



LETTERS

A damaging decision

The recent decision signed by the associate regional director of the National Park Service abdicating the service's authority to manage wildlife on private inholdings within Grand Teton National Park begs these fundamental questions. First why was the decision made and how does the decision advance the mission of the Park Service, which is to protect, preserve and leave unimpaired the park's resources for future generations to enjoy? And what, after 65 years of the park managing its wildlife, has suddenly occurred to precipitate this change? The Park Service has provided no justifiable response to these questions.

This surprise decision transfers to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department the authority to manage wildlife on roughly 2,300 acres scattered across a hundred parcels within Grand Teton park. Will Game and Fish now permit hunting of elk, moose, deer, buffalo, antelope and upland game birds on these inholdings? Will Game and Fish permit mountain lion and black bear hunting, and in the case of black bears, will they allow bears to be baited onto private land so they can be shot? And if wolves and grizzly bears fall under Game and Fish authority, will there be an open season on them too on land inside the park?

How is the park supposed to manage and protect its wildlife if over 3.5 square miles of the park's front country are opened for hunting, trapping and the general taking of wildlife?

This terrible Park Service decision opens the door for these and other scenarios to play out. I don't begrudge Game and Fish for contemplating these opportunities, however I do urge them to show restraint and respect for the park's mission and not come out

with "guns blazing" just because they were handed the opportunity to do so on an ill-conceived administrative platter.

National parks are meant to be protective arks for our nation's wildlife, but this latest decision, made by a mid-level administrator with no public input, has significantly weakened this very purpose. Where can our diverse and conspicuous wildlife find a safe haven if not within our national parks?

Some might say that since elk hunting already occurs within Grand Teton, so what if the inholdings are suddenly opened to more hunting? My response is simply this: Elk hunting is allowed (not mandated) as a result of intense and complicated negotiations that occurred in the 1940s. Allowing elk hunting (when deemed necessary) was a compromise. In return the American people received the 310,000-acre Grand Teton National Park. By contrast, what have we received for this latest unilateral decision? Nothing — except for a precedent-setting weakening of the park's hard-fought 1950 enabling legislation.

I find it ironic and very disturbing that as we prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of what many consider to be "America's Best Idea," our system of national parks, that we now are witnessing the shredding of the very fabric meant to protect our wildlife within one of our nation's finest places — Grand Teton National Park. One has to wonder — where are the park's wildlife defenders — apparently not within the decision-making level of the National Park Service. This unjustified decision needs to be rescinded.

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