

# Group wants Yellowstone officials to reduce roadkill

By The Associated Press - 11/29/04

## **YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, Wyo. (AP) — The National Park Service needs to do more to protect wildlife from motorists, an advocacy group for public employees says.**

An average of 103 large mammals have been killed each year from 1989 to 2003 due to vehicle collisions in Yellowstone. A large mammal is defined as one that weighs more than 30 pounds, according to the Park Service. During that period, 566 elk, 456 mule deer and 192 bison died on park roads, according to Yellowstone officials.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, or PEER, based in Washington, D.C., said it appears park officials are planning roadways based more like a Department of Motor Vehicles than a National Park Service.

"The planning is around road construction," said Jeff Ruch, PEER executive director. "They don't have kind of a comprehensive policy, even though it is by far the largest source of (wildlife) mortality." He said he would like park officials to "devote some serious management attention to the causes of these problems." "For example, do they want to discourage driving at dusk and dawn?" he said. "They may want to re-evaluate speed."

Ruch said Yellowstone is widening roadways, which may mean higher speeds and more wildlife killed. He said other parks have systems that alert drivers to wildlife on roadways.

Yellowstone spokeswoman Cheryl Matthews said "much work" has been done examining speeds on roadways and most of the park has a 45 mph speed limit. And, she said, areas where road upgrades are occurring have a lower wildlife mortality rate because the construction improves visibility. "Road width and alignment enhances visitor access and safety," she said. "It helps wildlife because of sight distance and thinning of vegetation, and for through-traffic to negotiate through wildlife jams." She said on the four segments of roads that have been upgraded, roadkills have dropped. The upgrades have been on Craig Pass, at the east entrance, from Old Faithful to Madison, and from Madison to Norris.

Matthews also said the park tried an experiment with crossing sensors that would alert motorists with flashing lights if wildlife stepped onto the roadway, but technical problems halted the effort.

The peak of animal-car collisions was in 1994, when 148 animals were killed. The lowest number was in 2000, when there were 83 wildlife deaths.

The most common animal killed is elk, followed closely by mule deer. Bison is third, then coyotes and moose. There have also been beavers, whitetail deer and wolves killed by cars. This year, five black bears and one grizzly bear were struck and killed by vehicles in Yellowstone. Usually, an average of one black bear killed each year.

Biologists blamed the deaths on a poor whitebark pine cone crop, which pushed bears closer to people and roadways in search of food.

But Ruch said more research needs to focus on the effect of roads on wildlife. "The way they treat roadkill, they treat it like the weather," he said. "It gets better or worse, and they don't know why, and there's nothing they can do about it."

## **Wildlife deaths**

By The Associated Press

A look at numbers of wildlife killed in Yellowstone National Park by vehicles from 1989-2003.  
Source: National Park Service.

### **ANIMAL DEATHS**

Antelope 24  
Beaver 17  
Bighorn sheep 6  
Bison 192  
Black Bear 12  
Bobcat 3  
Coyote 135  
Elk 566  
Grizzly Bear 5  
Moose 112  
Mountain Lion 2  
Mule Deer 456  
Raccoon 8  
Whitetail Deer 10  
Wolf 11