



PO Box 2406
Livingston, MT 59047
Phone: 406-224-2250
Email: info@GrizzlyTimes.org
Web: www.GrizzlyTimes.org

NEWSLETTER

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

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August 8, 2022

Dear Friend of the Grizzly Bear,

Summer is heating up – and so are grizzly bear human conflicts. So far, 23 Yellowstone grizzlies are known to have been killed this summer. Accounting for unknown and unrecorded deaths, the real number is probably twice as high. A disturbingly high number of the known grizzly bear deaths – eight – are under investigation for possible poaching, on top of 17 deaths still being reported as being under investigation for possible poaching last year. As we have written elsewhere, growth rate of the Yellowstone grizzly bear population has flatlined for the last twenty years – and could be declining.

That is why it is more important than ever to redouble efforts to reduce conflicts. Louisa's recent essay, synopsisized below, focuses on a remarkable success story involving sanitation improvements in Jackson Hole, Wyoming that offers larger lessons for efforts to coexist with bears. But cheek by jowl, we are also witnessing a different grizzly tragedy unfold in Jackson Hole. These two cases, one a success, the other a tragedy, are emblematic of the broader challenges facing grizzlies in the Northern Rockies as well as the complex tangle of factors that contribute to grizzly bear deaths.

Together, these cases underscore the need for a deeper understanding of the many reasons bears die and meaningful engagement of citizens who care about grizzlies and the wildlands they depend on.

A Grizzly Success: Grand Teton Matriarch 399 Inspires New Coexistence Partnership

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



Photo of 399 and company by Tiffany Taxi

Louisa's recent essay focuses on an impressive success story inspired in part by the celebrity grizzlies of Jackson Hole, including grizzly matriarch 399, who awoke to a safer world because citizens and local government officials stepped up to address the problem of unsecured human attractants.

In April, Teton County upgraded regulations to keep grizzlies from exploiting human foods and getting into trouble – often dying as a result – and Wyoming Wildlife Advocates, a local conservation organization, 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 progress was inspired by tragedy. Last year, with permission of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Wyoming officials killed six grizzlies in the valley – three descended from 399 – on the grounds that they had become conditioned to human foods.

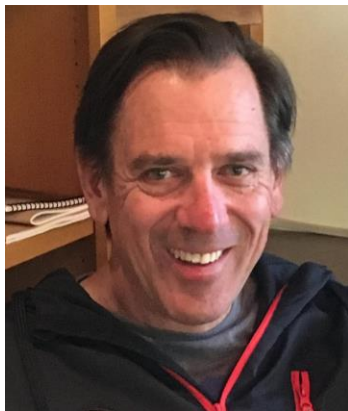
These executions motivated Jackson residents Savannah Rose Burgess and her friend Walt Ackerman to advocate for new county policies to help save bears' lives by making bear-proof trash cans mandatory and banning wildlife feeding.



Savannah Barnes and Walt Ackerman

Savvy about social media, Savannah posted a petition on change.org asking signatories to call or write Teton County commissioners requesting they adopt these policies, arguing that the lives of Jackson Hole's celebrity bears were at stake. An astonishing 75,000 people from all over the country signed the petition. And called. And wrote.

As a result of Savannah's petition – and the firehose of calls and letters – Teton County officials saw the need to act. With years of experience in natural resource policy and deep commitment to Jackson Hole's wildlife, Planning Commissioner Sue Lurie and Teton County Commissioner Luther Propst were perfectly suited for the challenge. They agreed that the county needed to amend its Land Development Regulations to ban the problematic practice of feeding bears and other wildlife, and to make bear-resistant trash cans mandatory on private lands.



Luther Propst and Sue Lurie

Tapping into the expertise of bear coexistence practitioners in the West, Sue and the county planning board crafted amendments that incorporated hard-earned lessons from other communities about keeping attractants away from bears. Over the course of the winter, Walt reached out to influential local business owners in a community economically dependent on wildlife and public lands, as well as to the local waste hauling companies that would be critical to the success of new policies. While the owners of the waste companies were not opposed, some were legitimately concerned about the cost of bear-resistant bins and how the transition would work.

Fortuitously, 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, Executive Director of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates, about using the organization's nonprofit status to make this a tax-deductible donation. She also asked if the group could help handle the logistics of distributing bins.

To Kristin and leaders of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates (WWA), this was a golden opportunity to advance coexistence in Jackson Hole. The group quickly rose to the challenge, ordering 280 trash bins from Kodiak Products, a company that makes some of the top-rated bear resistant trash bins. WWA leaders also committed to donating an additional \$100,000 to the program through an internal donation of \$50,000 contingent on a match from outside contributions to support the purchase of more bins.



Drew Gath



Kristin Combs

To deal with growing scope of the work, 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 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 experience in environmental cooperatives. Meanwhile, Frank Durbian, manager of the National Elk Refuge, offered to store the dumpsters at its Jackson headquarters – a convenient hub for distribution.

In April, the County Commission unanimously passed the amendments. So far, Jackson Hole Bear Solutions has delivered more than 200 trash bins to residents – plus they have placed a second order that will be delivered in August and are working on a third. Local waste haulers have delivered an additional several hundred.

Interest in the program is, moreover, exploding around the country. After reaching \$50,000, the required match for donations, Jackson Hole Bear Solutions has 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.

Meanwhile, Teton County is exploring other Bear Smart recommendations with the intent of being certified as a Bear Smart Community. This is the gold standard of coexistence approaches because it is the most comprehensive – and has a proven record of success. If the county achieves this goal, human-bear conflicts

would plummet. And Teton County could become a model for effective coexistence in the region.



Outsmart the Bear

Louisa's essay explores some takeaway lessons from this case, including:

- Icons are Powerful Agents of Change.
- Having a Financial Investment Helps.
- Ideological Stakes Help.
- Citizens Have Power.
- Dedicated Government Leaders are Important.
- A Nimble, Committed Nonprofit Matters.
- Mutual Respect, Humility, and Flexibility Make a Difference.
- Good Information Matters.
- Bear Watchers Can Be Agents of Positive Change.
- Baby Steps are Wise.

This story underscores that it is possible to find 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. And it 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.

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

And now for a darker side of the Jackson Hole bear story – and why we are asking you to help.

But first, it is important to note that unsecured attractants are problematic throughout the ecosystem – and improving sanitation practices in one county does not compensate for what happens in the county next door. And as we discuss below, despite protections offered by the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), 399 and other grizzlies are still threatened by notoriously hostile state wildlife agencies and poor leadership among government entities responsible for managing grizzlies.

Stop the Killing: One of 399's Quadruplets Has Been Killed – and Jackson Hole Grizzlies are Vulnerable

On July 14th, Wyofile reported that one of the four cubs (number 1057) that Jackson Hole's grizzly bear matriarch 399, had recently sent forth into the world was killed by Wyoming state game managers near Pinedale, Wyoming, because of conflicts over human attractants.



*Grizzly bear 1057, 399's two year old offspring that was recently killed.
Photo by Savannah Rose Burgess.*

We are asking you to tell officials in Wyoming's Game and Fish Department and the federal government that they need to recognize that Jackson Hole's beloved celebrity bears are special to thousands of people worldwide and deserve to be treated accordingly – not like expendable widgets. These grizzlies are not cyphers, nor are they part of a surplus population.

Last year managers killed 6 grizzlies in Jackson Hole alone, largely because of conflicts arising from problematic human behaviors. So far, seven grizzlies have been killed in Greater Yellowstone this year because of unsecured attractants. Killing bears to resolve problems caused by human choices and behaviors is

ineffective, unethical, and at odds with the Endangered Species Act. Managers should instead focus on education, prevention, and enforcement of relevant laws – all of which are focused on people.

Please contact Dan Thompson and Brian Nesvik of Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Hilary Cooley of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Deb Haaland of the Department of Interior. Contact information for these people is below.

And when you write or call these officials, please tell them why you care about these bears and your personal connection to this region and grizzlies – and remember to be respectful and civil.

The Problem of Wyoming Game and Fish – and State Wildlife Management

Wyoming's Game and Fish Department is one of the most regressive wildlife management agencies in the country, notorious for its hostility to grizzly bears and other large carnivores. Funded largely by fees from selling hunting licenses and from federal taxes on guns and ammunition, the agency features killing wildlife, including grizzly bears, as its primary management tool. The agency has long campaigned to strip endangered species protections for Yellowstone's grizzlies, which would give Wyoming primary authority over grizzlies and the opportunity to institute a trophy hunt.

State managers detest the phenomenon of people thronging to Jackson Hole to watch bears that have taken up residence near roads. More to the point, they are threatened when people come to respect and even revere individual animals. Wyoming's managers have made it clear that they will not give 399 or any other celebrity grizzly a break. With the recent execution of Grizzly bear 1057, Wyoming managers will have killed seven of Jackson Hole's popular grizzlies during this last year alone. Indeed, the agency's top brass have made it clear that they would like to get rid of all roadside bears.

Importantly, managers in the US Fish and Wildlife Service who are charged with protecting grizzlies have routinely greenlighted the executions – while continuing to promote removal of ESA protections and divestiture of authority to state managers who have made clear that they want to substantially reduce the size of Yellowstone region's grizzly bear population.

We need your help to stop wildlife managers in Wyoming and the US Fish and Wildlife Service from killing more of Jackson Hole's vulnerable bears. More than ever, these bears need special treatment that recognizes their role in bringing much-needed joy and inspiration to people in our much-troubled world.



399 and company by Tiffany Taxi

Please Tell Wyoming and Federal Officials:

1. Jackson Hole's celebrity bears are special and need to be protected. These bears delight families from across the country and around the world. Wyoming Game and Fish managers and US Fish and Wildlife Service officials need to do more to protect bears that have learned to live near and tolerate people.
2. Wildlife managers need to find more safe locations where bears that have gotten into conflicts can be relocated and given a second chance. There are not enough designated sites for relocating bears. Many of the existing sites also have high densities of resident grizzlies that push newly relocated bears either into local areas near people or on a hazardous journey back to where they were captured.
3. Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the US Fish and Wildlife Service need to redouble their efforts to reduce conflicts, consistent with legal requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Although considerable progress has been made on public lands implementing measures to keep human foods away from bears, this is not the case on private lands. Most of the grizzlies executed by managers in or near Jackson Hole were killed because they became involved in conflicts on private lands after being lured there by freely available attractants. Although progress is being made in Teton County to improve sanitation (see the essay above), grizzlies roam far beyond Jackson Hole into areas where unsecured trash is still available, including Sublette County where Number 1057 was recently killed.
4. The current system of state wildlife management almost exclusively serves the interests of hunters and others who prioritize the exploitation of wild animals. The vast majority of Americans care about wild animals simply because they exist, but are given no voice in management. State wildlife agencies are infused with an

ethos of domination, control and killing that is increasingly out of step with public values and preferences. We must reform state wildlife management, notably in Wyoming, so that it reflects the prevalent values of Americans. Grizzlies and other wild animals belong to all of us.

Contact Information:

Dan Thompson, Wyoming Game and Fish Department Large Carnivore Supervisor:
Email: daniel.thompson@wyo.gov
Phone: 307-332-2688

Brian Nesvik, Wyoming Game and Fish Director:
Phone: 307-777-6000

Hilary Cooley, US Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator:
Email: hilary_cooley@fws.gov
Phone: 406-243-4903

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland:
Phone: 202-208-3100
Email: feedback@ios.doi.gov

For More Background Information:

Newsclips:

- <https://wyofile.com/officials-kill-sub-adult-offspring-of-famous-grizzly-399/>
- <https://wyofile.com/grizzly-399s-four-cubs-will-soon-reach-a-life-or-death-crossroads/>

Grizzly Times: 399's Story: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/399-s-story>

Playing Russian Roulette with Grizzly Matron and the Bears of Yellowstone, Part 2, by Louisa Willcox: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/playing-russian-roulette-with-grizzly-matron-399-and-the-bears-of-yellowstone-part-2>

A Will to Dominate: Problems and Pathologies of State Wildlife Management, by Dr. David Mattson: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/files>

Grizzly Times' Primer on Grizzly Bear Advocacy: The States: Of Killing and Domination: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/state-wildlife-agencies>



For More on How You Can Help:

See the “**Take Action**” tab on the Grizzly Times website that includes a “**Primer**” on how to be an effective advocate for grizzlies. And stay tuned for a questionnaire we will be featuring in an upcoming newsletter to learn a bit more about your interests and background – and issues you might want to be more engaged in.

- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/take-action>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/advocacy-primer>

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

The Primer outlines seven arenas where you can make a positive difference:

- Strengthen Fish and Wildlife Service’s leadership in recovery of grizzly bears
- Curb destructive activities by the US Forest Service
- Reform anti-carnivore management by wildlife agencies in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana
- Buttress the National Park Service’s laudable efforts to keep bears and people safe
- Support efforts by Tribes to play a more meaningful role in grizzly bear recovery
- Expand coexistence efforts on private lands
- Reduce deadly collisions with trains and automobiles

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

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

Please Consider a Gift to Grizzly Times...

We need your help! We have retired and are doing this full-time work pretty much gratis – despite the gradual dissolution of our physical bodies.

If you were following the most recent delisting court case, you know that David's role was vital to the litigation success that restored Endangered Species Act protections to Greater Yellowstone's grizzly bears. The skilled attorneys could not have won the case without David's scientific expertise. He also helped with the successful appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court, which has implications for delisting of Northern Continental Divide grizzlies, and perhaps all grizzlies in the lower 48 states.

As we do not have our own nonprofit, a not-for-profit tax-deductible organization, Conservation Congress, has agreed to be our fiscal sponsor. (*Thank you, Denise!*)

You can make a one-time contribution or sign up for a monthly donation through this link:

[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***