

Project Completion Report Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (RM-CESU)

Project Title:

Developing a Social Research Plan for Yellowstone National Park

Project Code (such as UMT-72 and/or the “J” or “P” number):

UMT-275

Type of Project (Research, Technical Assistance or Education):

Technical Assistance

Funding Agency: National Park Service

Partner University: University of Montana

NPS Agreement Technical Representative:

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Principal Investigator:

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Start Date of Project:

September 1, 2012

End Date of Project:

December 31, 2013

Funding Amount: \$93,800

Project Summary

Work Accomplished

The post-doctoral researcher hired to carry out this project, Dr. Rebecca Garvoille, has worked with park management to begin the development a cohesive social sciences program at Yellowstone National Park. Specifically, Dr. Garvoille’s work resulted in several key accomplishments:

1. Dr. Garvoille interviewed park managers to define key social science needs and issues, and reviewed the relevant literature in order to draft a social science strategic plan. The Yellowstone Social Science Strategy is currently being finalized.
2. Dr. Garvoille provided key social science expertise on a number of high-priority park issues and project reviews, including research on and a final PowerPoint about the myriad economic values of Yellowstone National Park for Yellowstone’s Superintendent.
3. Dr. Garvoille drafted two research proposals on pressing natural resource management priorities including the human dimensions of wild bison, and native fish conservation at Yellowstone Lake.

4. The NPS is funding a second phase of social science capacity-building at Yellowstone National Park including the continued development of the Yellowstone Social Science Program and implementation of the human dimensions of wild bison study through a 2013-2015 CESU Agreement with the University of Montana.

Number of students participating in this project:

This project did not involve any students; thus, no degrees were conferred. However, the project did employ one post-doctoral researcher in social science, Dr. Rebecca Garvoille.

Lessons Learned from this project:

This project was a tremendous opportunity for learning more about how to apply social science in a national park setting, and how design a comprehensive and systematic social science research strategy for national park purposes. Specifically, the research team learned the following:

1. Yellowstone National Park has three broad, high-priority social science themes that merit additional research, and around which its Social Science Strategy is organized:
 - a. **Park Users and the Park Experience** – this theme addresses using social science to evaluate Yellowstone’s diverse user communities and how are they engaging with and experiencing park resources
 - b. **Enhancing Park Planning, Information Delivery and Strategic Communications** – this theme addresses using social science to develop a more sophisticated understanding of values, impacts and effectiveness of Yellowstone’s projects, public processes and uses of technology.
 - c. **The Politics of Nature** – this theme addresses using social science to assess the different scales and types of micro-scale and macro-scale environmental politics that shape Yellowstone’s resources and its management.
2. Yellowstone National Park is valuable not only as a driver of tourism and recreation in the Greater Yellowstone region, but also because it provides irreplaceable ecosystem services, such as clear water and water storage, and it protects environmental amenities that attract human capital and investment to the region.
3. Additional research is merited on the attitudes and values of gateway community residents who co-exist with wild bison on the ground.
4. The sustained involvement of the park management team was critical to the development of a successful social science strategy, and to the prioritization of social science needs at Yellowstone National Park.
5. Yellowstone National Park has multiple social science needs; thus a discussion about their prioritization as well as about the state of existing knowledge on these issues, was critical to plan development.
6. Successful social science proposals and research on the human dimensions of natural resource management depend on collaborations with Yellowstone National Park’s natural scientists.
7. There is a clear need for on-site social science expertise at Yellowstone National Park.
8. Marshalling resources and lessons learned from other social scientists and social science projects across the National Park Service was useful for defining what social can look like at a national park unit and for explaining the important work social science can do for park managers.

Other RM-CESU agencies or research partners who participated in this project: N/A