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MAMMALS IN YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

BLACK BEAR – Black bears are omnivores that tend to be vegetarians but will eat fresh meat, carrion, and fish as well as fruit, grass, insects, and roots. A black bear's color may vary from black to cinnamon to light brown, often with a light brown muzzle. It has a straight facial profile and can climb trees readily. Black bears hibernate from approximately November through late March, and give birth to their cubs in their winter dens. Black bears will reach about 3 feet in height at the shoulder. An adult male will weigh 210-315 pounds; a female will weigh 135-160 pounds. They will live 15 – 20 years in the wild.

Biologists estimate that black bears are at possibly 500 to 600 black bears in the greater Yellowstone area.

GRIZZLY BEAR – The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is one of the few remaining strongholds of the grizzly bear in the lower 48 United States. Threatened with extinction, this large bear is most common in backcountry areas away from roads and developments. Grizzly bears have a distinct hump at their shoulders, are usually larger and more heavily built than black bears, and have dished faces. Compared to black bears, grizzly bears have longer, less curved claws and larger shoulder muscle mass that makes them more suited to digging than climbing. Their diet consists of grass, roots, berries, insects, mice, and other small rodents. They will eat fish, fresh meat, and carrion they happen to find. They hibernate from approximately November through late March and give birth to their cubs while in their winter dens. A grizzly will reach about 3 ½ feet at the shoulder. An adult male will weigh 216-717 pounds; a female will weigh 200-448 pounds.

The population estimate for grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is 350 to 400. The population has been stable to increasing at a rate of one to four percent per year since 1986, but human-caused mortalities and habitat loss remain long-term concerns in grizzly bear management.

BEAVER – While not abundant, beaver have continually lived in Yellowstone since its recorded history began. Parkwide surveys in 1989, 1994, and 1999 found beaver living in all major drainages, particularly along the Upper Yellowstone River south of Yellowstone Lake, the Gallatin and Madison rivers, and the Bechler River area. Beaver are also present in low densities on the Northern Range, often building bank dens (as opposed to lodges) on waterways such as the Lamar and Gardner rivers. The 1996 survey documented at least 49-51 active colonies on ponds and rivers in the park. Lodges may support from one to six or more beaver; average colony size in Yellowstone has not been studied. The beaver is about 35-40 inches in length, of which the last 10 inches is the paddle-shaped tail. An adult can weigh between 30 and 60 pounds. It is the largest rodent in North America.

BIGHORN SHEEP – Bighorn sheep reside primarily on the Northern Range, but sheep from several herds summer in other parts of the park as well. In a cooperative aerial survey in spring 1999, 181 bighorn sheep (91 ewes, 29 lambs, 61 rams) were counted in and outside the park.

An adult male (ram) will reach up to 300 pounds in weight, and a set of horns can weigh over 40 pounds. A female (ewe) will weigh up to 200 pounds. Lambs are born in May and June. Bighorn sheep feed primarily on grasses and will forage on shrubby plants during the fall and winter.

BISON – The bison (buffalo) of Yellowstone are a remnant of the former millions that once roamed the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. During the summer, the herds generally migrate to higher country, but they can often be seen in open grasslands along the Lamar, Yellowstone, Firehole, and Madison rivers. An adult male (bull) bison may weigh nearly 2,000 pounds and a female (cow) about 1,000 pounds. Cows give birth to their young (normally a single calf) in late April and early May. Bison feed primarily on grasses and sedges. For their size, they are surprisingly agile and can run at speeds up to 30 miles per hour.

The bison population in the park varies from about 2,000-3,000 animals. Efforts continue on a long-term cooperative bison management agreement between Yellowstone and the surrounding states and land management agencies.

BOBCAT – A bobcat is a small wild cat with prominent, pointed ears with a tuft of black hair at the tip. Females weigh about 20 pounds and males can weigh from 16 to 30 pounds. They are seldom seen but are usually reported in the north end of the park where snow is not as deep in winter. They feed on small mammals such as mice, rabbits, and hares and prefer rocky outcrops, canyons bordered by ledges, and semi-open areas. They resemble lynx but have distinctive black bars on the inside of the forelegs.

COUGAR (MOUNTAIN LION) – These are the largest member of the cat family living in Yellowstone. Population estimates are about 18 to 24 animals. The north end of the park is most likely the only area where lions live all year; winter conditions and resulting lack of prey prevent lions from living in other areas of the park year-round. Adult males in Yellowstone weigh about 140 to 160 pounds while females weigh about 100 pounds. Cougars prey mostly on elk, deer, and pronghorn, with porcupine comprising an important supplement to their winter diet.

COYOTE – This member of the dog family is one of the more commonly seen predatory mammals in the park. The coyote preys on ground squirrels, mice, and other small mammals and scavenges larger animals that have died or been killed, especially during winter. Coyotes frequent the drier, large, open areas of sagebrush and grassland. Adult coyotes average about 25 to 35 pounds and reach a height of about 16 to 18 inches at the shoulder. Coyote numbers in the park have been noticeably affected by the reintroduction of wolves; their numbers have been reduced because of direct mortality resulting from wolf-coyote interactions as well as changes in coyote denning behavior due to the presence of wolves. Coyotes are common, especially on the Northern Range.

MULE DEER – Named for their large, mule-like ears, these deer are generally distributed over most of the park during the summer in areas of broken forest and meadow. Most will migrate to lower elevations with more open range during the winter. The summer mule deer population is estimated at about 2,500 animals.

WHITETAIL DEER – Sightings of whitetail deer have been reported along Slough Creek and in Willow Park, both in the northern part of Yellowstone. They are lighter in color than mule deer and have a distinctive white tail that is raised like a flag when they feel threatened. These animals are only occasionally observed in Yellowstone.

ELK (WAPITI) – Elk feed on a wide range of vegetation including grasses, sedges, other herbs and shrubs, the bark of aspen trees, and conifer needles. An adult male (bull) weighs about 700 pounds while a female (cow) is about 500 pounds. Elk calves are usually born the first week of June and can weigh 30 pounds at birth. During the summer, as many as 30,000 elk in 7 different herds live in Yellowstone. During the winter, many will move to lower elevation, but 8,000 to 20,000 will remain in the park. Winter-weakened elk and newly born calves provide a major food source for predators, especially grizzly bears and wolves.

LYNX – The lynx is another wild cat that is a little larger than a bobcat. Lynx have heavily furred paws, a solid black tip to the tail, and the ear tufts are longer than those of a bobcat. They usually are found in dense conifer forest. Early in 2000, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service listed the Canada lynx as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. There are no population estimates for the park available, but they are rare.

MOOSE – The moose is the largest member of the deer family. Unlike elk, which are often found in herds, moose are usually observed alone or in small family groups. They frequent marshy meadows and the margins of lakes and streams, feeding on willows and aquatic plants. Occasionally they rest submerged in water. Moose can move quickly; a cow protecting her calf can be a potentially dangerous animal. An adult bull moose in Yellowstone can weigh between about 1,000 pounds and a cow will average 700 to 900 pounds. The cow will give birth to a calf, or often twin calves, in May. Current population estimates are not available, although moose can often be seen around Yellowstone, Lewis, and Shoshone lakes, and along river corridors such as the Lamar and Lewis.

MOUNTAIN GOAT – Mountain goats are not native to Yellowstone. They were stocked in mountain ranges near the park decades ago and are now occasionally seen in the mountainous areas in the northwest and northeast corners of the park. Populations in the Gallatin, Absaroka, and Crazy Mountains outside of Yellowstone show increasing numbers. They are easily distinguished from bighorn sheep by their long, white hair and small black horns.

PRONGHORN - The pronghorn, or American antelope, is a plains animal with a body adapted for speed and agility. They depend on speed and superior eyesight for protection from predators and prefer open grasslands to forested areas. Pronghorn feed on sagebrush and grasses and are found only on sagebrush and grasslands. The male is called a buck, a female is a doe, and young (born in late May or June) are kids. An adult male will weigh 100 to 125 pounds. In Yellowstone, pronghorn are found predominantly in the north end of the park. Current population estimates are 200 to 250 animals on the Northern Range.

WOLF – The gray wolf was reintroduced to the Yellowstone Ecosystem in 1995 when 14 wolves were brought to Yellowstone from Canada. Current estimates now put the number of wolves in the greater Yellowstone area at about 300. A wolf pack usually consists of a dominant adult pair, their most recent litter of pups, the pups' siblings, and some unrelated wolves. Wolf litters, averaging six pups, are born in the spring. Wolves are predators that feed on elk, deer, moose, and other smaller animals. An adult will weigh between 85 and 130 pounds and will measure 26 to 32 inches in height. Wolves' fur can vary in color from light gray, to brown, to black.

WOLVERINE – Rarely seen or reported, photographic and track evidence indicates that a few of these extremely wide-ranging, solitary scavengers live in the park. They prefer coniferous forests for their habitat.

OTHER MAMMALS – The gnawing mammals are the most abundant of Yellowstone's mammals and provide a staple diet for the far less numerous mammal and bird predators. Many gnawing mammals hibernate in winter, although not all do. Some are active, mainly at night, and are seldom seen by visitors. These include several species of mice, the woodrat, and the flying squirrel. Others, such as chipmunks and ground squirrels, scamper about during the day. The common porcupine occupies the forest, while muskrats build homes along streams and ponds. The pika and yellow bellied marmot are restricted to open, rocky slopes, especially at higher elevations.

Four species of bats summer in Yellowstone and five kinds of shrews inhabit the park. Other year-round residents include marten, longtail and shorttail weasel, mink, badger, river otter, hare, and cottontail.

Please see the Mammals of Yellowstone National Park checklist in this packet for a complete listing.