



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

Newsletter & Blog

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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Dear Friends of the Grizzly,

As we approach the darkest day of the year, the stars remind us that bears have provided direction since time immemorial. The Big Dipper in Ursa Major (the Big Bear) points to the North Star in Ursa Minor (the Little Bear), which has long guided travelers and sailors in the Northern Hemisphere – literally giving them “bearings.”

NEW BLOG:

The Grizzly Costs of Coexistence, Part Two

By Louisa Willcox

In Part Two of this essay, Louisa explores what it will take to provide coexistence efforts needed to reconnect grizzly bear populations in the Northern Rockies and allow bears to adapt to a warming climate. Now more than ever we need new sources of funding. The onus of living with bears falls on relatively few people, but bears offer broad benefits for society, so it is reasonable for our government to provide the lion’s share of funding to support nonlethal coexistence.

She concludes with this: “We must do better with the resources we now have, even as we seek new funding to expand our coexistence infrastructure and increase the cadre of skilled specialists. We can start by focusing on shared real-world problems as part of an effort to bring people together who may otherwise be on opposite sides of ideological fences. Who knows? We might discover that we have more in common with bears and each other than we had previously imagined – to the benefit of bears, our communities, and ourselves.”

<https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2019/12/16/The-Grizzly-Cost-of-Coexistence-Part-Two>

NEW PODCAST:

Grizzly Times' Interview with Lou Bruno, Champion of the Wild

Don't miss this interview with Lou Bruno, one of the most dedicated advocates for the wild you will meet anywhere. Lou is a teacher and naturalist who has devoted much of his life to protect the Badger Two Medicine country next to Glacier National Park. The Badger Two Medicine lies in the heart of grizzly bear country and has been called "the Backbone of the World" by the Blackfeet. But it is threatened by energy development and off-road vehicle use.

Thirty-five years ago, Lou started the Glacier Two Medicine Alliance and has helped sustain a remarkably diverse and effective coalition of ranchers, sportsmen, business owners and members of the Blackfeet Tribe. The group recently won another major victory that retired a major oil and gas lease in the heart of the Badger. His hard-won insights are especially important at this critical time in conservation.

Some excerpts:

"I love the fact that grizzlies are here, and that I live in country where I could walk down the road and run into one... We live with them every day, we take precautions. Everyone I know is glad to do it as far as my neighbors here, just because we like the fact that we live in grizzly country. And I feel like if you don't like it, there's 99.9% of the rest of the country that you could live in without grizzlies."

At a 2015 hearing on oil and gas development in the Badger:

"People were constantly getting up, one after the other, and from their point of view talking about how important it was to keep the Badger wild, and to keep oil and gas development out. And these were Native Americans, they were veterans, they were farmers and ranchers, they were conservationists, everyone you could think of. And when you look at that broad spectrum of Montana society all having the same value system as you do, it's pretty powerful."

Episode 41: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/the-grizzly-times-podcast>

IN THE NEWS:

Fish and Wildlife Service Forced to Take a New Look at Status of Grizzlies

A federal judge in Montana recently ordered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to review the status of grizzly bears by March 2021 – a step that could prompt the agency to revisit its broader plan for recovering bears in the lower 48 states.

This agreement resolves one claim in the Center for Biological Diversity's ongoing lawsuit that challenges the Trump administration's failure to update the federal Recovery Plan for grizzly bears. The Recovery Plan is now more than 25 years old and does not reflect current science.

In a 2011 status review, the Service acknowledged that the 1993 Recovery Plan no longer reflected the best available science and needed to be updated to consider additional recovery areas.

<https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/lawsuit-forces-feds-take-new-look-status-grizzly-bears-2019-12-09>

Update on Montana Advisory Council and Bear Managers' Meetings

At recent meetings of grizzly bear managers and the governor-appointed Grizzly Bear Citizen Advisory Council, officials shrugged off another record-breaking year of mortalities in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) – and a fifth year of unsustainably high grizzly bear deaths in Greater Yellowstone.

There is no doubt that government agencies are hell-bent on removing endangered species protections for Greater Yellowstone and NCDE grizzlies – and even perhaps all the lower-48 grizzly bear populations. Sadly, agency scientists are complicit in this partisan agenda. To pave the way, Montana officials announced they would develop a new state plan to manage grizzlies after delisting that will almost certainly be yet another cynical ploy in a larger campaign.

At the December 4th meeting of the Citizen Advisory Council in Bozeman, Montana Governor Steve Bullock left no doubt about the purpose of the council: “...to prepare for when this really is an animal that we as a state hold in trust, that it’s completely our responsibility.”

The Council is heavily stacked against the bear, with some members verging on hysteria. Trina Jo Bradley said: “My little girl can’t go outside and play because of the grizzlies.” And: “Some bears just have to die in order to better the species and the tolerance” – even though killing grizzlies has never been shown to build tolerance.

Thankfully, the Tribes interjected some sanity and levity in these meetings. Gerald “Buzz” Cobell, Blackfoot Nation Fish and Wildlife Director, shared a story from Chief Earl Old Person about a warrior who was saved by a bear. Cobell is indeed getting more calls from Blackfoot residents reporting bear problems, but they want managers to move the bears, not kill them.

“To the Blackfeet, our stories are real,” Cobell said. “That’s why the Blackfeet revere the bear. The bear is our brother.”

Stacy Courville, bear specialist of the Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes, said that no child has been mauled even though “grizzlies in the Mission Valley own our valley at night... We have high densities of grizzly bears living in close proximity to people on a day-to-day basis all season long, and bears avoid people just fine.”

- <https://www.mtpr.org/post/grizzly-bear-advisory-council-struggles-herculean-challenge-Missoula>
- <https://www.missoulacurrent.com/outdoors/2019/12/grizzly-bears-tribal-leaders/>
- <https://www.mtpr.org/post/after-year-record-grizzly-bear-deaths-managers-talk-human-bear-conflict-reduction>
- https://missoulain.com/news/local/grizzly-mortalities-high-again-as-agencies-consider-management-tools/article_73e03f2b-ff43-59ab-895e-fbbb49f2ecc0.html
- https://www.fairfieldsuntimes.com/news/state/scientist-grizzly-bear-conflicts-will-not-go-away/article_6640baa1-8e5d-587b-a4f1-c4d89e0cba9f.html
- <https://www.mtpr.org/post/fwp-crafting-new-statewide-grizzly-management-plan>

Lawsuit to Address Imperiled Species in Bureaucratic Purgatory, Including Whitebark Pine Trees

The Center for Biological Diversity recently announced it intends [to sue the Trump administration](#) for failing to tackle a backlog of hundreds of species waiting for a decision on federal protection. These include wolverines and whitebark pine trees.

Yours truly helped draft the petition filed by Natural Resources Defense Council to list whitebark pines under the Endangered Species Act due to threats from climate change and disease. Between 2003 and 2009, over 80% of all mature whitebark pine trees in the Greater Yellowstone were killed by an unprecedented climate-driven outbreak of mountain pine beetle. Fish and Wildlife Service had found that the species warranted ESA protections, but would be left on the sidelines because the Service had higher priorities. Until recently, whitebark pine had been a key food for Greater Yellowstone grizzlies. <https://www.wyomingpublicmedia.org/post/conservation-group-prepares-launch-massive-endangered-species-act-lawsuit#stream/0>

More Buffalo Will be Slaughtered this Winter

At a recent meeting of the government's bison managers, participants voted to remove 600-900 Yellowstone bison through hunting, quarantine, and slaughter this winter – this out of a population that numbers no more than 5,000 animals.

The decision was ostensibly made to address concerns about transmission of the bacterial disease Brucellosis from bison to cattle through contact with infected afterbirth. Yet buffalo have never been known to transmit the disease to cows, whereas elk have done so numerous times. Curiously, no elk (so dear to the hearts of big game hunters) have been slaughtered – other than as a normal part of the hunting season. Clearly, agencies are deploying a double standard.

Mike Mease of the Buffalo Field Campaign asked: "If it's OK for elk to spread the disease out there, why isn't OK for bison not to be out there, too?"

Buffalo are a key food for grizzlies – and Yellowstone's Northern Range herd comprises one of the few main foods that have not yet tanked. But grizzlies have little opportunity to make use of bison dying naturally during the winter because so many are being hunted or carted off to slaughter or quarantine.

- <https://www.mtpr.org/post/agencies-tribes-vote-reduce-yellowstone-bison-population-600-900>
- https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/yellowstone_national_park/slow-drip-bison-quarantine-creating-path-from-yellowstone-to-fort/article_2912f508-3477-53ae-89c2-0344c15c6d85.html

You can read more from David on trends in trout, ungulates and whitebark pine trees:

- <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/cutthroat-trout>
- <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/future-prospects>
- <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/trends-1>

Grizzlies Moving North in Arctic in Response to Climate Change

According to Doug Clark, a University of Saskatchewan Associate Professor in the School of Environment and Sustainability, grizzlies are moving north in the Arctic. Climate change is likely playing a role, says Clark.

And, here is a cool blog by Doug published in Grizzly Times that explains more about what is going on with grizzlies in the North:

- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/.../The-Grizzlies-of-Wapusk-an-U...>
- <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/grizzly-bears-move-north-in-high-arctic-as-climate-change-expands-range->

Great OpEd on Threats to Wildlife on Alaska's Tongass National Forest

Trump's reversal of the roadless rule on the Tongass National Forest poses a serious threat to grizzlies and other wildlife. The reversal prompted LaVern Beier, a former wildlife researcher with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, to write a powerful opinion piece, noting that "clear-cuts have no value to wildlife once the canopy closes in at 12-14 years."

Beier also expressed concerns about the adverse effects of roads, and about how logging will change bears' foraging behavior: "...female brown bears spend more time burning energy navigating through clear-cuts and second growth seeking refuge in standing trees and avoiding males versus fishing. The end result of an altered landscape within a female brown bear's home range increases cub mortality by males compounded by the fact these female brown bears do not consume adequate salmon for denning and cub survival."

He concludes: "Wilderness is the symbol of brown bear habitat, and God isn't making wilderness anymore. Once it's gone, it's gone forever."

<https://www.juneauempire.com/opinion/opinion-tongass-roadless-rule-reversal-threatens-brown-bear-populations/>

GOOD NEWS:

Good News for Grizzlies in the Swan!

Missoula County Commissioners together with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Vital Ground recently partnered to purchase a conservation easement on a parcel of key grizzly bear habitat consisting of prime low-elevation wetlands in the Swan Valley. These lands lie between the Swan and Mission mountains in habitat that connects these landscapes. Congratulations to all who helped make this happen, including the Quinn family!

<https://www.missoulacurrent.com/outdoors/2019/12/swan-valley-easement/>



*A mama bear teaches her cub to scratch its back on a tree in British Columbia, Canada.
Photo by Marion Vollborn*

Banff Wildlife Crossing Structures Save Lives, Including Bears

Wildlife crossing structures along the Trans-Canada highway in Banff National Park in Alberta have reduced wildlife mortality by 80%. But more needs to be done to reduce deaths outside the fenced areas near crossing structures, and more structures are needed.

In keeping with this need, Alberta's government has set aside \$20 million to build a long-awaited overpass east of Canmore – a site of frequent collisions with wildlife – and an underpass in the Crownest Pass area in southwestern Alberta.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/alberta/article-success-of-wildlife-corridors-in-banff-national-park-has-advocates/>

TAKE ACTION!

Sign Petition to Keep Hibernating Bears Safe from Hunters in Alaska

Unbelievable but true: hunters can now kill hibernating bears in Alaska thanks to a U.S. House and Senate resolution rolling back Obama-era regulations against the practice. President Donald Trump signed the bill into law last spring.

Killing innocent hibernating bears is barbaric and inexcusable.

Please consider signing this [Change.org](https://www.change.org/p/u-s-senate-make-it-illegal-to-kill-hibernating-bears-in-alaska) petition that asks to leave hibernating bears in peace!

<https://www.change.org/p/u-s-senate-make-it-illegal-to-kill-hibernating-bears-in-alaska>

Please Consider a Gift to Grizzly Times

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

If you were following the recent delisting court case, you know that David's role was vital to the litigation success that restored protections to Greater Yellowstone's grizzly bears. The skilled attorneys could not have won the case without David's scientific expertise. There will be continued demands on David's time with the appeal of this case to the 9th Circuit Court, potential delisting of NCDE or even all lower-48 grizzlies, and mounting threats to the Cabinet-Yaak population.

As we do not have our own nonprofit, Conservation Congress, a not-for-profit tax-deductible organization, 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 the Conservation Congress link: <https://www.conservationcongress-ca.org/give>

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,
Louisa and David***

The Grizzly Cost of Coexistence, Part Two

December 16, 2019
[Louisa Willcox](#)



This is the second of a two-part essay that delves into the complexities of grizzly bear coexistence, why we need more resources, and some options for generating new funds.

In [Part One](#) of this essay, I laid out the ingredients for successful coexistence with grizzly bears, and why we need more resources. Here I delve into the costs and some ideas for meeting funding needs.

Now more than ever, we need to be innovative in thinking about how to meet the need for funds to support grizzly bear coexistence work. Even with strong laws such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and public support for reducing conflicts, recovery efforts will fail if resources are lacking.

During my decades of experience with grizzly bear conservation, I found that people with different values and perspectives can agree on the need for more funding for bear-resistant dumpsters, electric fence, education, and more.

The onus of living with bears falls on relatively few people, but there are broad benefits for society, so it is reasonable for our government to provide the lion's share of funding to support nonlethal coexistence. As a society, we subsidize public values all the time. For example, last year the National Endowment for the Arts spent [\\$80 million to support the arts](#). We also spent over [\\$2 billion last year](#) to underwrite the cost of building new sports stadiums.

According to a [2005 report by the Government Accountability Office](#), we subsidize grazing on public lands to the tune of \$123 million annually (or an average of \$64 per cow), but without accounting for the ecological damage done. (Other studies estimate that taxpayers subsidize public lands grazing at two to three times that amount.) More relevant to grizzlies, using GAO estimates, ranchers who graze roughly 9,000 cow/calf pairs on National Forest lands in Wyoming's Upper Green River area receive nearly \$576,000 annually in subsidies – even though their subpar grazing practices have created the largest mortality sink for grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Rather than requiring improved husbandry practices, the government recently rewarded these privileged ranchers by allowing them to kill an additional 72 grizzlies during the next ten years.

On the other hand, citizens who enjoy watching wildlife generate roughly \$142 billion and 1.4 million jobs nationally (see the [2011 report by US Fish and Wildlife Service](#)). In Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana alone, wildlife watching generates about \$2 billion each year. In Yellowstone Park, where seeing a grizzly bear is always high on the viewing list, [sight-seeing tourists bring \\$629.6 million to the local economy](#) each year.

Of course, these figures do not account for the aesthetic, spiritual and other benefits we place on the presence of grizzly bears. Given that grizzlies enrich our lives in so many ways, we all have a stake in ensuring that conflicts are reduced as much as possible. But coexistence is not cheap.

Costs of Coexistence Infrastructure

For example, bear-proofing a single garbage-disposal site costs something like \$10,000 to \$20,000, not including maintenance. Bear-resistant garbage cans cost about \$400 each.

On private ranchlands, one-time costs for a carcass composting facility can run about \$20,000, and annual operating costs around \$25,000. On the upside, if more facilities come online, costs will almost certainly drop because of efficiencies of scale.

The cost of electric fencing around calving areas varies greatly depending on the length and complexity of the fence, but can cost as much as \$10,000. Pure-bred livestock guardian dogs from Eastern Europe are expensive too -- around \$2,000-\$3,000 per dog, not considering the substantial food bill.

Structures to facilitate highway crossings and reduce collisions are the most expensive of all coexistence options. For example, Alberta just approved [\\$20 million to build an overpass](#) near Banff Park and an underpass near Crowsnest Pass. Many millions would be required to provide safe passage across transportation corridors for grizzlies within and between Northern Rockies ecosystems.

Estimates for comprehensive upgrades of sanitation infrastructure could run \$50,000 to \$100,000 per watershed, but less in places where some infrastructure already exists.

Even though it's difficult to come up with a full estimate of costs, comprehensive coexistence will undoubtedly cost millions of dollars annually for all of the grizzly bear ecosystems in the Northern Rockies.

Carnivore Coexistence Fund: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?

Over the years I have collaborated with coexistence experts, agency personnel, tribal representatives, and livestock producers to create a new federally funded program to support grizzly bear coexistence efforts. In one attempt, all large carnivores were included.

This idea first surfaced in the late 1990s among Wyoming Game and Fish officials who sought additional funds to support state grizzly bear management -- partly to facilitate removal of federal protections. The agency suggested establishing a [\\$40 million federal endowment fund](#) to support coexistence between people and federally-protected large carnivores in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The fund would have been managed by the nonprofit National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Idaho and Montana officials quickly jumped on board, as did Governors of the three states. The time appeared auspicious given that Montana's Senator Conrad Burns chaired the Interior Appropriations Committee and could have made it happen.

I saw benefit in the initiative while disagreeing with the states' cynical motives. As staff of the Sierra Club at the time, I worked to garner support from members across the country. Other groups such as Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation, and the Wildlife Management Institute worked to support the initiative as well.

Senator Burns chose not to support this effort but instead chose to fund a massive program to estimate the size of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) grizzly bear population using DNA-based methods. Perhaps needless to say, his move was cynical (a theme?), and designed to set the stage for removing ESA protections for the NCDE grizzly bear population.

Shortfalls in funding for coexistence efforts have only increased over time. About ten years ago, on behalf of Natural Resources Defense Council, I again collaborated with tribal representatives, conflict specialists, political leaders, and ranchers to promote new funding for grizzly bear coexistence in a package intended for inclusion in the federal Farm Bill. The goal was to provide enough funding over a long-enough period of time to make a difference in a particular locale, and based on that, to facilitate learning that would extrapolate to other landscapes.

Although many ranchers were supportive, the more ideological leaders of various livestock organizations were not. The proposal collapsed when hardline leaders of the Montana Stockgrowers Association insisted that any new funds underwrite killing grizzlies. Despite past failures, the idea of a fund for nonlethal coexistence work is worth revisiting. The government is the obvious source of money, but not the only one. Some of the many wealthy individuals in this region could also help, as some already have.

Other Funding Options

At a national level, a new tax on backpacks, binoculars, and other recreational and wildlife watching equipment could not only help pay to support coexistence with grizzlies, but also all wildlife that is not typically hunted. A [new tax on recreation gear](#) could mimic the taxes on arms, ammunition, and fishing equipment imposed by the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act and the 1950 Dingell-Johnson Act.

Today, taxes generated by the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts together with hunting and fishing license fees account for about 80% of the funding for state wildlife management agencies across the country. One perverse outcome of current funding structures is a dominant bias towards serving hunters and anglers and producing animals to be hunted or fished under auspices of “harvestable surplus.” (This problem is explored in other essays [here](#) and [here](#).)

A [new tax on outdoor gear](#) could level the playing field, putting “non-game” wildlife such as grizzlies on equal footing with elk and trout. This in turn could contribute to reforming state wildlife management agencies to become more responsive to a public that is demanding that wildlife be managed for intrinsic values even as interest in hunting declines.

So far, the powerful companies that produce outdoor recreation gear have resisted a new tax on their products, opting instead to support an approach that would allocate a portion of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for support of non-game wildlife management under the [Recovering America’s Wildlife Act \(RAWA\)](#). This Act has been recently introduced in Congress.

A downside of this approach is that it would perversely tie wildlife conservation to proceeds generated by leasing access to oil and gas, in turn leading to often irreversible ecological damage. Another is that only 5% of the fund would support imperiled species recovery at a time when Congress has reduced funding for ESA programs in the US Fish and Wildlife Service to starvation levels. But if passed, RAWA could generate over a billion dollars for wildlife conservation that benefits animals such as bats, birds, bears, and more.

What Next?

Any possible federal mechanism for funding conservation of non-hunted wildlife has pros and cons. And in these distracted times securing new government funds for programs that benefit our national welfare is especially challenging. This challenge makes the path to securing resources for grizzly bear coexistence work unclear.

But what I can say for certain is that the bottom will fall out of funding for coexistence if federal protections for the grizzly are removed...along with incentives that the Endangered Species Act currently provides for people to invest in coexistence.

We must do better with the resources we now have, even as we seek new funding to expand our coexistence infrastructure and increase the cadre of skilled specialists. We can start by focusing on shared real-world problems as part of an effort to bring people together who may otherwise be on opposite sides of ideological fences.

Who knows? We might discover that we have more in common with bears and each other than we had previously imagined – to the benefit of bears, our communities, and ourselves.

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