



The Clarks River Corridor; a land use base study
by Barbara Louise Garrett

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE in Earth Sciences (Geography)
Montana State University
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Abstract:

The Clarks Fork Corridor will potentially experience change in the future as the result of Yellowstone National Park policy and development of Wyoming State 292. To determine the use of this region at the present time the data for the United States national forests in the region was compiled. Information regarding the use of the private lands was derived by personal interviews and surveys. Forty per cent of the second home owners were personally interviewed between July 16, 1973 and July 7, 1973, and eighty-five per cent of the business operators were surveyed during this same time period. Travel patterns and use of the present road system was investigated by means of a highway survey. Road check stations were established for three days on both US 212 and the Crandall Road, and all traffic was stopped. The data acquired indicates that timber is being reservoired, mineral deposits explored (though not actively mined), and grazing and recreation use of the land is on the increase. Sixty-nine per cent of the second home owners have acquired their sites since 1963, and land values have increased in response to this demand. The Crandall Road is used as an access into the Corridor, and US 212 is basically a tourist route for Yellowstone National Park. The eighteen square miles of private property will come under increasing use pressure as change occurs.

A land use base study is the necessary basis for all land planning. This thesis provides this basis for the Clarks "Fork Corridor, an area which is currently on the threshold of change and in need of land planning.

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ABSTRACT

The Clarks Fork Corridor will potentially experience change in the future as the result of Yellowstone National Park policy and development of Wyoming State 292. To determine the use of this region at the present time the data for the United States national forests in the region was compiled. Information regarding the use of the private lands was derived by personal interviews and surveys. Forty per cent of the second home owners were personally interviewed between July 16, 1973 and July 7, 1973, and eighty-five per cent of the business operators were surveyed during this same time period. Travel patterns and use of the present road system was investigated by means of a highway survey. Road check stations were established for three days on both US 212 and the Crandall Road, and all traffic was stopped. The data acquired indicates that timber is being reservoired, mineral deposits explored (though not actively mined), and grazing and recreation use of the land is on the increase. Sixty-nine per cent of the second home owners have acquired their sites since 1963, and land values have increased in response to this demand. The Crandall Road is used as an access into the Corridor, and US 212 is basically a tourist route for Yellowstone National Park. The eighteen square miles of private property will come under increasing use pressure as change occurs. A land use base study is the necessary basis for all land planning. This thesis provides this basis for the Clarks Fork Corridor, an area which is currently on the threshold of change and in need of land planning.

INTRODUCTION

The Clarks Fork Corridor is a unique land area of spectacular beauty and great diversity. Yucca and sagebrush cover lowlands in the east, while tiny wildflowers edge snowfields in the tundra of the Beartooth Plateau. Jutting glaciated volcanic peaks form the horizon around timberskirted mountain meadows in the valleys. Water bodies are a dominant land feature, in the form of a multitude of streams and lakes. Wild lands contrasts with the tourist town of Cooke City.

The Corridor, straddling the valley between the Absaroka Mountains to the south and Beartooth Uplift to the north, extends eastward from the northeast entrance of Yellowstone National Park. This land area includes the national forest land of the Cooke Subunit, Gardiner District, Gallatin National Forest and Clarks Fork District, Shoshone National Forest, and integrated private property. (Figure 1, page 2)

The Beartooth Highway (US 212) from Red Lodge to Cooke City traverses the Corridor, and provides a scenic approach to Yellowstone National Park. The road is closed to through traffic from about October 15 to May 30 due to snow in the high areas. The Crandall Road, an unimproved

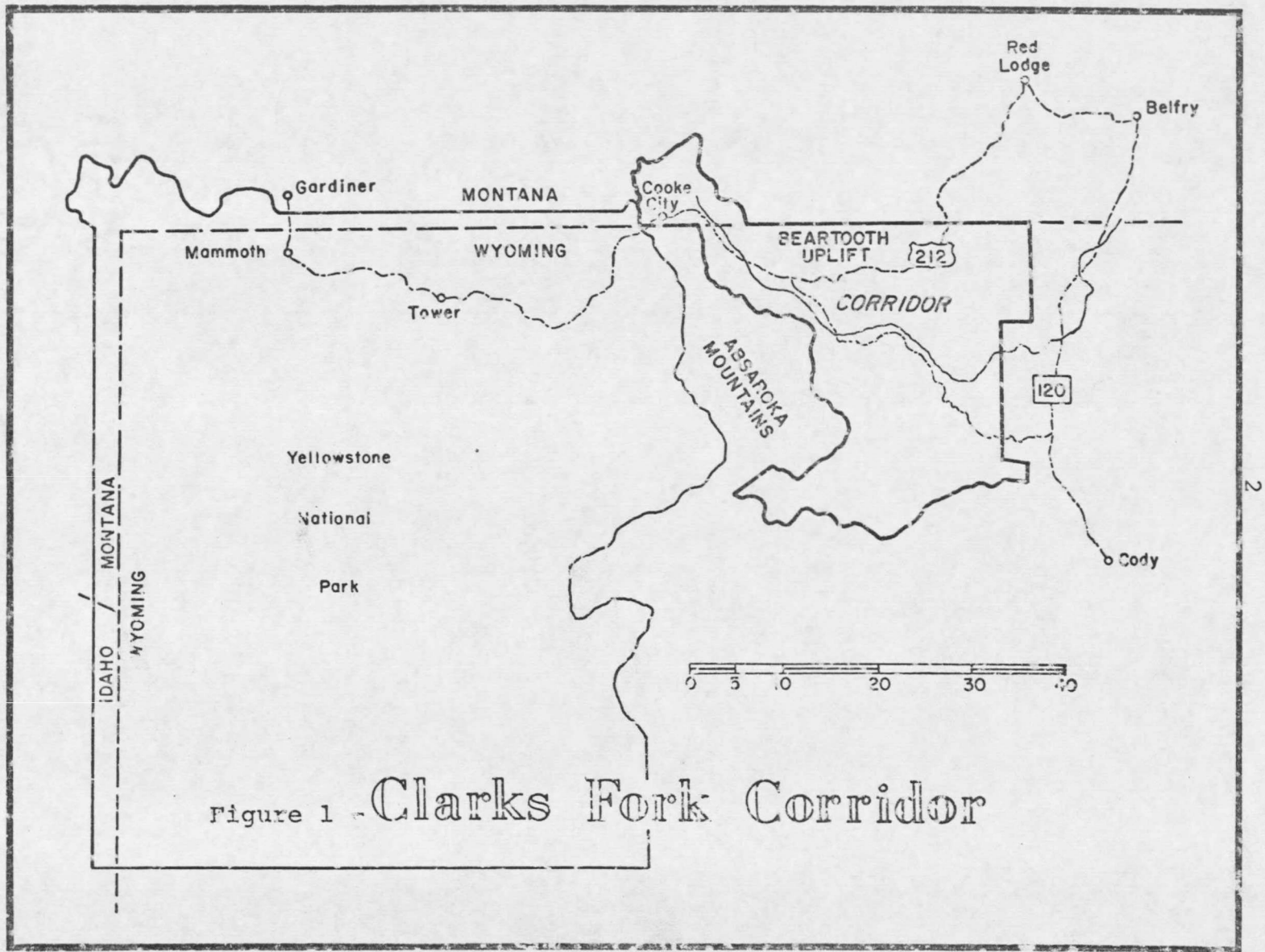


Figure 1 - Clarks Fork Corridor

dirt road, connects US 212 to Wyoming 120 providing access from Yellowstone National Park To Cody, Wyoming. This road does not provide through travel in the winter due to the closure of US 212 at Cooke Pass.

The Cooke City area, adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, provides goods and services for visitors. Most of the traffic through Cooke City is generated by its adjacency to Yellowstone National Park, and the existence of the businesses in this area hinge upon this factor.

The Problem

Most of the land of the Corridor is federally owned. The United States Forest Service compiles data on a continuing basis, of the natural resources and USFS facilities in this area. The National Forest land, however, is divided into the Gallatin and Shoshone National Forests, and is not administered as one unit. No study has been made of the Corridor as an integrated unit by the United States Forest Service; nor has any study considered the private land use. The dominant use of the area is recreational. Private lands, as well as the National Forests, are used for recreation purposes. This land use base study

will analyze the Clarks Fork Corridor as an integrated unit, including private as well as public land.

Justification

Increasing population, leisure time and mobility have increased the pressure on recreation land. Use of recreation land areas can be expected to increase. The Yellowstone Master Plan proposal and construction by the State of Wyoming of the Clarks Fork Road will encourage increased use of the Corridor and alter existing use patterns.

The Yellowstone Master Plan is a document which is intended to provide some comprehensive, conceptual direction in the ongoing process of planning for the Park. While the Park has no direct control over the adjacent gateway areas, its policies indirectly affect these areas.¹ The trend in the Park is to urge further development of overnight

¹Informal interview with Ted Bucknall, Resource Management Specialist, Yellowstone National Park, May 8, 1973.

facilities in the gateway areas rather than in the Park itself. Specifically, the Yellowstone Master Plan states:

Every encouragement and assistance should be given to the development of visitor overnight accommodations outside and within an hour's driving distance of the Park. Means should be explored whereby the portal cities might receive planning and development assistance.²

Existing use intensity and patterns will alter with the completion of the Clarks Fork Road (Wyoming 292), which will closely follow and/or improve the present unimproved Crandall Road. The purpose of this road is to provide year around access from the Big Horn Basin into Yellowstone National Park. This would provide through access in the northeast section of the Park as well as year around road facilities in the Corridor. The Yellowstone Master Plan states:

Construction by the State of Wyoming of the Clarks Fork Road from Cody to Cooke City will cause a shift in visitor-use patterns. As this occurs, studies should be initiated to determine levels of visitors facilities, both for winter and summer operations in the northeast section of the Park.³

²United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Yellowstone: Master Plan. (Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming: National Park Service, 1971), p. 29.

³Ibid, p. 32.

The area served by the Crandall Road presently serves as a local recreation area. Development of the Clarks Fork Road will result in a sharp increase of tourist through traffic and alter use patterns.

The Clarks Fork Corridor is poised on the threshold of change, and understanding the use of this area now will aid in improved policymaking and provide a basis from which change can be measured in the future.

