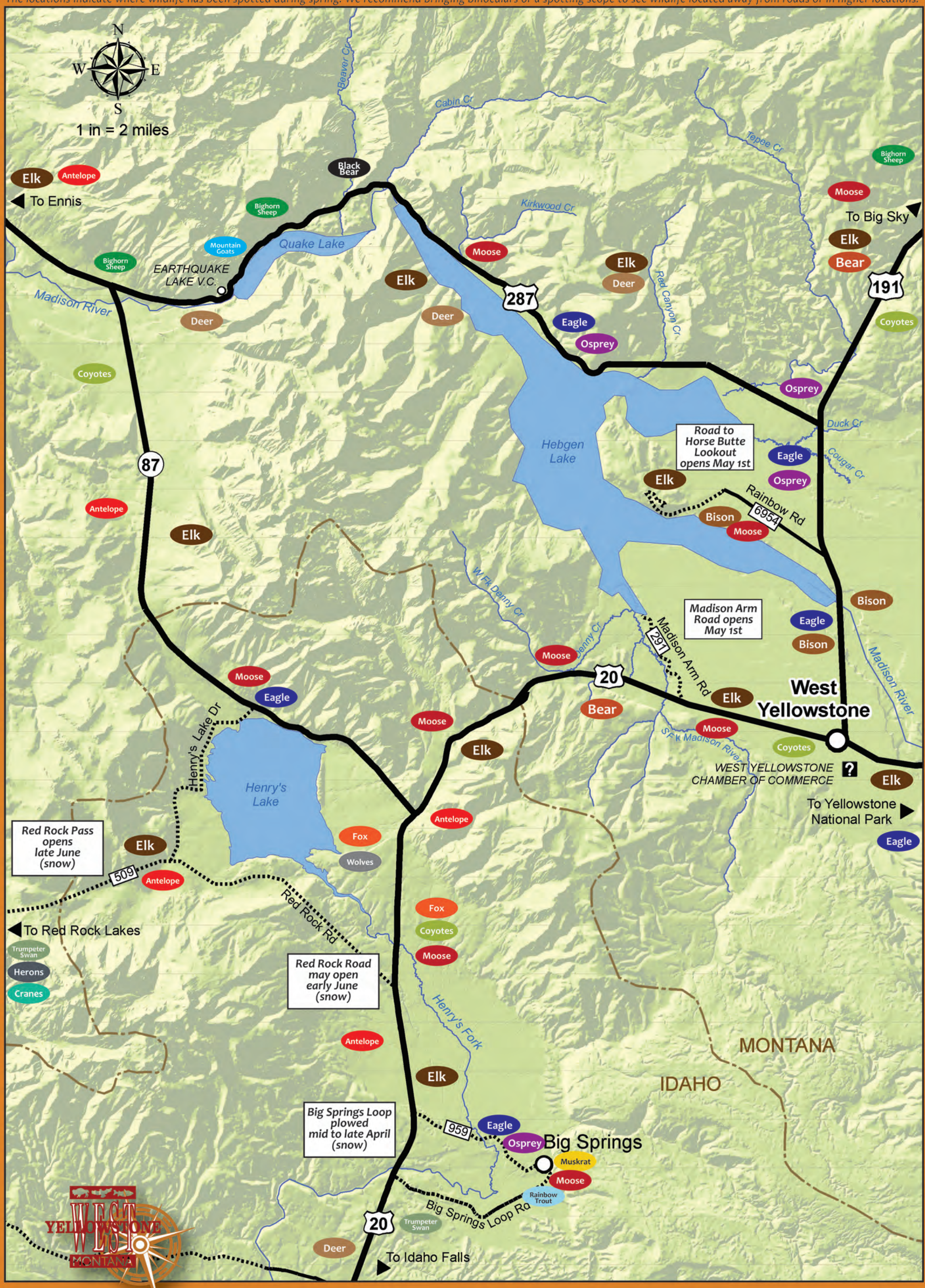
West of Yellowstone Park

SCENIC AND WILDLIFE ROUTES - SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER (APRIL TO MID JUNE)

The locations indicate where wildlife has been spotted during spring. We recommend bringing binoculars or a spotting scope to see wildlife located away from roads or in higher locations.



www.DestinationYellowstone.com

Note: Spring weather is unpredictable and can affect road access. See the back for important contact information.

Suggested Spring Routes

Welcome to West Yellowstone! We invite you to relax and enjoy this special time of renewal. Forests spring to life with the first green meadows, flowing rivers, and abundant wildlife sightings.Plus, less travel, fewer people, and off-season rooms rates are a perfect value for families and groups. The Grizzly Wolf & Discovery Center is open every day, and the Yellowstone IMAX Theatre from Wednesday-Sunday (1:30 PM).

"Around the Block" West Yellowstone Spring Wildlife Tour (64 miles round trip)

This 64-mile round trip, called 'the block' among local residents, travels through two states, over two mountain passes and winds around three lakes. Depart from West Yellowstone on Highway 191 heading north towards Bozeman, Montana. Watch for wildlife on or near the roadways. During the spring, large groups of bison (buffalo) leave Yellowstone for nursery areas in this area. You may even see a brand-new bison calf, reddish color walking alongside its mother. Watch for moose, osprey, eagles, coyotes, and foxes near the Madison River and Cougar Creek areas. Approximately 9 miles north of West Yellowstone, watch for junction with Highway 287. Turn left (west) on Hwy 287 towards Ennis and Virginia City, Montana, which runs along Hebgen and Quake Lakes. Watch for moose and elk along the pines and aspen trees on the hillsides (mile markers 18 – 10). You will see signs for "Building Destruction" with parking lot and trail access. These buildings were destroyed in 1959 by one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded on the North American continent. These are also great birding areas.

After passing the Hebgen Lake Dam, you will top a small rise called Refuge Point. Stop and read the fascinating story about the paratroopers who came to the rescue of stranded campers after the earthquake.

As you continue along Hwy 287, you will drive along Quake Lake (mile markers 6-3). Watch for bighorns along the road and on the sunny slopes that are free of snow. Around mile marker 5, check the dead trees in Quake Lake for a large group of migratory cormorant ducks. As you approach the Quake Lake Visitor Center, look on the cliffs behind it for mountain goats. The Earthquake Visitor Center does not open until Memorial Day Weekend, but you can park and hike to the large "Memorial Boulder" on the hillside. As you drive down the mountain, watch carefully for more bighorn sheep by the sides of the road and up on the ridges. There may also be deer along the river.

Proceed another 2 miles until the junction with Idaho Highway 87. Turn left (south) and drive for nine miles to Raynold's Pass. This pass straddles the Continental Divide. Jim Bridger guided a group of scientists over it in June 1860. This is a great area for moose, elk, deer, antelope, coyotes, foxes, and wolves. At the junction with Hwy 20, turn north to West Yellowstone about 12 miles away. Look for moose among the willows and aspen trees. Stop at the pull-out for Howard's Springs (mile marker 402) for a quick break. As the Hwy 20 returns to West Yellowstone, watch for black and grizzly bears (near trees and trails), moose, and elk.

West Yellowstone to Ennis Spring Wildlife Tour (145 miles round trip)

Follow the same directions for the "around the block" tour paralleling Hebgen and Quake Lakes. Once past the Earthquake Visitor Center, continue on Hwy 287 past the junction with Idaho Hwy 87. You will see a sign for Ennis, another 41 miles to the northwest. After leaving the canyon area, you will climb to some vast grazing lands, large Montana ranches, majestically ringed by snow-capped mountains. This is the winter location for three large herds of elk. At times, you can see thousands at once. This is also one of the best locations for spotting antelope and deer as well.

West Yellowstone to Big Sky

(90-120 miles round trip)

Leave West Yellowstone and head north on Hwy 191. Continue past the junction with Hwy 287, over a large hill, and down around a steep curve and bridge over Grayling Creek. Continuing north, this stretch of road runs through twenty miles of the extreme northwestern section of Yellowstone Park (55 mph speed limit). This is truly a scenic corridor as the road parallels Grayling Creek and then the Gallatin River. Bordered to the west, by the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area, the Gallatin National Forest and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests, this area is also known for its wildlife. You can spot bald eagles, black and grizzly bears; deer, elk and moose; otters, foxes, and coyotes, at different times through the year. The predators follow the Gallatin elk herd which migrates from Specimen Creek inside Yellowstone Park to areas near Big Sky. After leaving Yellowstone Park, watch for moose, deer, and elk in the springs area to your west; then moose along the river for the next ten miles. Elk and deer frequently travel across the highway, especially in early mornings and late afternoons, to reach the river. As you approach the 320 Ranch area, begin watching the ridges for bear and mountain lion, often spotted each spring. When nearing the Big Sky turnoff, watch for more bighorn sheep, especially on sunnier slopes. Turn on Big Spur Road/Montana Hwy 64 to travel up into the Big Sky area.

West Yellowstone to Red Rocks Wildlife Refuge (90-120 miles round trip)

(This route may not be fully accessible until late May-early Jun depending on snow and weather conditions. The Lower Lake Road is open May 15 through December 1.)

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located in the scenic and isolated Centennial Valley of southwestern Montana, approximately 50 miles west of Yellowstone National Park. The refuge has a vast array of habitats, ranging from high elevation prairie at 6,600 feet, to the harsh alpine habitat of the Centennial Mountains at 10,000 feet above sea level. Take Hwy 20 south from West Yellowstone, Montana to Island Park, Idaho. Turn right (west) at the Hwy 87 Junction (13.1 miles) and drive another 5.1 miles to Henry's Lake Drive, taking a left and driving towards Henry's Lake. These roads are gravel and not paved. After another 5 miles, Henry's Lake Drive becomes Red Rock Pass Road and you will enter back into Montana (11.6 miles). Red Rock Pass Road becomes MT-509 after another 9.4 miles, you will drive through Lakeview, Montana and then another two miles to Lower Lake Road which drives into the Refuge. (Alternative route: Follow Highway 20 past Henry's Lake to the Red Rock Road (509). Turn right and continue to Red Rocks Wildlife Refuge.)

West Yellowstone to Big Springs, Island Park, Idaho (50 miles round trip)

(This route may not be fully accessible until late May-early Jun depending on snow and weather conditions.)

Leave West Yellowstone on Hwy 20 heading south to Island Park, Idaho. (See wildlife spotting tips in the "Around the Block Tour" above.) After 12 miles, you leave Montana for Island Park, Idaho which has the longest "main street" of any town in the U.S., over 30 miles! Along the way, be sure to watch for antelope and elk grazing in the fields, eagles and hawks sitting on fence posts, and ospreys on specially constructed nests. Watch for moose and elk near marshy areas and small ponds along the highway. Seven miles later in the Mack's Inn Area, you will want to turn left (east) on Big Springs Road (Forest Rd. 59). Drive east for another five miles and you will be at Big Springs. Big Springs is both a spring and the birthplace of the South Fork of the Henry's Fork River. A short distance from the glassy pool is a bridge where you can feed the huge trout, mallard ducks, and white-tailed deer. Watch for osprey, bald eagles, waterfowl and the occasional moose, white-tailed deer, and muskrat.

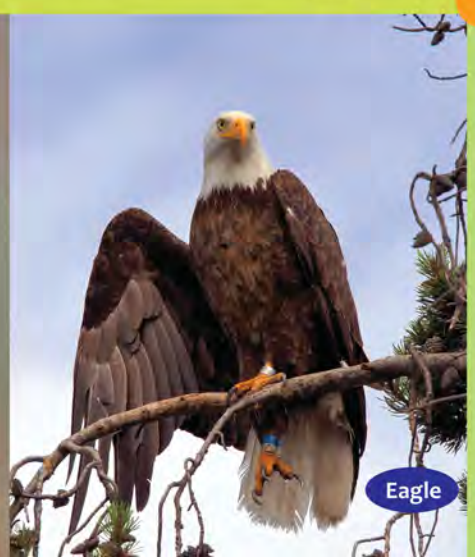
Kids wildlife spotting game

Can you spot it?

Bison

Bear

Bison


Eagle

How many of these animals and birds can you spot? Use your "West of Yellowstone Park" map to find the places where you might see one!

Bison/Buffalo	☐	Antelope	☐
Bald Eagle	☐	Bluebird	☐
Grizzly Bear	☐	Coyote	☐
Raven	☐	River Otter	☐
Elk	☐	Deer	☐
Bighorn Sheep	☐	Black Bear	☐
Moose	☐	Fox	☐
Osprey	☐	Bobcat	☐
Mountain Goat	☐	Wolf	☐

Spring Travel Tips

Spring weather is very unpredictable and can change quickly. Visitors are advised to be prepared for a range of conditions. We recommend checking on road and weather conditions through the numbers below before departing.

Opening Dates for Roads and Activities

Yellowstone National Park roads open WEATHER PERMITTING to motorized, wheeled vehicles on a staggered schedule each spring:

April 15, 2011—Weather permitting, west-side roads open including the North & West Entrances to Norris, Madison, Canyon, & Old Faithful.

May 6, 2011—The road linking Canyon, Fishing Bridge, & the East Entrance.

May 13, 2011—The South Entrance to Grant, West Thumb, Fishing Bridge, & Lake over Craig Pass to Old Faithful, and Tower Junction to Tower Fall. The road from Cooke City over Colter Pass to the Chief Joseph Scenic Highway intersection to the Long Lake gate opens as possible.

May 27, 2011—Dunraven Pass (Tower to Canyon); Long Lake Gate over the Beartooth Highway to Red Lodge, Montana.

National Forest roads generally open mid-to-late May depending on weather conditions. For specific road openings check with the Hebgen Lake Ranger District Headquarters of the Gallatin National Forest located in West Yellowstone.

The General **Fishing Season** opens in Montana Saturday, May 21st, 2011. There are areas in the Central District (areas outside of West Yellowstone) along the Gallatin and Madison Rivers that are open year –round. The Montana 2011 Fishing Regulations contains specific details.

The season opens in **Yellowstone National Park** on Saturday, May 28th, 2011 for most areas. Check at the Visitor Information Center for exceptions.

More Information

West Yellowstone Visitor Center: 406-646-7701
Hebgen Lake Ranger District Headquarters: 406-823-6961
Yellowstone Park Road Conditions: 307-344-2117
Montana Road Conditions: 511 (in Montana) or 1-800-226-7623
Wyoming Road Conditions: 888-996-7623
Idaho Road Conditions: 888-432-7623

National Weather Service forecast for Yellowstone: National Weather Service forecast for Yellowstone and Grand Teton: www.crh.noaa.gov/riw/?n=ynp_gtnp

West Yellowstone Montana

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