

## Tracing the Origins of an Idea

The history of Yellowstone National Park is, in some ways, very well documented. The presence of a research library, a National Archives and Records Administration affiliated archives, an extensive photographic collection, and numerous publications indicate that exhaustive research has centered on many facets of our nation's first national park. This project attempts to capture an elusive gap in Yellowstone's history—the evolution of the ideas that have shaped our current management philosophy of the park's wildlife populations.

Through first-person oral history interviews, this project opens a window to the Yellowstone of the 1960s and early 1970s. In the 1960s, park management plans called for the numerical reduction of both the elk and bison herds. Park staff accomplished this first through shooting and later by live trapping and shipping these animals. By the 1970s, however, Yellowstone's management philosophy had changed to that of "natural regulation," which is still adhered to today. Interviews with administrators, field biologists, maintenance workers, park photographers, naturalists, and park rangers provide a wide range of viewpoints and experi-

*Photo shows a dead elk attached to a "weasel," an over-snow vehicle used in the 1960s to transport shooters to remote areas and to haul out the dead elk. NPS photo.*



ences. In addition, insight is gained into how such changes and growth come about within a national park

While the project has focused on wildlife issues, the interviews have provided a rich picture of what it was like to work in the park during the early '60s, '70s, and beyond. The experience of Yellowstone is one that many people hold dear—and those who made it their career certainly reveal a similar fondness for the park and its resources.

Among the many benefits of this project is its implications and applications to today's wildlife issues. Many of the concerns that existed in the 1960s and '70s are still significant in the year 2000. By understanding past rationale and experiences, present managers may gain new perspectives, be better prepared for management consequences, or may avoid repeating past mistakes.

When asked what perspective he could offer wildlife managers of today, former Yellowstone Chief Naturalist John Good, offered these words of advice:

We were so sure. Remember that wonderful line of Charlie Brown's, 'Now how can we lose this ball game when we're so darned sincere?' ... If you could have gone back and sat in on a ranger conference in 1961, you would have found the same attitude that attains today. That we know what we're doing. Most people—most reasonable people—will accept that we do. We said that in 1961, we're saying it now in 1999. I don't know whether what we're doing is exactly right. All I remember is that to the Greeks, the ancient Greeks, a cardinal sin was hubris. And hubris was pride. And certainty. And so, I wave my finger from the ancient past and say, beware hubris, beware certainty.

The value of this voice and others as well as the ideas that they helped form will continue to provide perspective for Yellowstone's future.

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