

# Soaring over the Beartooths for the fish below: an aerial survey

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CCN SENIOR REPORTER

Bob Zimmer, Water Program Coordinator for Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC), invited a group to fly over the Beartooth Plateau on Friday, July 1. He wanted a mixed group to actually see the areas GYC is actively working to protect or is considering for preservation. Currently, the group is backing action on the East Rosebud Wild and Scenic Act Bill submitted by Sen. John Walsh and Jon Tester. A hearing was just held on Wednesday in the U.S. Senate to consider the bill.

It is the water that drives Zimmer. He is working to preserve habitat for the native Yellowstone Cutthroat trout.

The Beartooth Mountains are located in south central Montana and northwest Wyoming and are part of the 900,000 acre Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, within Custer, Gallatin and Shoshone National Forests. Granite Peak, the highest point in Montana at 12,807 feet, is located here.

Zimmer explained the mountains are just northeast of Yellowstone National Park and are part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The Beartooth Plateau contains some of the oldest exposed rocks on earth and a diversity of water features.

"There is a value worth conserving."

— Bob Zimmer,  
Greater Yellowstone Coalition

The type of rock on its surface is coarse-grained gray and pink granites, gneisses, and schists that formed about 3.3 billion years ago when sedimentary and volcanic rocks were heated and recrystallized.

Over 25 small glaciers exist in the Beartooths with Grasshopper Glacier being one of the more distinctive. According to Zimmer, we are losing many of these glaciers. The mountains have over 300 pristine lakes and some waterfalls in excess of 300 feet.

Index

Opinion, p.4

## BEARTOOTH

from Page 1

Upon his direction, the flight flew over the Boulder River drainage, to the Stillwater River drainage to the East Rosebud Creek drainage. Regarding East Rosebud he said, "This area is critical for livelihoods and recreational value up these canyons, valleys and streams. There is a value worth conserving."

Locals from the East Rosebud, Mary Ellen Mangus and Dale Hayes were along for the flight. Both women are members of the Friends of the East Rosebud and support the current proposed Wild and Scenic bill.

It was discussed how other states are running out of water. Even now, people from out of state are looking at Montana's water.

"The northeast basin and streams' resiliency on the Beartooth Front are very important to the fish as well as large mammal conservation," he said. "The eastern slope holds the snowpack longer and colder into the summer for native trout."

Zimmer said a federal study came out in April, about the potential for small hydroelectric projects over the whole area of the Upper Yellowstone. It found a lot of potential for 4-50 KW size projects. Zimmer discussed how Mystic Lake had a major

hydroelectric project that raised its level 14-15 feet. When asked whether it made sense to develop numerous multiple small projects for small amounts of energy at the expense of native trout and other habitats, Zimmer said, "That's the question."



Photo by Eleanor Guerrero

An aerial survey of the Beartooth Front reveals sheer peaks, steep canyons and precious water drainages that support livelihoods, fragile wildlife and local residents.