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Case Study: The Challenges of the Greater Yellowstone

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CASE STUDY: THE CHALLENGES OF THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE

Bill Bryan
Board Member
Greater Yellowstone Coalition

External Development Affecting the National Parks:
Preserving "The Best Idea We Ever Had"
September 14-16, 1986
Estes Park, Colorado

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by

Bill Bryan
Board member, Greater Yellowstone Coalition

Monday September 15, 1986

Greater Yellowstone Coalition's Early Years

Why the Coalition was formed:

- Yellowstone is greater than the sum of its parts
- Needed an ecological approach to management and protection instead of ones conferred and limited by political boundaries and jurisdictions, if Yellowstone's integrity is to remain intact.
- No one national or local organization was doing the job that many felt was necessary.
 - there appeared to be a niche/vacuum for some group to fill
 - also thoughts on "prototype" were on some environmentalists' minds, for if such an organization was a success, then it might be replicated elsewhere.

Organizational meeting took place on May 1983:

- Most leading environmental groups (national and local) attended.
- Resolved that a group was needed to meet head-on the challenges of the Greater Yellowstone.
- Steering Committee was formed.
 - Coalition concept adopted in intent, but not necessarily in reality.

June, 1984:

- The organization was in place.
 - Had developed a staff, office, funding, and expanded the Board of Directors.
 - Annual meeting at Mammoth, Wyoming.
 - A charge was adopted - national legislation concerning management of the Greater Yellowstone. Serious in intent, but politically naive.

Our Rookie Years, June 1984 - June 1986:

- The concept caught on in many ways.
 - National publicity and regional publicity was extensive.
 - Agencies adopted "our" words. "Ecosystem" became a popular buzz word.

- Environmental groups started capitalizing on the concept. (TWS as an example).
- Monied interests were initially attracted.
- Lots of issues.
 - Published a challenges book. 88 threats were cataloged, concerning all the issues threatening the Greater Yellowstone.
 - Became involved in many issues, such as forest plans, access, timber sales, oil and gas, road building, park management policies, etc.
- Organizational problems developed.
 - Too much for a small staff.
 - More issues than fundraising, planning, etc. could handle.
 - Structure issues.
 - Role of member organizations went unaddressed, as did the role of members.
 - No tough long-range planning took place, because current problems were so pressing. Therefore, GYC didn't have a clear vision and agenda.

Second Annual Meeting:

- A media success, great attendance, new NPS director spoke
 - But this was almost like artificially feeding a deer herd - it postponed the inevitable (i.e. issues of vision, agenda, structure, funding, staffing, etc.).
- The euphoria of the 1985 annual meeting didn't last long.
 - National hearings on Greater Yellowstone. This was initially pushed by a national organization, but we readily got caught up in it.
 - A problem in that GYC hadn't done its homework, so we took it hard at home by those worried that we were a Park expansion group, etc.
 - A great deal of grassroots damage.
 - "Playing God in Yellowstone" book accused GYC of not being tough enough on the Park Service, that maybe we were too forgiving. This was an accurate criticism, especially because of our lack of an articulated vision and agenda.
 - Internal problems arose due to:
 - lack of organizational planning
 - lack of priorities around fundraising
 - small staff
 - lack of clarity around Board and staff

Our transition year, 1986:

- A leadership change at the staff level precipitated major thinking on basic issues. GYC should have addressed earlier on:
 - Are we regional or national?
 - Are we a coalition?
 - What kind of staff should be hired?
 - What is the role of members?

- What is our vision and agenda?
 - What are our sources of income?
 - Are we an advocacy group, an educational/research group, or a mediation group?
- Long-range planning is now taking place, a new executive director is being hired, and GYC will proceed from here. At what level is anyone's guess

In conclusion:

- There is a great need for a GYC-type organization for the Greater Yellowstone.
 - The Parks and the USFS are not going to do the job. Witness the forest plans, Park management revealed in A. Chase's book, and in the YPS current bison management plans.
 - Local groups can't do the job, as they are too limited in vision
 - The national groups can't do the job, as they have bigger agendas, competition issues, image issues, too concerned with revenues.
- GYC needs a tough vision and strategy that has a clear goal, and an agenda to get there.
- It must be a tough, fair-minded advocate, accountable to its mission and membership. It need to be national in scope and yet regionally accountable.
- It needs to be professional in all its day-to-day activities.
- It can't be a coalition, but it can be a membership-based coalition.
- It has to rise above the tunnel visioned and provincial environmental interests, and at the same time have their blessings.

Therefore, The Greater Yellowstone is threatened by all sorts of extractive, special interests, and by poor professional management. But will short-sighted, myopic environmental interests ultimately do it in? That remains to be seen, and GYC's future is the key.