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NEWSLETTER

Featuring updates on grizzly bear conservation activities,
and the latest *Grizzly Times* Blog and Podcast
from [Louisa Willcox and David Mattson, PhD.](#)
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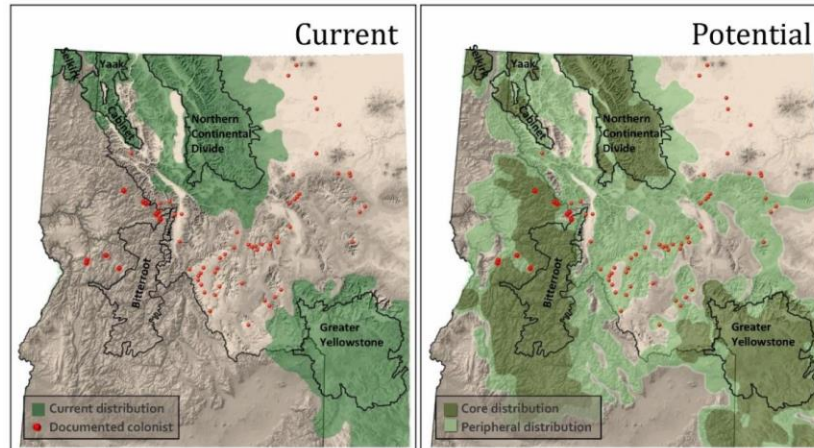
May 28, 2021

The Grizzly Bear Promised Land: Conservationists and Indigenous People Speak Out for Grizzlies in Idaho's Selway-Bitterroot

Conservation groups and indigenous people are celebrating Dr. David Mattson's recent report, "The Grizzly Bear Promised Land," while redoubling efforts to recover grizzly bears in the vast Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem of central Idaho and far western Montana. David's comprehensive report covers the history of grizzlies in this region, from the Ice Ages to the present, and describes what will be needed to ensure that grizzlies once more flourish in this bounteous region. Release of the report comes at a time when grizzly bears are showing us – with their own paws – that they are again making wildlands of the Selway-Bitterroot their home.

To view "The Grizzly Bear Promised Land" Report, click below:
[Mattson Report](#)

Recolonization of this landscape by grizzlies is an inspiring new development with broad implications. The Selway-Bitterroot is nothing less than the ecological lynchpin of recovery for grizzly bears throughout the Northern Rockies. As the map below shows, central Idaho and its adjacent wildlands potentially connect all of the currently isolated or semi-isolated bear populations in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming to create a single population of interbreeding grizzlies sufficient in size to guarantee long term viability and recovery.



The current scientific consensus unambiguously shows that we need between 2,500 and 9,000 grizzlies in the contiguous United States as part of a single freely interbreeding population if we are to achieve meaningful recovery – and restoration of grizzlies in the Selway-Bitterroot is critical to achieving that goal. We currently have no more than 1,000 bears, even in our two largest populations – the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone.

As David's report shows, we need more bears in more places to ensure that they will flourish in the face of climate change and increasing human pressures, and the Selway-Bitterroot provides some of the best bear habitat anywhere.

To advance the goal of meaningful recovery, conservationists recently sent letters to Congress and the Biden administration that call for immediate action to make areas between existing bear populations more permeable and to protect grizzlies and their habitat, not only in the Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem, but throughout the Northern Rockies.

No Ordinary Bear – and Its Disappearance

The grizzly bears that occupied the Selway Bitterroot since the last Ice Age – and continue to survive in the Selkirk, Cabinet-Yaak, Northern Continental Divide and Yellowstone ecosystems – are members of a unique evolutionary and biogeographic lineage called Clade 4. After once being widespread in the Northern Hemisphere, this lineage has since disappeared virtually everywhere on Earth except for mid-latitudes of North America, where these unique bears are relegated to small vulnerable populations.

Idaho's ancestral grizzlies once relied on abundant fruit, anadromous salmonids, and whitebark pine seeds – as well as bison grazing the Snake River plains. Idaho's Selway-Bitterroot region almost certainly supported several thousand grizzly bears at the time of European contact, with the highest densities of bears at mid-latitudes other than perhaps in the area that was to become California.



Grizzly bears as they might have appeared, peacefully grazing in a meadow on top of the Sapphire Mountains, prior to being killed by Europeans.

But Europeans extirpated grizzly bears in Idaho with astonishing speed. Concentration of most grizzlies along lower-elevation spawning salmon streams made them acutely vulnerable to heavily-armed Europeans – and even the most remote areas didn't offer refuge from an explosion of miners who flooded the region in search of wealth. Massive wildfires during 1910 and the near extinction of spawning chinook salmon a little later may have been the coup de grâce. By the 1950s, grizzlies had winked out in their last strongholds in upper reaches of the Clearwater River.

Promise and Peril

With the demise of mining operations in most areas and recent efforts to protect grizzlies, the potential of Selway-Bitterroot's wildlands to support grizzlies has largely been restored. As many as 1,000 grizzly bears could likely live here. Such a robust population would significantly improve the prospects for grizzly bears in the lower-48 states, especially if these bears are part of a contiguous interbreeding population of several thousand grizzlies. Our long-isolated populations in the Northern Rockies could be reconnected, but only if grizzlies are allowed to recolonize suitable habitat throughout the Northern Rockies, including in Canada.

But grizzly bears face a multitude of hazards, including unsecured garbage and food; conflicts over livestock depredations; conflicts with big game hunters; and mortalities caused by black bear hunters mistaking a grizzly for a black bear. Excessive and poorly managed logging roads on a number of National Forests fragment habitat and increase the likelihood of illegal killing. And Interstate Highway I-90 and human settlements in the Bitterroot Valley pose formidable barriers to free movement of grizzlies into central Idaho.

Fortunately, we know how to tackle these challenges, whether related to highway crossing structures or human-grizzly bear coexistence.

Conservationists and Nez Perce Tribal Members Demand Action to Protect Grizzly Bears

Many conservationists recognize the urgent need to protect grizzlies that are recolonizing the Selway-Bitterroot, as well as the need to bolster protections for this species across the West. To address these imperatives, 31 conservation organizations and tribal members sent letters last week to the U.S. Departments of [Transportation](#), [Agriculture](#), and [Interior](#), as well as to [Congress](#), calling for coordinated federal action to ensure the long-term survival of grizzly bears. These letters emphasized the need to prioritize funding for support of coexistence efforts and to protect vulnerable habitats. Without immediate action, the groups contend that existing and recently enacted anti-wildlife policies in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming will result in more grizzly bear deaths and a failed recovery effort.

On May 18th, Friends of the Clearwater, a regional group based in Moscow, Idaho, hosted an online event for members of the media that highlighted David's report and release of the letters to Congress and the Biden administration. The event included spokespeople from Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment Wild – a group of Nez Perce tribal members – as well as Wild Earth Guardians, Western Watersheds, Friends of the Bitterroot, and Grizzly Times.

“The Grizzly bear – like salmon and wolves – are integral to the life ways of the Nimiipuu, the Nez Perce tribal name for ourselves, which means, The People,” explained Elliot Moffett, President of Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment. “We support the recovery of the grizzly bear and oppose state measures to open up or expand trophy hunting of bears, wolves, and other animal brothers and sisters. The wholesale hunting and trapping of at-risk species is out of balance with responsible management. This is unacceptable.”

In their [letter to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland](#), the groups urge that she resist demands to remove Endangered Species Act protections. The letter also urged Secretary Haaland to support efforts to peacefully co-exist with the grizzlies and other protected wildlife.

The organizations [call on Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack](#) to take a close look at actions recently taken by the Forest Service. This agency has authority over the majority of grizzly bear habitat, and has systematically weakened or even eviscerated measures to protect bears and the habitats they need to thrive.

“Under the last administration, the Forest Service pushed through land management plans that fail to protect core grizzly bear habitat and lack any safeguards for corridors that bears need to reach new areas,” said Adam Rissien of Wild Earth Guardians.

In their [letter to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg](#), the organizations ask him to make wildlife crossings throughout the West a funding priority, drawing either on existing sources of funds or by requesting that Congress allocated monies dedicated to the task.

“Wildlife crossings over and under highways and interstates connect habitat and provide a practical measure to secure grizzly migration,” said Kristin Combs of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates.

Roadmap to Recovery

With warming global temperatures, we can expect that diminishing snowpacks and increasing summer droughts will degrade rivers and streams, increase the frequency of wildfires, and lead to local extirpations of bear foods. These and other environmental changes will almost certainly diminish native foods that are currently important to grizzly bears throughout the Northern Rockies. Moreover, increasing numbers of people are flooding into this region, either as tourists or in pursuit of a better quality of life. All of these trends translate into threats that underscore the need for more bears in more places if we are to ensure the future of grizzly bears.

The current need is urgent, but the remedies are clear. The future of grizzlies in the contiguous United States will depend on encouraging colonization of the Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem, maintaining Endangered Species Act protections for grizzlies throughout the Northern Rockies, and working with local residents to promote coexistence efforts and encourage greater acceptance of grizzlies. All of this will depend on even greater commitment by the federal government to recover grizzly bears, with benefits not only to the multitudes of people who care about these animals, but also the ecosystems that grizzlies occupy.

David’s report provides the details of a roadmap to recovery.

Media Coverage of the Recent Online Press Conference:

- <https://www.kpax.com/news/montana-news/wildlife-advocates-ask-congress-biden-administration-to-up-grizzly-bear-efforts>
- <https://bitterrootstar.com/2021/05/conservation-groups-call-for-urgent-action-to-protect-grizzly-bears/>
- <https://lmtribune.com/northwest/groups-call-for-expanded-grizzly-bear-protections>

Please Consider a Gift to *Grizzly Times*...

We need your help! We have retired and are doing this full-time work pretty much gratis – despite the gradual dissolution of our physical bodies.

If you were following the delisting court case, you know that David's role was vital to the litigation success that restored Endangered Species Act protections to Greater Yellowstone's grizzly bears. The skilled attorneys could not have won the case without David's scientific expertise. He also recently helped with the successful appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court, which has implications for delisting of Northern Continental Divide, and perhaps all lower-48, grizzlies.

As we do not have our own nonprofit, a not-for-profit tax-deductible organization, *Conservation Congress*, has agreed to be our fiscal sponsor. (Thank you, Denise!)

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Great Falls, Montana 59401

* Be sure to note that your contribution is for *Grizzly Times* (GT).

Thank you for your continued support – in any way – it is greatly appreciated!