

The Nation

Gray wolves' return presents challenge in the West

As the wild predators multiply faster than predicted, some groups seek permission to kill or remove them

By Patrick O'Brien
FSA 1084V

Six years after they were returned to the world's first national park, the gray wolves of Yellowstone are pushing beyond its boundaries into an ecology, life-and-death conversation with the populated West.

Multiplying faster than wildlife biologists expected, the wild predators are a major success story for wilderness ecology. Species Act. In Yellowstone and central Idaho, about 350 wolves now hunt their traditional prey: weaker elk, deer and moose. But increased runs with domestic livestock outside the park and near human settlements have forced managers of the restoration program to kill or remove scores of wolves. Farm and ranch groups being brought back, want the government to lift restrictions on wolf hunters' shooting the animals to protect their cattle, sheep and dogs. With the management meeting, some wolf defenders worry that the new administration will weaken a program that has allowed the species to regain a foothold in the wild.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, who helped bring the first 14 reintroduced Canadian wolves into Yellowstone in 1975, returned to the park Saturday for a final briefing before leaving his post next week. It was the first anniversary of a court ruling that upheld the species' controversial return. The 31 wolves released in Yellowstone in 1990-95 have grown to 164



National Park Service photo of the animals in Yellowstone National Park in 1990-95 have grown to 164 animals.

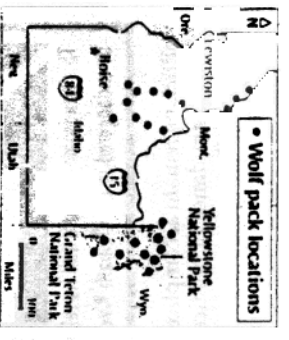
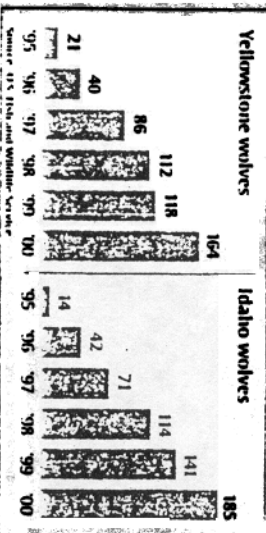
Pushing the boundaries: The 31 wolves released in Yellowstone National Park in 1990-95 have grown to 164 animals in 16 packs. An additional 34 let loose in the central Idaho wilderness have expanded to 185 wolves.

Babbitt won't speculate about whether his Republican successors will try to undo the wolf gains that he said Saturday that livestock "will not have priority" over wolves on public lands in the West.

Both Ferris and president at Defenders of Wildlife, which has paid more than \$155,000 in bounties for livestock killed by wolves, expresses "treacherous fears" about changes under the recent-elect Bush. "We're getting up to do whatever it

Wolf count grows in recovery areas

How the gray wolf population has risen in the Yellowstone National Park and Idaho regions since its re-introduction in the mid-1980s. Number includes those re-introductions plus subsequent young.



takes to preserve this effort," Ferris says. Ed Bangs, wolf recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, dismisses the worries. "This program has received about zero political intervention," says Bangs, who joined the project during the Reagan administration.

Richard Krause, assistant counsel for the American Farm Bureau Federation, says stockbreeders will press anew for authority to shoot wolves that threaten herds, rather than have to wait for government agents to investigate, verify and then track down the culprits. Krause says that Gale

park was reduced from 13 wolves to one by legal shootings and live removals after it repeatedly attacked livestock last year in Paradise Valley, Mont., north of the park.

Since the 1980s, authorities have had to shoot 82 wolves and relocate 91 others in the northern Rockies for killing livestock. Last year, Yellowstone wolves killed seven cattle, 31 sheep and five dogs, while central Idaho packs killed 15 cattle, 55 sheep and three dogs.

Three young, Sheep Mountain males, trained in captivity to avoid livestock, are now back in the wild. The acid test might come this summer, when ranchers move cattle back to Paradise Valley pastures.

Some people already have killed some wolves illegally, heaving to an anti-wolf philosophy known as "shoot, shovel and shut up." Reliable counts are elusive. A tally as of 1998 found 21 illegal shootings of radio-collared wolves. Fish and Wildlife just posted a \$10,000 bounty last month for the killers of two more in Idaho.

Despite the turmoil, the northern Rockies packs have reached Fish and Wildlife's goal for down-listing the species to "threatened": 20 pairs of males producing successful litters for at least two of three consecutive years. Last July, the agency proposed reclassification.

Wolf advocates say they worry that such moves are hasty.

Defenders of Wildlife and the Turner Endangered Species Fund are pushing for wolf reintroductions in Colorado's southern Rockies.

Last month, Defenders of Wildlife established a "proactive" fund for attack prevention: herd-guarding dogs, electric sheep fences, nonstunneting devices to scare wolves and perhaps even adding extra cowboys.



THE EYERDAM RETORT

Save Them Suckers

Although it sounds

vaguely like something Mista Teemight have said, the federal government has stopped the traditional irrigation flow of the Klamath River in Oregon because the river is very low and them endangered suckers are at risk. Suckers in this case are fish deemed to be endangered by way of their dwindling numbers.

The federal water managers say, and it is true, that the federal Endangered Species Act prohibits any government agency from doing anything that has the least chance of bothering, harassing, perturbing, non-plussing or dissing an endangered species, even the lowly, bottom dwelling, scum sucking Klamath River suckers.

That is what they are telling the cattlemen who are losing their livelihood and watching their ranches wither. It is simply out of their hands. They cannot legally do the right thing and provide water to the unofficially endangered humans and their cows because the Federal law prohibits sharing the water with the ranchers if it might cause discomfort to the officially endangered suckers.

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Of course that is crap.

You might remember the Puerto Ricans, some of whom still live in Puerto Rico, an American protectorate that occasionally writes with talk of independence. As far as the Navy is concerned, the second best thing about Puerto Rico is that, like Washington DC, Puerto Rico has no political clout, no senate subcommittee chairman to protect it from the government. Therefore, when the Navy wanted a place to pulverize with cluster bombs, depth charges and other live ammunition, when the Navy needed genuine shallow sea grass beds upon which to practice amphibious landings, Puerto Rico was the perfect place. It was surrounded by water. It has nice beaches. It might have to be invaded someday, anyway. And there is nobody there but a bunch of Puerto Ricans to complain (and a Kennedy or two.)

But that is not exactly true. Puerto Rico has Fat Bambis. The Fat Bambis population of Puerto Rico is estimated at less than 500. This is, sort of, the West Indies. The West Indian Manatee that the government insists is an endangered species lives there

naturally and year round. It doesn't even need sewage outfalls and power plant effluent to keep it alive. Vieques Island is where they belong, not shivering through Florida's chilly, 50-degree winters.

We all know that it is absolutely against that inviolate Endangered Species Act to say anything bad in the presence of a Fat Bambis, let alone pulverize their habitat and drive over them with amphibious tanks. (Perhaps the landing craft go slow enough that the Manatees can get out of the way.) By now you have probably guessed that Vieques Island is not just any Puerto Rico island. It is the principal Fat Bambis habitat of Puerto Rico, kind of like the Brevard County or Crystal River of Puerto Rican West Indian Manatee habitats. Chances are there were a few more than 500 before the annual, unfortunately necessary military D-Day drills.

Meanwhile, in Brevard County, already and without the required signage, undercover federal agents in unmarked speed boats are issuing federal citations to boat operators when they seem to be going too fast in areas that will, in about six months, be slow speed zones set aside to protect the thousands of West Indian Manatees that pass through this part of Florida each year fleeing Puerto Rico.

A few questions come to mind.

So, if it is OK to conduct a practice war in an area where

an endangered species lives, breeds and looks cute, why can't the farmers up in Oregon have a little water? And what kind of hypocrite government holds homeowners for ransom and forces them to pay a \$500 donation (bribe) to The Save

The Manatee Club before they get a federal government permit to build a dock on their property while the same government bombs the environmentally sensitive home of Fat Bambis and her cuddly baby down in Puerto Rico? How long can sensible

rational judgment and too many opportunities to thumb their noses at the lifestyles they envy or abhor.

If a species like the sucker is endangered, then round up a couple dozen and play reverse-Noah while the drought continues. Give the ranchers their water and nurture the safety colony of coddled suckers. When it rains again, turn the captive breeding colony loose.

West Indian Manatees, on the other hand, aren't really endangered. The government



This handsome creature and its relatives are said to be endangered in the Klamath River Basin.

politicians remain accomplices to this sham dance of political correctness?

The problem is not suckers, whooping cranes or Fat Bambis. Nobody wants them harmed or dead. The citizens are far more careful with nature than their government, if the Florida Flood Gate manatee mortality rate or the Puerto Rican practice war episodes are any evidence. The

problem is with the Endangered Species Act. It's a sloppy law that provides bureaucrats too few opportunities to exercise

because of government-sanctioned pollution and the government's refusal to dredge and maintain choked waterways.

Most of the life that evolved on this planet evolved into extinction and was displaced. We cannot bring them back nor can we stop the inevitable course of natural selection. We can change the government and change its laws, however. Until we do so, we are all suckers, and endangered at that.

Anger boils without water in Ore.

Farmers, allies condemn limits on irrigation to protect species

By Patrick McMahon
USA TODAY

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — Shouting "water, water, water," several thousand residents on Tuesday welcomed a convoy of anti-government activists carrying an empty, 12-foot-tall bucket into town.

The giant bucket symbolized sympathy with farmers fighting the federal government over water to irrigate crops. Oregon has been suffering through a drought. Federal irrigation water was shut off for a time in the spring to protect endangered fish, and another shutoff is imminent.

The bucket, hoisted onto the town plaza in front of the Klamath County Government Center by a crane, also reflects growing anger in parts of the West over federal environmental policies.

"This bucket represents the very best and the very worst of the United States," said Klamath County Commission Chairman Steve West. The worst, he said, is a federal government "seduced by its own bureaucratic power."

"This is a fight for our lives," said local resident Richard Ruedger, 50. He wore a button saying "Stop the Rural Genocide" and a light-blue ribbon pin symbolizing water.

The bucket was brought in from Elko, Nev., and three truck convoys carried food, supplies and money from Montana, Nevada and California. The protesters paraded through downtown during the morning, then drove to a "Freedom Day" rally at the county fairgrounds that featured such speakers as former congresswoman Helen Chenoweth-Hage, a conservative Idaho Republican.

Although some residents were concerned that the rally could be flashpoint for violence, none was reported. "I was assured that this would be a peaceful crowd and that the militia types would not be coming," Sheriff Tim Evinger



By Julie Jacobson, AP

Flood of protesters: Bill Oetting rallies opponents of federal water regulations Tuesday in Klamath Falls, Ore. The giant steel bucket symbolizes farmers' fight with the government over irrigation.

said. He estimated the downtown crowd at 4,000 and the rally crowd at 2,000.

The timing of the rally coincided with another controversial step in the area's struggle over water in Upper Klamath Basin that the government has reserved to help endangered species — the suckerfish and coho salmon.

When water was not released in the spring for irrigation, almost 1,400 farms went dry. Since late July, farmers have been getting irrigation water ordered released by Interior Secretary Gale Norton. Those rations, however, are expected to stop on Thursday.

The latest deadline has peo-

ple here on edge as they wait to see whether the federal government will shut the gates that hold back the water — and whether activists will try to reopen them.

"I've heard people say they'll make sure the water keeps flowing," said Barbara Martin, 40, a real estate agent who said she has been at the headgates almost every day for more than a month.

"We're concerned about the health and safety of our employees, but we're going to do what the law requires," Interior Department spokesman Jeff McCracken said.

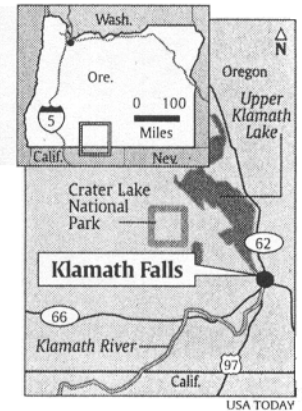
In a statement, Norton urged local, tribal and federal officials

to keep searching for solutions.

Water in the Klamath basin has been regulated for years. Local Indian tribes have had water rights since the mid-1800s, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation was directed by Congress to develop an irrigation plan in 1905.

The government had provided water for 94 consecutive years. But this year's drought and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's order requiring higher lake levels led to the crisis.

It is the same drought that lowered lake levels behind hydrodams throughout the Northwest, forcing utilities to find higher-cost alternatives and raise electric rates. The



drought also has produced conditions fueling many of the ongoing forest fires in Oregon and Washington.

The neighboring Klamath Tribes say that even if the Endangered Species Act didn't exist, there would still be a water crisis in the basin.

"The real problem is the federal government promised people more water than the rivers and lakes can supply, while at the same time encouraging so much habitat loss and pollution in the forests, streams and marshes that the watershed itself has been damaged," said Allen Foreman, tribal chairman for the Klamath Tribes.

Foreman urged the convoys of protesters to go home. "Their message will actually hurt farmers and ranchers in the basin by raising false hopes and discouraging people from coming together to focus on the search for workable answers," he said.

Tuesday's parade route was lined with signs espousing many conservative causes, but the most enmity was reserved for environmentalists and the Endangered Species Act.

People such as Hank Nichols, 70 and retired, see a much broader threat to a way of life. "They use the sucker(fish) just like the spotted owl," he said, recalling logging cutbacks in the early 1990s after the owl was listed as endangered.

"They done it to the loggers, they've done it to the miners, they did it to the fishermen, and now they're after the farmers," Nichols said. Environmentalists, he said, "won't be happy till they've destroyed an entire way of life."

USA Today 8/22/01

Interior Department caves in to grizzly bear scare

Our view:

Effort to return bears to the Northwest runs into roadblock.

In 1997, more people were killed by vending machines than by grizzly bears. But as a final decision on whether to reintroduce grizzlies into a remote area of the Northwest nears, fears are trampling such facts. A carefully negotiated plan to bring the bears back is stalled, and opponents are busy stoking public concern by emphasizing, as Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne recently did, that the grizzly is a "flesh-eating, anti-social animal."

Left unsaid is that in the wild, grizzlies pose little risk. In Yellowstone National Park, home to 400 or more grizzlies, five deaths have been recorded over 150 years.

So late last year, after more than a decade of negotiation, a coalition representing the timber industry, conservationists and state and federal agencies agreed to reintroduce 25 bears to the 1.2-million-acre Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, a remote area on the Idaho-Montana border surrounded by millions of acres of national forest.

This summer, though, Interior Secretary Gale Norton shelved the plan, citing technical reasons and political opposition. Next week is the deadline for filing formal objections to Norton's action, after which Norton will make a final decision.

The now-mixed idea was to release bears gradually into the wilderness over five years. The animals would be classified as an "experimental population," which would allow grizzlies that caused problems to be relocated or killed. An effort would be made to prevent them from entering the region's only populated area, the Bitterroot Valley in Montana. And a local citizens committee would manage the entire program.

The goal in 50 to 100 years: a stable population of roughly 280 bears scattered over an area bigger than most states.

Government biologists who helped develop the plan say experience suggests the risk of bear attack is as low as one injury per decade and one death every few decades. And the terms negotiated by local interests would provide greater economic protection than at present.



Yellowstone National Park via AP

Bears become rare

Before European settlement, 50,000 to 100,000 grizzly bears roamed much of the West, from Mexico to Canada and the High Plains to the Pacific Coast. Only about 1,000 survive, concentrated in five largely remote areas of federal land from Yellowstone National Park, Wyo., to North Cascades Park, Wash.

Because grizzlies are covered by the Endangered Species Act, if a grizzly wandered into the Bitterroot today, the law could require strict limits on outfitting, livestock grazing, logging and hunting nearby. But under the "experimental" terms of the rejected plan, action could be taken to deal with dangerous or nuisance bears that otherwise wouldn't be allowed. Timber companies and other local interests in the area thus supported the plan because of fears that without it they could be worse off.

It's not dreamy to recognize that grizzlies help satisfy a transcendental need. Large predators — bears, alligators, cougars, mountain lions, wolves, even sharks — are part of the nation's mythology and identity.

A visionary program can always be killed through regulatory needling, but this now-comatose plan deserves better. Eight major wildlife science organizations called this week for a reversal.

Norton has a chance to do so, in the process taking an important step to adjust the public attitude toward large predators from mindless apprehension to mindful appreciation. That ought to be a natural goal for any interior secretary.

Risk to humans too great

Opposing view:

Grizzly bears are not endangered. Bush right to end Idaho program.

By Dirk Kempthorne

What is the cost of a human life sacrificed for an experimental federal program? Before leaving office, the Clinton administration proposed a plan to bring grizzly bears into Idaho under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). But the grizzly bear is not endangered. There are thriving populations of bears in Alaska, Yellowstone National Park and Canada.

Nevertheless, the plan assumed injury or death to people and even calculated the value of human life. A human killed by a grizzly bear in Idaho would cost the federal Treasury between \$4 million and \$10 million, and the plan even amortized the annual costs at \$80,000-\$200,000. As far as we know, this is the first time that death or injury to humans has been factored into a program proposed by the federal government under the ESA. I find that repugnant.

All of this was cooked up in a program that was vigorously opposed by two Idaho governors, the state's entire congressional delegation, the Idaho Legislature and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

The Endangered Species Act didn't re-

quire bringing grizzlies to Idaho, but the Clinton administration attempted to justify it under a section of the ESA that was originally designed by Congress to invite support for species recovery by providing for flexible management. However, the plan left the final decision-making authority in Washington, rather than in the states as promised.

President Bush has rightly declined to impose this deadly program on Idaho. Instead, the Interior Department, led by Secretary Gale Norton, has indicated that Idaho's concern about human safety and reasonable implementation of the ESA should be heeded. This is better than a Washington, D.C., view of how things should be done in Idaho.

The president's approach recognizes that real recovery of endangered species must come with the support of the states. This is precisely the reason the governors of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington state — two Republicans and two Democrats — reached an agreement last summer on how to recover salmon in the Pacific Northwest.

The federal Endangered Species Act should follow this model. The federal government's financial resources should be spent recovering species that are already endangered instead of on payments to American families who may be victims of grizzly bear attacks.

Dirk Kempthorne is governor of Idaho.

10/2/98

USA Today

Snowmobilers rush for last ride

As ban looms to protect Yellowstone, enthusiasts are roaring in from all over USA

By Tom Kenworthy
USA TODAY

WEST YELLOWSTONE, Mont. When Congress established the nation's first national park 129 years ago as a "pleasuring ground," it could hardly have imagined the scene that will unfold this holiday weekend at the western entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

More than 3,000 snowmobiles will likely roar through the gate and up a groomed road alongside the Madison and Firehole rivers to Old Faithful and beyond, their riders marveling at the park's mighty bison herds and spectacular geothermal displays. Trailing in their wake will be a cloud of blue exhaust and the piercing whine of their engines.

For much of this winter in Yellowstone, there's been a kind of last roundup mentality, as snowmobilers respond to the Clinton administration's decision to phase out snowmobiles here by the winter of 2003-04. In record numbers on some weekends, snowmobilers are pouring in from across the country, even as local business leaders and their political allies hope for a reprieve from the Bush administration and Republican Congress.

How President Bush and Interior Secretary Gale Norton address the ban, adopted in December, will say a great deal about their approach to federal land management questions. Both environmentalists and those who favor more commercialized use of the public domain will be watching.

The struggle over snowmobiles in national parks in one sense is as old as the park system itself, established by Congress for the twin purposes of conserving natural resources and allowing for their public enjoyment. How to reconcile those goals has repeatedly flared into controversy, often here in Yellowstone, where officials concerned about air pollution, noise and harassment of wildlife last year finally re-



By John Brecher, Jackson Hole News, via AP

Nature vs. snowmobiles: A bison tries to share a road with snowmobilers in Yellowstone National Park on Feb. 19, 2000. A ban will phase out snowmobiles here by the winter of 2003-04.

moved the welcome mat for snowmobiles.

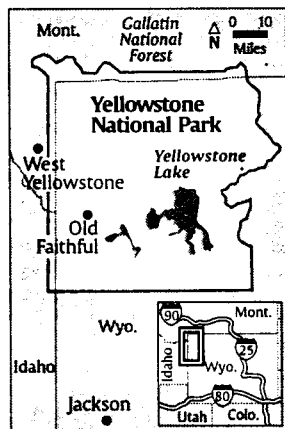
Declaring that the use of snowmobile was impairing natural resources, the park service sided with environmentalists such as the Greater Yellowstone Coalition's Mike Clark, who dismisses the pastime as "motorized hedonism."

Already, Republicans in Congress are moving to modify or revoke the new winter management plan for Yellowstone. It was the first issue mentioned in a letter sent to Bush late last year by incoming House Resources Committee Chairman James Hansen, R-Utah.

The battle will also be joined in federal court, where the snowmobile industry has sued to block the new rules, which industry attorney Bill Horn calls "ludicrous" and "a grand political gesture" not supported by the facts.

Scott Malvin, here snowmobiling with his wife from Nelson, Minn., and thrilled by the experience, couldn't agree more. "A bad deal," he says of the ban.

On protecting the park's wildlife, he says, "I think they



disturbed the snowmobilers more than we disturbed them."

At issue is not just how Yellowstone will be managed, protected and used, but also the future of the gateway town of West Yellowstone, population 913. Thanks to tens of thousands of snowmobilers, it has evolved from a summer tourist town that was largely shuttered during the winter to a nearly four-season community where money and tax revenue

flow almost non-stop.

From mid-December to mid-March, snowmobilers swarm along West Yellowstone's streets at all hours of the day and night. Some mornings, as they warm up their machines to head out to explore Yellowstone or the 400 miles of trails in the adjacent Gallatin National Forest, a blue cloud of exhaust hangs over downtown.

To many shopkeepers here, that blue smoke is the color of money, and they say they are worried, even angry, about the looming ban. "Before there were snowmobiles in Yellowstone, most of the businesses were boarded up in winter and people were on unemployment waiting for summer to come," recalls Jerry Johnson, the town's mayor and owner of a snowmobile rental business.

Snowmobiling contributes about \$12 million a year to the local economy, estimates Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Marysue Costello. The town government itself gets about one-eighth of its annual budget from taxes paid by winter visitors, who also include cross-country skiers.

snowshoers and those who ride tracked snow coaches into the park.

It's anybody's guess what will happen when snowmobiles are banned and travel into the park will be by snow coach only, except for one cross-park road kept open for cars.

Town administrator Fred Rice says he's "cautiously optimistic" that West Yellowstone will adapt, that people will still visit the park and snowmobile on trails in nearby national forests. But there have been no studies to assess the potential impact on tourism.

Some in West Yellowstone await the change eagerly.

"People come to our town and treat it like a playground; they run wild," says Scott Carlsley, who runs snow coach and ski tours. He looks forward to a future of "a pristine Yellowstone National Park without snowmobiles and the national forest outside with the best snowmobiling in the world."

Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo., says he believes that the advent of cleaner, quieter machines could usher in a compromise that would allow snowmobiling to continue on the park's 181 miles of roads. That goal could be achieved by legislation or possibly an amended winter use plan.

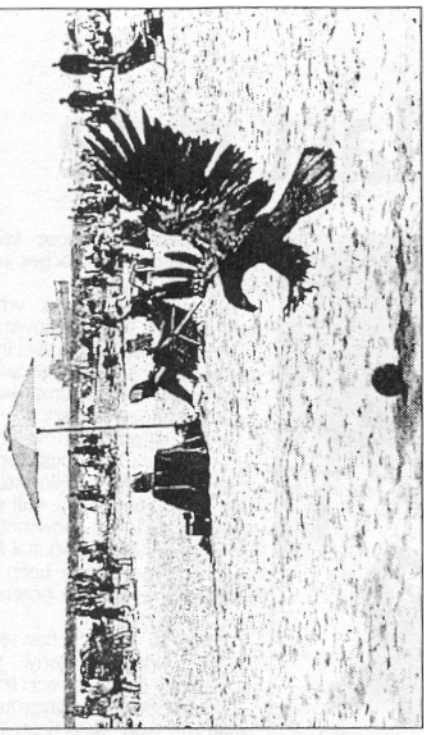
But Mike Finley, Yellowstone Park's superintendent, says snowmobiles are fundamentally incompatible with the park and violate a string of statutes, executive orders and rules dating to almost 30 years.

He adds that new technology will do nothing to protect wildlife, as he shows a video of a pack of snowmobilers stampeding bison at a time when the animals desperately need to conserve energy.

"Any administration can revisit an issue," Finley says, "but what you can't change are the facts" — intermittent high levels of air pollution along roads and at the entrance station that often make park employees ill; severe noise; snowmobilers driving off-road and sometimes speeding nearly double the 45 mph limit; and repeated stress on wildlife when they are most vulnerable.

Finley envisions a time when winter visitors to Yellowstone will travel by natural gas-powered snow coaches and on cross-country skis, when one can hear the howls of wolves and the hisses of geysers. It will be, he says, "much more in keeping with the wilderness character of Yellowstone."

USA Today 8/22/01



By Jim Cole, AP

In Hampton Beach, N.H.: A young bald eagle swoops down on a rubber football at the Atlantic shore. The bird has been harassing beach visitors.

The eagle has landed; beachgoers say 'Duck!'

Reuters

ferred "very minor scratches," Rafferty said. Wildlife officials estimated that the chocolate-brown bird is about 3½ feet tall and has a 6-foot wingspan. Rafferty said the eagle is about 18 months old.

"It's young because it doesn't have that 'bald spot' yet," he said. Only adult bald eagles have the distinctive white head feathers.

The American bald eagle, once an endangered species, is enjoying somewhat of a comeback. Wildlife officials are trying to capture the bird without injuring it.

They have baited an elevated platform with pieces of fresh fish and even a football to lure the bird from its perch.

"We don't worry about sharks here. The water is too cold. But now we have to worry about eagles," Rafferty said.

HAMPTON BEACH, N.H. — State and town officials tried for a second day Tuesday to capture a young bald eagle that has taken up residence at this seaside town, terrorizing beachgoers and hunting flying footballs.

The eagle, America's national symbol, apparently was released from a federal preserve in Massachusetts over the weekend, a New Hampshire parks official said.

"It's just been going from rooftop to rooftop or nesting on chimneys in the southern end of the beach," said Kevin Rafferty of the New Hampshire State Park Patrol. "It has gone after a few footballs in the air and a young girl when she went to pick up a football. Guess it thinks the footballs are a tasty morsel." The 8-year-old girl suf-

port is that the Park Service should become more of an advocacy or organization for preserving the nation's natural and cultural resources. "As a people, our quality of life — our very health and well-being — depends in the most basic way on the protection of nature, the accessibility of open space and recreation opportunities, and the preservation of landmarks that illustrate our historic continuity," the report concludes. The report recommends that parks: ▶ Become "a more significant part of America's educational system," particularly with regard to teaching the nation's "often noble, but sometimes shameful and sad" history. Parks should be used as classrooms, the report suggests, and the agency should use the Internet more effectively. ▶ "Adopt the conservation of biodiversity as a core principle" and that the Park Service becomes a key player in preserving marine resources and restoring wildlife corridors linking habitats. The report advocates creation of a system of marine reserves representing many types of habitats. ▶ Incorporate environmental sustainability, including energy efficiency and recycling, into all their operations.

The administration has proposed spending \$4.9 billion over five years to fix crumbling roads, sewer systems and visitor centers. Critics have charged that much of the money will be diverted from existing programs and that more should go toward protecting wildlife and other natural resources. More than 250 million people a year visit the 384 national parks, historic sites and other areas administered by the Park Service. Interior Secretary Gale Norton is under no obligation to implement the advisory board's recommendations. But the panel is influential enough and the report's distribution will be wide enough to stir considerable public debate. Produced in collaboration with the National Geographic Society, the report — a copy of which was obtained by USA TODAY — will be distributed to 10,000 decision-makers across the nation, including members of Congress, state officials and conservationists. In recent weeks, a top aide to Norton suggested that the report be heavily edited to put more emphasis on public recreation and impaired side of that equation, providing visitor services. But the advisory panel has put itself at odds with the Bush administration, which has made fixing maintenance and construction backlog the centerpiece of its parks policy.

The board's report, "Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century," is the National Park Service's latest attempt to reconcile a dilemma dating from its founding in 1916. In establishing the park system, Congress directed that parks be created both for public enjoyment and to "leave them unimpaired" for future generations. In siding firmly with the "unimpaired" side of that equation, the advisory panel has put itself at odds with the Bush administration, which has made fixing maintenance and construction backlog the centerpiece of its parks policy.

By Tom Kenworthy
USA TODAY

Panel supports conservation as new goal for Park Service

USA Today 8/22/01