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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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March 14, 2025

Dear Friend of the Grizzly,

Sharing this news is the hardest thing I have ever done:
On Feb. 2, Dr. David John Mattson, my husband and Co-founder of this Grizzly
Times website, passed away at home here in Montana after a long illness.

David was my beloved, best friend, and north star.



Dr. David Mattson

I know I am not alone in sharing a sense of grief and profound loss.

Our lives have been intertwined since 1986 when David was a researcher with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, and I was a clueless environmental advocate seeking to learn more about grizzlies.

Over the years, we learned that with different approaches—David, a world-class scientist, and me an environmental activist—we made a great team working to make the world a better place for grizzlies and their imperiled wild habitat.

When words do not fail me as they do now, I will share more about David's passion, heart and ferocious intellect—and some funny stories—that inspired me and countless others. Grizzlies would thank David too if they could speak!

I hope you will consider sharing your reflections about him, as well. Feel free to email them to us at info@grizzlytimes.org.

Forty years ago, few could imagine that grizzlies would have to do the heavy lifting for protecting wildlands and wildlife in the Northern Rockies. Among others, David

and I hoped that this would not be necessary, and that common sense and the converging science on the needs of elk, trout and ecosystems would prompt managers to exercise more restraint and Congress to act.

Since this did not happen, the burden has fallen heavily on the backs of bears and their advocates. For decades, David helped lawyers make sense of complex science, and the often tortuous and wrong-headed arguments of government officials, to craft winning cases that saved hundreds of thousands of acres of habitat.

He would be pleased to know that a few weeks after he passed, the imperiled Cabinet Yaak ecosystem was spared the disastrous impacts of a massive roading and logging project by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The ruling focused on the grizzly bear, and relied significantly on David's insights and evidence.

Much more needs to be done to allow bears to flourish in a rapidly changing world. Although David did not live to see the final product, he advised the advocates who assembled this report: "[A New Vision for Grizzly Bear Recovery in the Northern Rockies](#)."

As readers of our website which features his scientific research, you know how grizzlies are threatened by climate change, habitat destruction, excessive killing, and anti-carnivore policies. Making matters worse, now both the administration and Congress are pushing to kill more bears, strip protection for grizzlies in Yellowstone and other ecosystems and shrink populations to dangerously low levels.

Now, more than ever, we must stand together to defend grizzlies, wild places, and civil society.

To be better informed about current scientific and related management problems that will play out in the upcoming months and years, please read David's comprehensive report, *Flawed Science*:
[Report - Flawed Science by Dr. David Mattson](#)

His obituary and additional information follow below...

***For the bears,
Louisa***



David and his shadow, Tashi

OBITUARY

***David John Mattson, Ph.D.
Co-Founder, Grizzly Times Website
June 11, 1954 - February 2, 2025***

To a blank spot on a map! That is where David Mattson always wanted to go: places as far from the sign of humans and as full of wild animals as he could get. His quest began on the family ranch in South Dakota’s Black Hills where he discovered the secret haunts of elk and black bear—but not wolves because his grandfather and other homesteaders killed the last ones in the state.

David burned to atone for such losses. As a boy, he spent hours on the ranchhouse floor studying maps that led him to the wildest country remaining in the lower 48 states: Yellowstone. There, in the company of grizzly bears, David found home—and his superpowers.

Yellowstone National Park hired David to study grizzlies shortly after the last few hundred animals were protected under the Endangered Species Act. With stringy

blond hair and wild blue eyes, he appeared to some as a “country rube” willing to wear out a pair of boots a season crossing Yellowstone’s high country and glacial-fed rivers to collect data on grizzlies. That was until David opened his mouth and impressed veteran researchers with his observations of bear behavior, food habitats, human-bear connections—and more.



David documenting a Yellowstone whitebark pine midden that had been exploded by grizzlies.

David saw large carnivores as icons of a vanishing wilderness and prisms through which to understand ecosystems and the wider world. He expanded upon the work of pioneer grizzly bear researchers Frank and John Craighead and shed new light on ecological connections and the role of grizzlies and other large carnivores

as barometers of the health of ecosystems. His work underscored what the ancients have long known: the Great Bear is a mirror of ourselves and a test of our compassion.

David's colleagues could barely match his blistering pace or his prodigious output—over 1,000 papers, essays, reports, articles, lectures, testimony, public talks, radio and TV interviews, and opinion pieces during his 37-year career—on topics ranging from ecology, governance, ethics, and leadership to deeper questions about “what happens between our ears.”

David was a Renaissance man in a khaki field vest who challenged conventional siloed thinking and devoured disparate fields of study like a grizzly gorging on whitebark pine seeds before denning.

He shrugged off his role as one of the world's preeminent experts on grizzly bears, mountain lions, and other large carnivores—as well as accolades, awards, and degrees that included a Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Idaho (2000). His was a humble and practical path: solving problems between wildlife and people while striving to uphold principles of democracy to serve the broader public interest.

He believed that decisions should be based on facts, evidence, reason, and a sense of moral responsibility for the land. It was this combination of intellect, passion, and principle that inspired others to fight for wild animals and the ecosystems they depend on.



David in Yellowstone Park surveying winter-killed elk carcasses as part of his grizzly bear research.

David loved the details of behavioral ecology. He was the first to document grizzlies rubbing on trees and eating dirt, wasps, earthworms, mushrooms, and fat-rich cutworm moths in remote alpine cirques. His observations of bears during their fall feeding frenzy reminded him of their ability to seemingly die and emerge in spring with new life.

Not all of David's studies were smart. After surviving a Park Service study where he deliberately harassed grizzlies in the backcountry 24/7 to see what they would do, David quipped that "grizzlies show remarkable restraint in the face of human stupidity."

Ever curious, David expanded his interest in large carnivores worldwide and conducted groundbreaking research on mountain lion ecology in the Southwest. There he discovered cougars swimming across the Grand Canyon, a male roaming hundreds of miles across the parched desert on a seeming lark, and denning mothers protecting kittens by slaughtering predatory coyotes nearby.

Other highlights of David's career include roles as Research Wildlife Biologist and Station Leader with the U.S. Geological Survey in the Southwest, as Western Field Director of the MIT-US Geologic Survey's Science Impact Collaborative, and

as Lecturer and Visiting Senior Scientist at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

At times, David risked his career to defend his “inconvenient” research that argued for more restraint and changes in management. He became a hero among scientists who similarly suffered from speaking truth to power.

Through controversy, David discovered another superpower: collaborating with environmental lawyers to save wildlife and restore ecosystems. For 30 years, he was a leading architect and spokesperson of campaigns to protect grizzlies and the largest intact ecosystems in the lower 48 states. With litigators, he crafted winning strategies that reversed policies that harmed bears and their habitat and incorporated lessons into future campaigns.

David loved sharing his insights and observations about the mysteries of the lives of grizzlies, cougars, and their ecosystems with those who might never see them in the wild. To his students, he was a nurturing mother bear. To fellow travelers seeking to save this precious earth, he shone as the north star to light the way.

David’s wanderlust lured him to other “blank spots” including Far East Russia, Japan, Alaska, and the Yukon. But his home range was the Northern U.S. Rockies and the West.



David and Louisa in the Kalahari Desert in South Africa, visiting his son Sky who was helping lead a research project on meerkats.

David passed away at his home in Montana's Paradise Valley after a long illness. He is survived by sons Zac and Sky, former spouse Susan Bischoff, sister Donneen Torrey, and beloved wife Louisa Willcox, as well as, dogs Reilly and Maggie and cats Lucky and Puddum.

In the spirit of *The Big Lebowski*, one of David's favorite films, his ashes are stored for now in a Folger's coffee can—until the time when bears reemerge and when the wildflowers flush the mountainsides with color.

To honor David's work, please consider donating to these organizations:

- Western Environmental Law Center (and the work of Matt Bishop): 103 Reeders Alley, Helena, MT 59601
- Alliance for the Wild Rockies (and the work of Mike Garrity): P.O. Box 505, Helena, MT 59624
- Native Ecosystems Council (and the work of Sara Johnson): P.O. Box 125, Willow Creek, MT 59760
- Herding Rescue Dogs of Wyoming: wyoasr@gmail.com, (307) 752-0812

In addition to the Grizzly Times, please visit David's other websites:

- Mostly Natural Grizzlies: <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/>
- All Grizzly: <https://www.allgrizzly.org/>

See a cool video Presentation featuring David here: The Changing World of Yellowstone Grizzly Bears:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?>