

YELLOWSTONE COMPUTERIZES RARE ANIMAL REPORT SYSTEM

BY MARK JOHNSON

BEFORE THE 1930s, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL Park visitors, staff, and researchers recorded rare animal observations primarily in journals, Army scout diaries, Army station records, and administrative reports. During the 1930s, the agency began a more systematic system, with wildlife observations being recorded on wildlife observation cards. The system was further refined in 1986 with the implementation of the rare animal sighting form.

Though these observations contained very important information, the system made data analysis, sorting, retrieval, and summaries very tedious and time-consuming. In an effort to make data analysis more efficient, the Yellowstone Center for Resources updated and computerized the rare animal sighting report system in 1993.

The new computer database breaks down each sighting into 56 information fields that can be quickly sorted and retrieved. It can also be used in conjunction with the park GIS and is compatible with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wolf reporting system and the National Heritage Project conservation data system.

The new program will make the sighting reports much more usable for research and management biologists, resource management coordinators, visitors, and contract researchers. For example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can use the new system as a tool to help determine if and when wolf packs become established in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The new database consists of more than 1,000 records from 1986-95, ranging from species as small as amphibians and flying squirrels to as large as gray wolves and mountain goats. Wildlife observation records before 1986 will still be available for use manually, through the earlier wildlife observation card system.

PS

Mark Johnson is a Wildlife Veterinarian with the Yellowstone Center for Resources.