



YELLOWSTONE
A NATURAL ECOSYSTEM



a Natural Ecosystem

Life requires that all living forms in an area interact with each other in some way. The organization and interrelationships among living organisms and their non-living surroundings are conveniently described as **ecosystems**. An ecosystem allows the cyclic transfer of basic materials from plants through plant-eating animals to meat-eating animals. Decomposer organisms, such as bacteria, form a vital link of the system by converting the "waste" products of living plants and animals, as well as their dead remains, into simple chemical compounds which replenish the reservoir in the non-living environment. These compounds again become available as building material to plants, and the cycle continues. In contrast to the cycling of chemical compounds, energy is lost from an ecosystem at all steps but is resupplied by sunlight "captured" and utilized by growing green plants.

Over 1000 species of plants are adapted to Yellowstone's environment. These plants help determine the number and variety of animals which live in the National Park. So far as possible these living organisms are allowed to carry out their life cycles in the Yellowstone ecosystem without human interference.

Photo by John Brantow



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK is unparalleled with its geysers and hot springs, inspiring size, unspoiled landscape, and its great abundance and variety of living things. Over 100 years ago, these 3471 square miles of land were set aside to be maintained in their natural state. Although

today more than 2 million visitors come to Yellowstone each year for enjoyment, inspiration, and education, they barely disturb the complex natural processes which have continued for geologic periods of time. Man has decided to learn from these processes rather than alter them. Yellowstone National Park is one of the few places on earth where human technology and presence has not disrupted communities of plant and animal life. What better place to learn how life manages itself?

Photo by Mike Sample



IS YELLOWSTONE FOR WILDLIFE OR PEOPLE?

Yellowstone National Park is designated as a **natural area** and, accordingly, represents a unique and different form of land use. The basic objective of the park is to preserve natural ecosystems for the scenic, educational, scientific, and cultural benefit of all people. Man is encouraged to view, appreciate, and learn, but his role is limited to that of an observer rather than exploiter.

By having the opportunity to observe nature's processes at work, these visitors may gain an understanding of our world and our relationships to the other living things that share it. Thus the park may provide a yardstick against which man's effects on other areas might be evaluated.



Courtesy of the Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting with the interpretation of Yellowstone National Park.



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