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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, Ph.D.](#)
Co-Founders of *Grizzly Times*.

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November 29, 2023

Dear Friend of the Grizzly,



Unseasonably warm temperatures have coaxed a few phlox into blooming again, but grizzly bears—and we—know that winter is descending. As bears pack on pounds to survive winter famine, too many have been getting caught in the crossfire with big game hunters who are flooding the woods. The problem has

become so serious that some have dubbed this “grizzly season” even though hunting grizzlies is illegal under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

It is not surprising that so far this year, hunter-related conflicts are the leading cause of grizzly bear deaths in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). (It should be noted that about 90% of grizzlies that die are killed by humans.) Hunters have killed fourteen out of a total 45 grizzlies known to have died at the hands of humans. All hunter-related cases are under investigation for possible poaching. The second leading cause of grizzly bear deaths is retaliation for depredations on cattle. So far, managers have killed 11 grizzlies that got tangled up with cows and their owners. And disturbingly, six grizzlies were killed by vehicles—a record number for the GYE.

Using the government’s estimate of unreported and unknown human-caused deaths, over 90 grizzlies have been killed so far—roughly 10% of the estimated population of 970 or so grizzlies. According to experts, this is an unsustainably high death toll that continues an alarming trend that began when whitebark pine forests collapsed because of an unprecedented outbreak of mountain pine beetles unleashed in whitebark pine’s normally frigid haunts by a warming climate. Grizzlies have increasingly turned to eating elk gut piles left by hunters and meat from cows to make up for the loss of whitebark pine seeds, with the resulting slaughter by hunters and managers retaliating for depredations.

After struggling to get the data on dead bears in the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem (NCDE), we at *Grizzly Times* learned that our other grizzly bear stronghold in the lower 48 has witnessed a similar tragedy this year. So far, 42 grizzlies have been killed. Leading causes included trains and vehicles that killed ten grizzlies, as well as management deaths resulting from careless handling of human-associated foods by residents of the ecosystem.

Parenthetically, NCDE managers do not keep an up-to-date online dead bear database as is done for bears in Greater Yellowstone. This absence of current information thwarts meaningful and timely public engagement in managing our bears there.

The lessons of this slaughter are obvious: we need to do more to reduce grizzly bears deaths. And we know how. We have written extensively about hunters, trains and vehicles, coexistence and food conditioning and livestock operations:

- Blogs and Coexistence Success
Stories: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/coexistence>
- Primer on Staying Safe in Bear Country: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/bear-safety>
- Effects of Trains and Railways on Grizzly Bears, Essay by David Mattson: https://www.grizzlytimes.org/files/ugd/d2beb3_e7af8176b96748049c40fc1facd83071.pdf

- Upper Green River Grazing Plan, David Mattson
Declaration: https://www.grizzlytimes.org/files/ugd/d2beb3_59c35b2e46a04bbf8a07497109d9008b.pdf
- Teaching Bears, Essay by David
Mattson: https://www.grizzlytimes.org/files/ugd/d2beb3_f2baa7264a7f4ef5b7f62067386263ed.pdf

What we lack is the necessary commitment, law enforcement, and resources in the institutions responsible for grizzly bear management. While more nongovernment organizations are pitching in to boost coexistence practices, they cannot make up for government deficiencies.

Until we create a management regime in sync with public values, stop the unnecessary hemorrhaging of grizzly bears, and grow and reconnect our isolated bear populations, the federal government should not strip Endangered Species Act protections. This means reforming management, especially by the US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and states of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. David has written the most comprehensive analysis done to date on the problem of state wildlife management: https://www.grizzlytimes.org/files/ugd/d2beb3_a4aff4d546d941b08341d6f7d27e66ad.pdf

Power of Connection for Grizzly Bear Recovery: WildEarth Guardians Host Webinar with Grizzly Bear Advocates, Including David and Louisa

On September 13, WildEarth Guardians sponsored a webinar hosted by John Horning, the organization's Executive Director, to discuss efforts to recover grizzly bears in the Northern US Rockies, and challenges faced by those hoping to ensure that grizzlies flourish well into the future. In addition to David and Louisa, panelists included Adam Rissien, WildEarth Guardians' grizzly bear specialist, and Kristin Combs, Executive Director of Jackson Hole Bear Solutions and Wyoming Wildlife Advocates.

The excellent discussion, recorded [here](#), provided a concise overview of the threats to grizzlies, including climate change, development, long-term isolation, and the campaign by the states of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana to strip vital federal ESA protections. Delisting would reverse hard-fought gains made during the last four-plus decades of protection and push even our largest grizzly bear populations back to the brink of extinction.

Panelists emphasized that we can achieve meaningful recovery. To do so, we need to retain federal ESA safeguards, improve coexistence efforts, reform state wildlife management, and enhance connectivity among populations. These steps will improve bears' long-term genetic health and resilience in the face of rapid human-caused changes, while rescuing the Northern Rockies' most vulnerable populations in the Cabinet Yaak, Selkirks, and Selway-Bitterroot ecosystems.

Now for the Good News: Voices for the Bear

The remainder of this newsletter is devoted to a more uplifting topic: your bear stories. We are blown away by the inspiring, gorgeous stories we have received from you, our readers.

These stories are so bursting with exploration, devotion, and celebration of the bear that it seems sacrilegious to provide excerpts, as we do below—but only to tease you in the hopes you will read the pieces in their entirety. You can find them here:

- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-1>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-3>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-4>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-5>



Cosmic Spirit of the Great Bear
Painting by Karin Lease

These essays, poetry, video, and artwork provide a critical antidote to the stories we read so often about grizzlies as threatening, and even demonic, Monsters of God. We hope these contributions will help foster both a positive vision of grizzly bears and a community of mutually inspired people willing to speak up for grizzly bears and others who care about these animals.

If you have not yet submitted a story, video, poem, or piece of artwork, we hope that what has been published so far will inspire you to do so! Also, please send this invitation to anyone you know who might be interested.

We have been considering releasing these as an anthology if we can find a publisher. If so, and if you submitted a story, we will be sure to be in touch with each of you for permission, as this progresses.

We want to give special thanks to poet Ellen Bass, for helping us kick off this wonderful series with her poem “Grizzly,” and to volunteer Cecilia Mink whose enthusiasm for grizzlies and this project is contagious.

Excerpts of Your Stories

Grizzly by Ellen Bass



...And here she hunkers
over a bison carcass, slowly ripping free
the shoulder. Those precision instruments
that work with an ease that seems—yes—
delicate.

Blood stains the river and stains
the snowbank and stains the rock.
Vessel carrying the chemicals of life—
hair and bone, flagella and bloom.
She carries them, lumbering forward
as she sinks her teeth and feeds.

Ellen Bass is an acclaimed poet who has won many awards, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. The poem “Grizzly” is in her collection of poems, Indigo, published by Copper Canyon Press. It is used with permission by Ellen Bass. It can be found in its entirety here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers>

Grizzly Bear Telepathy, by Mike Bader



While working as Yellowstone Park ranger,
[I came upon] a 400-pound grizzly looking
right at me. I swear I had telepathic
communication with that bear. It said, "You
have to help us. There aren't very many of
us and there isn't anywhere we can go to
completely avoid humans." It then...
vanished into a dog-hair stand of trees
without a sound...

From that point on I was an advocate...

Mike Bader is a former Yellowstone ranger, independent consultant and researcher with several papers published in science journals and has been a grizzly bear advocate for more than 40 years.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2>

Room to Roam, by Phil Knight



Can't we leave room for another?
For the grizzly cubs and their mother?
For the wolf, badger, eagle and bear?
For all that lives wild out there?

Keep it WILD! Keep it GREEN!
Keep it FREE!
Open your eyes and see
We are playing a dangerous game
For the Bear's fate and ours are the
same!

Phil grew up in New England and fled for the wilds of the Rockies as soon as he could. He has spent 40 years in the Yellowstone area and has spent a lot of blood sweat and tears defending grizzly bears, wolves, wild forests and other worthy living things. As a Yellowstone Park tour guide, Phil is lucky enough to experience Yellowstone's incredible wildlife year-round. He and his wife Alaina live in Bozeman.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-5>

Cosmic Spirit of the Great Bear, by Karin Lease



The following excerpt of an email was submitted by Karin Lease, as well as her lovely painting of two bears, reprinted above:

"My heart breaks with the beauty and vulnerability of these magnificent bears. I am in tears as I read the newsletter and look at the photos... I wish I had a grizzly story to share, but alas I have never experienced any bears, except black bears."

Karin Lease is an artist and nature, animal, civil, and human rights advocate who lives in Sebastopol, California.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers>

Sharing the Land, by Bill Leikam



In the Badger–Two Medicine Wilderness of Montana the dog Sonny and I were up on a promontory... when I turned and... off to my left, maybe 200 yards distant, was a big brown grizzly just moving along minding its own business. ...The bear glanced at us and kept right on going...

Seeing that bear that close caused a stir in me that said, “What a beautiful spirit. We can both be here and enjoy the land.”

Bill Leikam co-founded the Urban Wildlife Project which focuses on studying and advocating for gray foxes in the San Francisco Bay area.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers>

Grizz Tracks, by Gary Macfarlane



Along the North Fork of the Buffalo, we hit that powerful and distinct smell...Bear, big bear. The hair on the back of my neck stood up... After that, every mark in the trail became a grizzly track. [My sister and I] spent a near-sleepless night in the tent. I became convinced that the...shape rustling and pushing on the lower wall of the tent was a grizzly paw. The flashlight showed it was a boreal toad on a night foray.

Gary Macfarlane was Executive Director of Friends of the Clearwater and champion of wildlife and wildlands for nearly 30 years until his retirement in 2021.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-3>

In the Spirit of John and Frank Craighead, by Tom Mazzarisi



Tough decisions and sacrifices will need to be made by all of us. Grizzly country is shrinking, not expanding, even though bears are reclaiming areas they once inhabited 200 years ago. More of us are crowding into the beautiful and wild country that grizzlies and so many other animals depend on for their survival. In the spirit of John and Frank Craighead, let's be fearless and uncompromising in coming up with solutions that ensure a future generation of kids can dream of seeing a wild grizzly.

Tom Mazzarisi spent part of his life working as a National Park Service Ranger, and currently focuses on planning and leading safaris in Africa.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-3>

In Honor of Monica, by Cecelia Mink



In September, 2021, word spread that a mama grizzly, Monica, and her three cubs were killed in Polebridge, Montana, after becoming conditioned to eating trash left in a trailer by some irresponsible people. When I saw the picture of Monica with a tear coming from her eye, I vowed that day I would become an advocate for these creatures of grandeur even though I had no clue what I was doing. Every day I think of that tear coming from Monica's eye, which inspires me to keep fighting for these precious souls.

Cecilia Mink is a wildlife advocate from a ranching family in Idaho, currently living in Whitefish, Montana. She is working to improve grizzly bear coexistence, and is also helping David and Louisa with this project to encourage inspirational stories about grizzly bears.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers>

Grizz Tracks, by Pat O'Herren



The bear [whose snout pressed between my pack and the back of my neck... and pushed me off the trail] had every right to take my life, to maul me, to neutralize me, to end what had been a lark in her territory. But she did not. And I owe that bear for every year I have lived since one spectacular blustery day in Glacier National Park. With a close friend, we later formed a non-profit to... give each and every grizzly bear one more day of life. I owed her at least that much. And I still do.

Pat O'Herren retired as the Chief Planning Officer for Missoula County, Montana and currently sits on that county's Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee, as well as the board of Advisors for Swan Valley Connections.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-3>

A Herd of Grizzlies, by Leslie Patten



Near my cabin... I watched a mother grizzly digging thistle roots with three 2 ½-year-old offspring that looked almost as big as her.... I thought about the story, *The Woman Who Married a Bear*, about a native girl who falls in love with a handsome grizzly and goes to live in a lodge in the company of bears. For a few moments I felt I'd been in a bear lodge... and melded into bear consciousness.

Leslie Patten is an author and advocate for wild animals and wild lands who has lived in the remote Sunlight Basin of Wyoming's Absaroka Mountains for the last 18 years.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2>

Changing Lives One Grizzly at a Time, by Brian Peck



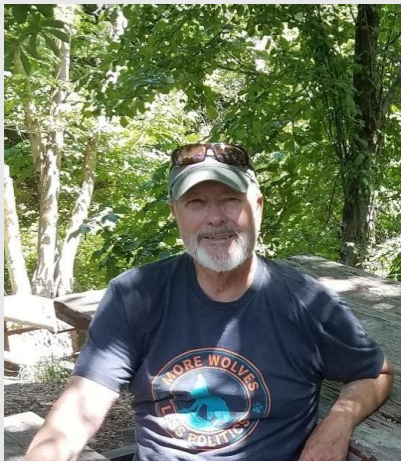
On Glacier Park's Logan Pass, I showed a black and silver grizzly to a family from Michigan. Looking through my spotting scope, the mother gasped. Her jaw dropped, and tears rolled down her cheeks, as the family, enthralled, peppered me with questions about grizzlies....

Many years later I remember that moment like it was yesterday, and somewhere in Michigan, I suspect there's a family that still looks back on that day and smiles. Such is the power of the Great Bear to change lives if we are willing to summon humility to look, listen, and learn.

Brian was an indefatigable advocate for wildlife and a consummate educator. For decades, he was a leading voice for grizzly bears and wolves in the Northern Rockies and worked as a wildlife consultant for Great Bear Foundation, Sierra Club, and Natural Resources Defense Council, among other groups.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers>

My Grizzly Encounter, by Kirk Robinson



There we were, face to face, a large grizzly bear and me. In two seconds I might be dead! My only hope was that he would not charge. My right hand dropped to the canister of bear spray hanging on my belt as I slowly stepped backward, my head now turned to the side to avoid eye contact. "You are very beautiful," I said softly, "you have nothing to fear from me. Good bear." What went on in his mind will remain a mystery, but evidently he didn't perceive me as a threat.

Kirk Robinson, PhD, is a former philosophy professor who founded Western Wildlife Conservancy in Salt Lake City in 1997. He is on the Advisory Board of Wildlife For All and on The Rewilding Institute Leadership Council. He enjoys backpacking, river trips, and exploring for Native American rock art.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-4>

Grizzlies Saved My Life, by David Stalling



I accepted myself that day while watching those magnificent and tenacious animals [a silver-tipped female grizzly and her two cubs]. In no small way, those bears helped save my life. I often joke with friends that grizzlies made me gay. ...Everything is what it is, including us. We are part of it all. We ignore that at our own peril. I learned that from wild grizzlies, in a wild high-mountain meadow, in a truly wild place.

David Stalling is a writer, photographer and wildlife advocate living in Missoula, Montana.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2>

The Language of Grizzlies, by Tom Sachse

At camp [with my son Dan] near Yellowstone's Lamar River, a grizzly sniffed around the tents... where he found an old elk carcass we had not noticed... The bear circled our camp and every time we moved or made a sound, he stood up to see what we were doing. Then he crossed the same river that we had struggled with.

...The bear didn't return, but we got his message. The carcass was his and as long as we respected his space, he would let us stay in his territory.

Tom Sachse is a retired educator who helped develop Utah's Secondary Comprehensive Counseling & Guidance Model.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2>

Why Grizzly Bears Matter, by Harry Rissien



This video of Harry Rissien was recorded during July, 2023, at the Great Bear Campout on Idaho's Lochsa River. The gathering, convened by Brett Haverstick and Wilderness Watch, consisted of passionate scientists, lawyers, activists, and citizens focused on developing strategies to protect the grizzly bear. The highlight of the weekend was hearing everyone's "why"—why grizzly bears?

Here is Harry's

answer: <https://video.wixstatic.com/video>

Harry is 11 years old and, at least for now, loves fly fishing. He lives with two proud parents (Adam and Leah) in Missoula, Montana. Adam works for WildEarth Guardians as the ReWilding Manager.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-4>

Perfumed by a Grizzly, by Stephen Stringham



[After weeks studying grizzly bears in Alaskan wilderness], I went to a creek where I bathed myself, scrubbed my clothes, and hung the laundry on bushes to dry... Out of the forest came an adult female grizzly who apparently thought I hadn't done a good enough job. After giving my underwear a sniff and snort, she pulled each pair off the bushes and dropped it onto the grass... Then she rolled on everything until it was thoroughly anointed with her own God-given perfume. Finally... she ambled off into the trees and plopped down for the night. Waiting until she was snoring gently, I crept up and retrieved my clothes.

Video footage of the event can be viewed [here](#) in Secrets of Living in Harmony With Bears.

Dr. Stephen F. Stringham is a pioneering bear behaviorist, wildlife ecologist, and author who lives in coastal Alaska. He is the Director of the Bear Viewing Association and Bear Communication & Coexistence Research Program.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-4>

My Encounter with One-oh-Four, by Jennifer Watson



The kill [of grizzly bear number 104] lay in the bed of the stream... She guarded it diligently. We froze... speechless, and in awe of the... gorgeous animal of brown with golden highlights. Suddenly, she rose largely on her hind legs, and sniffed the air... We granted her grace and her meal and backed away.

...I like to think that her descendants are roaming wild and free in the hills of the Shoshone National Forest, where I was lucky to briefly glimpse their famous great-great-grandmother.

Jennifer Watson is a wilderness and wildlife advocate and member of Great Old Broads for Wilderness who lives in Lolo, Montana.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2>



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.

As we describe in this newsletter, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, yet again, making a run at removing ESA protections for grizzly bears—potentially throughout Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho.

This move has been catalyzed by petitions from the Republican Governors of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho against a backdrop of legislation in all three states designed to persecute carnivores, with wolves targeted for especially vindictive measures. Congressional delegations from the northern Rockies are simultaneously attempting to legislatively remove ESA protections, with judicial review explicitly exempted.

If grizzlies are delisted, whether legislatively or by the administration, they will almost certainly be subject to punitive management aimed at reducing the sizes and distributions of our two largest grizzly bear populations. As always, we will be

in the trenches trying to protect grizzlies and the habitats they depend on in this region and elsewhere.

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

You can make a one-time contribution or sign up for a monthly donation through this link.

[DONATE HERE](#)

Or, you can mail a donation to:

*Conservation Congress
c/o Denise Boggs
1604 1st Avenue South
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!

***For the bears,
Louisa and David***