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NEWSLETTER

Featuring updates on grizzly bear conservation activities,
and the latest *Grizzly Times* Blog
from [Louisa Willcox and David Mattson, PhD.](#)
Co-Founders of *Grizzly Times*.

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September 9, 2020

Dear Friends of the Grizzly,

UPCOMING YOUTUBE LIVE EVENT: *The Effects of Hunting Grizzly Bears*

October 6th at 11 a.m. MST

(Event details will be posted by September 30th.)

Join us for this live YouTube event in which Dr. David Mattson talks about why the best available science says that hunting grizzly bears is harmful, not only ecologically, but also to relations between grizzly bears and people.

For more on what David will be speaking about, view the report entitled "[Efficacies and Effects of Sport Hunting Grizzly Bears](#)," which is also discussed in depth below. Additional details can be found by visiting [The Problem of Hunting Grizzly Bears](#) on the website [Mostly Natural Grizzlies](#).

IN THE NEWS:

Hunting has been front and center for members of Montana's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council, or GBAC, for the last two years, especially the question of whether to include a recommendation supporting the initiation of a sport hunt on grizzly bears if and when Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections are lifted for grizzlies in the state. After contentious debate, Council members agreed to not include a recommendation, but rather provide a side by side list of hunting pros and cons. The Council's final recommendations are scheduled for release in the near future.

The Council's arguments over merits of hunting illuminated not only the claims made by those who support or oppose hunting grizzlies, but also short-comings of the GBAC process itself.

The GBAC's facilitators and conveners – the former from University of Montana, the latter from Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) – did not emerge from the process in a flattering light.

In this newsletter we feature an essay, an open letter to Montana's Governor and the Director of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and a technical report that not only evaluates evidence germane to judging the efficacies and effects of hunting grizzlies, but also the GBAC process itself.

FEATURED ESSAY:

To Hunt or Not to Hunt Grizzlies? That May or May Not be the Question

This essay by David Mattson appraises the GBAC relative to well-accepted standards for high-quality collaborative processes. The technical report which follows below, also by David, marshals a compendium of scientific evidence to evaluate claims commonly used to promote the hunting of grizzly bears.

You can view the essay by clicking on the image below:



Ernest Hemingway Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum

David's essay tackles the complex and thorny issue of judging whether the GBAC was constituted and run in ways that served the greater good, or merely the special interests of those who convened it, abetted by facilitators captive to a subset of special interests.

David argues that:

“The Grizzly Bear Advisory Council was largely constituted and run so as to yet again serve the purposes of promoting delisting and instituting a grizzly bear hunt. FWP officials repeatedly advocated the virtues of—even need for—a grizzly bear hunt during Council proceedings. They worked assiduously behind the scenes with pro-hunting advocates on the Council to develop pro-hunting arguments. FWP officials further served their purposes by selectively feeding the Council information about the ecology and management of bears in ways brazenly designed to make the presumed virtues of hunting inescapable. And the facilitators allowed all of this to occur, largely uncontested.”

Looking beneath the veil of obscuring rhetoric, David finishes by observing:

“...arguments for hunting grizzly bears feature exclusivity, intolerance, violence, domination, sexism, and assuaging concerns about male virility. None of this strikes me as being particularly virtuous. By contrast, the arguments I hear in opposition to trophy hunting invoke empathy, compassion, and sensitivity to the welfare of other sentient beings—albeit without

our human capacity for language—all of which hearkens to virtue, at least as I understand it. Perhaps not surprisingly, proponents of trophy hunting more often tend to be men, whereas opponents more often tend to be women, probably in keeping with some deep evolutionary roots that are potentially—hopefully—the harbinger of a more promising future for all life on Earth.”

An Open Letter to Montana’s Governor and the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

On a related note, David sent [an open letter](#) on September 1st to Montana’s Governor and the Director of Fish, Wildlife & Parks expressing “grave concerns... about the recently adjourned Grizzly Bear Advisory Council arising from how the Council was created, facilitated, and informed by science.”

The letter concludes by noting that failings in the GBAC led to highly problematic outcomes: “For one, the potential benefit of science to society was subverted. For another, the legitimacy of collaborative processes was undermined. Last, but not least, facilitators and government officials failed in their responsibilities to the public trust.”

The letter focuses on problems with selection of Council members, facilitation of meetings, and provisioning of information, rather than on the content of Council recommendations, which turned out better than might have been expected thanks to the heroic efforts of two Council members – Robyn King and Michele Dietrich – who endured bullying, intimidation, and violation of protocols by other members, to promote a reasonable and science-based set of recommendations.

Click on the image below to view the letter:



1 September 2020

Governor Steve Bullock
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Director Martha Williams
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Ms. Heather Stokes & Mr. Shawn Johnson
Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy
32 Campus Drive
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear Governor Bullock, Director Williams, Ms. Stokes, and Mr. Johnson:

This letter outlines some grave concerns I have about the recently adjourned Grizzly Bear Advisory Council (GBAC) arising from how the Council was created, facilitated, and informed by science. Given the nature of this communication, it is probably essential that I offer some personal background before I get into the details of my concerns—especially as it relates to my credentials for appraising performance of the GBAC.

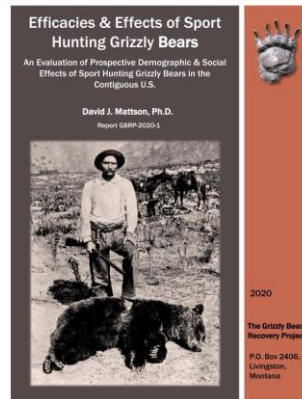
RECENT REPORT:

Efficacies and Effects of Sport Hunting Grizzly Bears

This recent report authored by David and released by The Grizzly Bear Recovery Project and Grizzly Times focuses on likely effects of a grizzly bear sport hunt on both bears and people in the Northern Rockies. The report addresses a number of issues central to debates surrounding whether or not to start hunting grizzly bears, if and when ESA protections are removed. The report starts by setting the ecological and management stage, then addresses potential impacts on bear populations, likely effects on human safety and human-bear conflicts, and finally, examines claims that hunting grizzly bears will build social acceptance.

The report concludes that sport hunting will create substantial risks for grizzly bear populations in the contiguous United States, and not reduce conflicts, improve human safety, or foster increased acceptance of grizzlies in rural landscapes. Instead, non-lethal approaches are much more likely to foster grizzly bear conservation and improve human-bear coexistence, especially when coupled with authoritative processes that involve people with divergent interests in making management decisions.

You can view the report by clicking on the image below:



Key conclusions of the report include:

- Grizzly bear populations in the contiguous United States are too small and isolated to insure long-term viability. Vulnerability of these populations has been and will continue to be amplified by recent and foreseeable deterioration of environmental conditions.
- State plans for managing grizzly bear populations are not precautionary but instead exacerbate risks through ideological commitments to the initiation of grizzly bear sport hunts as soon as ESA protections are removed.
- Sport hunting will have predictable additive rather than compensatory effects on grizzly bear mortality, compounded by unplanned-for indirect effects arising from compensatory demographic responses. Taken together, these effects will likely result in unanticipated and even undetected population declines.
- Sport hunting is unlikely to reduce levels of human-grizzly bear conflict barring hunts that drive local bear populations to near extirpation.
- Targeted removal of bears chronically involved in conflicts can reduce conflicts in specific locales for short periods of time. However implementation of strategies that focus on reducing availability of anthropogenic attractants are more likely to result in long-term benefits for both bears and people.
- Sport hunting is unlikely to improve human safety. Beneficial effects are more likely to arise from the promotion of prudent human behaviors—including sanitation of human facilities, improvements in livestock husbandry, and changes in practices of big game hunters.
- Sport hunting will almost certainly not increase acceptance of grizzly bears, even among those sharing space with grizzlies, but rather satisfy preexisting demands held by a small minority for hunting opportunities, and the tacit, if not explicit, expectations of a comparably small minority that numbers and distributions of grizzly bears will be reduced by a sport hunt.
- The issues of a grizzly bear sport hunt and removal of ESA protections have more to do with the institutional premises and business model of state wildlife management than with fulfillment of public trust responsibilities by state wildlife managers.

- Acceptance of grizzly bears is more likely to be encouraged by involvement of a broad cross-section of the public in grizzly bear management – with an emphasis on equity and sustained meaningful representation – than by implementation of a sport hunt.
- Sport hunting grizzly bears will almost certainly not achieve any of the goals stated by those who promote it, but rather simply fulfill a cultural predisposition, with the potential of further alienating the large majority of people who do not support or even morally object to trophy hunting.

Of relevance to these conclusions, a paper recently published in the journal PLoSOne, entitled "Population reduction by hunting helps control human-wildlife conflicts for a species that is a conservation success story," is being referenced by pro-hunting advocates as proof that hunting bears can and will reduce human-bear conflicts. As a bit of context, the paper's primary author, David Garshelis, works for a state wildlife management agency and is an advocate of hunting, which helps explain the somewhat inflammatory title. The paper itself is specific to black bears in Minnesota.

More importantly, despite the title, results of the reported research are consistent with the conclusions listed above. Substantial reduction of conflicts was achieved only after an approximate 50% statewide reduction in the black bear population, accompanied by local near-extirpation of bears in conflict hotspots. This population reduction overshot what managers were attempting to achieve, consistent with unanticipated compensatory effects, and went undetected for years. It's interesting that the last sentence of the paper's abstract takes note of "...the bluntness of this instrument [i.e., hunting] and deficiencies and uncertainties in monitoring and manipulating populations..."

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 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 recently helped with the successful appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court, which has implications for delisting of Northern Continental Divide, and perhaps all Lower 48, grizzlies.

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](#)

Or, you can mail a donation to:
Conservation Congress
2234 Sierra Vista Circle
Billings, MT 59105

* 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,
David and Louisa*