

PARK COUNTY WILDLIFE

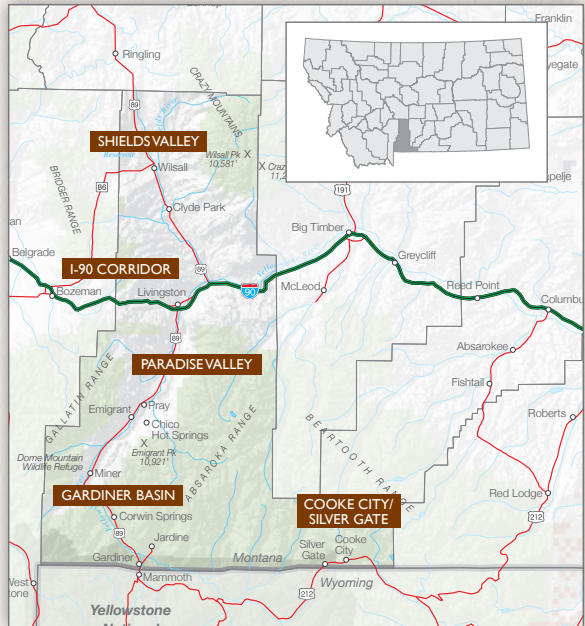


WILDLIFE OVERVIEW

Park County is located in southwest Montana where “the mountains meet the prairie.” The unique combination of large fertile valleys, major continental mountain ranges, a significant island mountain range (Crazy Mountains), and the beginning of the eastern prairie grassland provides a variety of wildlife habitats.

Remarkably, Park County supports a complete component of all the large species of wildlife that were present when Lewis and Clark first stepped foot in Montana in 1805. All 12 species of ungulates and major predators still occur. Not all species are easy to see, however in the right place and time of the year white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, antelope, bighorn sheep and bison are often viewed from the roads. If you're lucky you may also spot black bear, moose, wolf or some other interesting wildlife species.

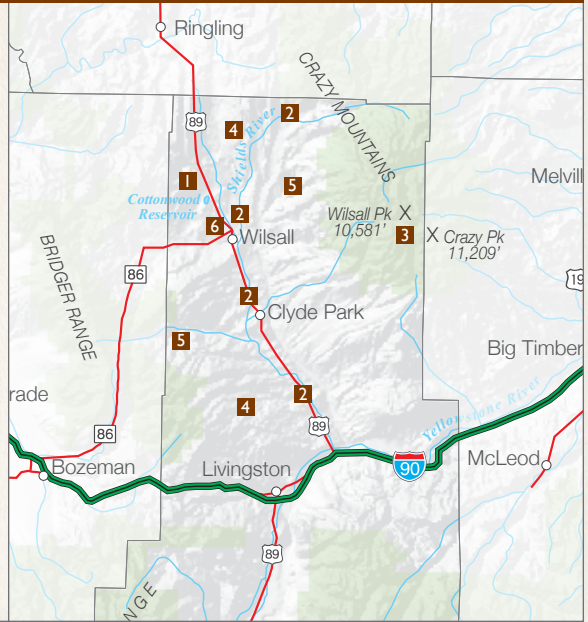
This rich wildlife resource and our open vistas help define Montana. Both Park County residents and visitors enjoy and are greatly enriched from diverse and healthy wildlife populations. Studies have shown that the presence of thriving wildlife populations and habitats are important factors in determining the “quality of life” in a particular area.



THE SHIELDS VALLEY

The Shields Valley is the largest valley in Park County and expands north along US Hwy 89 and includes the Shields River, Crazy Mountains, Bangtail Mountains, and the vast rolling hills north towards Ringling.

Total area is approximately 690 square miles, ranging from 4,550 feet to 10,578 feet (Crazy Peak) in elevation and includes approximately 1,500 residents.



- 1** The Shields Valley supports an unusually high concentration of golden eagles.
- 2** One of the best preserved native Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations in the state.
- 3** One of the largest mountain goat populations (Crazy Mountains) in the lower 48 United States, with excellent viewing opportunities from many backcountry trails.
- 4** Largest antelope population in the county ranging from 1,500-2,000 antelope.
- 5** Elk population of over 5,000, with the majority occurring on the west side of the valley.
- 6** Cottonwood Reservoir (and other wetlands) provide important staging, resting, and viewing areas for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds.

THROUGHOUT THE SHIELDS VALLEY:

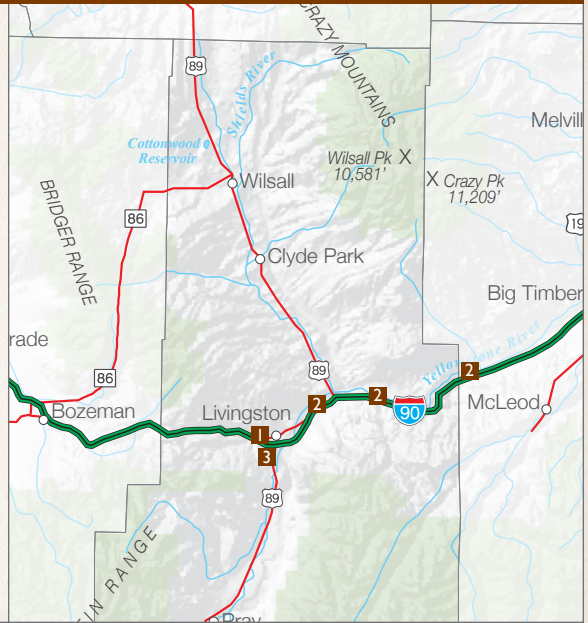
- Bighorn sheep do not currently inhabit the Crazy or Bridger Mountains.
- Excellent moose habitat occurs along the Shields River and tributaries, and moose can often be seen from the road during winter.
- Home to a small remnant sage grouse population, a species of concern throughout the western United States.



THE I-90 CORRIDOR

The I-90 Corridor is the area adjacent to I-90 running from the top of the Bozeman Pass and continues through towards Big Timber. It includes portions of the Gallatin Range, Bangtail Mountains, Absaroka Beartooth Mountains and Crazy Mountains.

Total area is approximately 465 square miles, ranging from 4,550 feet to 9,314 feet in elevation, and includes approximately 10,000 residents (including the city of Livingston).



- 1** The Livingston area is the home of a large year-round resident Canada goose population of several hundred birds.
- 2** Several pairs of bald eagles nest along this stretch of the Yellowstone River and lower Shields River.
- 3** Seasonally, black bears, mountain lions and moose are seen within the city limits of Livingston.

THROUGHOUT THE I-90 CORRIDOR:

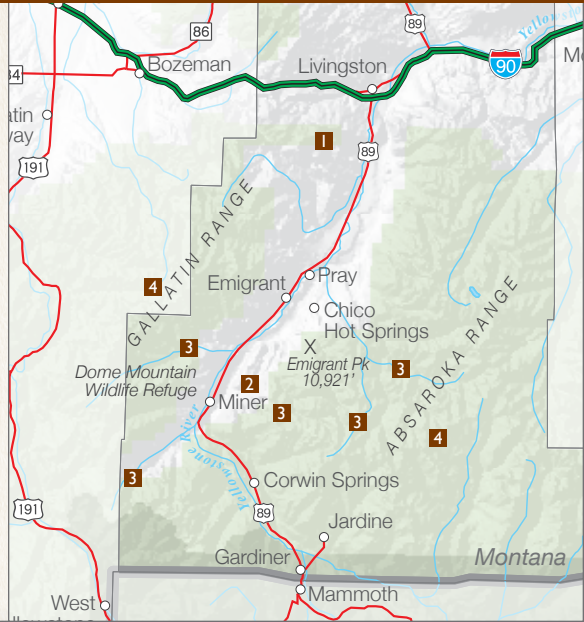
- Major human population and development area in Park County adjacent to the free flowing Yellowstone River.
- Northern boundary of expanding grizzly bear distribution, no confirmed grizzly bear sightings north of I-90 as of yet.
- From west to east this corridor is a transition zone from the Rocky Mountains to the eastern prairies.



PARADISE VALLEY

Paradise Valley includes the area east and west along the Yellowstone River from Livingston running south towards Tom Minor Basin and includes portions of the Absaroka Beartooth Mountains and Gallatin Range.

Total area is approximately 500 square miles, ranging from 4,500 feet to 10,921 feet (Emigrant Peak) in elevation, and includes approximately 2,100 residents.



- 1** Home to a large resident population of 3,000-4,000+ elk, the majority on the west side of the valley in the Gallatin Range.
- 2** The state-owned 4,600 acre Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area is located at the southern end of the valley near Dailey Lake. This area provides critical winter range for up to 2,000 of the migratory Northern Yellowstone elk herd.
- 3** Grizzly bear numbers are increasing on both sides of the valley with prime grizzly habitat from Six-mile Creek to Mill Creek and from Tom Miner Basin to Big Creek. Grizzly bear density decreases going north up to I-90.
- 4** Small numbers of rare wolverines and lynx (mid-sized carnivores) occur in the Absaroka and Gallatin Mountains on each side of the valley.

THROUGHOUT THE PARADISE VALLEY:

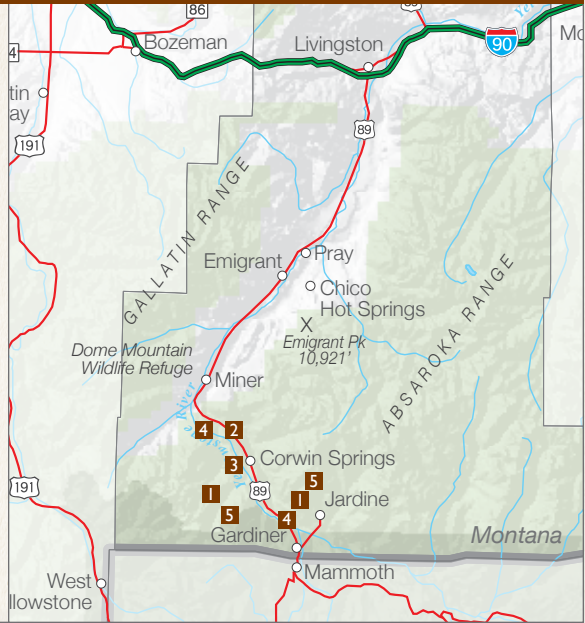
- Several wolf packs use Paradise Valley and adjacent mountains to include some packs that move back and forth between Yellowstone National Park and Montana.
- Moose also occur in small numbers in appropriate habitats in many drainages.



GARDINER BASIN

The Gardiner Basin includes the area north and south along Yankee Jim Canyon, the community of Gardiner and Jardine, and the area adjacent to Yellowstone River and the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

Total area is approximately 265 square miles, ranging from 4,900 feet to 10,969 feet (Electric Peak) in elevation, and includes approximately 1,200 residents.



- 1** This area contains critical/high density winter range habitat for a variety of wildlife providing outstanding and unique opportunities to view large numbers of elk, bison, mule deer, antelope and bighorn sheep.
- 2** Due to large numbers of wildlife along US Hwy 89 drivers are urged to use caution to avoid wildlife collisions, especially through Yankee Jim Canyon where Bighorn Sheep are often close to the road.
- 3** Bighorn sheep can often be observed during the fall breeding season (November-December) from the road at the base of Cinnabar Mountain, across the river from Corwin Springs.
- 4** Gardiner Basin contains healthy Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations in the river and important spawning habitat in several tributaries including Mol Herin Creek.

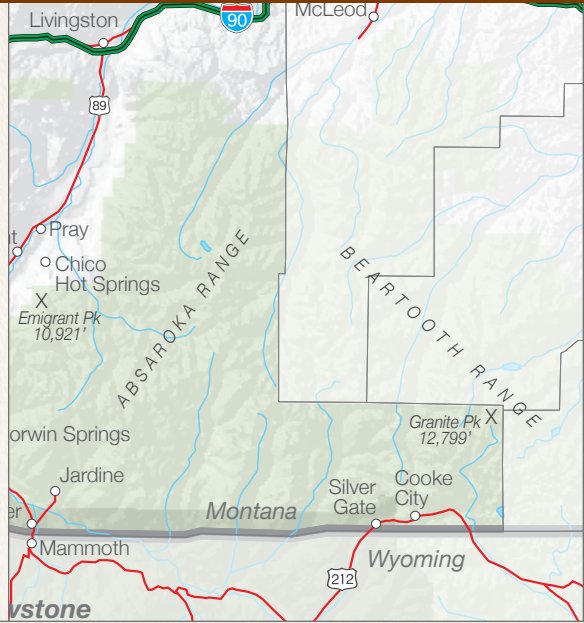
- 5** Gardiner Basin supports a healthy grizzly bear population. Grizzlies have been observed in all areas of Gardiner Basin, with most frequent sightings in Beattie Gulch, Sphinx Creek and Eagle Creek.



COOKE CITY/SILVER GATE

The Cooke City/Silver Gate area includes the communities of Silver Gate and Cooke City and the northeast portion of Yellowstone National Park, running east towards Sunlight Basin and the Beartooth Pass.

Total area is approximately 170 square miles, ranging from 7,300 feet to 11,163 feet (Mount Rosebud) in elevation, and includes approximately 100 residents.



- This area contains important summer and winter range for a significant moose population and is perhaps the best place to observe moose in Park County.
- Cooke City and Silver Gate are small high elevation mountain communities surrounded by designated wilderness areas that support good numbers of bighorn sheep and mountain goats.
- The high elevation forested habitat provides summer habitat for small populations of elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer. Antelope do not occur in this area.
- This area is also well known for grizzly and black bear activity. The narrow valley corridor of Soda Butte Creek places people and bears in close proximity and in potential encounter situations.
- The high elevation forests in this area support several species of furbearers including pine marten, bobcat, wolverines, red fox and weasels.





Wildlife need places to live. If we are to guarantee that present and future generations continue to enjoy the benefits of diverse wildlife resources we need to provide and protect healthy habitats for them to use on private and public lands. It is important for everyone to consider wildlife and wildlife habitat in land planning activities and in our everyday lives.

We need to find a balance between human activities and wildlife.

To accomplish that balance we all need to better understand our wildlife resources and what wildlife need to thrive in Park County. The best outcomes will be achieved when people get actively involved in public discussions and decisions and take measures to ensure wildlife and people can continue to co-exist. Montana has often been called the “Last Best Place” and our diverse wildlife heritage is a big part of that accolade.

This brochure was produced in part by:
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