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Yellowstone Boundary Gold Mine: Protecting Yellowstone and creating public land

Application Date	6/3/2024		
Applying Organization	Greater Yellowstone Coalition	Grant Type	Member Directed
Requested Amount	\$50,000.00	Project Name	Yellowstone Boundary Gold Mine: Protecting Yellowstone and creating public land
Contact Name	Tiffany Sandholm	Project Location (State or Territory)	MT
Contact Title	Foundation and Grants Manager	Project State/Province	MT
Contact Email Address	grants@greateryellowstone.org	Project Multiple Locations	
Notes		Status	Submitted
		Created By	Tiffany Sandholm, 5/31/2024, 4:17 PM

Organization Details

Organization Name	Greater Yellowstone Coalition	Annual Operating Budget	\$5,609,303.00
Applying Contact	Tiffany Sandholm	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	32	Main Phone	406-586-1593
Total Membership		Website Address	https://greateryellowstone.org
BIPOC-led	No	Address	215 S. Wallace Ave. Bozeman, Montana 59715 United States
C-Suite Staff			

Proposal Questions

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| <p>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</p> <p>Our mission is to work with all people to protect the lands, waters, and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), now and for future generations. We envision a GYE where wild nature flourishes, plant, animal, and human communities thrive in reciprocity, and all people work together to conserve this globally significant ecosystem. For over 40 years, Greater Yellowstone Coalition has pioneered creative solutions to large</p> | <p>2. Final Success</p> <p>Protecting 1,598 acres of vital wildlife habitat, crucial migration corridors, and unique year-round recreational access from gold mining, new roads, and real estate development by transferring key private in-holdings on the border of Yellowstone National Park into public ownership.</p> |
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landscape conservation and ecosystem stewardship. In that time, we have grown to 32 staff located in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. Our conservation priorities are driven by science, social, political, and ecological realities. We work to protect critical lands for wildlife and habitat connectivity, make the GYE a global model for resilience to the impacts of climate change, protect the region's rivers and native fish, reduce wildlife conflicts, promote social tolerance for wildlife, and support the rights and conservation priorities of Indigenous people.

3. Location Details

Along the remote northern edge of Yellowstone National Park (YNP), Crevice Mountain rises some 3,000 feet above the Yellowstone River. Cloaked in conifer forests and rich with wildlife, Crevice and the surrounding landscape exemplify much of what is extraordinary about the GYE. Unfortunately, Crevice was also home to a significant gold mining threat.

For over a decade, Crevice Mining Group, LLC, invested heavily in developing a gold mine on Crevice, immediately adjacent to one of the world's most iconic protected landscapes. Located on the border of our nation's first national park and just upslope from the pristine Yellowstone River, the mine site would have overlooked nearly half the park. Because of its location, a mine on Crevice posed a direct and outsized threat to the lands, waters, and wildlife of YNP.

Crevice provides vital habitat for protected grizzly bears, serves as a critical wildlife corridor for elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep, and is one of the few places outside the park where Yellowstone bison can safely roam. This connectivity is crucial for maintaining genetic diversity and enabling species to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Protecting Crevice ensures the continuity of large, contiguous habitats, which is vital for the survival of wide-ranging species and those sensitive to habitat fragmentation.

The biodiversity of Crevice is notable, with its various habitats ranging from alpine meadows to coniferous forests. The forested areas of Crevice play a significant role in carbon sequestration, helping to mitigate climate change by absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere. Additionally, the natural vegetation and soil structures play a crucial role in filtering water, ensuring clean and safe water flows into the Yellowstone River. Natural landscapes like those on Crevice, free from industrial development, are more resilient to disturbances such as wildfires and floods, with intact ecosystems better able to buffer and recover from such events.

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

To achieve permanent protection of the 1,598 acres on the border of Yellowstone National Park from mining and transfer them into public ownership, we have outlined two distinct phases:

Phase One - Completed

After years of groundwork, months of behind-the-scenes negotiations, the most urgent and ambitious fundraising campaign the Greater Yellowstone Coalition had ever undertaken - and with the help of The Conservation Alliance - we did it, we extinguished the last viable gold mining threat along Yellowstone National Park's border. On September 25, 2023, we officially hit our fundraising target. With the fundraising campaign successfully completed, GYC closed on the deal with Crevice Mining Group and on September 27, 2023, took ownership of the company's assets — effectively killing the mine before it could start.

Phase Two

Now, GYC is working with willing landowners to secure the remaining private in-holdings on Crevice Mountain. The lands and mineral rights will then be transferred to the Custer Gallatin National Forest — creating new public land that is permanently protected under the mineral withdrawal enacted by the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act in 2019.

Of the 1,598 acres, 1,208 represent unpatented mining claims on Forest Service land, while 390 acres are privately owned. GYC recently worked with the Bureau of Land Management to relinquish and extinguish the 1,208 acres of unpatented mining claims on Forest Service land. These lands are now permanently protected through the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. Of the remaining 390 acres of private land, GYC owns 13 acres, and we are in the process of working with landowners to secure the remaining properties.

Our primary objectives this year are to:

- Transfer GYC's 13-acres to the Forest Service,

To safeguard these valuable ecological attributes, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition raised \$6.25 million to purchase the mineral rights, leases, and claims covering 1,598 acres on Crevice owned by Crevice Mining Group. This resolved the immediate threat of mining by allowing the company to abandon their planned mine. As a result, the area's biodiversity is maintained, climate resiliency is enhanced, and the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the Yellowstone region are protected.

- Purchase the 169-acre property, and
- Begin negotiations and due diligence on a 9-acre property.

The Forest Service is currently working through due diligence (appraisal, environmental hazards assessment, title work) on GYC's 13-acre property, and plans to purchase it by early 2025. This will result in new public land and public access, with the land permanently protected through the mineral withdrawal passed in 2019.

We are under contract with a signed purchase-sale agreement on the 169-acre property and are currently working through due diligence. We have until December 31, 2024, to complete due diligence and until March 2025 to finalize the purchase. Once acquired, the 169-acre property will be held by our partners at The Conservation Fund until public funding allows the Forest Service to purchase it. The owner of the 9-acre property has expressed interest in selling it, and this summer we will start due diligence.

Public funding will be secured for both properties (and subsequent properties) through the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Forest Service Region 1 has made this project a top priority for FY26 funding, and due to the values at risk and its adjacency to Yellowstone National Park, it is a high priority for the program.

As part of Crevice Mining Group's mineral estate acquired last September, we obtained mining leases covering the private lands and minerals on Crevice Mountain. GYC's ownership of these leases prevents mining while we work to secure the remaining private lands on Crevice Mountain. We are committed to paying the \$15,000 annual lease payments until the lands and mineral rights are transferred into federal ownership, at which point they will be protected in perpetuity under the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act.

The successful completion of this project will continue to have immense positive impacts on the residents and businesses of Yellowstone's northern gateway communities in Jardine, Gardiner, Emigrant, and Livingston, Montana. Gold mining threatens every aspect of what makes these communities unique – recreational access, tourism, abundant wildlife, clean water, agriculture, and growing economies. People have enjoyed this area for its backcountry recreation opportunities like hiking, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing, as

well as its tremendous scenic values for generations.

5. Key Decision Makers

To successfully purchase private land, building trust with landowners is essential. We have spent years cultivating relationships on Crevice Mountain and will need to continue this work as we navigate through the process of purchasing the lands formerly threatened by mining. Maintaining trust through frequent communication and exercising patience will allow us to eventually secure and then transfer the lands on Crevice Mountain to public ownership.

Additionally, we are collaborating closely with staff at the Forest Service, whose support is crucial for Phase Two of our project. This phase involves securing LWCF funding to facilitate the transfer of the private lands to public ownership and permanently protect all 1,598 acres under the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. GYC staff hold weekly meetings with Forest Service personnel and will host summer field trips to conduct due diligence on both the GYC-owned property and others in 2024-25. There is strong support and commitment to this project both at the Custer Gallatin National Forest and Region 1 in Missoula.

We are also partnering with The Conservation Fund, which will act as the interim owner of land until the Forest Service secures LWCF funds for its purchase. Throughout the due diligence phase, biweekly meetings will be held to ensure coordination and progress.

7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

We hope to accomplish the following outcomes over the next year:

- Complete our due diligence to finalize the acquisition of 169-acre property by March 2025.
- Complete negotiation and due diligence with landowner and sign purchase-sale agreement on 9-acre property.
- Transfer GYC owned 13-acre property to the Forest Service.
- Work with the Forest Service Realty Team to submit proposal for LWCF funding.

9. TCA Funding Plan

Funding from The Conservation Alliance will support contracted services to conduct our due diligence (appraisals, mineral reports, etc.); legal counsel costs, mineral lease payments, and staff

6. Elevate Voices

Over the past 9 years, we have organized significant grassroots opposition to mining on Yellowstone's boundary. This has included helping to create and support the Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition and the Wild Livelihoods Coalition, both of which include hundreds of businesses in local communities north of the park. During the campaign to pass the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act, the diversity and breadth of business owner support for the mineral withdrawal was essential to our eventual success.

Now that we have moved into a quieter phase with direct landowner engagement, our approach focuses on building trust through open, consistent communication and following through on our commitment to completing land purchases.

GYC has a robust Tribal conservation program that focuses on issues such as bison conservation and restoration, river restoration, protecting important cultural areas, and elevating Tribal rights and voices. We partner with the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes on issues of mutual priority, and have an office staffed by three Tribal members at Fort Washakie on the Wind River Reservation.

8. Evaluate Your Progress

We will evaluate our progress and success utilizing the following metrics: Land Acquisition Progress:

- Successful sale of GYC's 13 acres to the Forest Service (anticipated by early 2025).
- Completion of due diligence for the 169-acre property by December 31, 2024.
- Purchase the 169-acre property by March 2025.
- 9-acre property is under contract in 2024.

Collaboration:

- Regular meetings with Forest Service personnel and partners.
- Successful organization and completion of summer field trips for due diligence.

Regular meetings with The Conservation Fund to ensure coordination and progress.

Public Funding Secured:

- Forest Service receives approval for LWCF funding.

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

GYC staff and board of directors recognize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as crucial elements both within and outside our organization. Over the past five years, we've actively embraced DEI

time to manage and complete a complex set of transactions with landowners and coordination with the Forest Service.

principles, seeking external guidance and committing to internal assessments and improvements.

Recently, GYC's Leadership Team outlined a two-year plan for advancing DEI within the organization. Key objectives include staff training to engage diverse audiences, creating a culture deck to enhance onboarding, increasing support for Tribal staff and programs, and updating board policies for inclusivity. We've completed a board policy audit and are implementing recommendations to ensure a welcoming environment for all members. These initiatives reflect our ongoing dedication to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment as we pursue our conservation mission.

11. Confidential Items

No, although purchasing private land is sensitive in nature and we have purposely kept out of our proposal the names of properties and their owners to keep them confidential.

Other Relevant Application Details

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our proposal for consideration.

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