

Where's a Yellowstone bear? Look on your phone

April 18 2012, By MEAD GRUVER , Associated Press



This June 2011 file photo shows Grizzly bear No. 399 crossing a road in Grand Teton National Park, Wyo., with her three cubs. People now can use their phones to find out where somebody has just seen a bison, wolf or grizzly bear in Yellowstone National Park. The new apps take wildlife viewing to a new level but not without raising concerns for the well-being of wildlife, park rangers and the tourists themselves. (AP photo/Tom Mangelsen, File)

(AP) -- Pretty soon, the best place to be on the lookout for wolves, grizzly bears, bison and other wildlife in Yellowstone National Park could be your phone.

Just don't be surprised if lots of other people get the same idea and most of the creatures you see are the two-legged variety.

New smartphone apps enable people to pinpoint where they've recently

seen critters in Yellowstone. People who drive to those locations can - at least in theory - improve their odds of seeing [wildlife](#) compared to the typical tourist's dumb luck.

One app called Where's a Bear promises "up to the second" animal sightings in Yellowstone. Recently a website called Yellowstone Wildlife began offering a similar app.

Websites long have kept track of animal sightings in Yellowstone. Already this spring the Yellowstone Wildlife site shows signs of life: [Mule deer](#) near park headquarters at Mammoth, bison in the area of a landmark petrified tree.

A message on the site warns of grizzlies feeding on a bison carcass near the Yellowstone River Trail. The statement relayed from the National Park Service could save a life. Grizzly attacks killed two tourists in Yellowstone last summer.

But not everybody thinks that making a lot of wildlife sighting information readily retrievable by phone is a hot idea. As it is, the crowds that stop to gawk at roadside wildlife in Yellowstone can grow to hundreds of people, pointed out Vicky Kraft, of Pine Mountain, Calif., who maintains a Facebook group for Yellowstone.

Grizzlies are especially challenging for park rangers who have to both direct traffic and keep people a safe distance away.

"It's crazy. There's no parking. People sideswipe each other because they're looking at the bear," Kraft said Monday.

Wildlife becoming too comfortable around people is another concern. A grizzly habituated to people is even more dangerous than your average bear.

"I think there's a responsibility that a person should have if they really like Yellowstone to say, 'Gee, is this going to be bad for the animals? Is it bad for the ranger? Is it bad for the park?' And I think when you look at a situation with that app, the answer would have to be yes," Kraft said.

Attempts to reach the app developers through their websites Monday and Tuesday were unsuccessful.

Yellowstone officials said the apps could become a problem depending on their popularity.

"If it did take off it would be a concern. It's got other applications but at its worst core it would send more people to wildlife jams," Yellowstone spokesman Dan Hottle said.

One technical problem with the apps is the vast majority of Yellowstone doesn't have cellphone coverage. Also, it's not like anybody is going to persuade a moose, elk, or bald eagle to wait around for the next tourist to show up.

On the other hand, a pack of wolves seen killing a bison might stick around for days while they fed on the meat, suggested Tom Mangelsen, a wildlife photographer who lives in Jackson Hole, just south of Yellowstone.

"I imagine it would be helpful, certainly for tourists or people who aren't familiar with Yellowstone, and I suppose for people like me, too," Mangelsen said.

Mangelsen counts himself among the many photographers and tourists who have been watching a popular grizzly in Grand Teton over the past few years. The grizzly recently emerged from hibernation with her three cubs - big news in Jackson Hole.

Mangelsen said he didn't rush off to share the news online.

"I haven't been on one of those websites more than three times in my life to see what's going on in Yellowstone," he said. "But I know people live by it."

More information: Where's a Bear app: <http://bit.ly/IvVLlz>

Yellowstone Wildlife site: <http://bit.ly/HGfwXo>

©2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Where's a Yellowstone bear? Look on your phone (2012, April 18) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-04-yellowstone.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--