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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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April 5, 2023

Dear Friend of the Grizzly,

Spring is here, with temperatures warm enough to melt some of the snow around our house, but many more feet in the Absarokas and Gallatin Range above. Opportunities for grizzlies to graze grass and dig biscuitroot are still several weeks away, although carrion will be an abundant source of high-quality food for the foreseeable future.

Newly awakened bears are blissfully unaware of the political drama that has dominated news coverage during the last month, largely related to efforts by our regional Congressional delegation to legislatively remove Endangered Species Act protections for grizzlies in the Yellowstone and the Northern Continental Divide ecosystems. Although surprises are always possible with D.C. politics, the passage of this legislation seems, right now, unlikely.

Our last newsletter covered these press-focused shenanigans by our regional politicians and some of our efforts to push back through opinion pieces and letters to the editor in regional and national newspapers. This newsletter features a series of essays that David wrote focused on the problems and pathologies of wildlife management by the states. These essays are relevant to the issue of delisting because state managers will be the ones determining the fates of grizzly bear populations in the northern Rockies once the federal government divests authority to Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.



Photo by Richard Spratley

***A Will to Dominate
Problems and Pathologies of State Wildlife Management***

Essays by David Mattson, Ph.D.

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/AWilltoDominateEssays>

The remainder of this newsletter features David's first-person introduction to his essays on state wildlife management, including an overview of what motivated him as well as a synopsis of the essays themselves.

The Essays

“This collection of essays addresses a common theme: the pathologies and other problematics of state institutions of wildlife management in the United States. I do not use the word pathology lightly, realizing that this term is necessarily referenced to some notion of health. In this case, I consider health to be manifest in democratic forms of governance that faithfully reflect the full diversity of our identities, interests, and worldviews. Perhaps more controversially, I also consider health to be manifest in governance that provides for the welfare and well-being of other sentient beings who lack our semiotic and textual forms of communication— notably, fellow large-brained mammals such as grizzly bears, wolves, and mountain lions.

The Main Thesis

I consider wildlife management by state governments to be a throwback to the era when non-Hispanic white men unapologetically dominated our socio-political landscape. In those times, the prevailing ethos was one of domination and use,

not only of nature and the wild animals therein, but also of women, anyone with more than a hint of melanin in their skin, and people who deviated from arbitrary norms of gender and sexuality. This ethos persists as the justifying principle for those who are privileged by an institution—wildlife management—devoted to the notion that animals exist primarily to be hunted down by mostly non-Hispanic white men, albeit in a regulated way that provides for a sustainable 'harvestable surplus.'

This ethos derives from one that saw the genocide of indigenous peoples, the disenfranchisement of women and minorities, a civil war over the perpetuation of slavery, the determined persecution of predators, and, earlier on, the related slaughter of virtually any non-domesticated animal that moved. Those who defend our current system of wildlife management would decry any association with this legacy. Yet, these same people devotedly defend the idea that animals exist almost exclusively to be 'used' (i.e., killed) by humans, with minimal regard for welfare or well-being—not unlike those who made similar defenses of slavery and Jim Crow segregation in reference to non-white people. By and large, these same people also work assiduously to exclude anyone who does not want to kill wild animals from having a voice in deliberations over how wild animals are 'used.'



As egregious, state wildlife management, rather than being an icon of fiduciary public virtue, more closely resembles a business selling public goods (i.e., wildlife) for private profit (i.e., hunting licenses) to a small minority of people from a narrow demographic (e.g., non-Hispanic white men) while using public funds to develop marketing campaigns (i.e., messaging) to recruit more customers (i.e., hunters). Perhaps needless to say, this business model organized around selling publicly-owned assets (i.e., wildlife) to people with a minority interest (i.e., hunters) is the

antithesis of an ideal where impartial trust administrators (i.e., wildlife agency commissioners) faithfully attend to the full diversity of interests and needs manifest by their trustees (i.e., the totality of the American public).

The main claim to progress made by those who vocally defend the institution of wildlife management is that wild animals are no longer indiscriminately slaughtered for commercial purposes—with the explicit exception of coyotes, bobcats, foxes, prairie dogs, wolves, pocket gophers...and more—and that any person who wants to kill a wild animal is required to buy a license before doing so without, parenthetically, needing to display much competence with their chosen weapon or trap.

An Important Proviso

These essays focus on cultures and systems of governance, specifically the modalities and dominant themes that configure the management of wildlife in the United States. Much of this dynamic organizes around the ethos of hunting and the influence of hunters operating under the justifying banner of what has come to be called The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Hunters and those who operate at their behest are thus strongly implicated in everything that follows.

Even so, I do not purport to ascribe the emphasized themes and modalities in these essays to all of those who have hunted, identify as hunters, or operate as their functionaries in wildlife management agencies. It is not only easy to conflate the necessarily wide range of variation in worldviews, personalities, and behaviors of those who hunt with modalities typifying central tendencies, but also for those who may feel offended or defensive to conflate my critique of culture and governance with a critique of all who hunt. It is not. My lived experience and the relevant research make clear that self-identified hunters are diverse, not only in how they orient to wild animals—but also in how they orient to people.



That having been said, culture and institutions are created by people and thus ineluctably reflect the worldviews, perspectives, and behaviors of those who constitute them. The connection is inescapable. While the generalities expressed in these essays do not fully describe all who identify with state wildlife management, they also capture much that is shared and essentialized. Narratives and cultures shape, as well as mirror, communities of people who strongly identify with something as potent as hunting and killing wild animals.

Reading the Essays

The four essays in this series are ideally read in sequence given the extent to which each one builds on the ones before. However, there is also enough redundancy to allow for the essays to be read as stand-alone pieces. The first essay addresses governance and representation issues; the second, the ethos and iconography of wildlife management and hunting; the third, trends in hunter numbers and hunting ideology that aggravate intrinsic structural issues; and, the fourth, the social, political, ideological, and biogeographic entanglements of wildlife management.

Each essay contains supporting references that are listed at the end and sequentially numbered as they appear in the text. These references serve as a guide to additional readings for those who might be interested in finding more detail about each addressed issue.”

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Photo by Brad Orsted

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 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, which 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*