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Griz Expert Says 'Mountain Bikes Are A Grave Threat To Bears'

Undue political influence on grazing decisions in eastern Oregon.

Lessons From Yellowstone

by [GEORGE WUERTHNER](#) on MAY 25, 2019 · [6 COMMENTS](#) · in [ADVOCACY](#), [B.L.M.](#), [ECONOMY](#), [FOREST SERVICE](#), [MONTANA](#), [NATIONAL PARKS](#), [PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT](#), [PUBLIC LANDS](#), [WILDERNESS/ROADLESS](#), [YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK](#)



As we ponder the future of public lands in Montana, including what areas deserve protection as Wilderness, it is worthwhile to look back in history to see how past protective measures were viewed.

In 1872 with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park many Montana citizens were outraged. For example, the Helena Gazette opined: “We regard the passage of the act as a great blow to the prosperity of the towns of Bozeman and Virginia City.”

In 1910 the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce opposed the creation of Glacier National Park suggesting the park would be a waste of trees that could be logged.

Upon the establishment of Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, the local paper predicted that Jackson would soon be a “ghost town.” Has anyone been to Jackson lately? There are more than 16,000 “ghosts” living there.

I go through this litany of responses to protected landscapes to demonstrate how wrong the local perspective has always been about the economic impact of protecting lands.

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Unfortunately, logging, mining, livestock grazing, and industrial tourist development has compromised much of Montana's wild country. A modest amount of this was necessary to create communities.

However, we are way out of balance. Montana only has 3.4% (3,443,038 acres) of its 94 million acre landscape protected as designated Wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act.

Despite all this historical evidence, we find many local politicians, including Senator Daines and Representative Gianforte as well as many in the Montana legislature advocating for eliminating protections for Forest Service and BLM Wilderness Study Areas as well as opening up more public lands for resource extraction by timber and oil and gas industries.

In a sense, the widespread opposition to protecting lands based on the presumption that it impedes economic prosperity is no different the wrong-headed opinion of the Helena Gazette about the creation of Yellowstone National Park back in 1871. In a 1948 speech before Parliament, Prime Minister Winston Churchill warned: "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." Are we going to repeat the same mistakes of the past with regards to our wildlands?

Think of what the editors of the Helena paper would say if they could read the findings of a new report from the National Park Service that showed visitors to Yellowstone Park generated \$647.1 million in economic benefits to local communities. That figure, as large as it may be, does not come close to the real economic value of Yellowstone's wildlands.

The above figure does not include the less tangible but real economic value of a large protected area in attracting footloose businesses and individuals. People vote with their feet and choose to live here to be near high-quality landscapes. Many people live in the Greater Yellowstone area who have no direct business connection to the tourist economy, but they pay taxes, employ people, and support communities in countless ways

If you were to incorporate the ecological benefits protected by the park and surrounding protected wilderness areas including values like clean water, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and the like, its value is easily in the billions of dollars.

As various agencies like the Custer Gallatin National Forest, as well as other forests and Bureau of Land Management agencies, consider new management plans, in many cases they put resource extraction

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industries like timber and oil and gas ahead of the protection of wildlands.

For instance, the Lewistown BLM and Missoula BLM Districts recently abandoned recommending protection for tens of thousands of acres of WSAs under their jurisdiction and expanded the areas open to resource development.

In these decisions, they are pushed and prompted by many Montana politicians who don't know the history. In the name of economic development, they are helping to destroy the very wildlands that are the goose that lays the golden egg. As Churchill predicted, those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.

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George Wuerthner is an ecologist and former hunting guide with a degree in wildlife biology

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6 Responses to *lessons from yellowstone*



Kirk Robinson says:

May 25, 2019 at 10:43 am

Good article, George. Here in Utah we have nearly the entire state political establishment not only opposing wilderness designations, but trying to undo national monument designations and be allowed to build new roads into currently roadless FS lands, ostensibly to enable the state to promote forest health.

In fact, I just finished reading an article from the Mountain Plains Journal of Business & Economics, 2013, written by libertarian ideological purists in a USU dept. largely funded by the Kochs, that purports to find "a both statistically and economically significant 'lost' \$146.5 million in total nonfarm payroll growth in Kane and Garfield counties." One of the

authors of the report, Brian Steed, will be sworn in as Utah's new boss of the Dept. of Natural Resources on June 1.

The GSENM, created by President Clinton in 1996, once covered large portions of Kane and Garfield counties. Now, thanks to Trump and the Utah political establishment, it has been broken up into three smaller monuments, reducing its total acreage from nearly 1.9 million acres by nearly 50%. The economic study reported in the article used data such as tax receipts per capita income from 1990 to 2020.

I am no economist, nor, try though I did, could I figure out how the authors arrived at the conclusion that the monument had prevented growth in the non-farm sector of the economies of the two counties. However, I find the conclusion radically counter-intuitive. I think it refutes the methods used to arrive at it. I've been in the area many times, and it's abundantly obvious that the non-farm business sector has increased tremendously in the towns of Escalante and Boulder. No doubt in Kanab, too, though due to its larger size it's harder for me to identify. How could the researchers arrive at the conclusion that the non-farm payroll would have risen by nearly \$150 million more if the monument had never been created? The only thing I can think of, though it isn't mentioned in the article, is that the authors tacitly assumed that the huge deposits of coal on the Kaiparowitz Plateau would have been mined were it not for the monument designation, and that this would have resulted in lots of non-farm economic growth.

Interestingly, a more recent Headwaters report (2017) on the economic value of the GSENM reports a significant economic boon to the area following monument designation. And if you've driven through Escalante in recent years, you've seen it with your own eyes.

REPLY



Nancy Ostlie says:

May 25, 2019 at 11:59 am

Excellent synopsis. Thanks from leaders of Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Bozeman Broadband

REPLY



John R. says:

May 30, 2019 at 9:45 am

Good summary George.

REPLY



Mareks Vilkins says:

May 31, 2019 at 3:17 am

<https://www.monbiot.com/2016/02/10/the-lesser-evil/>

There is nothing rational or proportionate about the deregulation the European Commission contemplates. When Edmund Stoiber, the conservative former president of Bavaria, reviewed European legislation, he discovered that the combined impact of all seven environmental directives incurred less than 1% of the cost to business caused by European law.

REPLY



Mareks Vilkins says:

May 31, 2019 at 3:17 am

http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/refit/admin_burden/docs/o8-10web_cbrocuttingredtape_en.pdf

REPLY



idaurisine says:

May 31, 2019 at 7:14 am

No different than over here. 😞

REPLY

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QUOTE

"At some point we must draw a line across the ground of our home and our being, drive a spear into the land and say to the bulldozers, earthmovers, government and corporations, "thus far and no further." If we do not, we shall later feel, instead of pride, the regret of Thoreau, that good but overly-bookish man, who wrote, near the

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end of his life, "If I repent of anything it is likely to be my good behaviour."

~ Edward Abbey

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