philosophy that had been espoused

by John Muir and was being revitalized by his modern counterparts.³ Like other forms of conservation, aesthetic conservation had a "problem-oriented" goal, primarily to preserve species that humans valued. It departed from utilitarian conservation by advocating nonconsumptive resource use that elevated the human spirit instead of human industry. To Albright, prohibiting bear feeding violated the principles of aesthetic conservation in two fundamental ways: by killing bears and by dispersing them. Albright was convinced that the only ways tourists and bears would ever be kept apart was if roadside bears were either killed or hauled into the park's backcountry, which would lead to a reduction in the number of bears that tourists could see.

1. Donald Swain, *Wilderness Defender: Horace M. Albright and Conservation* (Chicago, 1970), 258-59. Albright retired from the NPS in 1933 to join the United States Potash Company; he became the company's president and general manager in 1946.

2. Horace M. Albright, "New Orders for National Park Bears," *The Backlog: A Bulletin of the Camp Fire Club of America*, 22 (April 1945), 5-11, copy in Albright, Horace M., New Orders for National Park Bears file, Mammals-Ursidae section, Vertical Files, Yellowstone National Park Library, Mammoth, Wyoming (hereafter YNP Library). The Camp Fire Club was a conservation group that shared Albright's conviction that wildlife visibility was key to wildlife conservation. When NPS officials

proposed to cease operations at Yellowstone's Lamar Buffalo Ranch in 1944, the Camp Fire Club strongly opposed the idea out of concern that an unsubsidized, free-roaming bison herd would not survive and that even if it could, the animals would no longer be visible to visitors. Charles Banks Belt, *History of the Committee on Conservation of Forests and Wildlife of the Camp Fire Club of America 1909-1989 and the Camp Fire Conservation Fund 1977-1989* (Chappaqua, N.Y., 1989).

3. James S. Pritchard, *Preserving Yellowstone's Natural Conditions: Science and the Perception of Nature* (Lincoln, 1999), 181.



Director Drury sought support for ending roadside feeding from wildlife biologist Olaus Murie, who agreed that the park was not justified “in sacrificing some of the main purpose of a park, and endangering lives and property.” The challenge, though, was to disabuse people of the notion that begging bears, such as the one at right and the cubs below, were harmless.

Both photographs by Jack E. Haynes, Haynes Fnd. Coll., MHS Photograph Archives, Helena



Wildlife biologist Olaus Murie’s 1944 report that argued against tourists’ “inalienable right” to see bears in Yellowstone may have sparked Albright’s article. In an eloquent missive solicited by NPS Director Newton Drury, who sought support for his decision to end roadside feeding, Murie wrote that “it is a question of whether we are justified in sacrificing some of the main purpose of a park, and endangering lives and property, in order to maintain a special display, furnish cute bear antics, however stimulating this may be to the public.”⁴

Albright did not take kindly to Murie’s comments, and in two letters to Director Drury, he made it clear that what irked him about Murie and his ideas was the absence of any concern for the desires of “the public who like the bears . . . much more than the geysers.” “Murie knows mighty little about the traveling public,” Albright wrote, “and apparently is not particularly concerned about whether the public enjoys the parks or not.” He could not understand “why the public cannot have access to one or two big feeding grounds where they can see both black bears and grizzlies, photograph them, and enjoy their funny antics and be safe.” During his superintendency, he remembered, bears annually bit an average of two hundred people to “no significant negative effect.”⁵



It should be noted, of course, that Albright was not opposed to wilderness, just to the idea of the national parks being reserved and managed for it. In his view, the NPS’s wedding of ecology, wilderness ethic, and policy would ultimately sacrifice the needs and desires of the public for the sake of what the ecologists defined as a “purer” nature. He argued that “Not all park visitors can see bears along the roads. This does not disturb the scientific group. They think that if a person wants to see a bear he should go out into the wilds and find one, and then he would see a bear as a child of Nature and be vastly more thrilled and inspired by such a spectacle than to observe one near a highway.”⁶

4. Olaus Murie to Newton Drury, March 24, 1944, file N16, Management of Natural Resources and Areas #1 1982, box N-130, National Archives, Yellowstone National Park, Mammoth, Wyoming (hereafter NA, YNP).

5. Horace M. Albright to Newton Drury, April 13, 1944, file 715.02 pt. 5, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, January 1941 to December 1943 (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943), box 1749, entry E7, Record Group 79 (hereafter RG 79), Records of the National Park Service, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NA, College Park); Horace M. Albright to Newton Drury, March 21, 1944, *ibid.*

6. Albright, “New Orders for National Park Bears,” 8. Whether the “scientific group” to whom Albright referred included the entirety of

the Wildlife Division, a group of biologists whose task was to survey and contribute to scientific knowledge about national park wildlife, or Olaus Murie alone is unclear. But Murie was certainly a specific target, as his exclusionary beliefs about wilderness were anathema to principles of conservation—*aesthetic or utilitarian*—that advocated the more democratic “greatest good for the greatest number for the greatest amount of time,” as opposed to an experience of carefully defined quality for those who were refined enough to be able to appreciate it.



Bears pour out of the woods as hotel employees refill a bear-feeding ground. An armed ranger watches from atop the truck cab.



To Albright's thinking, the evening entertainment at the bear-feeding grounds—a compressed interaction that showed how nature worked to as many visitors as possible in the shortest amount of time—was a far more efficient use of resources. At the bear feedings, the public observed the interactions and behaviors of no fewer than four species at different hierarchical levels in the food chain (black and grizzly bears, coyotes, and seagulls), all accompanied by educational interpretation given by park personnel.⁷ This was ecology as spectacle, served up to a crowd in a manageable amount of time and in an accessible space. People enjoyed themselves and learned something, bears got fed and (according to Albright) stayed away from the campgrounds, garbage went away, and all it took was a big pile of bear bait. Why throw away one of the park's most valuable resources (the pleasure and experience afforded by the bears) and provoke public anger for the sake of the abstract ideal of a far less tenable Nature? If they get hurt, Albright, in essence, declared, tell a funny story and convince 'em that they'll be more interesting for the scar.

Drury, Yellowstone superintendent Edmund Rogers, and others, however, had had enough of trying to salve bear bites with anecdotes. A woman was dead, the NPS was being sued over it, and ecology taught that the natural world was a series of interconnections that might work just as well in the absence of active human intervention. A national park, administrators argued, ought to be a place

to see nature in operation, not a circus or a zoo where people went to view the humanized “antics” of animals. Thus, the feeding grounds stayed closed, and efforts to wean bears from campground garbage and roadside feeding continued.

World War II, recently ended, had effectively prevented vacationers from visiting the park, and Drury and Rogers knew that tourists would soon be returning in droves and that park officials would have to make a special effort to convince them that the elimination of bear feeding was a positive change. Fearing the public would be both outraged to discover the feeding grounds closed and determined to feed bears themselves, they planned to intensify educational efforts to “correct” nursery and fairy-tale images that perpetuated an old-style narrative about the Yellowstone bear.

One significant source of irritation was Union Pacific Railroad (UP) advertising that frequently depicted bear feeding as legitimate tourist entertainment. In particular, the railroad's 1946 schedule circular, designed by Walter Oehrle, depicted anthropomorphized bears engaging in

7. Albright, “New Orders for National Park Bears,” 9.

8. Paul Shea, “The Bears of the Union Pacific” (paper presented at West Yellowstone Historical Society, West Yellowstone, Montana, June 30, 2000).

9. Hillory Tolson to Lawrence Merriam, June 26, 1946, file 715.02 pt. 6, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, January 1944 to June 1949, box 1749, entry E7, RG 79, NA, College Park (hereafter Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944–1949).

10. Lawrence Merriam to Newton Drury, September 26, 1945, *ibid.*; Newton Drury to Lawrence Merriam, October 4, 1945, Bears vol 1: 1939–1947, NA, YNP; Newton Drury to Secretary of the Interior, October 4, 1945, *ibid.*

11. “Special Report: Canyon Bear Ground Restoration Project,” May 27–31, 1946, copy in Bears vol 1: 1939–1947, NA, YNP.



various activities in preparation for the postwar renewal of rail service. The cover of the circular showed a passel of happy bears greeting the first train to West Yellowstone with shouts of “Welcome Back!”⁸

The UP bears certainly were not the “dangerous wild animals” that Rogers wanted to show visitors, so there was little room for them in a postwar framework of bear and visitor management. As such, NPS Acting Director Hillory Tolson requested that Regional Director Lawrence Merriam urge the UP to modify its message: “We hope that special attention may be devoted by the Yellowstone Park staff to correcting the unfortunate impression which has been given by the Union Pacific Railroad publicity that the tourists should expect to renew convivial relations with the ‘friendly’ Yellowstone bears, which relationship was interrupted by the war.”⁹ The UP produced Oehrle circulars until 1960 but never again depicted tourists and bears in close association.

NPS management also decided that simply stopping the bear-feeding shows was not enough—the landscape of the feeding grounds needed to be turned back to nature. The demolition of the Otter Creek bear-feeding grounds was recommended to Drury September 26, 1945, by Regional Director Merriam, who deemed the task of such import that he wanted it completed before the 1946 season, in spite of funding and staffing shortages. Drury and Rogers hoped that visitors would have forgotten about bear feeding, and it is no surprise that Drury immediately supported of this suggestion to erase evidence of NPS-sanctioned feeding from the park landscape. On October 4 he responded that Merriam should arrange with Superintendent Rogers to “obliterate, so far as possible, all developments pertaining to the feeding of bears at the

Canyon feeding area at the earliest possible date” and informed Assistant Secretary of Interior Oscar Chapman of the decision. Park officials agreed not to issue a press release notifying the public of these plans nor of concurrent plans to remove all signs relating to the Antelope Creek buffalo pasture, whose previous inhabitants now freely roamed the park. If anyone inquired about the absence of these landmarks, he or she should simply be informed that the areas were no longer being used.¹⁰

In late May 1946, with the feeding grounds already in a dilapidated state from five years’ disuse, park personnel removed fencing, guard rails, signs, stairways and log seats, a retaining wall, two pit toilets, and the small building used to heat the water with which the concrete feeding pad had been hosed down each night. Removal of the pad itself was postponed until drier weather permitted bulldozer operations.¹¹

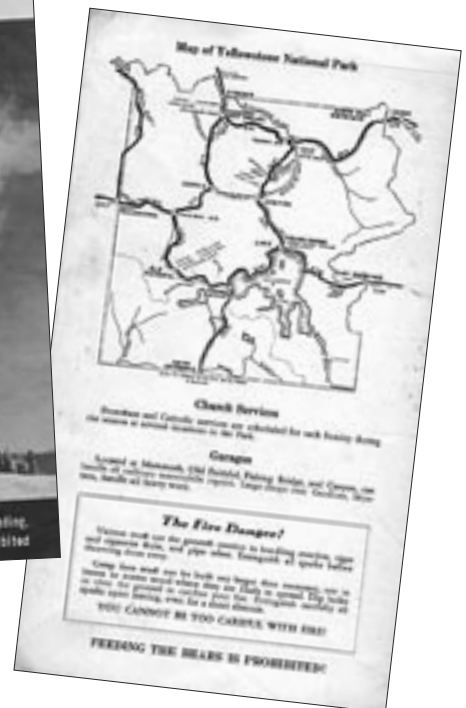
The razing of the Otter Creek feeding grounds placed a palpable strain on what had historically been a congenial relationship between Director Drury and former director Albright. In October 1945 Drury notified Albright of the plans to demolish the facility. A month later, in response to Albright’s apparently negative and accusatory reply, Drury demonstrated that his tolerance for Albright’s

public and private criticism of the park’s new wildlife policies had reached its limit: “Maybe we are wrong, and should have temporized longer, but I have to ‘call ’em as I see them,’ and take the consequences. [Your] references to ‘secrecy’

Park officials countered the images of friendly bears perpetuated in railroad and concessioner brochures (below) with their own message (center and far right): “Any Close Approach to Bears Is Dangerous—Feeding, Molesting, Teasing, or Touching Bears Is Prohibited.”



Brochures from MHS Library, Helena



and 'bureaucracy' I find hard to comprehend in reviewing the record. . . . In any event, Supt. Rogers assures me that if there is a reversal of the present policy, he would recommend the feeding grounds on another site."¹²

Given the unlikelihood of a "reversal of the present policy," it is hardly surprising that the demolition of Otter Creek upset Albright. More than precluding a return to the past, the demolition represented a desire to purge past's existence by erasing its traces from the landscape. Because Albright had been largely responsible for shaping the agency and its ideals, the NPS's sudden eagerness erase

12. Newton Drury to Horace M. Albright, November 7, 1945, *ibid.*

13. C. C. Adams, W. C. Allee, Arthur A. Allen et al., "Excerpts of Comments on the Abolition of 'Bear Show' in Yellowstone National Park," January 1946, copy in Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944–1949, NA, College Park; Newton Drury to A. T. Wilcox, December 19, 1946, *ibid.*; William B. Sanborn, "The Educational Program of Yellowstone National Park" (master's thesis, Claremont Graduate School, 1947), 92, copy in YNP Library.

14. Janet Bryant to Secretary of the Interior, July 22, 1948, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944–1949, NA, College Park; "Monthly Report of Activities [of Yellowstone National Park Biologist]," September 8, 1948, copy in Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park; John J. Craighead to Lon Garrison, October 25, 1960, file N1427, Bear—General 1958–1960, box N-168, NA, YNP.

his philosophical legacy must have hurt him personally and deeply, a fact perhaps demonstrated by his allusions to "secrecy" and "bureaucracy." In a sense, the razing physically destroyed Albright's guiding philosophy. With the elaborate Otter Creek feeding and viewing accommodations, aesthetic conservation had been built into the park landscape. The facility's destruction represented more than a desire for the new picnic ground that replaced it. It signified the NPS's resolve not to return to the old ways of thinking about itself and its duties to the public.

In order to reassure itself that the agency had done the right thing, the NPS in December 1945 solicited comments from scholars and environmental leaders from around the nation about whether they agreed with the closure of the feeding grounds (they did). A year later Drury wrote to one A. T. Wilcox of Michigan State College that "throughout

15. Curtis K. Skinner, "Some Notes on the Black Bear (*Euarctos americanus*): From Observations at Old Faithful, Yellowstone National Park 1931–1932," 1932, copy in *Ursidae* (Skinner), Vertical Files, YNP Library; Victor Cahalane to Robert Forbes, December 11, 1951, file 715-02, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–, box N-339, NA, YNP (hereafter Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–).

16. Victor Cahalane to Chic Young, November 21, 1951, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–, NA, YNP.

the year 1946 this Office did not receive a single protest against this policy, nor a request that the feeding of bears be resumed. . . . [T]his dearth of audible signs of nostalgia has surprised us.” However, a researcher, who in 1947 wrote a thesis on Yellowstone’s educational program, disagreed, noting that “great numbers of visitors express disappointment that the bears are no longer fed by the Service.”¹³

Visitor Janet Bryant of Livingston, Montana, for example, wrote to the secretary of Interior in 1948 to complain of the bears’ scraggly appearance and “starved” condition since the removal of the garbage and voiced her fear that the bears were unable to “find anything to eat.” Bryant’s observations led her to the inevitable conclusion that “after a-while they will be extinct.” Later that season the park’s biologist stated that law enforcement rangers were having difficulty preventing visitors from skirting barricades and gathering at the still-existing dumps (the park continued to use open pits for trash disposal until the early 1970s) to watch the grizzlies that still went there to feed, thereby creating their own informal and unsanctioned bear shows. Efforts to stifle these informal bear shows failed, and they continued at least through summer 1960.¹⁴

From the late 1940s to the 1980s the historical record shows a continual negotiation between the NPS and its visitors as visitors struggled to understand why the park had changed and the NPS struggled to explain it to them. In 1926 Yellowstone had offered visitors the opportunity to see two bears in a zoo, to sit and watch grizzlies scarf up leftover steaks and pies, and to personally feed the innumerable black bears that lined the roadsides and “held-up” their motorcars. A mere twenty years later the zoo was gone, the feeding grounds razed, and park officials were fervently trying to figure out how to bring roadside feeding to an end. Given that an economic depression and a world war (both of which stifled visitation) occurred in the intervening years, it is likely that most visitors’ image of Yellowstone was of the park as it had been in the old days. For them, Yellowstone existed as though the 1930s and 1940s never happened.

In the postwar era, more than in any previous period, park officials focused on their message as being the most effective medium by which to solve the “bear problem.” At this time, the NPS’s communications strategy included sending out

In the 1950s the NPS even tried humor to convince visitors to stop feeding bears, though at least some failed to understand the point of this poster.

press releases and newspaper stories written by employees emphasizing that feeding bears was dangerous to both bear and tourist. Officials also placed the Naturalist Division (formerly the Educational Division) in charge of a collection of “pictures of the type we like to have published.”¹⁵ Publications distributed in the park changed as well. In 1947 a photograph of a black bear staring back at the camera from the forest’s edge in a manner consistent with Edmund Rogers’s desire to remake the park bear into a wild animal replaced the 1940 drawings of bears interacting with people in the park’s broadside.

As it had with the UP in 1946, the NPS also started to reach out to external image-makers, using letters received from visitors as the pretext. When concerned citizen William Wandall sent Superintendent Rogers a cartoon strip from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in which “Colonel Potterby and the Duchess” befriended a roadside beggar bear, Rogers responded to Wandall while NPS Wildlife Division Chief Victor Cahalane contacted the cartoon’s artist, Chic Young (creator of the more enduring *Blondie*). Cahalane conceded that Young could not “be expected to know that our rangers are getting prematurely gray over the chances that tourists take with the supposedly tame but actually wild and powerful bears.” He suggested a way that Young could mitigate any damage done: “How about giving your public a cartoon which will show some aspect of the real relationship between people and park bears? Following is the text of one of the signs we have posted in Yellowstone. . . . [I]t may lead to an idea.” Cahalane then reproduced “Notice to Bears” for Young’s perusal. Young’s response to Cahalane’s proposal is unknown.¹⁶

Regardless of whether Young ever used the information, Cahalane’s letter is valuable as an example of the NPS’s ongoing experimentation with messaging during the 1950s. It seems curious that a sign that took a comic approach and anthropomorphized bears by pretending they could read would be erected under the superinten-

NOTICE TO BEARS BEWARE OF SABOTAGE

We want to warn you that certain humans in this park have been passing the biscuits and soda pop to some of your brothers. Keep your self-respect—avoid them. Don’t be pauperized like your uncles were last year. You remember what happened to those panhandlers, don’t you?

Do you want gout, an unbalanced diet, vitamin deficiencies, or gas on the stomach? Beware of “ersatz” foodstuffs—accept only natural foods and hunt these up yourself.

These visitors mean well but they will ignore the signs. If they come too close, read this notice to them. They’ll catch on after awhile.

THE COMMITTEE.

IF YOU CAN’T READ, ASK THE BEAR AT THE NEXT INTERSECTION



National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park

gency of Rogers, who so wanted to convince visitors that bears were dangerous. In that sense, “Notice to Bears” may suggest a willingness to try just about anything to change visitors’ attitudes toward bear feeding. (In the same year the NPS introduced a very different flyer called “Dangerous” that featured what would come to be known as a “horror bear,” an enraged bear roaring, waving its front legs in the air, and displaying an enormous set of pointy teeth.)¹⁷

Another problem with the use of humor in bear warnings was that such signs tended to backfire, when, more inspired to own the signs than to obey them, tourists turned them into souvenirs. In September 1957 June Lange of New York, New York, wrote the superintendent that she had been “very much amused by your sign concerning the fact that the public should not feed the bears. Would it be possible to secure one of those that read ‘Bears Beware’ etc.?” There was little humor in Acting

17. Fred Johnston to Director, National Park Service, August 10, 1951, *ibid.*

18. Dan Beard to Victor Cahalane, October 4, 1941, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1941–1943, NA, College Park; June Lange to Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, September 30, 1957, file N1427, Bear Management & Control, Damage & Injuries, 1954–61, box N-163, NA, YNP (hereafter Bear Management & Control, 1954–61); Frank Sylvester to June Lange, October 11, 1957, *ibid.*

At the other end of the spectrum from “Notice to Bears” is the poster “Dangerous” with its “horror bear,” complete with an enormous set of pointy teeth and intimidating claws.

Chief Ranger Frank Sylvester’s negative reply to Lange’s collector’s impulse.¹⁸

That at least some people failed to understand the point of “Notice to Bears” (if they, in fact, saw it) was reflected by the number of visitors who wrote to suggest that instead of warning people that they endangered themselves by feeding the bears, the park should explain the ways in which they endangered the bears by feeding them (which is exactly what “Notice to Bears” did). Several respondents to a 1952 survey and numerous individual visitors to Yellowstone between 1952 and 1963 proposed this suggestion as well.¹⁹

Although some rangers chose to verbally communicate the “feeding is bad for bears” message to people stalled in bear jams—traffic congestion created by people stopping to watch bears—the idea was apparently not yet widespread among visitors in the early 1950s. Josef and Elizabeth Lynch of Germany, for example, offered a Euro-sophisticate perspective with a relativist remonstrance that to eat garbage was consistent with the “nature” of Yellowstone’s bears: “It would be as *unnatural* for a most intelligent animal as the wild bear is to look for food—hardly accessible food in the forest—as it is *natural* to expect food—easily attainable food—from visitors. . . . We can’t consider millions of human visitors of the Yellowstone National Park feeding bears as unnatural. The bears are simply drawing natural consequences from the natural behavior of their fellow beings—visitors to the Yellowstone and other National Parks.”²⁰

Though not the most cogent explanation, the Lynches’ point, that humans are part of the natural world and that it was natural for the bear, as an omnivore engaging in evolutionary struggle, to conserve energy by feeding on easily available garbage and handouts, would prove a popular argument for proponents of feeding in the years to come. It appeared to provide scientific and philosophical

19. Donald L. Bock, “A Survey of Public Opinion Concerning the Yellowstone Bear Feeding Problem,” p. 11, December 4, 1953, copy in YNP Library.

20. Josef and Elizabeth Lynch to Suggestion Box, Canyon Ranger Station, August 21, 1950, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–, NA, YNP.

21. Joseph Paul Bitzer to Thomas E. Martin, August 21, 1951, *ibid.*; Joseph Paul Bitzer to Edmund Rogers, August 21, 1951, *ibid.*

22. Although changing ideas about the “unnaturalness” of feeding had been an important factor in the park’s decision to eliminate feeding, little in the park’s overall antifeeding message during the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated the influence of preservation philosophy.

23. Jack Frost Andrews to Conrad Wirth, August 31, 1956, Bear Management & Control, 1954–61, NA, YNP.

grounding for the act of supplemental feeding after the closure of the park's garbage dumps.

Others just wanted to feed the bears without being hassled by the marshmallow police. Visitor happiness was the issue for Joseph Paul Bitzer of Davenport, Iowa, who was incensed to arrive at the park in summer 1951 only to discover bear feeding illegal and that bears that injured people or repeatedly raided campground garbage cans were shot. Bitzer's arguments in favor of feeding recalled Albright's when he pointed out that bears injured only a very tiny percentage of visitors and that it was usually the visitor's own fault. Also like Albright, whose designation of Yellowstone as "the bear park" reflected the inseparability of the place and the animal in his mind, Bitzer proclaimed that "Yellowstone wouldn't be Yellowstone without the bears and the ability to be near them and feed them, etc." He offered some suggestions on proper feeding methods and concluded with the suggestion that if the NPS was concerned about the health of the bears, it should provide people with a list of what was and was not good for bears to eat.²¹

The park's managers disagreed and continued to experiment with different ways of telling people to stop feeding the bears.²² Unfortunately, there is little evidence that educational efforts discouraged people. The number of bear-related personal injuries rose from 38 in 1951 to 109 in 1956. There also seemed to be more begging bears than ever. In 1956 visitor Jack Frost Andrews wrote to ask what was going on: he saw eight bears during a 1939 park visit but returned with his children in 1956 to see an astonishing seventy-one.²³

In light of continuing misunderstandings, a social science researcher attempted in 1952 to ascertain just what Yellowstone's visitors knew about bear feeding. That summer Donald Bock of the Colorado A&M School of Forestry administered "A Survey of Public Opinion Concerning the Yellowstone Bear Feeding Problem," the first study of the subject conducted by an outside entity and probably the first since park biologist Walter Kittams interviewed visitors whom he encountered in the act of feeding the bears a few years previously. Like Kittams, Bock found that the majority of visitors knew that feeding violated park's rules but did not really know why, though most who had an idea believed that danger to visitors was the only reason for prohibiting feeding. In a statistic that might call into question the truth-in-reporting practiced by Bock's respondents, 72 percent claimed that neither they nor anyone in their party fed the bears, but 92 percent said that they saw others doing it. Sixty-four percent believed that feeding violated national park principles, but several of those who disagreed were emphatic in their responses. Perhaps most interesting for what it suggests about visitors' desire for a certain kind of visual experience is the statistic that 39 percent of respondents said they would rather have seen fewer bears in a wild state than more bears along the roadside. Seventeen percent preferred to see them at the roadside receiving handouts, 20 percent were indifferent, and 9 percent stated that they did not care about seeing bears at all.²⁴

In spite of its creative messaging, by the early 1950s the NPS still did not in any meaningful way back up its educational efforts with law enforcement, and if any-

Bear jam, 1952



Jack E. Hayes, photographer, Hayes Find Coll., MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

Jack E. Haynes, photographer, Haynes Fnd. Coll., MHS Photograph Archives, Helena



thing, feeding seemed to be on the rise, concomitant with the postwar surge in visitations brought on by the return of the family vacation and the advent of 1950s car culture, including the introduction of the mass-produced motor home.²⁵

In a 1951 memo the park's acting superintendent informed the NPS director that so many people fed the bears that only the most flagrant offenders—for example, the four people who actually left their cars to hand-feed—could be prosecuted. Rangers got traffic moving and talked with people about why they should not feed the bears, but punishing them for feeding was neither required nor encouraged. Although 95 percent of Bock's 1952 subjects reported knowing that feeding was illegal, visitors would continue feeding even in the presence of a ranger, and one seasonal ranger remembered that in three summers of patrolling bear jams between 1951 and 1953, he never wrote a single ticket for bear feeding nor was he ever reprimanded for failing to do so, despite regular inspections of his ticket book by his supervisor who knew that his seasonal staff devoted a substantial amount of time getting traffic moving.²⁶

This lack of punishment did not extend to bears that broke the rules. In the absence of a formal management plan, district rangers dealt with bears on a case-by-case basis. A seasonal ranger stationed at Lake, an area whose jurisdiction included the Fishing Bridge camp-



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

When people broke the rules, bears suffered. Rangers trapped and relocated some to remote territory (up to three times if necessary). Others were dispatched.

ground, explained that the campground's ursine visitors would be trapped and relocated three times and then were dispatched. As had been the case for decades, rangers kept track of strikes by marking offending bears with paint: "We had the three paint colors . . . and bruin got three chances at Fishing Bridge Campground. First time we trapped him, one color . . . next incident . . . the second color. Take him back into a remote area again. Same procedure the third time. If he came back the fourth time, he was trapped, and that was his last move. A bear trapped in the campground that had been previ-

ously painted three times was then disposed of. I guess if there was a bear management policy, that was it."²⁷

Most of the problem bears at Fishing Bridge in those days were black bears. Grizzlies, thought to be a more serious threat to human safety, rangers handled somewhat differently: "We had a grizzly on occasion as well. That was sometimes handled in a more direct way, depending upon history of incidents and all. . . . [W]e had some night incidents in which I held the flashlight, and the district ranger settled the grizzly bear problem in the campground on the spot [by shooting it]. Another description of bear-management methods during the 1950s also indicates a lack of messing around: "[B]ears that could not be

24. Walter Kittams to Edmund Rogers, August 6, 1948, Yellowstone: Mammals: Bears, 1944–1949, NA, College Park; Bock, "A Survey of Public Opinion," 7, 8, 9.

25. Roger B. White, *Home on the Road: The Motor Home in America, USA* (Washington, D.C., 2000).

26. Johnston to Director, National Park Service, August 10, 1951; Jim Caslick, interview by author, Mammoth, Wyoming, February 9, 2001, notes in author's possession.

27. Caslick interview.

Superintendent Edmund Rogers, who retired in 1956, oversaw extraordinary change during the twenty years he spent at Yellowstone's helm. Among his accomplishments was laying the groundwork for fixing the park's "bear problem." Pictured in 1937 at Petrified Specimen Ridge, he is accompanied by Jack Emmett (center) and Frank Oberhausley (left).



Jack E. Haynes, photographer; Haynes Find Coll., MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

successfully transplanted were destroyed or shipped to zoos," period.²⁸

It hardly seems curious, then, that rumors percolated that the NPS had embarked on a large-scale project to exterminate Yellowstone bears. In a memo dated September 24, 1951, Arthur Demaray, a thirty-four-year NPS veteran who had become director upon Newton Drury's April resignation, voiced concern over "rumors [that] are beginning to come to us expressing apprehension over the destruction of 'large' numbers of bears in Yellowstone Park, including the thought that bears are destroyed on the slightest provocation." He pronounced as "too drastic" the park's stated policy of instructing all district rangers "to avoid any delay in removing bears which persisted in frequenting developed areas and causing difficulty or which in any way appeared to be a threat to persons or property." Demaray's memo was followed by a letter to Wildlife Division chief Cahalane from C. R. Gutermuth, vice president of the Wildlife Management Institute, in which Gutermuth advised that he had been informed that rangers had killed an "excessive" number of bears in 1951 and that he had received the same complaint during the previous year. Gutermuth asked for the actual figures.²⁹

It was true that rangers killed forty-four bears in 1951, more than twice the number killed in 1950. Pressed for an explanation, Acting Regional Director James Lloyd fell back on the decades-old notion that Yellowstone's bears "overpopulated" their territory. Lloyd speculated that park officers killed more bears in 1951 because they failed to kill enough in the preceding seasons. He also hypothesized a direct correlation between high numbers of bears killed in one season and low numbers of injuries in the following season. In spite of lip service paid to education efforts, the NPS's underlying bear management phi-

losophy was still that the best defense is a good offense, and that meant killing problem bears.

The degree to which the NPS was playing in the dark in terms of bear management during these years and how heavily wildlife policy in general was modeled after traditional game management is demonstrated in Lloyd's assessment that "While we have not investigated bear conditions on the ground in Yellowstone and do not have all of the facts at hand, it appears to us that the Yellowstone bear problem is just another case of a surplus of park wildlife. There is no reason that we know of why bears, like other park animals, if uncontrolled, will not overpopulate their ranges."³⁰ Lloyd went on to predict that for the NPS to avoid lawsuits, Yellowstone's rangers would have to exercise even more vigilance (that is, kill more bears) after roadside feeding ended.

That management decisions could be made on the basis of appearances alone, by people who admitted ignorance of scientific fact about the animal in question, seems unthinkable today. It makes sense, however, when considered within the context of the park's long-established ungulate-management strategies; managers regularly culled Yellowstone's bison and northern elk herd, either by relocating or killing "excess" animals. Ecologist and historian James Pritchard has written that according to the range-management principles park biologists used until the 1970s, "Yellowstone's view of ungulates and range remained tied to an outlook emphasizing the production of forage" and "assumed that changes in the plant communities reflected intense grazing pressure." In other words, managers largely regarded carrying capacity a function of how the land looked, and if it did not appear verdant, then there were too many elk.³¹

28. Ibid.; Glen F. Cole, "Information Paper—Grizzly Bear," November 12, 1969, copy in Bear Management 1969 file, Vertical Files, YNP Bear Management Office, Mammoth, Wyoming.

29. Arthur E. Demaray to Director for Region 2, September 24, 1951, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–, NA, YNP; C. R. Gutermuth to Victor Cahalane, November 15, 1951, *ibid.*

30. James Lloyd to Director, National Park Service, October 10, 1951, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–, NA, YNP.



National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park

Brothers John and Frank Craighead began grizzly bear studies in 1959 and revolutionized the world of bear research. In so doing, they popularized the idea of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and helped to instigate changes in the park's wildlife-management policies.

Pritchard concludes that, overall, the “effect of ecological ideas on Yellowstone during the 1940s and 1950s was somewhat limited.” Thus, it should come as little surprise that, in a park where managers automatically interpreted changes in the land as problems caused by an imbalance of nature calling for human solutions, managers, over the protests of the Wildlife Division, interpreted the “bear problem” as being the result of overpopulation. Lloyd’s statements clearly indicated a belief that the solution was to cull the population—an old idea masquerading under a new guise. Over the next decade managers repeatedly reiterated their intent to intensify bear-control measures, that is to solve the problem by killing more bears.³²

Edmond Rogers retired in 1956 after spending twenty years at Yellowstone’s helm, more time than any other superintendent in the park’s history. Under his tenure, the park experienced extraordinary changes. The NPS closed the bear-feeding grounds, made strides toward demythologizing the relationship between bears and people in Yellowstone, and essentially aban-

doned aesthetic conservation in favor of a brand of preservation shaped by the early wilderness movement. The Great Depression and war years had offered opportunity for change, and Edmund Rogers seized it. Yellowstone’s “bear problem” was far from fixed, but the groundwork had been laid.

Just three years after Rogers’s retirement, scientists arrived in Yellowstone whose presence would forever change what had been, up to then, the relatively insular world of bear management in the park. When twin brothers John and Frank Craighead began their revolutionary grizzly bear studies in 1959, no one could have predicted the acrimony, controversy, and change that would ultimately result from their research. We have the Craigheads to thank for developing radio telemetry; for popularizing the idea of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—a more effective framework for thinking about and managing Yellowstone’s resources than existed previously; and, for both better and worse, for shining a critical spotlight on wildlife management that in the coming years would occasionally inspire unprecedented public outcry about public-land management and the NPS.

31. Pritchard, *Preserving Yellowstone’s Natural Conditions*, 199, 235. The controversy surrounding the northern Yellowstone elk herd and the application of changing ecological principles to the park’s northern range can be further investigated in Pritchard, *Preserving Yellowstone’s Natural Conditions*, as well as in innumerable scientific papers and National Academy of Science reports from the past few decades, including “Ecological Dynamics on Yellowstone’s Northern Range,” a 2002 report by the National Research Council.

32. Pritchard, *Preserving Yellowstone’s Natural Conditions*, 199; Arthur E. Demaray to Director for Region 2, September 24, 1951, Bears, vol 2 January 1, 1948–, NA, YNP; Lon Garrison to Director, National Park Service, February 19, 1959, Bear Management & Control, 1954–61, NA, YNP; Nelson Murdock to Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, August 17, 1960, *ibid.*

The body of knowledge created by the Craigheads and those who followed them has also contributed to the development of a narrative about the bear in Yellowstone that is primarily scientific and stresses the bear's role in the Yellowstone ecosystem. The grizzly bear (listed as a threatened species in 1975) receives most of the attention, as has been the case since the early 1970s—not only because it is a keystone species but also because wilderness and environmental organizations have adopted it as a symbol of a variety of causes.

Yellowstone's black bears are still around, of course. But you will not see them begging for marshmallows at the roadsides, due in part to the vision of Edmund Rogers and his colleagues more than half a century ago. *AM*

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Although Yellowstone's grizzlies get most of the attention, the descendants of this black bear still roam the park, though you won't find them begging for marshmallows along the roadsides.

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena




Wilderness Society director Robert Sterling Yard sought to erase the social progressive aspects of wilderness advocacy from the society's mission. He tapped Olaus Murie to pen an essay disavowing the "democratic wilderness" concept. Murie wrote that "wilderness is for those who appreciate' and that if 'the multitudes' were brought into the backcountry without really understanding its 'subtle values,' 'there would be an insistent and effective demand for more and more facilities, and we would find ourselves losing our wilderness and having these areas reduced to the commonplace'"—much as he posited that the bear had been reduced to the commonplace by tourists' over-exposure to it.³⁹

Drury likely knew, then, what Murie would produce: a treatise that supported the NPS's recent policy changes and disavowed it of any obligation to guarantee the public an animal sideshow. Murie's response accomplished this goal and also echoed Arno Cammerer's suggestions that the NPS try to convince the public that a bear encounter that required some effort was more valuable than one supplied on demand. In combination with efforts to change its image from that of plaything to preda-

tor, requiring people to seek out the bear would increase its status as a subject to be dealt with rather than a symbol to be consumed. As such, the success of the new message would necessitate a reformulation of people's ideas about nature—a shift from human-oriented conservation thinking to the "nature-oriented" preservation thinking that posited that wildlife had the right to live life separate

from human domination. This introduction of the values espoused by the emergent modern wilderness movement (and recommended for bear management purposes as early as 1929) represented a pivotal moment in modern NPS history—a philosophical and narrative shift from

making nature accessible to the people to encouraging the people to seek reward from effort. 

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Seton, *The Biography of a Grizzly*, p. 35



Feeding grounds in Yellowstone quickly habituated bears to eating garbage and handouts and caused unnatural behavior in grizzlies—they would rarely gather in numbers or share food in the wild. Below, grizzlies feed and spar with each other at Otter Creek in 1937. Beginning in the 1940s the NPS strove to undo decades of animal and visitor behavior perpetuated by entertaining park-goers with these feedings.



Jack E. Hayes, photographer, Hayes Foundation Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena