



Old Faithful Cell Tower Chronology (1995-2026)

May 1995: Cellular One requests permission to place cellular antennas on an existing telecom structure at Old Faithful (near the Post Office).

July 24, 1995: The House Commerce Committee releases its report on a bill that will become the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Concerning cell tower proposals on Federal lands, the Committee writes:

“The Committee recognizes, for example, that use of the Washington Monument, Yellowstone National Park or a pristine wildlife sanctuary, while perhaps prime sites for an antenna and other facilities, are not appropriate and use of them would be contrary to environmental, conservation, and public safety laws.”

February 1996: The Telecommunications Act of 1996 is enacted.

December 1, 1997: The Director of the National Park Service issues an order (#53A) laying out the agency’s procedures for handling applications for cell towers on NPS land. It provides that after receiving a completed application, “the Superintendent will insure that the public is notified and given the opportunity to comment” by publishing a notice in the *Federal Register* and also in a local newspaper.

1998: Western Wireless submits a formal application to build a free-standing cell tower at Old Faithful.

Yellowstone officials prepare a *Federal Register* notice for the proposed cell tower, but it is never published.

August 17, 1999: Yellowstone issues a press release notifying the public that the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Old Faithful cell tower is available. The EA describes the proposed Old Faithful cell tower as follows:

“The tower may not extend more than 10 feet above the tops of the surrounding forest vegetation... At the Old Faithful site, the monopole would be camouflaged to appear at a distance to look like one of the burned lodgepole pine trees adjacent to the proposed site.”

August 24, 1999: Yellowstone receives just one public comment on the Old Faithful cell tower proposal, and it opposes the tower. Yellowstone officials conclude that one comment is sufficient public input on the proposal.

August 31, 1999: The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office concludes, based on the description in the EA, that the cell tower at Old Faithful will not have an “adverse effect” on the Old Faithful Historic District.

November 1999: Yellowstone issues a “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI) for the Old Faithful cell tower.

NPS signs the Right-of-Way (ROW) for the Old Faithful cell tower. The ROW provides that “... a 70-foot antenna tower will be installed... at this location.”

May 26, 2000: Marv Jensen, Yellowstone’s Assistant Superintendent, unilaterally amends the 1999 ROW to allow for a taller tower at Old Faithful. Instead of a 70-foot tower, Jensen’s “amendment” (simply an entry in the Administrative Record kept at Yellowstone) allows for a 100-foot tower.

2001: The Old Faithful cell tower is constructed. Shortly thereafter, following complaints from YNP staff and visitors, “a big [horizontal] platform” is removed from the top of the tower to reduce its visibility.

Dead lodgepole pines continue to fall on the hillside, making the tower more and more visible.

December 2003: PEER writes to WY’s Historic Preservation agency, questioning whether the agency’s 1999 determination of “no adverse effect” for the Old Faithful cell tower is still valid, given that most of the “burned lodgepole pine trees adjacent to the proposed site” that were supposed to shield the cell tower have fallen over.

January 7, 2004: WY’s historic preservation agency agrees with PEER’s assessment, and writes to Yellowstone Superintendent Lewis about the “adverse effect” the cell tower is now having on the Old Faithful National Historic District.

March 2004: A PEER press release alerts the public to WY SHPO’s determination that the Old Faithful cell tower has an “adverse effect” on the historic district. PEER also asserts that the tower is illegal because the Park Service approved it without proper notice and contrary to Congressional intent. [CELL PHONE TOWER AT OLD FAITHFUL IS AN EYESORE - PEER.org](#)

March-September 2004: Editorials appear in various newspapers opposing the Old Faithful cell tower.

March 19, 2004 editorial in *The Idaho Mountain Express*: “Old Faithful Cell Tower is Unfaithful Blight.” This editorial calls for the removal of the Old Faithful cell tower.

April 19, 2004 editorial in *The Providence Journal*: “Wireless National Parks”

April 19, 2004 editorial in *The Tampa Tribune*: “Invasion of the Cell Towers”

September 27, 2004 editorial in *The Idaho Statesmen*: “Cell-phone towers belong outside our national parks”

June 2004: The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) asks Yellowstone Superintendent Suzanne Lewis how she plans to “eliminate the adverse visual effect of the [Old Faithful cell] tower.” [U.S. HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY TO INVESTIGATE OLD FAITHFUL CELL PHONE TOWER - PEER.org](#)

July 8, 2004: YNP issues a moratorium on new cell towers “until such time as a thorough planning process has been done and a plan is completed.” [OLD FAITHFUL CELL TOWER MAY BE SHORTENED AND CAMOUFLAGED - PEER.org](#)

September 1, 2004: PEER issues a press release revealing that Yellowstone has been illegally pocketing the money paid for ROW permits for cell towers. [YELLOWSTONE PARK ILLEGALLY POCKETS CELL TOWER MONEY - PEER.org](#)

January 14, 2005: Superintendent Lewis writes a memo to the “Record”:

“Due to negative visual impacts and comments from the public, it has been decided that the tower should be modified by removal of the top 20-foot section of the monopole... This will... bring the tower into compliance with the existing EA and FONSI. [Finding of No Significant Impact]”

June 13, 2005: Western Wireless removes the top 20 feet of the Old Faithful cell tower. [OLD FAITHFUL CELL TOWER MAKEOVER IS A BUST - PEER.org](#)

May 21, 2008: U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) criticizes the Old Faithful cell tower in a speech on the floor of the Senate:

“There has been almost no organized outcry about the profusion of thousands of cell towers along the same interstates and in the same communities that Lady Bird [Johnson] sought to protect from junkyards and billboards. These cell towers have replaced almost every available scenic view in America with a cell tower, usually ugly, always with blinking lights.... The National Park Service even erected a cell tower in clear view of Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park.”

September 2008: Yellowstone releases a “Wireless Plan” Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review. The EA (p. 28) calls for the Old Faithful cell tower to be relocated “to an area near the Old Faithful water treatment plant when it becomes feasible to reduce the overall visibility of the tower.”

April 2009: Yellowstone issues a FONSI for its Wireless Plan. Page 4 repeats the language of the Plan: “The Old Faithful cell tower will be relocated to an area near the Old Faithful water treatment plant when it becomes feasible, to reduce the overall visibility of the tower.”

September 28, 2009: Western Wireless's ROW Permit for the Old Faithful cell tower is extended for one year.

July 2010: Yellowstone's Wireless Committee says that "... the move to the proposed site [the water treatment plant] could take place as early as Spring 2011."

October 2010: A new ten-year ROW Permit for the Old Faithful cell tower is signed. It states that NPS will "continue to consider and evaluate alternative sites in the Old Faithful area as they are identified." Paragraph #23 provides that "a request for migration" of the Old Faithful cell tower "is to be expected during the timeframe of this right-of-way."

May 23, 2012: Superintendent Wenk writes: "Relocation of the Old Faithful cell tower will not be undertaken until a suitable location can be found..."

2012-2019: For the next seven years, there is no documentation on NPS efforts to relocate the Old Faithful cell tower. When discussion resumes, the Old Faithful project has been transformed from a "relocation" of the existing tower to a larger "replacement" tower.

October 11, 2020: The ROW for the Old Faithful cell tower is about to expire. Yellowstone officials agree to a one-year extension of the ROW.

May 5, 2021: Verizon writes to NPS officials: "... can you send us some info on where you would like the new location?" Yellowstone's Tech Services head Bret DeYoung responds: "Attached in a kmz.file with three possible locations for the new stealth tower..."

June 29, 2021: YNP's in-house newsletter (*Squad Notes*) discloses that after "an engineering site visit last Thursday with Verizon, Technology Associates and Diamond Communications," a "site behind the [Emergency Services Building] seems to be a suitable location to reduce the visual effect and support collocation."

March 1, 2022: YNP approves a three-year amendment for Verizon's ROW Permit at Old Faithful. "The annual use and occupancy fee shall remain at \$6,000 for the duration of this term." (This has been the fee since 2009, despite inflation of about 50% from 2009 to 2022.)

October 19, 2022: Yellowstone's Bret DeYoung writes to Diamond Communications: "Yellowstone's next step in the compliance process may include communications with the public on the relocation plans at OF..."

March 19, 2024: *Squad Notes* reveals that Diamond "would like to complete the new site this summer... The old site would be removed from water tank hill when the new one goes live." The new tower is not built in 2024.

September 10, 2024: YNP's Amanda Brown writes that the starting time for the new tower will be fall of 2025. "Removal of existing site will be a separate project in 2026."

September 16, 2024: Verizon gets another extension on its ROW Permit until 2026 (with same Use & Occupancy fee of \$6,000).

November 22, 2024: An appraisal report on the Old Faithful cell tower is written by Wayne Harding. The Use & Occupancy fee is set at \$24,000 per year (\$18,000 for co-locators).

Some time during 2025: A new 110-foot cell tower is built at Old Faithful. For NEPA compliance, Yellowstone uses a Categorical Exclusion from NEPA (Cat-Ex 3.3.E.4): “Removal of non-historic materials and structures in order to restore natural conditions.”



New Old Faithful Tower

However, nothing was “removed” during 2025. The existing cell tower at Old Faithful remained on the hill as the new tower was built. Records review indicates that Yellowstone did not do any analysis of the environmental impact of the new tower in the new location.

September 2026: The original Old Faithful cell tower is removed from the hill behind the Old Faithful geyser. No press release informing the public is issued.

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