



**Greater Challenges,  
Fewer Resources:  
Preliminary Findings of Greater  
Yellowstone Conservation  
Organization Survey 2009**

**Executive Summary**

The Greater Yellowstone Conservation Organization Inventory (GYCOI) is a project of two Jackson, WY-based organizations: the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative (NRCC) and the Charture Institute.

In early 2009, the GYCOI conducted an online survey of the nearly 200 self-identified conservation organizations it has identified as operating in the Greater Yellowstone region. The survey revealed the following findings:

- In 2008 and especially in 2009, the primary concern of conservation organizations in the Greater Yellowstone area is how the recession will affect their organizations, specifically their ability to pursue their missions. This new resource-starved environment is forcing the Greater Yellowstone's conservation organizations to closely assess their respective strengths and weaknesses, and be more selective in their priorities.
- A majority of conservation organizations see the recession continuing to effect their operations through the end 2010. This suggests that, for at least the next two years, fewer and/or lower-intensity conservation-related activities will occur in the Greater Yellowstone region.
- Conservation priorities between organizations vary widely. As a result, conservation organizations in the Greater Yellowstone identify a wide variety of conservation-related issues, and prioritize these different issues in very different ways.
- There is wide divergence of opinion in the conservation community regarding what constitutes a conservation success or failure, even on the same issue.
- Collaboration with other organizations is a generally accepted way to do more with less and achieve goals effectively. However, because the Greater Yellowstone conservation community is so diverse (even to the point where different self-identified conservation organizations can have diametrically-opposed views on the same issue), in practice collaboration does not occur as

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often or as effectively as potential suggests it might. This reality is further compounded by the fact that very little work has been done between organizations to identify and clarify a coherent set of regional conservation goals. An opportunity exists for the conservation community to think in more detail about establishing consensus-based regional conservation priorities.

### **Introduction**

In 2007, Greater Yellowstone Conservation Inventory Project (GYCOI) partners Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative and the Charture Institute published the first Greater Yellowstone Conservation Directory. The Directory lists almost 200 self-identified conservation organizations active in the region. In just two years, the Directory has become an important tool for conservationists in Greater Yellowstone to learn about others in the regional conservation community.

To follow up on the success of the Directory, in May 2008, GYCOI convened “Conservation 2.0: The Future of Conservation in Greater Yellowstone: Past, Present, and Future.” Participants gathered to discuss the region’s conservation challenges and opportunities, and to learn much more about individual conservation organizations.

In early 2009, GYCOI conducted an online survey of all organizations listed in the Directory. The survey’s goal was to better understand how organizations in the broader conservation community in the region perceive challenges, identify priorities, and view the future. The 50 survey respondents included representatives from all of the Greater Yellowstone’s major conservation organizations, and overall were a good cross-section of the Greater Yellowstone’s nearly 200 conservation organizations. Going forward, GYCOI intends to conduct the survey annually.

This report details some selected findings from this survey. A full report will be available online in summer of 2009 at [www.gycoi.org](http://www.gycoi.org).

### **Findings**

Four key findings emerge from the survey:

- 1) Conservation leaders in the GYE are very concerned about the effects of the recession on their organizations.
- 2) While every organization listed in the Directory has self-identified as a conservation organization, they do not necessarily share perspectives on problems or desired outcomes. Greater Yellowstone’s conservation organizations are very diverse in terms of size, focus, and perspectives.
- 3) There are also tremendous differences in views about what constitutes a conservation “success” and a conservation “failure.”

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- 4) While collaboration and partnerships are frequently invoked as ways to build aggregate strength behind conservation activities, there may be types and levels of inter-organizational partnerships—that have not yet been implemented—that can lead to further gains for the conservation community as a whole.

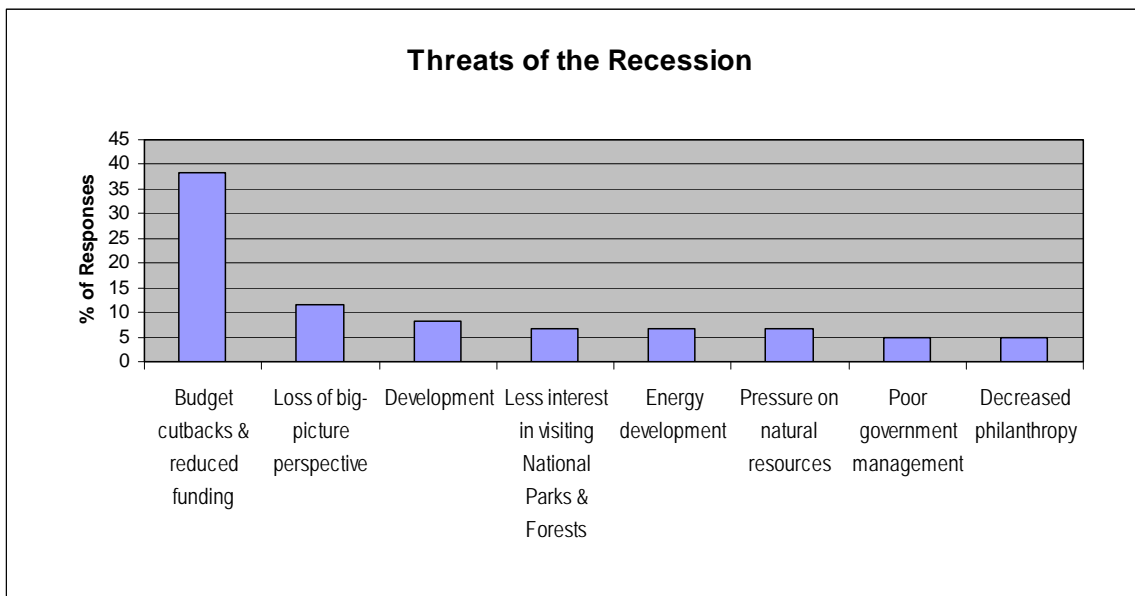
## 1) Maintaining organizational viability in lean times

Conservation leaders are anxious about the effects of the recession on organizational strength.

72% of respondents indicated that they are concerned about the possible effects of the recession on their organization. 32% of respondents indicated that they are extremely concerned. The specific impacts to organizations include lower budgets, reduced staff, reduced wages and benefits for staff, and reduced levels of activity. Roughly 1/3 of respondents predicted a decreased level of activity, and another 1/3 predicted decreased budgets.

2/3 of respondents anticipate that the effects of the economic recession will last at least until the end of 2010. This strongly suggests that on the whole, there will be a reduced capacity for conservation organizations to address conservation-related issues for at least the next two years, if not longer (as roughly 1/3 of respondents anticipate the effects of the recession will last into 2011 or longer).

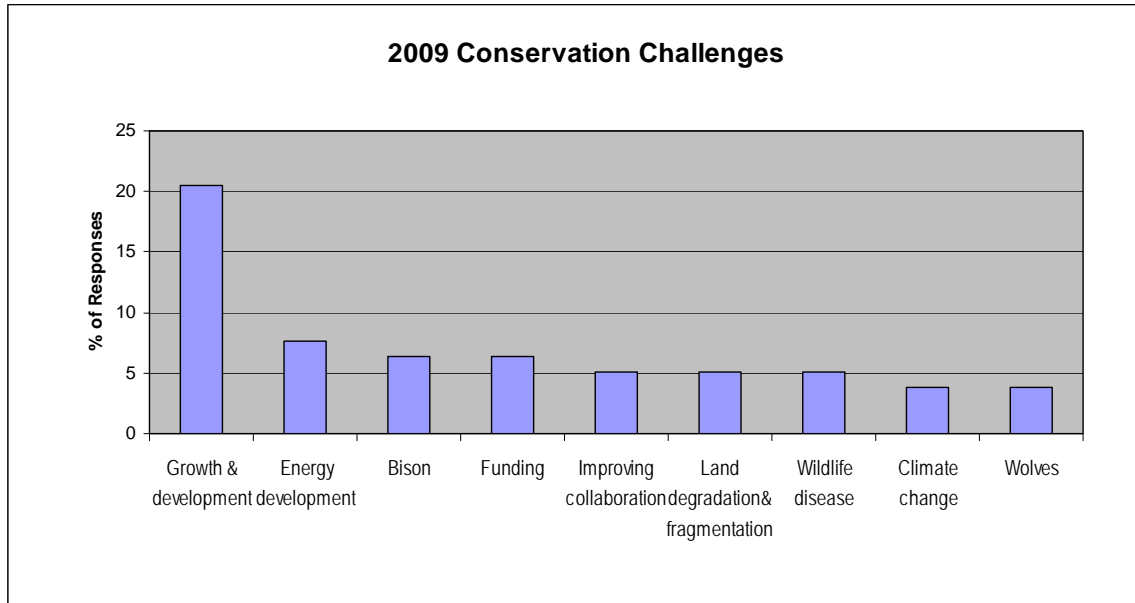
When asked to identify threats that the recession might have on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, almost 40% of responses mentioned budget cutbacks and reduced funding. Other responses indicated that people believe the recession will force organizations to focus on smaller-scale or very local issues work that they might have capacity to engage in effectively.



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## 2) Perspectives on conservation threats and priorities

Respondents were asked what the biggest challenges facing the Greater Yellowstone in 2009 would be. Growth and development (i.e. housing and business developments in wildlife habitat) are by far considered to be the biggest challenges to the GYE.

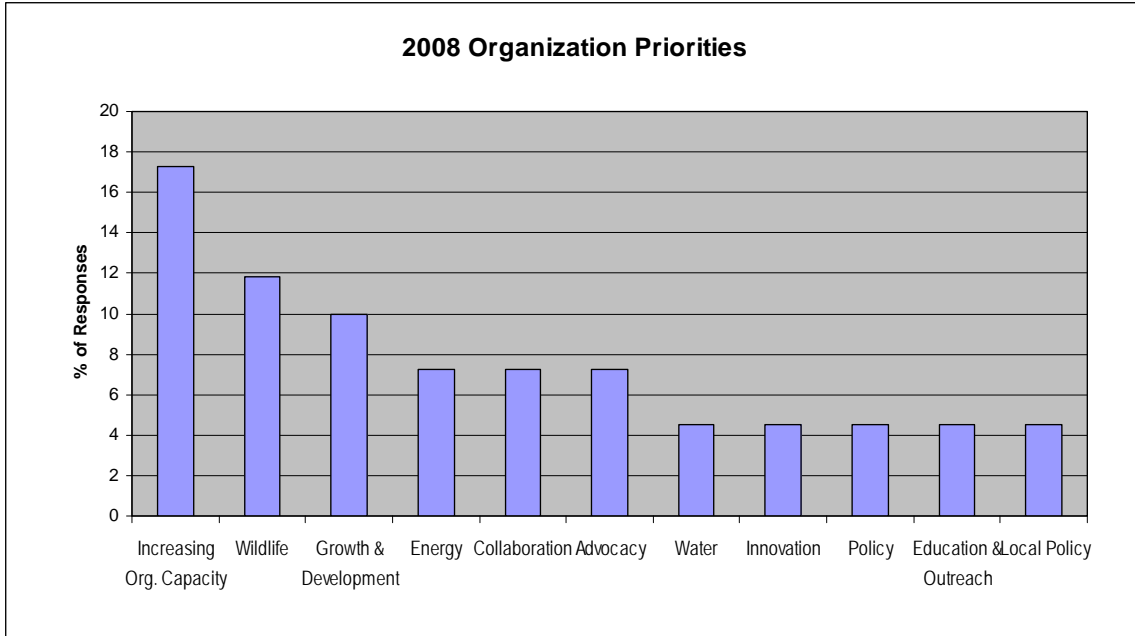


Respondents were also asked what the top priorities of each organization were for both 2008 and 2009.

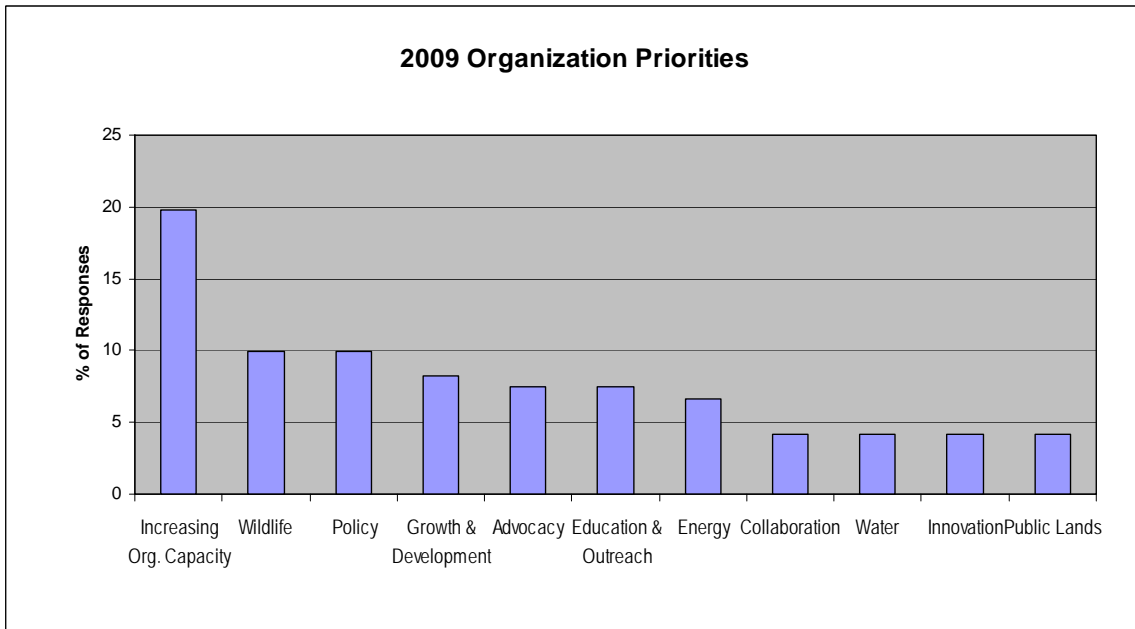
In both 2008 and 2009, organizations felt that maintaining or growing organizational capacity—i.e. fundraising, publicity, media, expansion of the organization, and related activities—was a priority over any other issue, either internal or external to their organization. Other issues of shared concern include wildlife, policy, and growth and development.

In 2008, priorities were a mix between external, content-focused priorities, and internal, organizational priorities. Increasing organizational capacity was a top priority for organizations in 2008. Other items that mentioned as priorities, but had less consensus, included: research, science, environmental ethics, forests & forest management, sustainability, public lands, tourism & recreation, & agriculture.

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2009 priorities show an even greater emphasis on internal organizational issues (i.e. maintaining or increasing organizational capacity). This includes fundraising, publicity, media, expansion of the organization, or conducting conferences & events. Other items that were mentioned as priorities, but had less consensus, included: research, science, forests & forest management, sustainability, litigation, & agriculture.



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The survey also showed that there appears to be a mismatch between external challenges and internal organizational priorities. 21% of respondents indicated that various issues related to growth and development are primary challenges in 2009. However, only 8% of respondents indicated that addressing growth and development will be 2009 priorities, meanwhile, 20% of responses indicated that increasing organizational capacity will be a priority.

### **3) Perspectives on conservation effectiveness and outcomes**

Respondents were asked to rate how effective their organization was in 2008. 89% indicated that their organization was highly or somewhat effective, which suggests that respondents believe in their missions, and are confident that their organization is working towards their stated goals.

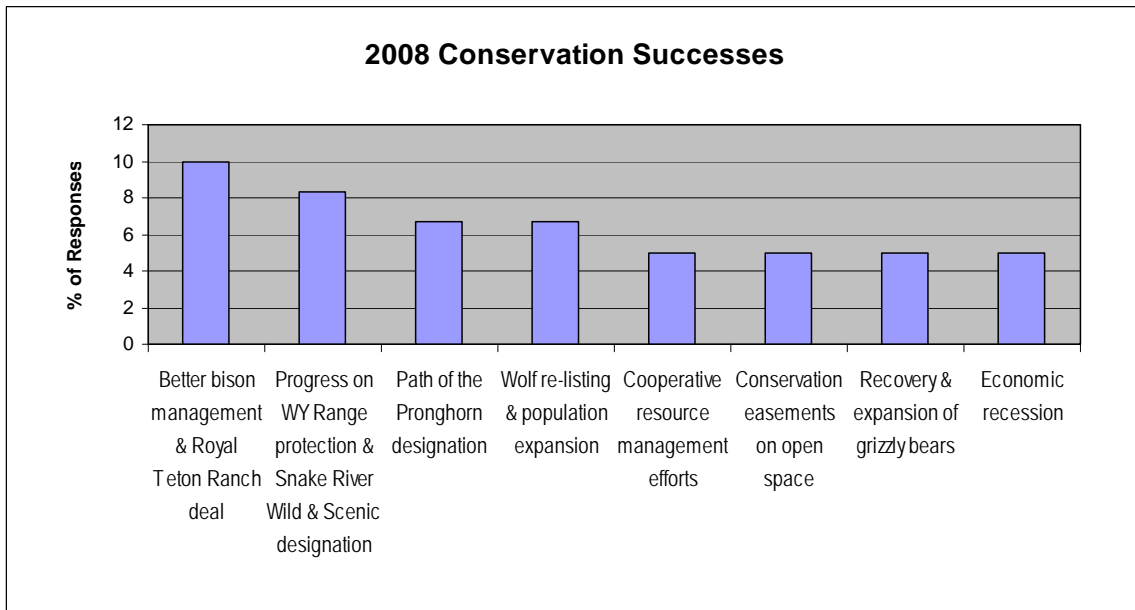
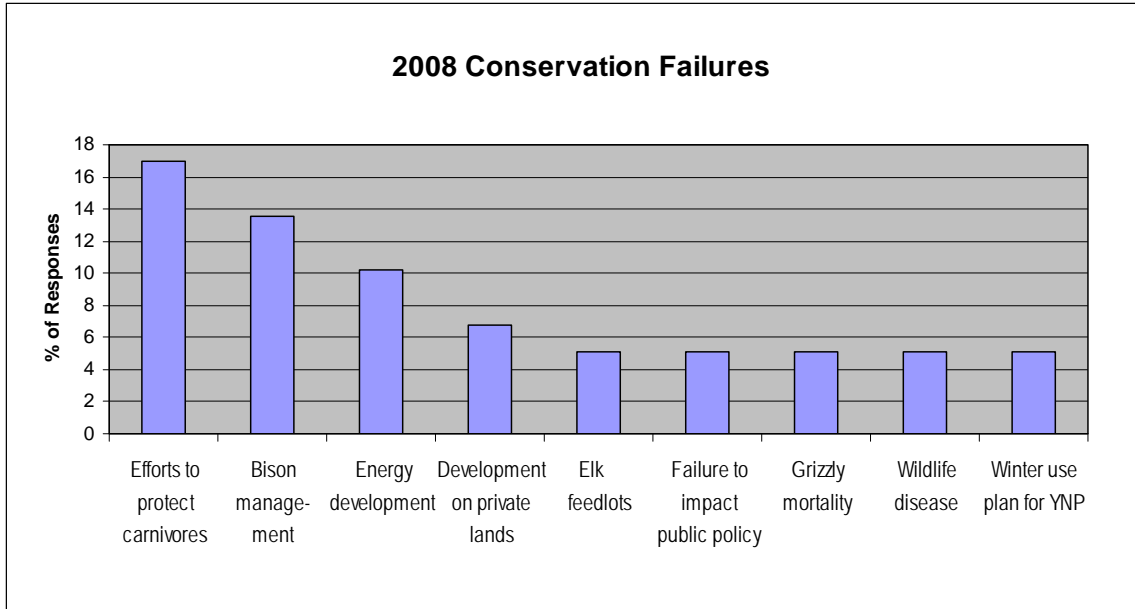
Many organization leaders anticipate reduced budgets and decreased conservation activities as a result of the economic recession. Assuming there is a direct link between resources and conservation effectiveness, conservation efforts over the next few years will be less effective unless leadership can maintain effectiveness with fewer resources.

Respondents were then asked how they judged their effectiveness. Responses were varied, but areas of consensus included success of advocated policies, funding received, number of participants, and number of organizations collaborated with. Other responses included some measure of public involvement, acres protected, and number of projects completed.

This represents, somewhat crudely, the metrics organizations use to evaluate their success. It is clear that accomplishing parts of an advocated policy can be deemed a success. Income received is also used as an indicator that any conservation group's message, identity, or messages resonate with funders. Using a number of participants, number of collaborations, and level of public involvement all make reference to either shared values or goals for any one conservation position or project, which might indicate that the mission, at least, of an organization has conceptual support.

Respondents were also asked what the most significant conservation successes and failures in the region were in 2008. Responses were very issue-specific, and reflect some of the most widely-publicized and contentious issues of the region today.

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When comparing the 2008 failures and successes, it is clear that conservation organizations can have divergent views on similar topics. For example, bison management was considered both a conservation success and a failure in 2008. The same is true for large carnivore issues, such as the wolf delisting debate. It appears that consensus on some contentious issues may be difficult to find within the conservation community, and by extension, will remain very difficult to find among even broader interests.

There also appears to be a disparity between what conservation groups identify as successes and what organizations deem the largest challenges, and what each group tends to agree on as being priorities. This suggests that individual conservation groups are contributing some select piece or pieces to conservation efforts in general, however, since

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consensus-based regional priorities are not clearly defined, it is difficult to determine if individual conservation group contributions align with regional priorities.

Successful conservation outcomes and measures of effectiveness for any one organization may in fact be deemed a failure by another organization. Establishing a region-wide understanding of conservation effectiveness is difficult given how individual organizations have different priorities and measures of effectiveness.

### **4) Opportunities**

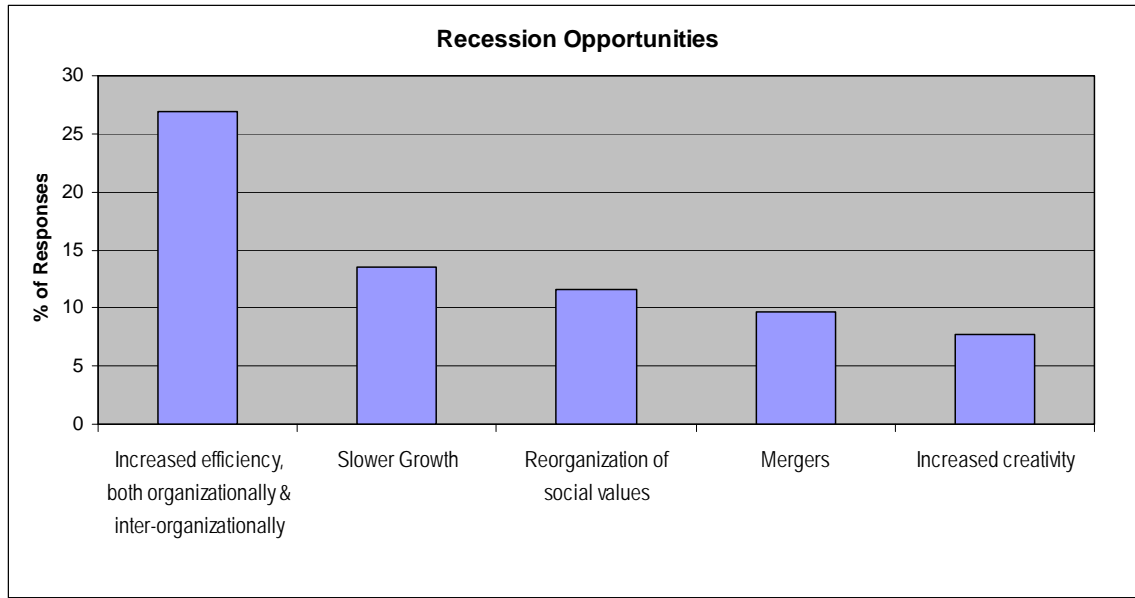
Collaboration and partnering are activities that are frequently mentioned as ways to do more with less. 90% of survey respondents said that it is somewhat or extremely important that organizations work together. As mentioned earlier, the large number of active conservation groups in greater Yellowstone represents a multitude of perspectives on conservation issues, and—outside of shared concerns for organizational capacity—have widely divergent priorities. Collaboration and partnership that occurs now may be through self-selected affinity groups that share perspectives on problems and strategies.

86% of our survey respondents indicated that they partnered with other organizations in 2008 on a wide range of issues, suggesting that organizations have established mechanisms for sharing work loads and costs. Over 30% of all respondents indicated that they partnered specifically on wildlife and habitat projects, and another 20% indicated that they partnered on land protection and planning work.

When asked how well Greater Yellowstone's Conservation Organizations work together, 51% stated working together is done "somewhat well," while not one person responded that organizations work together "extremely well." There is clearly room for improvement in how organizations work together.

When asked where the greatest opportunities lie for further collaboration in the GYE, a clear priority was to develop new systems of funding and ways to work together on specific issues.

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Conservation organizations are historically resourceful and creative, and respondents indicated that the recession does present opportunities. Notably, many respondents felt that limited resources force organizations to increase their efficiency, both internally and as a cohort. Mergers and increased creativity to solve conservation problems also emerged as potential organizational opportunities. In the bigger picture, an overall slowdown in growth and development gives conservation professionals a chance to catch their collective breaths and reprioritize. Additionally, conservationists think that citizens as a whole may reorganize their social values, which could benefit conservation.

### **Methodology**

- Survey responses were multi-faceted, detailed, and nuanced. In the interest of having representative results, we aggregated survey responses into general descriptive categories that captured the essence of the responses.
- Respondents were allowed to provide multiple responses to most survey questions. The graphs show consensus in specific categories.
- Importantly, response weighting reflected here is across organizations, and may not reflect how each individual organization would rank their respective priorities. We were seeking areas of consensus on important issues.

### **About GYCOI**

The GYCOI effort continues to provide a mechanism for conservation organizations to better understand the perspectives, priorities, outputs, and shared concerns of other organizations in the community. To use the Greater Yellowstone Conservation Directory or to view full survey results in summer of 2009, visit [www.gycoi.org](http://www.gycoi.org).