



The Position of the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited on Floating in Yellowstone National Park

Montana Council of Trout Unlimited

5 April 2015

At the 7 March 2015 meeting of the State Council of Montana TU, council members discussed Wyoming Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis' legislation directing the National Park Service to study opening up moving waters in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks to watercraft. After significant discussion, the council moved and unanimously voted to oppose the use of all watercraft in Yellowstone National Park's rivers and streams.

In mid-March we notified TU national and the Idaho and Wyoming Councils of this position. The chairman of the Idaho Council responded by saying their group would support the Montana Council. TU national's senior scientist responded saying he thought this was a good position, and expressed concern over the risk boaters posed by introducing new aquatic invasive species into the park. In 2014, Montana's Snowy Mountain Chapter submitted formal comments to the Montana congressional delegation opposing previous legislation from Rep. Loomis regarding floating in Yellowstone National Park. *The Montana Council did not take a position on Rep. Lummis' legislation*, but it can be inferred if the council doesn't support floating it wouldn't support – and could oppose – Rep. Lummis' bill (which also addressed Teton National Park).

The reasons the Montana Council decided it is important to oppose watercraft on Yellowstone National Park's rivers and streams include several criteria directly related to TU's mission, including:

1. Allowing floating on rivers and streams in the park will add a significant management burden on the park in an era of declining budgets and staffing. Additional costs could result from permitting, inspections, monitoring, enforcement and search and rescue activities. The result will likely be that fewer resources will be available for TU priorities (and other important resource considerations) in the park, including maintaining high-quality fishery management and implementing the parks' native fish restoration plan. This could reduce the effectiveness of TU's current investments with the park in native fish restoration.
2. Additional watercraft in the park (boats are currently allowed on a number of lakes) will significantly increase the risk of introductions of aquatic invasive

species. Currently, Park Service inspection programs for AIS are not funded adequately. Further, AIS prevention and detection programs in the surrounding states do not adequately address all potential risks. For instance, most highway AIS inspection sites – which are not infallible regarding large craft – do not inspect pack rafts, float tubes, deflated rafts, kayaks and other small craft. Because people visit Yellowstone National Park from across the nation, and because many visitors are from states with serious infestations of harmful invasive species, including zebra mussels, quagga mussels or Eurasian water milfoil, the risk of an introduction of AIS in the park from small vessels is high.

3. The potential for increased conflict with fish and wildlife in the park, including in spawning areas, areas where grizzly bears forage, nesting areas for waterfowl or riparian-dependent birds, etc.

Other considerations include:

1. A desire to ensure that somewhere in the West there is a representative slice of streams and rivers that are technically floatable, but are free of water craft, thereby allowing non-floating recreationists to enjoy streamside experiences that don't include floaters moving through fishing areas, picnic sites, swimming holes or areas of quiet repose.
2. Rivers and streams surrounding the park already abound with a broad spectrum of floating opportunities for anglers, tubers, casual floaters and whitewater enthusiasts.
3. Concern that river conflicts created by overcrowding and inappropriate behavior that are growing in the region, including just outside the park along waters such as the upper Yellowstone (see Carter's Bridge on a hot summer day), could emerge on streams in the park. River conflicts as a resource concern has been growing in Montana in recent years, prompting state officials to create special rules for commercial users on the Beaverhead and Big Hole Rivers, and, to develop plans that have yet to be universally accepted or even effective on rivers such as the Madison and Blackfoot Rivers.

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