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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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August 3, 2023

*Dear Friend of the Grizzly,*

None of us—animals, plants, and humans—have escaped the impacts of the recent unprecedented weeks of broiling weather. The essays here by Dr. David Mattson are especially timely as they address not only the climate crisis harming grizzly bears in the Northern Rockies, but also the underlying social, political, and psychological mechanisms that lead people to deny the reality of anthropogenic climate change. These pathologies—rarely elucidated in the public discourse—beset a distressingly large portion of the American public and taint the deliberations of government researchers and bureaucrats with authority over our natural world, including grizzly bear populations in the contiguous United States.



But before we delve into this distressing topic, we want to follow up on the last newsletter where we asked you to share your inspirational stories about experiences with bears, whether near, far, or through art and dreams. We have been blown away by what we have received so far, and wanted to share these contributions here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers> and <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-2> and <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/from-our-readers-3>

Please keep them coming! We are profoundly touched by your passion for grizzlies and the natural world and look forward to working with you to expand the reach of contributed essays, poems, and reflections. We realize the private nature of your contributions and will check back with you as we expand this project. What a treasure trove!



*Blondie and her cubs. Photo by Savannah Rose.*

You can read David's provocative essays on climate change here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/TheRhetoricofDenial>

David introduces his essays with the following reflections:

"I grew up on a small ranch in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Our property was at about 5,200 feet in elevation surrounded by ponderosa pine forests graced with aspen groves bordering the meadows and white spruce and paper birch on the north slopes. Our marshy bottomlands were overrun during spring with small frogs

called spring peepers. A small creek that ran through our meadows was chock full of trout that served as a dietary staple under circumstances that managed to elude South Dakota's game wardens.



*The Black Hills, circa 1970*

All of this is history. Birch have long since died out on our ranch and the aspen groves are not too far behind. Spring peepers disappeared several decades ago, along with the wet bottomlands. During summer, the water in Hay Creek is too warm and flows too vagarious to support more than a handful of trout. Summers and winters are warmer; both are more often drier.

These changes are real, and not the product of a foggy memory. Changes in climate are borne out by long-term weather records, and my teenage fascination with photography provides undisputable documentation of the demise of birch and aspen. The eerie silence of spring is its own testimony to the disappearance of spring peepers and their mating cacophony.

These losses, in a place I deeply love, have long been a source of grief for me. During the early 1970s, I readily chalked them all up to natural variation in climate—barring, of course, the devastations directly attributable to Forest Service timber management. During the mid-1980s, however, that changed, partly because of my exposure to prescient publications by the likes of Stephen Schneider, Charles Baes, and James Hansen, and partly because of

conversations with a forward-thinking wildlife researcher at Montana State University named Harold Picton.

All these scientists had seen the writing on the wall regarding the inescapable effects on our global climate of rapidly increasing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. For them, it was largely a matter of chemistry and physics, although when rereading their publications from the 1970s and early 1980s I am struck by how accurately they foretold the pace and nature of anthropogenic climate change.

Even back then, they were advocating the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and proactive mitigation strategies. This was 40-45 years ago. Without intending to be self-complementary, I found the logic and evidence presented by these researchers to be compelling, if not irrefutable. Dr. Picton subsequently recruited me to co-author a 1986 conference paper that, to my knowledge, constitutes one of the very first forays by any researchers into how climate change might affect bears. This collaboration catalyzed a life-long interest in how climate change affects ecosystems, with a focus on bears.

The first product of my solo inquiries into climate impacts was a paper I published in 1991 that, among other things, addressed how grizzlies in Yellowstone might be affected by foreseeable losses of whitebark pine, at the time an important high-elevation source of fat-rich food for grizzly bears. The timing of this paper was unfortunate given that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, egged on by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, was attempting to orchestrate the removal of Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for Yellowstone's grizzly bears—the first of several unsuccessful attempts.

The arguments I made in 1991 were inconvenient, especially those related to the effects of climate change. Chris Servheen, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator at the time, side-stepped addressing my substantive concerns by derisively likening me to “chicken little”—a tactic of substituting labeling for rational discourse well-honed during later decades by the likes of Donald Trump.

This was the first of many subsequent encounters with systematic denial of anthropogenic climate change and its impacts by well-educated people buried in the bowels of politicized wildlife management agencies catering to the interests of political and corporate elites. I went on to become (by all indications) a thorn in the side of bureaucrats and agency researchers bent on railroading removal of ESA protections for Yellowstone grizzlies, with my claims and their counterclaims regarding matters such as impacts of climate change becoming a centerpiece of public and scientific controversies.



These contestations reached a climax during court battles surrounding unsuccessful attempts by the Fish & Wildlife Service to remove ESA protections in 2006 and 2016. Climate impacts featured in arguments during both rounds of litigation, with the Fish & Wildlife Service assiduously denying not only climate impacts on bears, but even the magnitude and potential severity of climate change itself. This decades-long encounter with scientific malfeasance and trust betrayal by government bureaucrats predictably left a scar. Of course, this is my subjective experience and perspective, but it is a perspective shaped by a long history and my own burial in the bowels of bureaucracy that left me with little patience for those inside management agencies who didn't seem to have a moral compass, courage, or capacity for self-reflection.

Since retiring from academic and government service in 2013, I've expressed myself regarding grizzly bear conservation and other matters in several essays featured on *Grizzly Times*, a website pioneered by my wife, Louisa Willcox. The two essays featured here are updated and revised versions of blogs I posted in 2018 and 2019 featuring the effects of climate weirding on grizzly bears and people. These essays strive to serve several purposes, including persuasion of those who are amenable to persuasion, as well as expression of angst in a world that seems indifferent to the crises we inhabit. Hopefully, this introduction provides some context for my, at times, seeming stridency about a matter that strikes me as the existential issue of our times—not only for grizzly bears but also for humans.”

We hope that these essays provide insight into why anthropogenic climate change is such a crisis for grizzly bears as well as information about specific impacts that can be useful for reaching out to government decision-makers and politicians with influence over bears, bear habitat, and our natural world.

On a related note, [Save the Yellowstone Grizzly](#)'s film [The Beast of Our Time: Climate Change & Grizzly Bears](#) offers additional reflections by people who have lived and worked with grizzlies for decades and are concerned about the threat posed by climate change to these magnificent animals.



*Photo by Savannah Rose.*

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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 we have discussed before, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is, yet again, making a run at removing Endangered Species Act protections for grizzly bears—potentially throughout Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. This move has been catalyzed by petitions from these states' Republican Governors 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 state 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***