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

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March 18, 2022

Dear Friend of the Grizzly,

As grizzly bears have been sleeping, we have been burning the midnight oil on their behalf. We are excited to share our hot off the press “[Take Action](#)” tab on the Grizzly Times website that includes a “[Primer](#)” on how to be an effective advocate for grizzlies that is hopefully not too short and not too long. At the end of this newsletter, you will find four timely actions featured on the Take Action section of our website that address urgent threats, and offer you an opportunity to help the Great Bear and the wild places it calls home.

We decided to put this material together after many conversations with advocates who were frustrated by the lack of information online. The complexities of the grizzly bear arena can be confusing and daunting. Even so, we hope to provide guidance and advice informed by our years of experience in the trenches.

The Primer outlines seven arenas, discussed in more detail below, where you can make a positive difference. They are:

- Strengthen US Fish and Wildlife Service’s leadership in recovery of grizzly bears
- Curb destructive activities by the US Forest Service
- Reform anti-carnivore management by wildlife agencies in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming
- Buttress the National Park Service’s laudable efforts to keep bears and people safe

- Support efforts by Tribes to play a more meaningful role in grizzly bear recovery
- Expand coexistence efforts on private lands
- Reduce deadly collisions with trains and automobiles



This list is long because the management landscape is complex, and protecting bears depends on many complementary actions. Federal, state, and local managers, as well as elected officials and private individuals, shape the conservation arena and determine whether grizzlies live or die. And each agency and elected official operates in a different context, within a particular legal framework.

At its most basic, recovering grizzly bear populations requires that we keep grizzlies alive and protect habitat they depend on. Advancing these goals depends upon caring people speaking up. By voicing your concerns – via social media or, better yet, directly to your elected officials – you send a message that you care about grizzlies and wild nature. Don't forget: officials often do difficult things only because their constituents make them.

Effecting positive change depends on where you are from, your interests and passion, and which landscapes you personally know. Each of us also has a different temperament. For those who are comfortable with conflict, you may opt to engage directly with government decision processes and with managers in state and federal agencies. For those who don't like to be involved directly in contentious situations, support of groups working to protect private lands or promote coexistence might be a better option.

The point is to find an area, arena, or issue that suits your personality and style. Grizzly bear conservation is a huge canvas, with plenty of room for each of us to make our mark.

Also, where you are from matters. If you live outside states in the Northern Rockies, engaging with state wildlife managers has less of an impact than if you engage with managers in federal agencies such as the Fish and Wildlife Service or Forest Service. Federal managers answer to all American citizens, not just to those living in a particular state.

You will find specific action items for each of the seven arenas described below by clicking on the header. Here, we thought it might be beneficial to briefly describe the domains over which different government agencies and managers have authority, along with our take on how well each agency is doing its job.

### [US Fish and Wildlife Service: Conservator of Endangered Species](#)

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) gives the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) ultimate authority over grizzly bear recovery, although more concrete actions affecting grizzly bears or their habitat are undertaken by a number of different wildlife and wildlands management agencies that the FWS oversees. All grizzlies in the lower 48 are listed as threatened under the Act.

The Act has greatly benefited grizzlies by requiring that management of this species on public and even private lands be guided by the precautionary principle and informed by the best available science. Indeed, we may have lost the grizzly entirely were it not for the ESA.

The ESA prohibits people from killing grizzlies except in cases of self-defense. The ESA also requires that the FWS ensure that decisions by other agencies such as the Forest Service do not directly or indirectly jeopardize grizzlies.

Although these requirements may sound clear-cut, in reality they are not because pressure from politicians and those invested in exploitation of natural resources chronically distorts the decision-making of land and wildlife managers, typically to the detriment of grizzly bears. And, as we discuss below, the FWS chronically neglects its legal duties in response to bullying by politicians and wildlife managers from Northern Rockies states. In the process, the FWS tends to neglect the best available science and contravene other ESA mandates, which is why many FWS decisions, including several attempts at removing ESA protections and routine approvals of destructive logging projects, have been overturned in court.



*Cartoon by Phil Juliano*

### [U.S. Forest Service: Not So Green Giant](#)

The Forest Service (FS) manages the lion's share of grizzly bear habitat, putatively on behalf of all Americans. Unlike the Park Service, the FS is required by law to manage for "multiple uses," meaning energy development, logging, grazing, wilderness, and recreation of all sorts. But unfortunately, the agency has been captured by the logging industry it was set up to regulate – and now increasingly by mountain bikers and users of off-road vehicles. The agency's culture of exploiting forests contributes to a schizophrenic approach to grizzly bear management. And too often, the FWS gives the FS a green light to destroy habitat, precipitating litigation by conservation groups.

Roads and logging on National Forests have been enormously controversial as the Forest Service churns out decision after decision authorizing construction of more roads and projects to log the last secure refuges of grizzly bears, even on forests such as the Kootenai where grizzlies are acutely threatened. Roads harm bears by fragmenting habitat and facilitating access by poachers. Although the Forest Service has put in place standards to limit the number and density of roads – some better, some worse – the agency continually seeks to weaken these standards. Perhaps surprisingly, this is still true under the Biden administration. Harmful logging projects continue to be promoted on the Kootenai, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Custer-Gallatin and other forests.

Grazing by livestock on national forests has similarly been problematic for grizzlies. In the wake of losing key native foods, grizzlies have been increasingly seeking out livestock to compensate. Although some ranchers work hard to accommodate grizzlies ([see this](#)), others do not. Wyoming's upper Green River allotments on the Bridger-Teton National Forest are witness to the greatest concentration of grizzly bear deaths in Greater Yellowstone – almost all because of notoriously anti-carnivore ranchers in the area who see grazing on public lands as a “right” rather than a privilege.

But more positively, on forests that have long been occupied by grizzlies, managers have implemented policies to keep human attractants away from grizzlies, much as the National Parks have done. Even so, food storage orders have not been uniformly applied in areas occupied by grizzlies, which sets the stage for on-going human-bear conflicts. The agency is also extremely short staffed, and law enforcement is spotty, as exemplified by a situation on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest where a single officer covers well over one million acres.



### [The States: Of Killing and Domination](#)

State wildlife managers answer to commissions that are appointed by the governor of each state. As is the case with hunters, nearly all these wildlife agency commissioners are non-Hispanic white men who proudly proclaim their avid interest in hunting, if not membership in the National Rifle Association. Each state Commission conducts regular meetings – most now on zoom – that theoretically provide members of the public with limited opportunity to comment.

But, be forewarned, if you are not a resident of the state in question, you will be disregarded – even if you do have a chance to comment. And even if you are an in-state resident, commission meetings can be intimidating, especially if you are a

woman, don't hunt, or are a person of color. Odds are, if you fall into any of these categories, you will likewise be dismissed.

On a more positive note, state wildlife agencies do have dedicated and skilled people in positions devoted to non-lethally preventing and resolving human-grizzly bear conflicts. But the success of these specialists and the coexistence programs they implement is intrinsically limited by anti-carnivore policies promulgated by those who run state wildlife management agencies.

For more on the problematic nature of state wildlife management, see this [series of essays](#) by David.

### **National Park Service: The White Hats, Mostly**

Many people think that grizzlies are managed primarily by the National Park Service within the confines of National Parks, but that is not true. Most critical grizzly bear habitat lies outside of National Parks. Even so, Grand Teton, Yellowstone and Glacier Parks have authority over an important but small portion of the landscape where grizzlies live – and where they need to live to flourish.

With a preservation mission, National Park managers often do a great job keeping grizzlies and humans safe. They have instituted strong rules and educational programs designed to keep grizzlies from having access to human foods – and from being killed as a consequence. But education and other conservation programs that promote prevention of human-grizzly bear conflicts and increased understanding of grizzly bears have suffered from budget cuts during recent years.

The Park Service has been overwhelmed by an influx of visitors during recent years. Rangers are increasingly challenged by stupid people doing stupid things around bears. In response, some rangers are hazing and harassing grizzlies rather than improving management of people. Hazing is only temporarily effective at best and harmful at worst (See this [Report](#) by David). And Park managers in the region have been loath to limit visitation, which is desperately needed, not only to protect grizzly bears but all other Park resources as well.





*Guardian of Our Ancestors Legacy Chairman David Bearshield at Glacier National Park Prayer for the Great Bear.*

### Of Tribes: A Powerful Voice for the Bear

Native peoples have ancient connections with grizzlies who they still view as relatives, healers, and guides. Grizzly bears were not systematically hunted anywhere in what was to become the contiguous United States prior to the widespread slaughter of large carnivores that began with the arrival of Europeans, many of whom saw killing grizzlies as the pinnacle of hunting success. Today, Tribes almost universally oppose hunting grizzlies for trophies.

Sovereign Tribes have long-standing legal claims to enormous tracts of grizzly bear habitat. Indeed, through treaty rights, claims, and reservation lands, Tribes are key to connecting our currently isolated grizzly bear populations to achieve meaningful recovery in the lower 48 states.

Grizzlies already occupy several reservations, including those of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Blackfeet, Northern Arapaho, and Eastern Shoshone Tribes. Many more Tribes without grizzly bears on their lands have expressed concern about the plight of grizzlies, as well as interest in supporting recolonization and recovery of the species on suitable habitat in their treaty lands and current reservations.

In 2016, an unprecedented 270 Tribes, traditional societies and tribal elders signed a treaty entitled “The Grizzly: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration” that called for banning trophy hunting of grizzlies and for providing Tribes with a meaningful role in grizzly bear management. Congressman Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) later introduced this treaty as a bill in Congress. Numerous Tribes also challenged the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s 2017 decision to remove ESA protections for grizzlies and allow a trophy hunt.

### Private Lands: Conservation Opportunity or Mortality Sink?

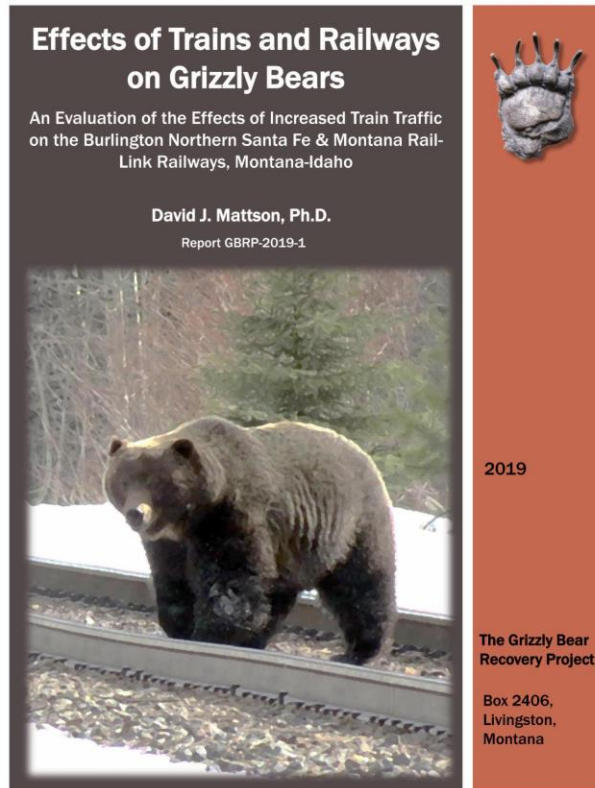
Private landowners manage a small portion of grizzly bear habitat, but their lands often contain ecologically rich riparian areas and other important spring bear habitats. Not surprisingly, grizzlies die at disproportionately higher numbers on private lands because of poorly managed livestock, readily available attractants, and the intolerance of many landowners.

Commissioners and administrators in roughly 100 regional counties have responsibility for matters such as garbage management and availability of attractants on private lands in currently occupied or potential grizzly bear habitat. Unfortunately, only a few counties have strong ordinances limiting the availability of attractants, and fewer yet have the capacity to enforce the ordinances that do exist.

Even under the best of circumstances, county governments have a difficult time curbing the destructive behavior of landowners given the religious fervor with which many Americans assert private property rights. Even more problematic, for a host of political reasons the FWS is reluctant to enforce the ESA's mandate to prohibit the harming of protected species that applies as much to private landowners as to public land managers.

Even so, numerous private landowners, land trusts, and private lands conservation groups are trying to do the right thing for grizzlies and other wildlife. Among these are truly inspiring collaboratives such as the Blackfoot Challenge, High Divide Initiative, and Tom Miner Basin Association that are working to improve coexistence between grizzlies and ranchers, as well as other private landowners.





### [Railroad Companies and Highway Departments](#)

With increased vehicular traffic in the region, more and more bears are being killed by collisions. Highways also fragment habitat and fracture grizzly bear ecosystems by impeding the free movement of grizzlies. But state highway departments can help reduce deaths by lowering speed limits, and by building highway overpasses and underpasses in areas where wildlife tend to cross.

Effective crossings have been constructed in Banff Park in Alberta. A collaborative effort involving the Federal Highway Administration, Montana Department of Transportation and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes has also installed numerous crossing structures on Highway 93 in Montana's Flathead Valley. But much more needs to be done.

Similarly, trains routinely kill grizzlies for a number of reasons. (See this [Report](#) by David). Trains accidentally kill elk and deer that, in turn, attract bears to railways where they too are killed. Hopper cars transporting grain during the Fall also accidentally spill grain on the tracks and draw bears to their death. The Santa Fe-Burlington Northern Railroad running along the south boundary of Glacier Park through the Middle Fork of the Flathead River is a particular concern. Here, increased train traffic increasingly disrupts movement of grizzlies from Glacier Park into areas farther south. Slowing train speeds, reducing night-time train traffic, and assiduous removal of attractants along railways can help prevent grizzly bear deaths.

## OTHER GRIZZLY TIMES RESOURCES

In addition to the Primer, you can learn more about the threats to grizzlies, as well as science, natural history, policy, coexistence, and cultural connections here:

- Read [Grizzly Times Blogs](#) and other materials on the Grizzly Times website that contain more information about challenges to grizzly bear conservation, and solutions for protecting grizzlies and their habitat, than you will find anywhere else. Here are some of the best: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/essays>
- Listen to [Grizzly Times Podcasts](#) that feature compelling and inspirational experts on numerous topics related to grizzly bear conservation.
- Watch [Grizzly Times Videos](#) covering our vision for the future of grizzlies, as well as, natural history and our cultural connections with bears.



## TAKE ACTION

Wondering what you can do for grizzlies right now? Here are four urgent actions:

- Help [stop the slaughter of wolves](#) that foreshadows the slaughter of grizzly bears.
- [Support reform of state wildlife management.](#)
- Help [stop destructive projects on National Forests.](#)
- [Support the Tribal Heritage and Grizzly Bear Protection Act.](#)

Please let us know what you think of this material and if you have any suggestions. We love to hear from you!

And we want to extend a special thanks to Blake Nicolazzo and Alex Duehl for their inspiration and advice – and to all of you who are working to save grizzlies. And many thanks to Janette Barnes for her tireless efforts assembling the Grizzly Times newsletters all these years.

For the bears,

*Louisa and David*

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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.

If you were following the most recent 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 helped with the successful appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court, which has implications for delisting of Northern Continental Divide grizzlies, and perhaps all grizzlies in the lower 48 states.

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:

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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!