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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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June 1, 2023

*Dear Friend of the Grizzly,*

In this Grizzly Times newsletter we announce our latest recipient of the **Grizzly Times Hero Awards, Sara Johnson**. The award is aimed at celebrating outstanding but often unsung heroes who are making the world a better place for grizzlies and other wildlife on behalf of all of us, including future generations. A description of the award follows along with a brief bio of our hero, Sara.



## **Background on Grizzly Times Hero Award**

Saving grizzly bears and their wild country involves challenging work that relies on people who have extraordinary passion, courage, and selflessness. Many of the most effective champions of the Great Bear work behind the scenes without promoting themselves, so they often do not receive the recognition they deserve. That is why we launched the Grizzly Times Hero Awards: to celebrate outstanding but often unsung heroes who are making the world a better place for grizzlies and other wildlife on behalf of generations to come.

At a time when threats are mounting and bad news can often prevail, it is easy to overlook the important difference that unsung heroes can and do make. In giving these awards, we aim to spotlight those people who are living the example we want to see in the world. And in this essay accompanying the granting of this award, we will explain why Sara matters, to both honor her as well as hopefully inspire others to act.

We give special thanks to the world-renowned wildlife photographer, Tom Mangelsen, who has allowed us to use an iconic image of Grizzly 399, perhaps the most famous grizzly in the world, in creating this award. This iconic bear symbolizes what we are fighting for: a magnificent animal that is not only intelligent, resourceful, nurturing, and quintessentially wild—but also deserving of our compassion, reverence, and respect.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/hero-award>

### **Sara Johnson, Grizzly Times Hero**



*Sara Johnson, Warrior for the Wild*

## **More About the Inimitable Sara**

Sara hails from the prairies in South Dakota, where her father set a positive example by protecting prairie dogs—an unusual practice among ranchers. After getting her Ph.D. in wildlife biology, Sara got a job in 1979 as a wildlife biologist on the Targhee National Forest in Idaho, west of Yellowstone Park. The Forest Service was then desperate to hire women—and to find staff who could speak Spanish and communicate with Basque shepherders about grizzly bears at a time of mounting conflicts resulting from depredations on sheep by grizzly bears.

What Sara didn't know was the massive and destructive scale of a clearcutting and roadbuilding program that had recently been launched by the agency. As she later recounted, "I had no idea what I was getting into. That was my awakening, my education about logging and its impacts on grizzly bears."

Weary of her struggles inside the agency to rein in the Targhee Forest, Sara then applied to the adjacent Gallatin Forest for a job she was overqualified for. When the Forest Service turned her down, she challenged the agency and won. During that time, Louisa became friends with Sara, who coached Louisa about the destruction being wrought by the Forest Service, all the while modeling enormous courage in the face of hostility among agency higher-ups.

Fed up after fourteen years inside government, Sara quit to start her own environmental group, Native Ecosystems Council, with the goal of systematically challenging a deluge of toxic decisions being promulgated by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in landscapes neglected by other conservation groups.

As a tireless advocate for wildlife, Sara says she has found the perfect line of work. "I understand all about logging, and I know how the Forest Service does nothing for wildlife. I'm focused—one might say obsessed—and I like the challenge of saving our forests."

Sara has for a long time worked closely with Mike Garrity and the Alliance for the Wild Rockies. "We have enormous respect for each other and make a great team."

Thank you, Sara, for your staunch defense of wild country and grizzly bears that depend on it.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/sara-johnson>

For those who might want to contact Sara, or better yet, support her important work, she can be contacted at:

Native Ecosystems Council  
P.O. Box 125  
Willow Creek, MT 59760



*Sara in her office, preparing to challenge an ill-conceived Forest Service decision. Photo by Bozeman Daily Chronicle.*

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### **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 you may have recently seen in the news, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is, yet again, making a run at removing Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections from 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, a not-for-profit tax-deductible organization, Conservation Congress, 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***