

A Grizzly Success

Grand Teton Matriarch 399 Inspires
New Coexistence Partnership



Photo by Walt Ackerman

by Louisa Willcox

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The ghostly shapes of five grizzlies emerged out of a blinding wet snow. As if on a mission, they plunged into the icy Snake River, swam across, and shook like dogs on the far side. Casually, the bears loped towards a stand of conifers, the snow closing in behind them.

This was spring's first appearance, captured on [video](#), of Jackson Hole's Grizzly Matriarch 399, one of the world's most famous grizzlies, and her four two-year-old cubs – now half her size.

Her fans rejoiced that at 26 years old – ancient in bear years – 399 had survived another winter famine. Yet here she was, on Easter evening no less, a living embodiment of spring's promise of renewal and transformation. Just as miraculous was her success raising quadruplets, an unusually large litter for any Yellowstone grizzly let alone such an old gal. And a few weeks later, after the arrival of an interested male suitor, 399 sent her cubs off to make a living on their own in the wild.

In some important ways, these and other Jackson Hole bears stepped into a safer world this spring. Teton County, Wyoming, which encompasses all of Jackson Hole, recently upgraded its [regulations](#) to keep grizzlies from exploiting human foods and getting into trouble – often dying as a result. At the same time, Wyoming Wildlife Advocates launched a new initiative, [Jackson Hole Bear Solutions](#), to deliver more bear-resistant trash cans to residents in the valley. Hundreds of bins have been delivered already – and more are on the way.

This story stands in sharp contrast to the steady fare of depressing news about grizzlies being killed because of Wyoming's zealous agenda to eliminate any bear it deems a problem. Teton County's success was born of an inspired collaboration between county officials and concerned citizens who share a vision of improved bear-human coexistence. Although small in geographical scope, this vision reflects a larger trend toward a more compassionate connection with wild animals.

As a longtime bear advocate and former resident of Jackson Hole, I have been closely following this story and attempting to elucidate its larger lessons for improving the practice of human-bear coexistence at a time when threats to grizzlies are mounting.

But, somewhat disconcertingly, researching and writing this essay also made me feel more grizzled than usual. When you start more than one conversation with “are you so and so’s son?” you know you have officially entered geezerhood.

But back to 399 – and the story.

Chapter One

About the Renowned Grizzly Matron 399

Few if any animals have been more celebrated than 399. Each year, families flock to Jackson Hole hoping to catch a glimpse of her, her grown-up daughter, Grizzly 610, and other celebrity bears such as Blondie (Number 793) and Felicia (Number 863) that make their living in the valley.

Grizzly Matron 399



Grizzly bear 399 and her four rambunctious cubs in April, 2022. Photo by Walt Ackerman.

The main reason these females settle into human-impacted environments is to keep their cubs safe from aggressive male grizzlies – known as boars – that often prefer to hang out in more remote areas. For 399 and other female grizzlies that frequent roadsides, staying near people is a better bet than mixing it up with boars that can and do kill cubs. So, for two decades 399 has taught generations of her offspring to forage near people for native foods.

Every day, these females and their offspring depend on human tolerance – literally, the kindness of strangers. To these grizzlies, people are allies – even, at times, babysitters. This should not surprise us given the [stories told for millennia by Native Peoples](#) throughout the Northern Hemisphere about humans living among bears, saved by bears, even marrying bears.

With a global fan club, Grizzly 399 is an ambassador for grizzlies everywhere. Her tolerance for people is legendary. To cross a road, she is known to look both ways before threading through parked cars and mobs of delighted onlookers, as doors slam and kids shriek – placidly returning to fetch a cub still wrestling with a road cone. Who could still cling to the myth that grizzlies are vicious man-eaters after beholding the ways of 399?

We know more about 399 than most grizzly bears because she has lived her long life so close to us. Tom Mangelsen, a world-famous photographer, has photo-documented his 15-year relationship with this special bear, but thousands of others fuel her fame with social media posts of her digging biscuitroot, chasing elk calves, and nursing her young.

399 reminds us of the difference that one good mom can make. Today, all Yellowstone grizzly bears are the descendants of perhaps only about 50 females that survived in the ecosystem during the early 1980's. Simply put, every mom matters – and a female such as 399 is an Olympian.

But despite her competence as a mother, 399 has barely replaced herself in the population. So far only one daughter, Grizzly 610, has also successfully raised litters. The reasons are straight-forward. Grizzly bear birth rates are inherently low and many of 399's offspring have been killed by humans. And, when 399 and other bears step outside the protected borders of the National Parks, they enter an especially dangerous world.

A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear

People pose the primary threat to grizzly bears. According to the federal government, about [90% of all adult grizzly bear deaths are caused by humans](#). Whether a grizzly

lives or dies is determined largely by our attitudes and behaviors, and the effectiveness of government efforts to curb our problematic behaviors.

Today, despite her fame and protections offered by the federal Endangered Species Act, 399, along with other celebrated grizzlies, are still threatened by freely available human foods – not to mention semis barreling down highways, unruly crowds, notoriously hostile state wildlife agencies, and poor coordination among the five government entities responsible for managing grizzlies or their habitat in Jackson Hole. I have written about these [threats elsewhere](#). But this essay is focused primarily on the problems that arise when bears get hooked on human foods and other manmade attractants.

For decades, the Park Service and Forest Service have required visitors to [keep food out of the reach of bears](#). But that is not the case on private lands. In recent years more and more bears have been killed by managers after becoming used to exploiting unsecured human foods near residences – and, as a result, potentially aggressive and dangerous. Reasons for more conflicts over anthropogenic attractants include the [rapid increase in numbers of people](#) moving into and visiting the region, and a [climate-driven decline in native foods](#) that is propelling grizzlies to forage more widely – including on private lands where garbage and other attractants are widely available.

Nowhere are attractant-related conflicts more clearly in evidence than in Jackson Hole. Last year, with permission of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, [Wyoming officials](#) “[euthanized](#)” [six grizzlies](#) in the valley, three descended from 399, on the grounds that they had become hooked on human foods. “Euthanize,” coined to describe situations where an animal is killed to relieve extreme suffering, is a term favored by managers to sanitize the act of killing for all other reasons. Needless-to-say, these particular bears were not suffering.

But the sixth of these executions – “Luna,” or Number 962 – changed the course of events.

Chapter Two

A Grizzly Death Triggers Change

[Luna’s death](#) in October 2021 was the last straw for Savannah Rose Burgess, a young wildlife photographer with a gorgeous blond mane and a passion for bears and wild animals. She understood that Luna, daughter of 399, could have continued her mother’s legacy. Although Luna had just lost her first cub, she was only five years old, with potentially many years ahead of her. But already she had amassed a rap sheet involving 22 conflicts related to human attractants. And she had likely been deliberately fed by

one woman in the valley who was responsible for hooking several other relatives of 399 on human foods, and, as a result, for their subsequent death at the hands of managers. Luna's final sin was breaking into a cabin.

Savannah Rose Burgess



Savannah Rose Burgess, grizzly bear advocate, wildlife photographer, and social media wrangler.

After Luna's death, Savannah had had enough. She met with her friend Walt Ackerman, a retired builder many years her senior, who shared her love of grizzlies – as well as outrage at the mounting slaughter. Walt had retired in Jackson where he delighted in photographing wildlife, a hobby that put him face to face with the indifference – even hostility – of managers to Jackson Hole's roadside bears. He matched Savannah's youthful enthusiasm with the gritty wisdom born of building skyscrapers in the rough-and-tumble construction world of New York City. Separated by generations, they shared a vision: although grizzly bear conservation was

enormously complex, Teton County could help save bears' lives by taking two simple steps: make bear-proof trash cans mandatory and ban wildlife feeding.

Savvy about social media, Savannah soon posted a [petition on change.org](#) asking signatories to call or write Teton County commissioners requesting they adopt rules to prevent bears from having access to human foods. An astonishing 75,000 people from the valley and all over the country signed the petition. And called. And wrote.

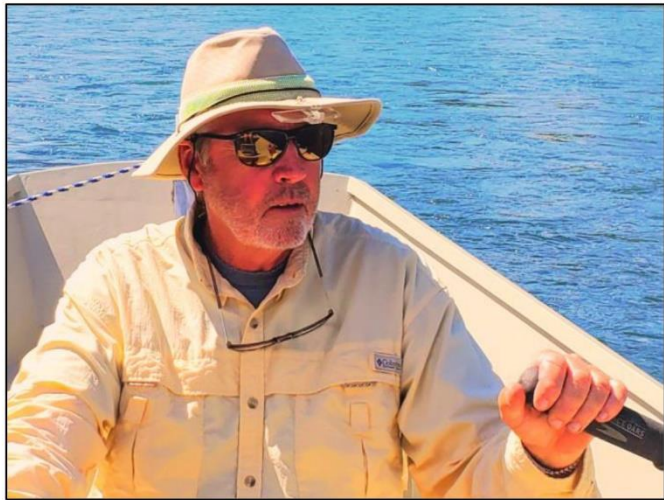
Savannah's appeal built on a recent successful nationwide campaign that had reversed the federal government's 2017 decision to strip endangered species protections for Yellowstone's grizzlies and allow for the beginning of a trophy hunt. [Grizzly 399 had been the face of that campaign](#), inspiring more than a million people across the country to speak out in favor of keeping Yellowstone grizzlies protected.

Here again, 399's fans rose up to defend grizzlies – and in so doing, changed the trajectory of management. In fact, so many advocates tied up the phone lines and clogged the Teton County's email inbox that they threatened to cripple its ability to do normal business.

Walt and Savannah requested a meeting with Chris Neubecker, Director of Planning, and Ryan Hostetter, Teton County's principal long-range planner, to discuss the matter. Moments later, they received an urgent invitation from Ryan to meet in person. The planners' request: "Please make the tsunami stop." Walt and Savannah agreed – if the planners agreed to develop new county rules governing sanitation and wildlife feeding.

A first draft was completed in three weeks.

Walt Ackerman



Walt Ackerman, wildlife advocate and master builder – of skyscrapers and programs to protect grizzly bears.

Talking Trash Becomes a Priority in Teton County

Hostetter and others county officials were hardly foes. It turned out that county officials, conservation groups and agencies had been talking about the need for a broader approach to [sanitation and feeding issues since 2018](#), but for various reasons the issue had fallen through the cracks. In the meantime, the county had been leaning on Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGF) officials to address human-bear conflicts, largely because the state has authority over wildlife management on lands outside Yellowstone and Grand Teton Parks. But over time, it became increasingly clear that this arrangement was not adequately protecting bears – or the broader public interest.

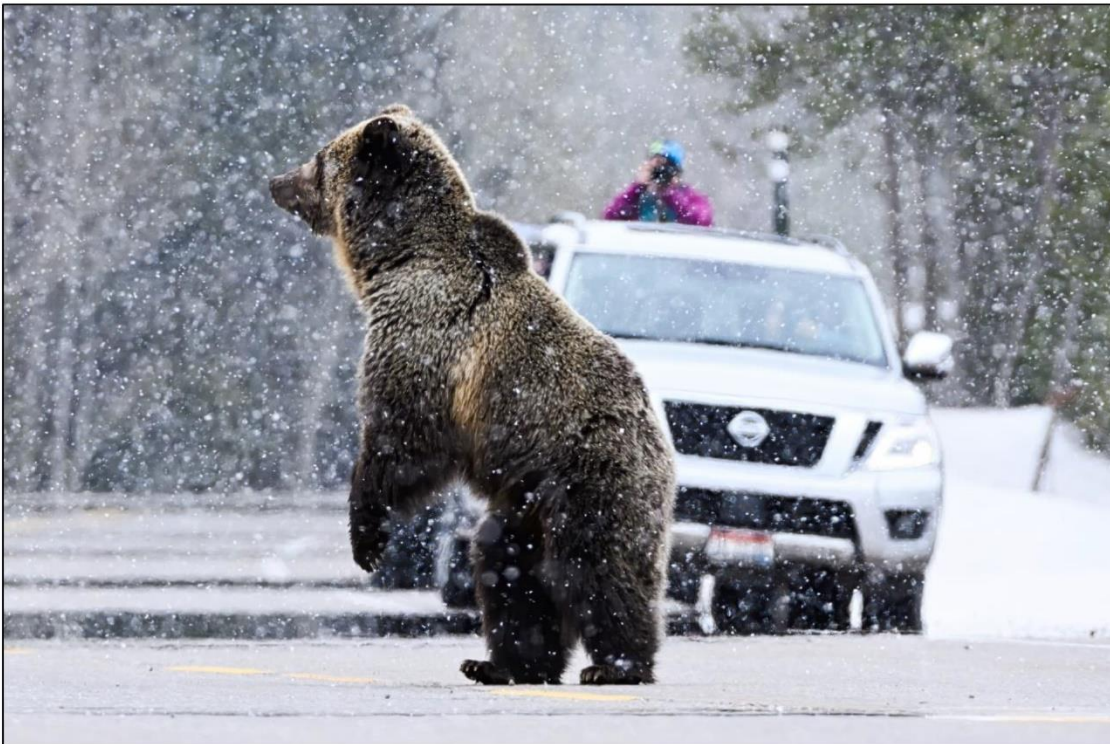
WGF officials do a good job with basic education about bear safety and helping landowners install electric fence to protect beehives and compost piles from bears. While working for the Sierra Club, I had been involved in the Wyoming's Living with Bears workshops that are part of its statewide [Bear Wise](#) education program. But with more bears dying and more people unfamiliar with bears descending on Jackson, education was proving to be far from enough for addressing conflicts. Underscoring this reality, a [study on bear conflicts](#) in Colorado found that education, without law enforcement, is not enough to improve human behavior around bears.

Stronger rules were clearly needed, but state managers lacked legal authority to do much more than education, outreach and assistance. In fact, unlike most other states,

Wyoming has not outlawed the problematic practice of deliberately feeding bears and other wildlife. As important, the state lacks authority over private land use – authority that largely rests with the county.

The [attitudes of wildlife managers](#) toward Jackson Hole’s roadside bears further limited the state’s ability and willingness to improve coexistence. Imbued with an ethos of controlling and dominating nature, Wyoming’s state wildlife agency abhorred the view, embraced by bear watchers, of revering and respecting individual animals. Even though the vast majority of Americans, including residents of Jackson Hole, enjoy watching rather than hunting wild animals, Wyoming wildlife management has long been dominated by a minority comprised of ranchers and hunters who exert inordinate political influence and either directly or indirectly provide much of the agency’s revenue. State managers dislike or, at best, merely tolerate large carnivores largely because they see them as part of a zero-sum game. According to this belief system, more carnivores mean fewer elk, which means less revenue from elk hunting licenses – all largely absent any supporting scientific evidence. (For more on the problem of state wildlife management, read this [essay](#) by David).

Bear Watchers & Bears



The vast majority of Americans enjoy watching rather than hunting wild animals, including grizzlies. Photo by Walt Ackerman.

It is hardly surprising that the agency detests the roadside wildlife viewing phenomenon because intimate connections with individual animals makes it harder to kill more grizzlies, prospectively including by sport hunting whenever ESA protections are removed and ultimate authority is handed over to the states by the federal government. Although WGF biologist Mike Boyce recently played a commendable role in protecting 399 and her cubs as they journeyed onto private lands in Jackson Hole, the agency's top brass want the problem of roadside bears to go away – by killing or otherwise removing any bear that ventures near people.

Savannah's petition made it clear that the county needed to step up on behalf of bears rather than continuing to punt to a state agency that relied on lethal methods for dealing with conflicts and little interest in addressing root causes. Although under the ESA the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has ultimate management authority over grizzlies, its grizzly bear management office is located far away in Missoula, Montana. This physical distance and a deluge of other obligations has resulted in little assistance for the county coming from the FWS either. Although FWS Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator Hilary Cooley did help keep 399 and her cubs alive during their walkabouts during 2021, she routinely signs death warrants for Jackson Hole bears while sponsoring the questionable and demonstrably unproductive practice of hazing grizzlies away from roads. (For more on the efficacy of aversively conditioning bears, see this [essay](#) by David).

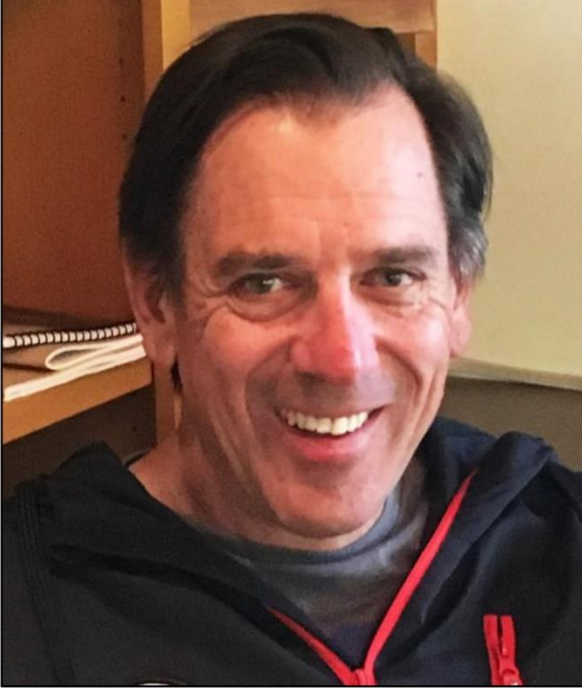
The firehose of calls and letters from bear lovers meant that Teton County officials could no longer ignore the plight of Jackson Hole grizzlies. The bear sanitation issue shot to the top of the county to-do list – where it landed in the laps of Planning Commissioner Sue Lurie and Teton County Commissioner Luther Probst.

Government Leaders Step Up

As fate would have it, no two people were more perfectly suited for the challenge. Sue Lurie is no ordinary bureaucrat, but a wildlife lover and nature photographer blessed with political savvy, a can-do attitude, and a commitment to improving wildlife conservation. Plus, she had the right background, with a master's degree in community and regional planning and a doctorate in natural resource policy and management.

Luther Propst shares her commitment and skill. An outdoorsman and dedicated environmentalist, Luther has worked on growth issues in rural and mountain communities throughout the North American West for more than 25 years. Full disclosure: I knew him since his time leading the Sonoran Institute, an inspired and creative effort to advance effective, innovative, collaborative and community-based

Luther Probst



Luther Probst, Teton County Commissioner: champion of Jackson's wild wonders and good governance.

solutions for land, water, and energy problems. Although a tad put off by the patronizing tone of some of the correspondence generated by Savannah's petition, Luther was in.

Luther and Sue agreed that the county needed to explicitly ban the problematic practice of feeding bears and other wildlife, and to make bear-resistant trash cans mandatory on private lands because, as Sue recognized, "the whole valley had become a bear conflict zone." This meant amending the Teton County Land Development Regulations to update the requirements covering wildlife feeding and bear conflict prevention.

The last time the county had addressed the issue was in 2008. But the rules it adopted then were fragmented, weak and outdated - as 399's wanderings made clear.

Because the legal issues surrounding this endeavor were complex, County Attorney Keith Gingery also played a key role in developing the new rules. Gingery brought a conservation ethic inspired in part by his father, Marshall, who had been Assistant Superintendent of Grand Teton Park, champion of wildlife - and, parenthetically, a friend of mine.

It just so happened that Teton County had the A team to tackle its human-bear conflict problem.

To county officials such as Luther and Sue, concerns about costs of bear-resistant trash bins loomed large. How could the county avoid hurting those who were less affluent and unable to afford paying hundreds of dollars for a bin? And how could it ensure a fair system?

With the assistance of Ryan, Keith, and other planning commissioners, Sue led the county's efforts to develop a more comprehensive, equitable, and reasonable countywide approach that kept human attractants out of bears' reach and accommodated those in the community who were less affluent. Sue shared that she was "looking for as much information as I could," which led her to reach out to community

members and beyond for input and advice on how to reduce conflicts and implement a coexistence program. The online workshop she convened with bear coexistence experts proved to be a game changer.

Coexistence Expert Workshop: How to Be “Bear Smart”

Communities throughout the West have witnessed plenty of failures as well as successes in efforts to reduce conflicts with black and grizzly bears. There is a lot that can be learned from experiences in other places regarding how to bear-proof homes and effectively manage birdfeeders, compost piles, chickens, and other attractants – as well as deal with the orchards and food-producing gardens that are emerging as a major issue as rural communities increasingly embrace sustainable agriculture.

To learn more about coexistence practices that might inform Teton County’s new policies, Sue convened an expert workshop that included Bryan Peterson, Executive Director of [Bear Smart Durango](#), Dr. [Heather Johnson](#), wildlife biologist with the US Geological Survey, and Heather Beresford, Environmental Stewardship Director of Whistler, British Columbia.

Between them, they shared more than half a century of experience working to coexist with bears. And in one way or another, each had been involved in work of the [Bear Smart Society](#), one of the most effective bear coexistence organizations assisting communities and officials across the West. This Canada-based group analyzes and synthesizes information on what works to reduce conflicts and the U.S and offers advice for how communities can become “Bear Smart” with laws and enforcement, education, and research needed to live amicably with bears. Its web site is a treasure trove of information about coexistence, and its guidelines have been honed through experience in communities across North America. It is no accident that the Interagency

Sue Lurie



Teton County Planning Commissioner Sue Lurie: committed to harnessing good information and giving wildlife a break.

Grizzly Bear Committee, comprised of grizzly bear managers, is [advocating for Bear Smart guidelines](#) over other coexistence approaches that have sprung up over the years, such as [Bear Aware](#) and [Bear Wise](#).



The experts' insights at Teton County's workshop were invaluable. [Heather Johnson's study on black bear conflicts](#) in Durango reinforced the need for Teton County to require self-locking or automated waste bins, rather than use manual ones that rely on human diligence. Heather Beresford's experience at Whistler in British Columbia underscored that bears will almost certainly find surprising things to be attractive, including [hot tub covers and snowmobile seats](#). (Vinyl products with "new car smell," including hot tub covers and snowmobile seats, can attract bears). And since [ornamental fruit trees attract bears](#), they recommended not planting more – and harvesting fruit before it ripens and attracts bears.

According to Keith Gingery, the workshop reinforced that "effective community coexistence involves more than laws – it entails a comprehensive approach that also includes research, education and outreach to specific members of the community such as beekeepers." Oh, that more officials understood this fundamental truth...

The workshop produced concrete results. The county's adopted [rules](#) require self-locking lids for bins that had been approved as [bear-resistant by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee](#) – and field tested by captive bears. They also ban the planting of additional ornamental fruit trees and recommend harvesting fruit before it ripens. And importantly, they require residents to make anything that attracts bears unavailable – not just dogfood, birdseed, fruit trees and beehives. Under the rules, anything found to be a bear attractant needs to be removed or secured within 15 days.

But the workshop's benefits went beyond helping shape the land use amendments, because Teton County is now moving toward adopting more Bear Smart recommendations that could further improve coexistence practices in the valley.

It goes without saying that none of these policies would have been adopted if Teton County officials had stuck themselves in a silo. And bear experts were not the only ones with good ideas: citizens were helpful too. At each planning commission meeting Sue offered the public opportunities to speak and, as expected, Jacksonians had a lot to say – almost all positive. Beyond meetings, Sue sought input from groups that would

be affected by the new rules and might not otherwise know about the debate – such as the local 4H group that raises chickens and rabbits. The kids were supportive and appreciated the reminder that they needed to lock up their animal feed.

Needless to say, Sue’s outreach made a difference in allaying fears, soliciting ideas and recruiting support.

Save Bears, Drink Cider

And support came from surprising parts of Jackson Hole’s population – not just ardent lovers of roadside bears. Among them were local cider makers Ian McGregor and Orion Bellorado whose business motto is: Save Bears, Drink Cider. Huh?

Turns out that Ian, who had been raised in Jackson, returned to the area with expertise in making wine and heard that bears were getting into the habit of eating apples and crabapples from ornamental trees. He and Orion, his childhood friend, had an idea: harvest the fruit in the valley before it ripens and then make it into hard cider – a practice that would keep bears safe as well. With the help of a grant from the Teton County Conservation District, Ian and Orion perfected their business model for [Farmstead Cider](#) along with the art of making cider from local apple varieties – something that had not been done commercially in Wyoming for over 100 years.

By 2021, when the sanitation issue came up for debate, Ian and Orion had already been going door to door for several years getting permission from landowners to harvest crabapples and apples – and in so doing, educating people about issues with bears. Ian began showing up at local meetings to support the county’s efforts and to share his

Ian MacGregor & Orion Bellorado



Ian MacGregor and Orion Bellorado of Farmstead Cider doing their bit to save bears.

experience. "It only makes sense to help out, as we are living in these bears' habitat," he offered.

Support from the business community would prove critical to the fate of the new sanitation rules.

Of Business Owners and Waste Haulers

As a retired businessman, Walt understood the political influence of business owners. In a community economically dependent on wildlife and public lands, and where roadside bears are a star attraction, business owners should understand their responsibility to avoid killing the goose that lays the community's golden egg.

Walt sent over 1,000 emails to local business owners explaining the issue and asking for their support. Recognizing that not everybody felt as strongly about saving bears as he did, he focused his argument on human safety. His message: you may not like bears, but don't you want to avoid inviting problems by leaving out unsecured trash? That argument persuaded a number of influential business owners who were ambivalent about bears, but who came around to support the measure because of its focus on human safety. Among them was David Defazio, CEO of Wyoming Whiskey, a company founded by Kate and Brad Mead, brother of Wyoming's former governor Matt Mead.

Further highlighting the community's sanitation challenges, in November 2021 Grizzly 399 and her cubs walked right through town, where they were videotaped on a security camera. Her repeated walkabouts during which many locals saw her – sometimes in their yards – reminded citizens that they had responsibility for her future. The upshot of her many appearances was this: more letters in the local paper urging action, and more requests to the local waste hauling companies from residents for bear-resistant bins. Talking to waste haulers was Walt's next task.

Walt recognized that the waste haulers would be significantly affected by new rules – and needed to be involved early on. He began talking with Yellow Iron Excavating & Waste Removal, Westbank Sanitation, and Teton Trash Removal to learn about their concerns. The largest of them, Westbank, enthusiastically supported the new rules. But the others had less of an economic buffer and were understandably concerned about costs of trash bins (\$300 plus each) and how the transition to bear-resistant cans would work. But the owners of these businesses too liked bears and wanted to help solve the problem.

Walt also reached out to groups and individuals devoted to coexistence with large carnivores, including Luke Lamar of [Swan Valley Bear Resources](#) in Montana. This initiative, part of [Swan Valley Connections](#), is a model of creative and collaborative bear coexistence work in the region and would later inspire the formation of Jackson Hole Bear Solutions.

399 & Young Take a Tour of Jackson



An image of 399 and cubs in Jackson, caught on a police security camera, reinforced the need for better coexistence policies.

Walt’s information and contacts helped decisionmakers such as Sue move fast – as fast as she could with an understaffed department deluged by urgent requests for building permits. She overcame resistance to implementing new rules before 2023, but the complexities about enforcement took longer to sort out because this was a land use matter over which the state limits county authority. Commissioners considered going to the state legislature to obtain an exemption from state laws so that Teton County could adopt simpler enforcement mechanisms that allowed the county to treat sanitation infractions much as they would parking violations. But given the fundamental hostility of Wyoming politicians to grizzlies, they feared such a move would be doomed.

In the end, the planning commission created a workable approach. A proven violator would receive a letter from the county planning director requesting compliance. If he/she did not “abate” the problem within 30 days, he/she would have a hearing

before the county commissioners and hopefully agree on a course of action. If the person failed to comply in another 30 days, they could be brought before a circuit court and potentially fined as much as \$750 a day. Although the system fits the constraints imposed on local land use authority, it is somewhat clunky and inefficient for dealing with the sanitation issue – and hardly as straightforward as issuing parking tickets.

After four meetings, the planning commission passed the new rules in January, 2022 and sent them on to the county commission for consideration.

Around the same time, Savannah met a generous anonymous donor who offered to provide \$100,000 for the purchase of bear-resistant trash cans to be distributed sometime before grizzlies emerged from their dens in the spring. Savannah asked Kristin Combs at [Wyoming Wildlife Advocates](#) about using the organization’s nonprofit status to make this a tax-deductible donation. She also asked Kristin if her group could help handle the logistics of distributing bins.

Enter Jackson Hole Bear Solutions

To Kristin, a seasoned outdoor educator and unflappable wildlife advocate, this was a golden opportunity to advance coexistence in Jackson Hole. Other leaders of the organization instantly understood the potential for bear conservation – far beyond the scope encompassed by the initial donation.

Although Wyoming Wildlife Advocates is relatively small and young compared to many in the region, the group rose to the challenge. Within weeks, WWA ordered 280 trash bins (at \$325 each) from Kodiak Products, a company that makes some of the top-rated bear resistant trash bins on the market and has received the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee’s “bear-resistant” stamp of approval. WWA leaders also committed to donating an additional \$100,000 to the program that included an internal donation of \$50,000

Kristin Combs



Kristin Combs, Executive Director of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates, helped launch Jackson Hole Bear Solutions.

that was contingent on a match from outside contributions to support the purchase of more bins.

To deal with growing scope of the work, Kristin and others at WWA launched a new initiative, [Jackson Hole Bear Solutions](#). The goal: to buy and distribute residential bear-resistant trash cans in the valley, offering them to residents at full costs, reduced costs, or free if an interested resident could not afford to pay. Even before the program was advertised, word got out and donations began to pour in locally and from across the country for the matching fund – including from people who had never been to Jackson or seen 399.

To coordinate the logistics, the group hired Drew Gath, a local with a degree in natural resources and experience in environmental community cooperatives. To Drew this job was a dream come true. Jackson Hole Bear Solutions also brought Savannah on as a Project Ambassador to help with the hugely complicated job ahead. All this came to pass before the bill was debated by the county commission – and 399 was out of her den with her four rambunctious offspring.

Meanwhile, Fish and Wildlife Service’s Frank Durbian, manager of the National Elk Refuge, offered to store the dumpsters at its Jackson headquarters – a convenient hub for distribution. And FWS’s Hilary Cooley wrote a letter in support of the proposed changes to the county rules.

At the same time, businesspeople in Jackson continued to press for stronger rules to manage human foods that were attracting bears. And remarkably, property rights proponents who often oppose new restrictions – even when they benefit the greater public good – were silent on the matter. Were they persuaded by the argument that better management of trash would make everyone safer? Was it the power and popularity of 399 and other bears? Was it the influence of the business community? Regardless, the absence of property rights ideologues removed a potential hurdle.

Nonetheless, on the eve of the April 12 County Commission meeting, the fate of the final sanitation amendments was still uncertain. Unsubstantiated rumors were circulating that the cost of a trash bin might run \$500-600 – and might not be available for 6 months or more due to supply chain issues stemming from the pandemic. And concerns lingered about how the rules would be enforced. On the Commission, Luther and Mark Newcomb were solidly in support, but the positions of Greg Epstein and Mark Barron were not known. And with Natalia Macker, the fifth Commission member, out on maternity leave, it was conceivable that the vote would be tied.

The meeting was packed – in the room and online. With over 70 people participating, it was a full court press. Emphasizing how sanitation to prevent human/wildlife conflicts improved public safety, Anna Olson, Director of the Chamber of Commerce spoke in

support, as did several owners of high-profile local businesses, including Wyoming Whiskey – and of course Farmstead Cider. After Obie Garvin of Yellow Iron Excavating and Waste Removal raised concerns about costs, as if on cue Kristin jumped in to introduce Jackson Hole Bear Solutions and explain that the first load of bins would arrive in Jackson later that week.

The mood in the room brightened. Within moments, the potential noes turned into yeses. With little more debate, the amendments passed unanimously. The crux of it all: “No person shall allow for the unintentional attraction and feeding of wildlife by allowing access to attractants on their property, including pet food, garbage, seed or birdseed, or other attractants made available to wildlife.”

Two days later, in a classic spring snowstorm, the trash cans arrived.

Spring Dump – And the Bear-Proofing of Jackson Hole

The Trash Bins Arrive



Savannah Rose Burgess helps to assemble trash bins at the National Elk Refuge.

As of June 2022, Jackson Hole Bear Solutions had delivered about 200 trash bins to residents – and Yellow Iron and Teton Trash Removal had delivered an additional several hundred. Priority areas for delivery included areas north and west of Jackson frequented by grizzlies and black bears, including Teton Village, the Solitude subdivision, and the area around the Jackson Hole airport.

Jenalee Shupman of Teton Trash offered this: “Things are going about as smoothly as we could have hoped for.” Their clientele was receptive to the new rules, and more were calling requesting bear-resistant bins. She is not the only one who hopes that residents use the bins properly – and like others, she is worried about compliance.

Jackson Hole Bear Solutions' work was also going smoothly, partly because the organization had capable staff devoted to distributing trash bins, and partly because the Elk Refuge provided an ideal, central location, and partly because its managers were especially accommodating.

And demand for trash bins has since been mounting, including among people who haul their own trash instead of relying on a waste company. Jackson Hole Bear Solutions had placed a second order that was to be delivered in August – delayed because Kodiak was getting flooded with orders from around the West.

Interest in the program was, moreover, exploding around the country. Donations had reached \$50,000, the required match, so Jackson Hole Bear Solutions created another \$25,000 match to continue the momentum – and because an estimated 3,400 or so trash bins will be ultimately needed in the valley.

Because the next trash bin order was delayed, Drew had the time to help landowners bear-proof beehives and orchards. He also reached out to homeowners' associations that can place larger orders. After going door to door in an affordable housing area on Melody Ranch, one resident voluntarily placed an order for 10 cans. Looking to the future, Drew hoped that others would be inspired to take similar steps to speed the distribution of trash bins.

But the work has been time consuming, and as Drew emphasized, the transition will not happen overnight. As of June 2022, about 10% of the residents in the county had bear-resistant trash cans. Drew estimates that at the current pace, that number may bump up to as much as 50% by November 1 when the law will be enforced.

The Trash Bins are Distributed



Kristin Combs delivers bear-resistant bin to journalist Angus Thuermer.

Other communities have experienced a significant reduction in bear conflicts when 60-80% compliance had been reached. While the goal is 100% compliance, getting there is a pretty high bar. More encouragingly, reduction in conflicts tends to culminate after around 90% compliance has been reached.

The upshot: at the current rate of delivery, we may not see significantly fewer bear food-related conflicts during 2022. Meanwhile, perhaps 20 grizzlies – many of them relatives of 399 – are roaming around Jackson Hole. “We started late,” Drew concedes. But better late...

Time will tell how well the county’s enforcement arrangement will work. Making matters more challenging, right now the planning department has no enforcement staff – so enforcement falls in the lap of Planning Director Chris Neubecker, who already has a very full plate.

But on the positive side, the county has assigned Chris Colligan, a county employee who was formerly a staff person with Greater Yellowstone Coalition, to work on adopting more Bear Smart recommendations. The county’s report accompanying the April 12 amendments set this goal: “make Bear Smart Community designation by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee – ultimately achieve the gold standard.” If accomplished, the number of bear conflicts and deaths in the valley would almost certainly drop dramatically. And Bear Smart status would set a good example for other coexistence efforts in Greater Yellowstone and the Northern Rockies.

Next Steps for Improving Coexistence

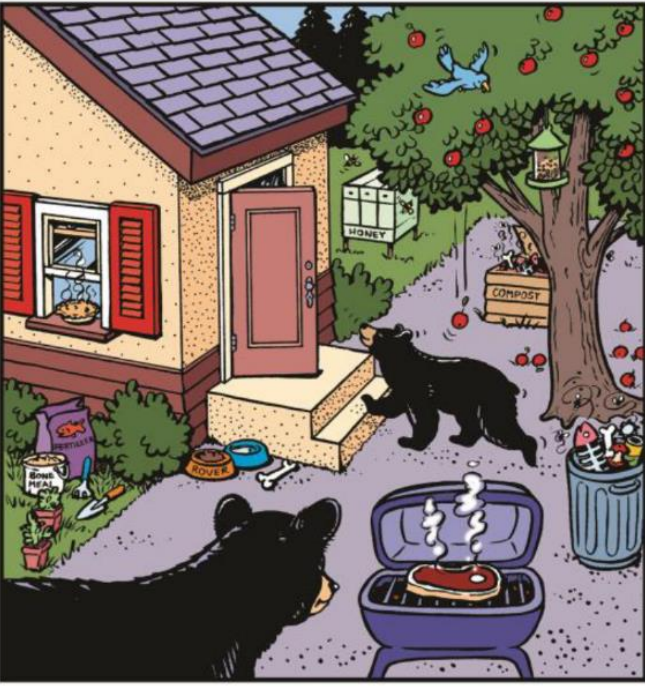
Clearly, one key challenge of the new system is enforcement. Since hungry bears will always be able to find weak links in a new system, enforcement is especially important. But because county enforcement is done by a planning department that is overwhelmed with building proposals and request for permits, sanitation for grizzly bears may not be a high priority even when the department’s enforcement position is filled. As a result, citizen documentation of violations will be important to achieving widespread compliance. If the current enforcement arrangement fails, county leaders will need to explore a simpler system, even if it means going to the state legislature to change the laws so that the county has more authority.

Another limitation of the amended zoning code is that it does not apply to the town of Jackson itself, where 399 and many other bears have wandered. Ryan and Keith have been sharing information with town officials about what the county did, and Walt has been raising awareness of the problem. Priority areas frequented by bears include the Snow King Ski Area and Cache Creek, where the town would need to acquire more expensive bear-resistant commercial dumpsters. But, more positively, the town’s

approach to enforcement is potentially more straight forward – and its leaders can look to the process that the county just went through to craft one of their own.


Meanwhile, Luther is pressing for the creation of a county Conservation Department that would include a wildlife program. Indeed, it seems strange that such a department does not yet exist given the importance of the valley’s wildlife, rivers, and environment to its commerce and culture. For reasons well beyond bears, the time for this idea has come.

Find the Attractant!



Sponsor logos go here

HOW BEAR SMART ARE YOU?
Can you find ten things wrong with this picture?
(answers on back of the page)



Bear Smart quiz for kids: can you find the 10 things wrong in the picture?

Luther also has offered this idea for promoting coexistence: hire one or more people, with or without legal enforcement capacity, but more certainly with a cool jersey and cool electric truck to talk to people about securing attractants so that 399 and other wild animals can safely live in the area. Grand Teton Park has shown that rangers on the ground can make an enormous difference in how people behave. Garbage rangers might be just the ticket – to avoid having to issue many, should the day come when the county has such authority.

Right now, Chris Colligan’s focus is on developing educational materials, including a video explaining the new regulations and a “Good Neighbor” handbook about

residents' responsibilities for wildlife. He and others are also evaluating the county infrastructure to ensure that it is meeting the rules and setting a good example. And a bear coexistence coordinator position is also under consideration sometime in the future.

But with the 2022 summer tourist season in full swing, more needs to be done right now to raise awareness of what people need to do to comply with the new rules. In one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, you might assume that the county has the resources to do ample outreach work – but it doesn't. Ideally conservation groups in the valley would band together to run radio and television public service announcements, publish letters to the editor, circulate posters, and create a media drumroll about what is expected of citizens and visitors when it comes to handling trash and responsibly living with bears.

Although this case study addresses only one part of a massive set of problems facing 399 and other grizzlies in the Northern Rockies, it represents a major success. It also offers lessons for promoting coexistence and conservation more broadly.



Chapter Three

Grizzly Lessons

Although every situation is inescapably contingent and complex – even to the point of being a singularity – we need insights that will help us better pursue conservation of grizzlies and their ecosystems at a time of unprecedented urgency. Here are some takeaway lessons from this case.

The Power of Icons. – We were blessed that this debate centered on one of our most iconic grizzlies in one of our most symbolically potent landscapes. In this case, local environmentalists harnessed the power of 399 and the majestic Tetons to great advantage – and citizens from Teton County and across the country responded. And, as with the 2017 effort by FWS to remove ESA protections for Yellowstone’s grizzlies, 399 became the face of a broader debate about grizzly bear conservation.

There is no doubt that celebrity animals and iconic species and landscapes can inspire a broad cross-section of people to advocate for positive change.

Power of the Purse. – Without a doubt, support from members of the business community helped secure the passage of the sanitation rules. Here and in other cases, decisionmakers need to hear from people besides environmentalists who have power and influence. And the business community can be an agent of positive change – and a powerful ally.

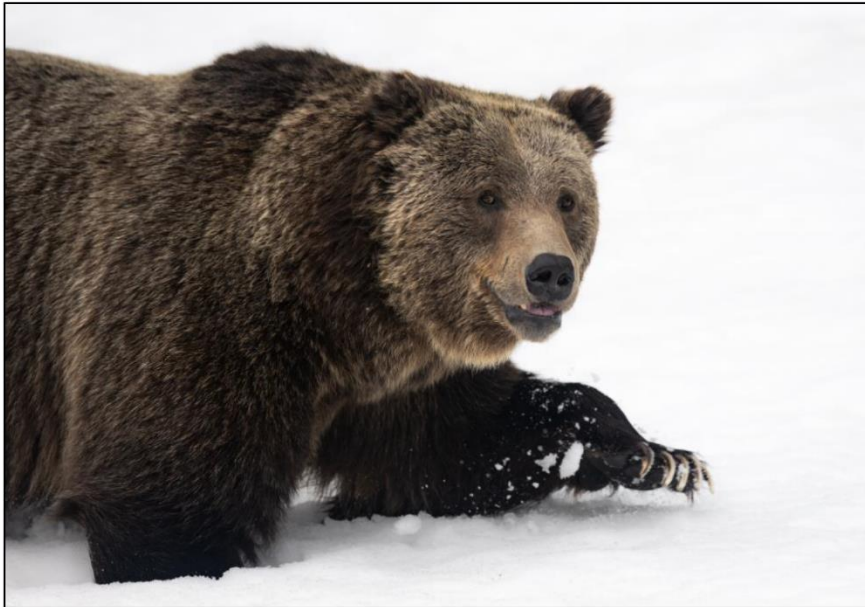
The anonymous donor also played a critical role by showing the county commissioners that bear lovers had skin in the game, sought to alleviate the financial burden on landowners and trash companies, and were not relying on government to pay the costs of the transition. Her gift also inspired Wyoming Wildlife Advocates to expand its impact by setting up Jackson Hole Bear Solutions, as well as the matching donation program that yielded yet more funds to buy bear-resistant trash bins. Donations build on donations. As in other cases I have been involved in, financial support – even modest donations – can make a significant real-world difference in solving environmental problems.

Minimal Ideological Stakes. – Advocates for improving sanitation in Jackson Hole were fortunate that those ideologically opposed to any new government regulation did not engage in the debate. The leaders’ strategy of focusing on public safety and practical solutions – and featuring local business owners – probably helped lower the ideological stakes as well. And importantly, local waste haulers did not see the rules as a huge imposition, but a reflection of public interest in wildlife and practical solutions to on-the-ground problems.

We have all seen examples where an issue became polarized along ideological lines and progress ground to a halt. Point being: it is always advantageous to keep ideological stakes as low as possible, recognizing that any one person's control over such dynamics will always be limited.

Citizen Power: The Grizzled Builder and the Young Bear Missionary. – This success would not have happened but for the inspiration and tenacity of Walt and Savannah. Working initially outside the framework of any institution, they crafted the campaign and single-mindedly pushed it over the finish line. The one a grizzled veteran of the bruising construction world, the other a sensitive young bear missionary – both determined to cut through bureaucratic inertia so that 399 and other bears could wake up to a safer world.

An Old Lover Appears



Male grizzly bear Bruno was spotted hanging around 399 in the spring of 2022. Could 399 have another litter next year? Photo by Savannah Rose Burgess.

Their skills were complementary, and perhaps the intergenerational nature of their relationship strengthened their collaboration. Savannah's tenacity and social media savvy elevated the profile of the issue nationally, while Walt was adept at recruiting local allies, gathering key intelligence needed by decisionmakers, and preventing rumors from hijacking the debate. Walt clearly

taught Savannah a thing or two along the way, including the meaning of Thomas Paine's adage: "If you are afraid you are going to offend someone, you are never going to get anything done." Conversely, Savannah taught an aging dog some new tricks about social media. Importantly, both decided to lead instead of waiting around for the government to do something.

These two are living proof that individuals, without doctoral degrees or formal affiliations with environmental groups, but with a moral compass and fire in the belly,

can and do make a difference. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Capable, Dedicated Government Leaders. – Inside the government, the right people showed up with the right skills at the right time as well – along with a commitment to do better by Jackson’s wildlife. Luther brought political expertise, decades of experience with environmental issues, and skill at bringing people inside and outside government together for a common purpose. Among local officials, Luther stands out for his willingness to engage in the tedious processes of governance – a critical component of getting things done.

Like Luther, Sue brought decades of relevant experience planning and solving complex environmental problems. With good communications and especially listening skills, she helped bring out the best in stakeholders and those in government. By gathering advice from multiple experts about what had been done elsewhere to deal with sanitation, as well as talking to locals whose voices might have been otherwise missed, she came up with an approach that was uniquely suited to Jackson Hole’s challenges.

Keith Gingery brought important legal skills along with a deep understanding and appreciation of bears and wildlife. In the process he helped assuage public concerns about transitioning to the new rules. And Ryan brought needed planning skills, filling shoes in the planning department that had up until recently been vacant.

Local officials of this caliber are irreplaceable – and more than ever, we need to keep such people in office. If environmentalists are frustrated with the pace of change, they should consider running for public office themselves or supporting the campaigns of conscientious folks who relish the business of governing.

A Nimble, Committed Nonprofit. – This campaign would also not have succeeded without the contributions of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates. This organization bravely seized on an important opportunity and wholeheartedly pursued it. The fact that Jackson Hole Bear Solutions was in place, that Drew had been hired, and that the first shipment of bins was on its way by the time of the Commission’s vote all mattered enormously to the dynamics of the April Commission meeting and passage of the legislation. Timing, resources, and institutional capacity mattered.

Leaders of the group were strategic at several levels, including recognizing that the valley’s sanitation challenges were distinct from the rest of the group’s conservation advocacy work. They had the capacity to rapidly create Jackson Hole Bear Solutions as a separate initiative devoted to coexistence – an arrangement that will likely enhance the effectiveness of this new program as well as their longer-standing ones.

Drew Gath



Drew Gath of Jackson Hole Bear Solutions delivering the goods.

Speaking from decades of experience in conservation, I can attest to how hard it is for well-established groups to be nimble, visionary, and courageous – qualities that can make all the difference. It is easy for all of us to be lulled into repeating what we have done in the past and being seized by bureaucratic inertia rather than capitalizing on new opportunities with a potentially transformative impact.

Of Mutual Respect, Humility, Flexibility, and Working Together. – During my interviews with the major players, I was struck by their humility, altruism, and mutual respect. Each made it clear that they were working toward a larger vision of the public good and recognized the same spirit motivating the others – which might have helped prevent differences in personal styles from getting in the way. Sue noted that although the team was not formally organized, they adopted an organic approach that enabled them to be flexible as circumstances changed. She observed that: “We were different people coming from different places with a passion to make this happen.”

In reflecting on this work, Walt mentioned Sue as “the biggest hero of anyone.” Sue in turn praised WWA for being so nimble, describing how Kristin “really stepped on the gas,” and also offered this: “Luther is the hero, as far as I'm concerned. If it weren't for the fact that he called together a group of us to talk about how we might improve the situation, the network of folks who went to work on it probably wouldn't have been activated.” Savannah repeatedly acknowledged Walt's leadership and inspiration and confessed to learning from Sue and Luther a lot about how local government works. Having seen plenty of dysfunction in the bear advocacy arena, Kristin was thrilled at how constructively the team worked together. And Luther praised Sue, Ryan, Walt – pretty much everyone who helped move the ball forward. He would know, because at one time or another he had talked to or hosted them at his home.

Finally, Ian offered this: “This was a really effective collaborative local government effort that helped solve a community problem. I was happy to be part of the conversation.”

How many times do you hear that about any government effort?

The point is that these folks worked well together – in part because they shared a vision that did not include taking credit or seeing their name in print. And it goes without saying than no one person could have done what this group did together.

As a footnote on the theme of respect, Luther’s irritation over the patronizing tone of some of the respondents to Savannah’s petition is well taken. Cynicism about government is understandable, but if you want to influence decisionmakers, you need to treat them with respect. You might not appreciate that some of the bear’s best friends work for government – but they do.

Blondie & Cubs



Beloved Jackson Hole grizzly bear Blondie (Number 793) and cubs. Photo by Savannah Rose Burgess.

The Importance of Good Information. – This initiative drew from the substantive contributions of many bear experts and coexistence practitioners who generously shared their insights and knowledge. Leaders in Jackson did not have to recreate the wheel. Mostly they needed to find the best information and apply it in the context of the specific challenges in Jackson Hole. Busy as she was, Sue made the time to get the best experts involved – and they responded.

Gathering good information is important to making sound and durable policies. This is an obvious point, but it is often given short shrift by busy, overworked decisionmakers. In this case, Walt helped officials by providing useful intelligence about a variety of things. Point being: citizens can help the government do a better job by assembling good information.

It is important to note that Wyoming Game and Fish has significant expertise in reducing bear conflicts, including in Jackson Hole, but the agency made virtually no contribution to Teton County's process. Agencies such as WGF, mired in petty concerns about power and prerogatives, need to rise to the challenge of being public servants, in this case by sharing skills in coexistence and conflict reduction. WGF officials could have been enormously helpful in this case – and still could in the future.

Bear Watchers as Agents of Positive Change. – As this case study has shown, bear watchers can be forces of positive change. While this sounds obvious, for many government officials it is not. The ethos of dominating and controlling nature has deep roots in agencies with authority over grizzlies. It is no accident that many managers see members of the bear watching community as an alien species because they value the lives of individual bears such as 399 and reject the view that wild animals are cyphers.

As with any group, this one has its share of bad apples – photographers who endanger themselves and bears by approaching too close. But bear watchers have access to resources and can be effective partners in conservation efforts. They are also an increasingly important part of the public that the government serves. As more and more people seek to reconnect with wild nature, we can expect bear watchers and the wildlife-focused groups they support to play an ever-greater role in grizzly bear protection.

The government should embrace rather than fight this trend. And on their side, bear watchers should learn about how to be effective advocates if they want to change how bears are managed.

Bear Watchers, Bear Fans



*Bear watchers: agents of positive change in grizzly bear conservation.
Photo by Walt Ackerman.*

The Wisdom of Baby Steps. — Because of the massive threats facing 399 and other grizzlies, it is tempting to bypass smaller and more achievable gains to seek sweeping – and sometimes impossible – solutions. But taking a small bite out of a large problem can contribute to larger gains by creating momentum, promoting learning, and building relationships with allies and decisionmakers.

If advocates had waited around until the larger policy problems were addressed, such as developing a better grizzly bear recovery plan or reforming state wildlife management, they would still be waiting – and nothing would have been accomplished for Jackson Hole’s bears. The point is that change often happens incrementally.

Admittedly, taking a baby step requires courage – and it can be hard to know which way to walk. That is why advocates should take the time to understand a problem and its context as fully as possible before acting, outline options for action, carefully consider which course to take – then make a choice, and adaptively change course as they go. This is especially important for complex issues such as those that typify grizzly bear conservation. Such an approach seems like commonsense, but time and again I have seen efforts fail because advocates frame issues haphazardly, don't know what the next steps are after taking the first one, or see a problem in "all or nothing" terms.

In sum: we need to learn how to be much more effective advocates for bears – which means developing comprehensive strategies, setting clear goals, taking baby steps, and learning and adapting as circumstances change.

The momentum built by these baby steps could yield bigger future gains for grizzly bears in Jackson Hole – and potentially the broader ecosystem. The concluding section of this essay highlights some promising directions that have the potential to bring the work of Jackson Hole Bear Solutions, Bear Smart efforts in Teton County, and others to fruition.



Photo by Savannah Rose Burgess.

Chapter Four

Looking to the Future

The Potential of Jackson Hole Bear Solutions. – We don't know where Jackson Hole Bear Solutions might go, but this endeavor could have a much broader impact than its founders imagine. For example, Drew has already gotten inquiries from ranchers in Idaho's Island Park area where five grizzlies – two moms and three cubs – were killed during the spring of 2022 because they got into repeated conflicts caused by access to unsecured garbage. Needless-to-say, these deaths are a huge blow to the bear

population. But importantly, the work of Jackson Hole Bear Solutions and the experience that its leaders are acquiring could inspire these and other communities to tackle their sanitation problems – problems that will only increase as the world warms, more native foods decline, and more bears seek out alternative foods.

Bear Smart Teton County? – Similarly, we don't know where Teton County's work to adopt Bear Smart guidelines more comprehensively may go, but it too could have a bigger impact than that of the sanitation rules developed so far, while inspiring other fledgling community efforts to coexist with bears in places such as Missoula and Whitefish, Montana. The choice of adopting a Bear Smart approach over Wyoming Game and Fish's Bear Wise program makes sense, because the latter focuses only on education, whereas the former is comprehensive in scope and includes regulations, data gathering, and research. Although WGF's Bear Wise efforts have not significantly reduced conflicts in Jackson Hole, Bear Smart programs have been highly successful in places such as Durango, Banff, Whistler, and Lake Tahoe. That is why the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee is promoting a Bear Smart approach.

Going forward, Teton County may need to expand efforts focused on gathering data related to violations and targeting outreach to specific groups such as birdwatchers. As demonstrated in cases such as Durango, conservation groups, citizens, universities, and state wildlife agencies can help with this work. Bear Smart communities elsewhere have also improved coexistence by developing bear hazard assessments that review the history and pattern of human-bear interactions in the community, preparing human-bear management plans, and developing comprehensive waste management programs.

Given some of the discrepancies among Teton County's various waste management policies, a waste management plan makes sense. For example, the county has laudably adopted a "pay as you throw" program designed to reduce the trash people generate by charging them for the volume of trash they produce. But this program is somewhat odds with the new bear policies that require the use of large bear-resistant bins. Because of the new bear rules, Teton County has put off the "pay as you throw" program for a year. In the long run, though, an integrated "Bear Smart" approach to trash polices in the county would likely be beneficial.

Developing a comprehensive Bear Smart waste management plan is one of seven criteria that communities are required to meet to be officially [certified as Bear Smart](#). According to Heather Beresford, one significant advantage of this certification is that it establishes clear expectations for a community and its elected officials. Point being that it is easy to forget – and over time, with a turnover in officials, commitment to coexistence programs can wane. According to Heather, Bear Smart certification has helped remind officials of their responsibilities, including to provide adequate funding for coexistence programs in Whistler and other Bear Smart communities.

It is worth noting that, so far, most successful Bear Smart communities are in Canada where many people still believe in government and the rule of law. But there is no reason that further progress cannot be made in Jackson Hole with its beloved world-famous bears.

Of Fruit Trees and Conservation Districts. – Ian and Orion’s work has inspired other conservation districts to consider programs that promote harvesting fruit from ornamental trees in communities where bears are routinely killed because of conflicts over orchards. Why does this matter? Because the problem of fruit near people is a problem for bears throughout the region, and because conservation districts can offer a powerful framework for approaching such problems.

Saving Bears...



Ian and Orion saving bears...

Conservation districts represent a diversity of local people in rural communities across the West working to solve common problems – typically related to weeds, water, and agricultural practices. But they have also done some outstanding work to save bears and other large carnivores. Montana’s Blackfoot Challenge started from a dialogue in a conservation district and has become a much-touted example of large carnivore

coexistence that other conservation districts are working to emulate. Where could the theme of “saving bears by drinking cider” go? Who knows, but the potential is promising.

Regardless of the improvements to sanitation in Jackson Hole, bears can still be clobbered on roads, poached, killed because of conflicts with livestock operators, or die from the incompetence of managers – all of which has happened to relatives of 399. (I have written about these deaths [here](#) and [here](#).) The point is that we have a long way to go before we can say we’ve comprehensively addressed the threats to grizzlies throughout Greater Yellowstone. Success rests in part on the extent to which managers evolve to see grizzlies as sentient beings, commit to their protection, and meaningfully coordinate with each other across jurisdictions. Given the crucial role of state wildlife

management agencies, success also depends on reforming these institutions that are increasingly out of step with peoples' preferences and values.

Although these topics are massive in scope and complexity, the recent coexistence efforts in Teton County show that even though progress may come in baby steps, altruism, skill, and passion for wildlife can be harnessed to improve how we manage bears – or rather, manage ourselves. By wandering across Jackson Hole again and again, Grizzly 399 reminded local residents that they live in her habitat – and that they have responsibility for her future and that of other vulnerable wild animals. Importantly, citizens, business owners, decisionmakers, and an environmental group responded to the call to action.


I started researching this story thinking that it was simple and contained, with self-evident implications. After all, I think of myself as something of an expert, having devoted 35 plus years to the protection of grizzly bears. I was wrong: this story was about much bigger themes – about fascinating people, lucky coincidences, and examples of courage and insight. This story is also about how Jackson Hole serves as an example of broader social trend towards more intimate connections with bears and wild animals, and what can happen when those who care about individual wild animals get engaged. Moreover, this is a story about finding common ground through partnerships with government to craft solutions to environmental problems at a time when the broader political system is breaking down and debates have become more polarized and divisive.

This story also offers larger lessons about how we can move forward in a civil society to tackle mounting environmental challenges – and ensure that 399 and other grizzly bears have a place among us in a rapidly changing world. And it offers hope. As the old guard of grizzly bear advocates get greyer, a new generation is taking their place. Here, people in their 20s and 30s such as Savannah, Drew, Ian, and Orion are showing the way to a more amicable and generous relationship with wild animals. We geezers should cheer them on.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks to the warriors for grizzly bears – famous as well as perhaps unknown – in Jackson Hole and the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem, including Savannah Rose Burgess, Walter Ackerman, Luther Probst, Sue Lurie, Keith Gingery, Kristin Combs, Kent Nelson, Drew Gath, Orion Bellorado, Ian McGregor, Ray and Terri Thomas, Tim Tennyson, Tom Mangelsen, and the late Deidre Bainbridge.

And eternal gratitude to my beloved husband, David Mattson, for his critical editorial eye and layout skills, and for putting up with my obsessive ways.



UnBear-able

Br.