

## National Geographic project puts focus on greater Yellowstone area



A spot of morning light hits the flanks of the Grand Teton as clouds swirl around its 13,770-foot summit near Jackson recently. Key features of the greater Yellowstone area such as the Tetons will be featured in a National Geographic 'Geotourism MapGuide' of the region. Photo by MARK GOCKE, Star-Tribune.

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CODY -- People living in and near the greater Yellowstone ecosystem: Here's your chance to raise your voice about 'what makes this place so special.'

A new project launched Tuesday in Cody and captained by National Geographic aims to identify those places, events, people and businesses of cultural, historical and natural significance to be highlighted on a "Geotourism MapGuide" of the greater Yellowstone region.

The goal of the project is to sustain and enhance the character of the area for both locals and visitors through community involvement and awareness.

'This project will only be as successful as how much participation we get,' said Diane Shober, director of tourism for Wyoming Travel and Tourism. 'It's the word of mouth that always helps to further a project.'

Wyoming Travel and Tourism, along with the Idaho Division of Tourism Development and Travel Montana, are partners in this project and have contributed funding for production of the 300,000 initial maps that should be available for free next spring.

Wyoming is paying half of production costs, about \$65,000, while Idaho and Montana split the remaining 50 percent because a majority of the ecosystem lies within Wyoming's boundaries

'I'm really very excited to see what this project means for Wyoming and our partners,' Shober said.

'The greater Yellowstone area is truly one of our most unique attributes we have,' she continued. 'We are taking a vast area and refining it. That only happens through the storytelling of each and every one of you.'

Residents and visitors alike are invited to nominate landmarks, attractions, activities, events and local businesses that define the region's unique character and distinctive appeal. Nominations will be accepted through the end of June and can be placed online at [www.yellowstonegeotourism.net](http://www.yellowstonegeotourism.net).

'People who live here are the experts who know the region -- the geological, cultural and historical character of the area,' said Brian Sybert, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition's Wyoming representative and coordinator of the MapGuide project.

'What makes this area unique and distinct, and what gives it its sense of place?' he added. 'What is so special about it?'

At Tuesday's launch event, many locals were already musing about areas they would like to nominate. David Dominick, longtime landowner and resident of the Big Horn Basin, shared several of his ideas, including his family's 7D Ranch in Sunlight Basin which marks its 50th anniversary as a dude ranch this year.

'I'm terribly excited (about this project),' Dominick said. 'I'm going to dig right in and come up with some sites.'

Some other sites he plans to nominate include petroglyph and pictograph areas, archeological sites such as Mummy Cave on the North Fork of the Shoshone River, geological phenomena including Devil's Canyon at Yellowtail Reservoir, important bird areas throughout the region, and authentic working ranches that convey the Western heritage.

Following the nomination period, a regional advisory committee -- the Greater Yellowstone Stewardship Council, composed of arts, conservation, business, government, historic, preservation and tribal interests -- will oversee what ends up on the final MapGuide. This permanent council will determine themes for the MapGuide and continue to be instrumental in how all the information received can be put to best use in sustaining the character of the region.

The greater Yellowstone ecosystem encompasses Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks and the surrounding public lands and communities. Additional community forums are scheduled throughout the region to further engage residents and visitors in the project.