



## Sacred Ground Protecting the “Backbone of the World”

**T**he Blackfeet Nation first encountered the United States government in the early morning chill of July 27, 1806. Capt. Meriwether Lewis, returning with his men from the Pacific, chanced upon a band of eight young braves, camped in spectacular buffalo country where unbroken prairie crashes headlong into soaring peaks. What unfolded that morning was the only bloodshed recorded by Lewis and Clark.

Before the summer sun had climbed high enough to warm the gravel banks of the Two Medicine River, two young Blackfeet men—boys, really—were killed.

Two centuries later, in 1982, the US government returned to those very same river banks, to the Blackfeet’s most sacred land, and sold it for oil drilling at a dollar an acre.

That river’s headwaters spill from the “Backbone of the World,” the Rocky Mountain heights known today as the Badger-Two Medicine. Adjacent to Glacier National Park’s southeastern boundary, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, the 160,000-acre Badger-Two Medicine is home to the Blackfeet culture’s origin stories—it is the center of their spiritual universe.

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## A Lasting Legacy for Grand Teton

By Sharon Mader  
Grand Teton Program Manager

**P**resident Obama has an amazing opportunity, before the end of his presidency, to create a profound and lasting legacy for America’s national parks. As we look toward the Centennial of the National Park Service in August 2016—NPCA is encouraging the administration to prioritize protecting lands in Grand Teton National Park that are owned by the state of Wyoming.

More than 1,200 acres of state-owned lands fall within the boundary of the park. These inholdings offer some of the most spectacular scenery and wildlife-viewing opportunities imaginable. Driving by these lands, travelers assume these acres are part of the park, as pristine and unimpaired as the surrounding landscape. That’s in large part because the state has been a fine steward, managing these lands carefully ever since the inception of Grand Teton. Yet, if the Department of Interior fails to complete a time-sensitive land exchange by January 6, 2016, these critically important inholdings will be on their way to the public auction block. If these parcels are sold for commercial and residential development, herds of pronghorn and bison will be displaced and ancient migration routes and scenic views obstructed forever.

Efforts to transfer ownership of state lands to the Park Service are well underway, but are bound by an extremely ambitious timeline. The clock is ticking, and without immediate action at the highest levels of government,



it’s possible this deal will not be completed in time. Wyoming’s leadership has proved a willing partner in negotiating the transfer and has authorized the federal government to purchase these lands either through a cash sale or an exchange for other federal mineral lands in the state. But despite good intentions on both sides, the progress has been slow and the state’s patience is wearing thin after numerous extensions over many years. Without immediate action over the coming months, all bets are off. If the transfer agreement expires, the lands could be sold to

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**Top:** Flowers of Grand Teton National Park  
©f1photo | Shutterstock **Above:** Moose in Grand  
Teton National Park | Lilyling 1982 | Dreamstime.com

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## REFLECTIONS FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, BART MELTON

**T**his past winter, snowmobiles and snowcoaches rolled into Yellowstone, guided by a brand-new, balanced and flexible winter-use plan that NPCA helped shape through decades of persistent advocacy. At Grand Teton, as a result of NPCA volunteers and their good work, park pronghorn migrated freely in areas where fencing had prevented their migration in the past. And up in Glacier, 400,000 acres of park-adjacent wildlands—an area larger than Zion, Bryce, Acadia, Arches, Carlsbad Caverns, and Great Sand Dunes national parks combined—were placed off-limits to mining and drilling leases, the conclusion of a multi-year legislative campaign.

Here in NPCA's Northern Rockies Regional Office, Tim Stevens—NPCA's longtime Northern Rockies Regional Director and architect of all our wintertime victories—decided it was time for a change, and moved on to pursue new challenges in conservation. And as Tim stepped down, I stepped up, changing out my job in NPCA's Yellowstone office to take over as Regional Director. Stephanie Adams, in turn, snatched up my old desk at Yellowstone, where I'm certain she will have many good winters to come.

In Glacier, 400,000 acres of park-adjacent wildlands—an area larger than Zion, Bryce, Acadia, Arches, Carlsbad Caverns, and Great Sand Dunes national parks combined—were placed off-limits to mining and drilling leases.

Tim Stevens left some darn big shoes to fill, and I'm humbled and honored to have been chosen to take over leadership where he left off. National parks have played a central role in my life for as long as I can remember. In fact, one of my first memories—I couldn't have been more than 5 at the time—is being wakened in the dead of night by a park ranger. I was with my family, in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and a mama bear with cubs had taken up residence in a tree near our tent. Later, we spotted the bears—my parents insist it was from a safe distance—and that moment has remained with me to this day.

I've made many more park memories since then, some with friends and some with family. I suspect that anyone who visits a



park for the first time—whether they are 5 or 50—leaves with a lasting memory. These experiences shape us, and help us to understand that protected parks and their surrounding landscapes are, like our victories, no accident. They are a choice. The visionaries and the leaders who came before us chose to create these special places, and we, in turn, must step up and choose to protect them. That's why I'm so excited to work with you in my new role, partnering to protect Yellowstone, Grand Teton, Glacier, and the parks of NPCA's Northern Rockies Region.

I have inherited a talented team from Tim Stevens, and that team includes you. NPCA needs your help if we are to have another winter like the last. As we build toward the 100th birthday of the National Park Service in 2016—and NPCA's own centennial in 2019—we are asking each of you to "Find Your Voice." That is to say, to find *your way* of making a difference on behalf of America's national parks. Stand up with us, here in the Northern Rockies and across the country, and **choose to act**—attend an event, write a letter, call a member of Congress, spend a day volunteering. Up in Glacier, you can join us for a summer celebration in honor of the legislation that protected all those acres next to the park. In Grand Teton, we'll be spending a September afternoon establishing new wildlife connections across the landscape. And, north of Yellowstone, you can help us modify fences so that during next winter's migration, park pronghorn have even more range to roam.

Together, we can find our voice and protect our National Parks.

*Bart Melton*

**Above:** Bart Melton and his partner, Caitlin, skiing in Yellowstone on New Year's Day.



# Sacred Ground – Protecting the “Backbone of the World”

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It also is critical habitat for many of Glacier Park’s most iconic and sensitive species including wolves, wolverines, grizzly bears, and bighorn sheep, and it links together key wildlife corridors between the park and the wilderness complex.

Blackfeet Chief Earl Old Person, in a recent letter to President Obama, wrote that “The Badger-Two Medicine for thousands of years has helped shape the identity of the Blackfeet people...I have always been told by our elders that our responsibility was to save those lands for our children and all future generations.”

Today, together, that is exactly what we are doing. NPCA has partnered with the Blackfeet and a host of conservation allies, contesting the legitimacy of those oil leases and pushing back against plans to industrialize an ancient wildland.

Many oil and gas companies have voluntarily relinquished their leases in the Blackfeet’s

cultural homeland, recognizing the natural and cultural importance of this powerful place. But 18 leases totaling 40,000 acres still remain, and one oil developer recently filed suit to gain access to drill.

We are fighting that suit, and we are working hard to cancel, swap, or buy all remaining leases in the Badger-Two Medicine. Our allies include the Blackfeet, of course, the entire Blackfoot Confederacy, every Native American tribe in Montana and Wyoming, and the National Congress of American Indians.

Beyond Indian Country, we have discovered great friends in high places. In particular, Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont) has championed the Blackfeet cause, standing up to the relentless crush of private industry across our public lands. Sen. Tester has reached out to everyone from Obama Administration staff members to his friends in the rock band Pearl Jam, and he has traveled to Blackfeet Country to see for himself what is at stake. Together, we have raised a powerful chorus on behalf of protection.

Now, it’s time for you to add your voice. We cannot do this without you.

Please drop Sen. Tester a line and tell him **thank you**. Follow Pearl Jam’s social media messages on this issue, and thank them, too. Visit our website to learn more and to sign an online petition. Write to Sec. of Interior Sally Jewell, and ask her to reconsider the legality of those dollar-an-acre leases.

It takes only a moment to find your voice and be heard—a timely action, for a timeless landscape.



[Tester.senate.gov](http://Tester.senate.gov)

[Doi.gov](http://Doi.gov)

<http://www.pearljam.com/activism/news>

<http://www.badger-twomedicine.org/>

**Below:** South Fork of the Two Medicine River, Montana ©Stephen Legault



## A Lasting Legacy for Grand Teton

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fund Wyoming’s educational trust. State law, in fact, requires that the State Lands and Investment Board manage or sell these lands for the highest revenue yield to the state.

The transfer agreement represents a win for all sides: The state receives funding to enhance education, the Park Service preserves critical lands within its

boundary, and the American people continue to enjoy Grand Teton’s spectacular scenery and wildlife in perpetuity.

There may be no better way to celebrate the Park Service Centennial than for the Obama Administration to provide the resources, staffing, and financial commitment to complete these important legacy projects. This is an unprecedented moment—a chance to demonstrate that national parks are as

relevant now as they were 100 years ago, and that they will remain so for the next 100 years, as well.

The visionaries who first imagined the Park Service, who fought to establish parks such as Grand Teton, prevailed against significant odds. Together, we also can overcome obstacles and preserve these jewels for our grandchildren to enjoy. Now that is a legacy worth striving for.

# Protect Wildlife in Grand Teton National Park

**G**rand Teton's pronghorn will once again migrate safely to critical winter habitat this year, thanks to an upcoming fence improvement project in Grand Teton National Park. Please join NPCA, the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation and Grand Teton National Park on Public Lands Day, Saturday, September 26, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., for a volunteer work day to enhance wildlife migration.

Barbed-wire fences, necessary for cattle containment, create dangerous and potentially deadly obstacles to pronghorn migration. These fences also affect many other species that move through the park on a daily and seasonal basis. Our project will focus on the North Elk Ranch, currently used for cattle grazing in the spring and summer. Volunteers will modify the fence by removing barbed wire and replacing it with wildlife-friendly smooth wire. They also will install a wooden top rail to prevent entanglement. These modifications help pronghorn to navigate under fences and other wildlife to safely jump over the rails.

For more information about this project and the Grand Teton Field Office migration campaign, contact 307-733-4680 or [smader@npca.org](mailto:smader@npca.org) or go to our website at: [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org)



**Above:** Pronghorn Antelope ©Jim Kruger | ISTOCKPHOTO

## Teaming up with Students to Improve Yellowstone Pronghorn Antelope Migration

**W**hen asked which wildlife roams the wilds of Yellowstone, most will quickly rattle off bison, grizzly bears, and wolves. Others will add bald eagles and elk to the list. However, one of the park's most unique species—pronghorn antelope—are often overlooked. As the world's second-fastest land mammal, pronghorn are built for speeds of up to 60 miles per hour. But the anatomy that allows such velocity is not well-suited to jumping, and that's tough in a modern country criss-crossed by ranchers' fences. Each year, as the Yellowstone herd follows historic migration routes to winter habitat north of the park, fences stop them in their tracks.

NPCA, through volunteer fence projects, has been working to remove or modify barriers to migration. Since 2010, volunteers have worked on more than 18 miles of barriers, enabling pronghorn to regain more and more of their historic winter habitat. This summer, we are teaming up with Ecology

Project International and students from across the country including Florida, California, and the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes here in Montana to tackle fence

barriers. Together, we will not only improve migration, but also discover a shared sense of connection to Yellowstone's wildlife and a responsibility to speak on their behalf.



**Above:** Montana State University students rebuild fences in the Paradise Valley. ©Stephanie Adams





## A New Approach to Yellowstone Bison Management

**A**merica's 407 National Park System units preserve the best of our country's ecological and cultural history, ensuring that our shared heritage endures for future generations. Even our very first national park—Yellowstone—remains today an important refuge for many species that otherwise would have been lost on the American landscape. And one of the most iconic species of the National Park System is the bison.

The image of the bison appears on the National Park Service's arrowhead, the seal on all of the agency's uniforms and signs. Bison symbolize the wild and rugged character of our national parks. Yet despite the important role that bison play in American identity, the bison of Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding Greater Yellowstone ecosystem are at times treated less like revered wildlife and more like livestock.

As the nation's only continuously wild herd, Yellowstone bison are the sole remnant of once-vast herds—many tens of millions—that roamed North America. By the early 1900s, Yellowstone served as a refuge for just 23 wild bison; the species was all but eliminated beyond park boundaries. Over the past century, the Park Service has worked hard to restore bison in Yellowstone. However, since the early 1990s this herd has been subjected to intensive population control

and range management, the result of controversy that arises when bison migrate to important habitat just beyond park borders in Montana during harsh winters. This deadly approach to bison management is based on an outdated court settlement. The decision to corral and cull this last wild herd is driven by fear that bison might transmit brucellosis, a non-native livestock disease, to cattle that graze Yellowstone's borderlands. Since 2000, managers have aimed to achieve "population targets" for Yellowstone bison that are not based on science.

Over the past 15 years, several small but positive steps have been taken to provide bison access to important winter habitat beyond park borders. Yet while noteworthy progress has been made, bison still are at times driven back into the park or shipped to slaughter once they cross into Montana. Fortunately, we now have an opportunity to set bison management on a new and better

path, ensuring the long-term survival of this iconic herd. Advances in science and changes on the ground have provided us an opportunity to explore new approaches that not only meet the ecological needs of bison, but also save millions of taxpayer dollars.

The National Park Service and the State of Montana are developing a new bison conservation management plan that is expected to increase tolerance for bison beyond park boundaries while at the same time reducing the risk of disease transmission. But beware: The last plan took ten years to complete. We need your help to ensure that the National Park Service commits the resources required to complete this new plan in a timely manner, because with each year that passes more of our nation's wild heritage is needlessly shipped to slaughter.

**Above:** Newborn bison calf in Yellowstone National Park. ©Neal Herbert | National Park Services



**Please sign a petition urging the Department of Interior to complete a new management plan for Yellowstone bison before the end of the National Park Service Centennial in 2016.**

Visit [npca.org/bison](http://npca.org/bison) to sign a petition urging DOI Sec. Sally Jewell to develop a new bison conservation plan before the end of the National Park Service Centennial. Now is the time to set a better course for bison management for the next 100 years.



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## Summer Celebration for Glacier's North Fork

**G**lacier National Park's remote western fringe is bordered by a crystal-clear river that flows wild out of the Canadian Rockies. Called the North Fork of the Flathead, this scenic river has been the unlikely source of an international water dispute for more than 30 years.

Now, it's time to celebrate an end to that transboundary quarrel.

In 2011, lawmakers in British Columbia quashed controversial plans to mine the headwaters. The historic development ban

put an end to projects seeking to tear down entire mountains in search of coal, gold, coalbed methane, and phosphate.

Then, late last year, lawmakers here in the United States did much the same, placing the Montana portion of the watershed off-limits to future drilling and mining leases. Like the British Columbia ban, it was historic moment—marking the first time in more than three decades that Montana's entire Congressional delegation found unanimous support for conservation legislation.

NPCA worked alongside many dogged and steadfast partners to protect these lands—and you were among those who made it possible.

So now it's time to float the river and celebrate work well done! Watch your inbox and your Twitter feed, because come summer, we'll be partying in Polebridge, Montana and you're invited.

**Below:** North Fork of the Flathead River  
©Jeremy Kratzer

