

## Comprehension

### Genre

A **Nonfiction Article** tells facts about a person, place, or event.



A male and female elk in their new home, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park



### Summarize

#### Main Idea and Details

The main idea of an article is what it is mostly about. Details give more information about the main idea.

## Animals Come Home to Our National Parks

**How did the return of elk to one national park and gray wolves to another affect the ecosystems of those parks?**

**N**ational parks protect **wildlife**, history, and culture. Still, hundreds of plants and animals have disappeared from our national parks. That's because their environment has changed, mostly because of human activities.

Today park rangers work to restore the balance of each park ecosystem. They are bringing plants and animals back into their **natural** environments. So far, the programs are working—especially for elk and wolves.

## Long Journey Home

It was a cold morning in January when 28 elk had finally **completed** a long **journey**. They had traveled 2,500 miles by truck from Elk Island National Park in Canada to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. They were the first of 52 elk to be reintroduced into the park.

Ten million elk once **roamed** all over North America. Now there are only about one million. Elk disappeared from North Carolina more than 150 years ago. Many were killed by hunters. Others died as people built farms, towns, and roads where elk used to graze.

Elk munch on trees and bushes, allowing more sunlight into the park so ground-level plants can grow. Smaller animals, like chipmunks, can then flourish. Chipmunks are food for larger animals, like wolves. Without the elk, the park's ecosystem didn't function as well. "We are trying to restore the ecosystem to what it was 200 years ago," said Lawrence Hartman of the National Park Service.

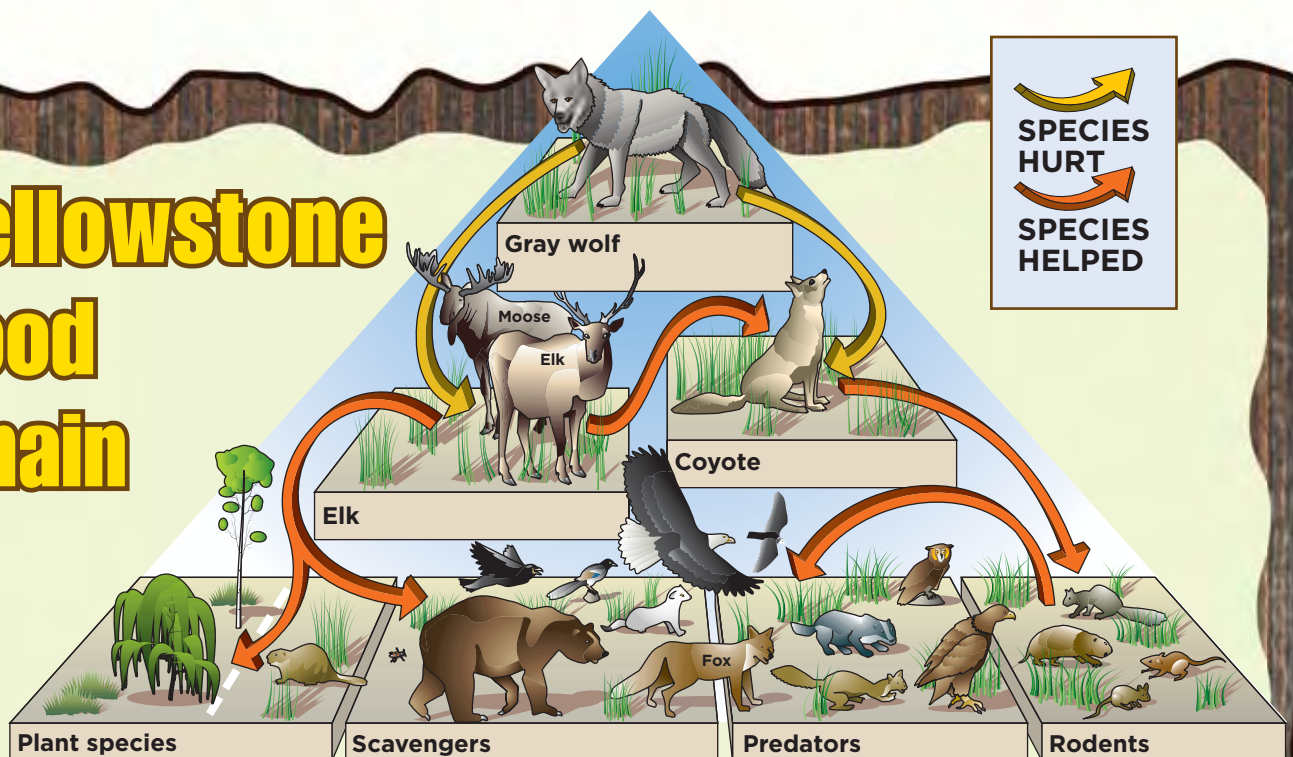
**Park workers watch as relocated elk dash for freedom.**



Have they achieved their goal? So far, so good. Researchers have been studying the elk's progress. Jennifer Murrow is leading the research. She tracks the elk using special radio collars that are placed around the elk's necks. The collars send signals that show researchers where the elk are and how they are doing.

Researchers also keep track of the number of elk calves that are born each year. In the first year, 11 calves were born in the park. Eight survived, but some were preyed upon by bears. It's all part of the natural balance—and that's exactly what wildlife researchers like to see.

# Yellowstone Food Chain



The disappearance of wolves left a big hole in Yellowstone's ecosystem. Coyotes and elk, which are hunted by wolves, became too numerous. Plants began to disappear because the elk population had grown so large. Foxes, which eat the same rodents as coyotes, were starving because the coyotes were catching most of the prey.

The ecosystem of the park was badly out of balance.

The government wanted to fix the park's ecosystem. They decided to bring back the wolves. The goal was to put nature back into balance. Now, Yellowstone is howling with life once again, and nature is taking its course.



**A gray wolf in  
Yellowstone  
National Park**

## Howling Back to Life

For centuries, packs of wolves lived in the West. When settlers came in the 1800s, they hunted these wild animals. By the 1970s, the wolves had completely disappeared from Yellowstone National Park. They had also become endangered in much of the United States.

In 1995, 31 gray wolves were released into the park. Now, more than a decade later, there are more than five times as many wolves roaming through Yellowstone.

## Think and Compare



1. What animal was returned to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and what animal was brought back into Yellowstone National Park?
2. How does the disappearance of one animal affect the other animals and plants in an ecosystem?
3. If you could visit any national park in the United States, which one would you choose, and why?
4. Compare the problems a park ranger at Yellowstone might face with those of a ranger in Yosemite or Petrified Forest National Park.

## Saving a National Park



### Test Strategy

#### Right There

You can put your finger on the answer. Look for key words in the question. Then find those key words in the selection.

Florida panther



Early settlers declared Florida's Everglades a worthless swamp. In fact it is a unique paradise for thousands of species of plants and animals, forming a delicate food chain. All they need to survive is each other—and a steady supply of precious water.

But humans wanted dry land for homes and crops. They drained water from the Everglades. This started a chain reaction that upset the ecosystem. The Everglades wetlands are now only half their original size. The number of wading birds decreased by 90 percent from 1900 to 2000. All this has made Everglades National Park one of the top ten most endangered parks in the United States.

Now there is a plan to save the Everglades. Engineers will build wells to capture water before it flows out of the Everglades. Then they will pump the water back. Many canals will be removed, allowing water to follow its natural path. The plan may take 50 years to complete. Saving this unique ecosystem is an important goal, no matter how long it takes.

## Meet Some Everglades Species

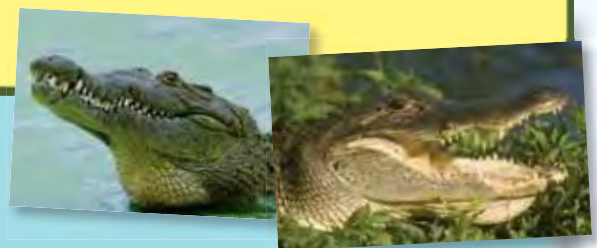
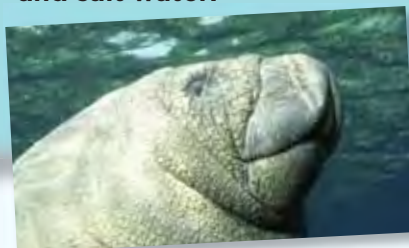
### Wood Stork

An endangered species in the Everglades, this tall bird hunts for fish with its long, curved bill.



### Manatee

This slow-moving mammal lives in both fresh water and salt water.



### Crocodile, Alligator

The Everglades is the only place in the world with both reptiles.



**Directions: Answer the questions.**

**1. What is a food chain?**

- A unusual species surviving without water
- B early settlers living off natural resources
- C plants and animals depending on each other
- D wetlands that provide food and resources

**2. Humans upset the Everglades ecosystem by**

- A hunting animals there.
- B ignoring it.
- C draining much of the water there.
- D making it into a national park.

**3. The new plan for the Everglades shows that**

- A people want to save it, no matter how long it takes.
- B people keep wasting natural resources, such as water.
- C people value new homes over national parks.
- D engineers will replace the park with canals.

**4. Why is the Everglades a “unique paradise”?**

**5. Explain the main idea of the article. Include the most important details in your response.**

**Tip**

**Look for key words.**



# Write to a Prompt

In the selection “Animals Come Home to Our National Parks” you read about wolves that have been reintroduced to Yellowstone Park. What effect will this have on the future of the wolves? Do you think they will remain endangered? Use details from the article to support your answer.



I included specific details.

## Giving Wolves a Chance

Wolves were once common in this country, especially in Yellowstone National Park. When large numbers of settlers began to move to the West, they hunted and killed wolves. The wolves disappeared from Yellowstone and became an endangered species.

Wolves were returned to Yellowstone beginning in the 1990s. That means the wolves have a chance to live in their natural habitat. There is food for wolves in Yellowstone, and it has everything they need to survive.

If people leave the wolves alone, they have a chance to survive. Eventually, there will be enough wolves that they will no longer be endangered. That will be good news for the wolves, for Yellowstone, and for people, too.

## Writing Prompt

In the selection “Animals Come Home to Our National Parks” you read about elk that were reintroduced to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. Do you think it was a good idea to bring elk back? How will this affect the park? Use details from the article to support your answer.



## Writer's Checklist

- Ask yourself, who is my audience?
- Think about your purpose for writing.
- Plan your writing before beginning.
- Use details to support your main idea.
- Be sure your ideas are clear and organized.
- Use your best spelling, grammar, and punctuation.