
Department of Energy

Yellowstone Agencies Plan to Reduce Emissions

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Castle Geyser at Yellowstone National Park | File photo

The 10 federal land organizations – including two national parks, six national forests and two national wildlife refuges – in the Greater Yellowstone Area comprise an entire ecosystem of their own. Straddling Wyoming’s borders with Montana and Idaho, the region draws millions of visitors a year, attracted by the dramatic landscapes, geothermal activity and chances to spot wildlife like bison, elk and grizzly bear.

Thanks to funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's Federal Energy Management Program, the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee will make that ecosystem the subject of a major emissions reduction project, which will pave the way for other federal land organizations to reduce their own emissions.

Through the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Colorado, FEMP has provided \$250,000 in technical assistance to the GYCC, helping it reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the GYA. With this money, NREL has already started evaluating where the 10 sites can reduce their emissions. This will help the GYCC meet its goal of reducing emissions by a minimum of 20 percent by 2020 (with higher savings expected). The laboratory's staff is also planning a training session for later this spring, where they will teach federal employees in the GYA how to identify opportunities for greenhouse gas reduction. The employees will also create plans to reduce emissions in their own lands and in the entire ecosystem.

Alicen Kandt, project lead for the Yellowstone-area project at NREL, said it's too soon to accurately say where the emissions reductions will come from. "[It's a] combination of everything – efficiency, renewables, behavior changes like driving less," she says. The area's abundant natural resources allow the team to consider several types of renewable energy sources, including solar, wind power and biomass.

This is the first effort Alicen's aware of where federal parks, forests and wildlife refuges have worked across agency boundaries to make and execute emissions reduction plans. That's part of why her team will document everything it learns – so other agencies can use the experience as a blueprint for their own emissions reductions. It may also be unique that the effort focuses on an entire ecosystem because most previous U.S. emissions reduction projects have focused on municipalities, agencies or businesses.

"The agencies were looking for an appropriate boundary," Alicen says. "Using city or agency boundaries are a bit awkward because the effects of greenhouse gas emissions are likely going to be felt beyond those bounds, and probably at an ecosystem level."

The region includes Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and the National Elk Refuge, as well as the Custer, Shoshone, Gallatin, Bridger-Teton, Caribou-Targhee and Beaverhead National Forests.

What does this mean for me?

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