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NEWSLETTER

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

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December 26, 2021

Dear Friends of the Grizzly,

Happy Holidays!

We are delighted at the enthusiastic response to last week's webinar: **Will 399 Survive? The World's Most Famous Grizzly Bear in Peril**, co-sponsored with Patagonia Action Works and featuring Tom Mangelsen, Louisa Willcox, and David Mattson.

We offer a very special thank you to the heroic champion of nature, Dr. Jane Goodall for adding her touching remarks about 399 and other wild bears. And thanks again to Alex Deuel, Blake Nicolazzo, James Carey, and as always, to Janette Barnes who has assisted with this newsletter from its inception.

Because so many of you asked thoughtful questions that we didn't have time to answer during the event, and because we did not have time to unpack some of the issues we touched on, we thought it might be helpful to address them in the form of a newsletter. So strap yourself in for a newsletter that is a bit longer than most!

But please don't hesitate to ask for clarification or amplification of our answers at info@grizzlytimes.org.

Also, in case you missed it, here is the recording of the Webinar, featuring comments by Dr. Jane

Goodall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcNA5daKOZA>

For those of you interested in engaging, we reiterate sending requests to US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to improve protections of grizzlies. The information that follows provides more context for these requests, and email addresses to FWS and others are listed below.



A Brief Overview

Perhaps the most famous grizzly bear in the world is known by her research number, “399.” She is an ambassador for all grizzlies in Greater Yellowstone. Yet she and her family have been subject to the risks run by many bears, including running into hunters as she and her four yearlings scavenged hunter-killed elk near Jackson, Wyoming, and being lured into areas south of the protected landscape of Grand Teton Park onto private lands where they have eaten honey from beehives and livestock feed carelessly left out by people.

These well-mannered and tolerant grizzlies are at great risk of being accidentally shot or becoming so used to eating human foods that they become dangerous and are killed by managers. While they have recently gone into their den, when they arise in the spring the challenges will begin all over again.

All grizzlies in Greater Yellowstone and the Northern Rockies face similar risks. Human-caused grizzly bear deaths are mounting due to climate-driven changes in native foods, poaching, thoughtless human behavior, and increasing numbers of people encroaching on the habitat that grizzlies need. A recent spike in grizzly bear deaths promises to reverse 40-plus years of hard-fought progress towards recovery under the Endangered Species Act.

Much more needs to be done at the federal, state and county levels to ensure that people behave responsibly and respectfully around these grizzlies. And plenty of tools are available to improve how we live with bears, including use of bear pepper spray while hiking and deployment of electric fencing around beehives. As

important, we need greater coordination and cooperation among bear managers and local authorities.

We still have ample habitat to recover grizzlies in the Northern Rockies. Reconnecting long-isolated populations is vital to ensuring that grizzlies flourish in a warming world.

For more on 399 see: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/399-s-story>

For Tom's book, *The Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek* see: <https://www.mangelsen.com/grizzly>



Quintessential matron grizzly 399 and cubs. Photo by Tom Mangelsen.

A Review of the Science

David's brief overview of the environment that has shaped the life of 399 and many other grizzlies is rooted in a wealth of research, much of which is summarized in videos and blogs that we've produced during the last six years.

The video linked below of a 2015 presentation by David at the Jackson Wildlife Art Museum is perhaps the most accessible summary of the relevant science.

The Changing World of Greater Yellowstone's Grizzly Bears: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqgRHZr0bNQ>

Adapting to Losses in Native Foods

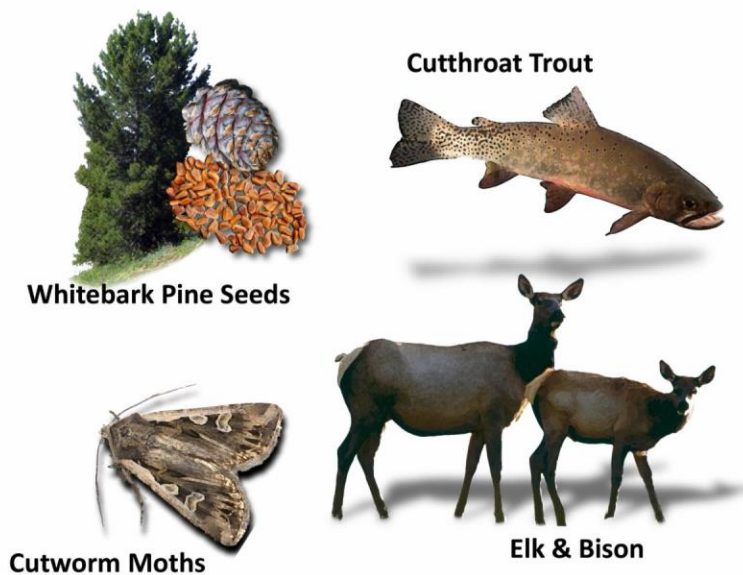
David emphasizes that 399 and other grizzlies have been struggling to adapt to losses of key native foods that were not only calorically rich, but also distributed in remote areas that kept them out of harm's way. The cutthroat trout fishery in Yellowstone Park was functionally extirpated as a source of bear food because of predation by non-native lake trout and deleterious changes in the hydrological

regime driven by a warming climate. Yellowstone cutthroat trout were critical to feeding hungry grizzlies during the spring and early summer in much of southern Yellowstone Park at a time of year when few other high-quality foods were available. For more see: <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/cutthroat-trout>

We have also lost over 80% of mature cone-producing whitebark pine trees in the ecosystem to an unprecedented outbreak of non-native mountain pine beetles unleashed by drought and warming temperatures, aided and abetted by mounting mortality caused by a nonnative fungal pathogen called white pine blister rust. Fat-rich whitebark pine seeds are especially important to female grizzlies, who eat twice as many as males do, with major effects on their reproductive success. And because the trees grow in some of the most remote country in the ecosystem, they help keep grizzlies safe from people during the fall feeding frenzy. For more see: <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/whitebark-pine>

Compounding all of this, we've also seen substantial declines in numbers of elk since the mid-1990s caused by a synergistic brew of poor management by the states, declining reproductive success linked to worsening forage conditions driven by climate change, and predation by wolves and bears. Along with bison, elk are the primary source of high-quality meat from native herbivores that grizzly bears obtain by both scavenging and outright predation. For more see: <https://www.mostlynaturalgrizzlies.org/ungulates>

The loss of so many high-quality foods has compelled grizzlies to seek out alternative high-quality foods, many of which are associated with people. As a consequence, human garbage and meat from livestock and remains of hunter-killed elk have emerged as major drivers of increasing conflict between human and grizzly bears. Even where grizzlies have found alternative natural foods, many of these are distributed in areas nearer people, often with the same effect on conflicts.



The Human Shield

Females face an additional imperative that has led many of them, notably 399, to seek out areas near people. Cubs die at a high rate, many of them from predation by adult males, which causes reproductive females to seek habitats where male bears are less likely to roam. Perhaps paradoxically, it turns out that roadside habitats are one of the safest places for females to raise cubs, primarily because male bears are loath to go there.

As a consequence, there is a long history of females putting up with the human mayhem along roads to ensure that their cubs stay safe. Importantly, 399 is merely one of the latest in a lineage of females willing to endure people as a way to access food and find security.

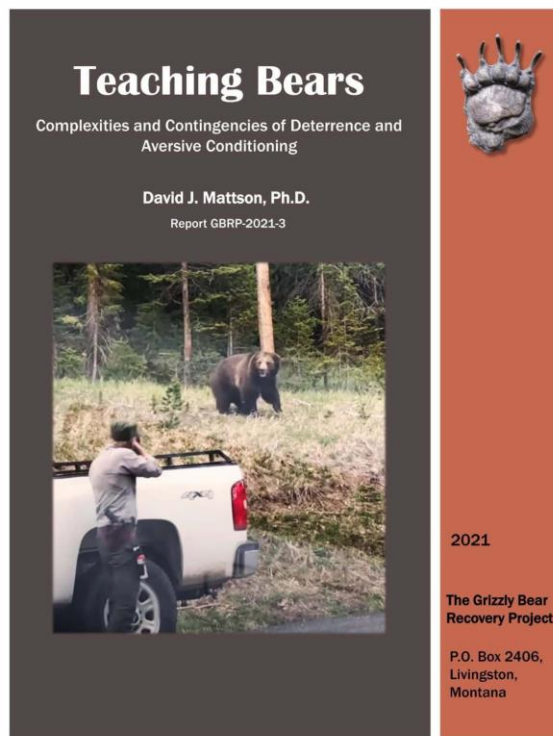
When you combine the allure of food and security with the loss of backcountry alternatives, you get a lot more bears near roads and residences – which puts an onus on us to act responsibly if we want a thriving grizzly bear population comprising a small remnant of what we once had.

Hazing and Punishing Grizzlies

Needless-to-say, managers are challenged by the fact that more grizzlies are spending more time near people. They have two basic options for addressing the predictable increase in conflicts: change people's behavior or change the behavior of involved bears. The first option is politically difficult, which increases the allure of the second, with the resulting predictable increase in attempts by bear managers during recent years to drive bears away from people by hazing them – i.e., by punishment and the infliction of pain.

David's latest technical report, **Teaching Bears: Complexities and Contingencies of Deterrence and Aversive Conditioning** ([Teaching Bears Report](#)), was inspired by a recent campaign by US Fish and Wildlife Service to haze Felicia (aka #863), one of Jackson Hole's celebrity grizzlies, from along roadsides that she has frequented for several years. Last year, FWS officials upped the ante by systematically hazing Felicia and other grizzlies in Grand Teton and Yellowstone, including 399, claiming that their efforts were based on sound science.

Click on the cover photo below to go to the report.



In response to this claim, David unearthed every bit of relevant research on the effects of hazing and aversive conditioning that he could find, summarized in this report that is the first and only of its kind.

This research points to several conclusions. First, hazed bears were unlikely to avoid human environs for long periods of times, especially if human-associated attractants remained available. Second, bears that have learned to be tolerant of humans because of heightened needs for food and security, exemplified by females with cubs (aka Felicia, and other roadside females such as 399 and 610), will be the least likely of all to translate hazing experiences into generalized avoidance of humans and human infrastructure, especially in the presence of high bear densities in the backcountry.

By contrast, bears that are inexperienced with humans or human-associated foods, with minimal security concerns, and with foraging opportunities in the backcountry, exemplified by naïve adult male bears, will likely respond best to hazing, if well executed. But importantly, hazing can cause unintended consequences for bears and people. If sustained to the point where a bear experiences acute distress or even trauma, relentless punishment can impede learning processes, making bears potentially more anxious, aggressive, or even helpless and unable to respond at all.

The takeaway is this: The role of aversive conditioning in managing human-bear conflicts is quite limited, in contrast to efforts focused on people. At best, hazing might help managers buy time to address the human roots of the problem, such as the availability of attractants or problematic behaviors of people.

Management Challenges

Numerous people who attended the webinar raised similar questions about how grizzly bears are managed and the reasons why, with an obvious focus on 399, who exemplifies the challenges facing Yellowstone's grizzlies and the people who live and recreate near them. Although we talked mostly about problems with the culture and institutions of state wildlife management, other government agencies also need major improvements to their perspectives and practices if people and grizzlies are to coexist on landscapes large enough to support a thriving bear population. The National Park Service, US Forest Service, Wyoming Department of Transportation, and county governments all have a long way to go.

Louisa provides an overview of the challenges

here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/playing-russian-roulette-with-grizzly-matron-399-and-the-bears-of-yellowstone-part-1-this-is-the>

And here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/playing-russian-roulette-with-grizzly-matron-399-and-the-bears-of-yellowstone-part-2>

The management challenges facing all grizzlies are addressed more comprehensively in a number of blogs and essays that can be accessed at: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/management-problems>



Cartoon by Phil Juliano

Delisting and The Problem of State Management

Tom, David and Louisa offered what could be construed as a harsh critique of state wildlife management, but their views are rooted in decades of lived experiences as well as ample research. Although many state wildlife managers work tirelessly to reduce conflicts with grizzlies, the leadership, finances and culture of the agencies they work for conspire to create a fundamentally anti-carnivore ethos.

Moreover, by design and function, state wildlife management excludes people who care primarily about the welfare of animals such as grizzly bears, and who value them simply because they exist, not because they might shoot them to hang on a wall. It turns out that these marginalized people comprise the majority of those living in states where grizzly bears range. And nationally, those who value wild animals such as grizzlies for their beauty and mere existence comprise an overwhelming majority that would be even further disenfranchised if management were divested by the federal government to the states.

The dysfunctional and antidemocratic nature of wildlife management is rooted in powerful forces. On the face of it, management of wildlife by state agencies is patently for the benefit of hunters and fishers, especially in the Northern Rockies. Even though hunters are a shrinking minority, they still dominate state wildlife management. Indeed, state wildlife agencies represent a last stronghold of the ethos of Manifest Destiny, which led to the genocide of native peoples, the

extirpation of most large carnivores, and the destruction of entire ecosystems during the 1800s and early 1900s.

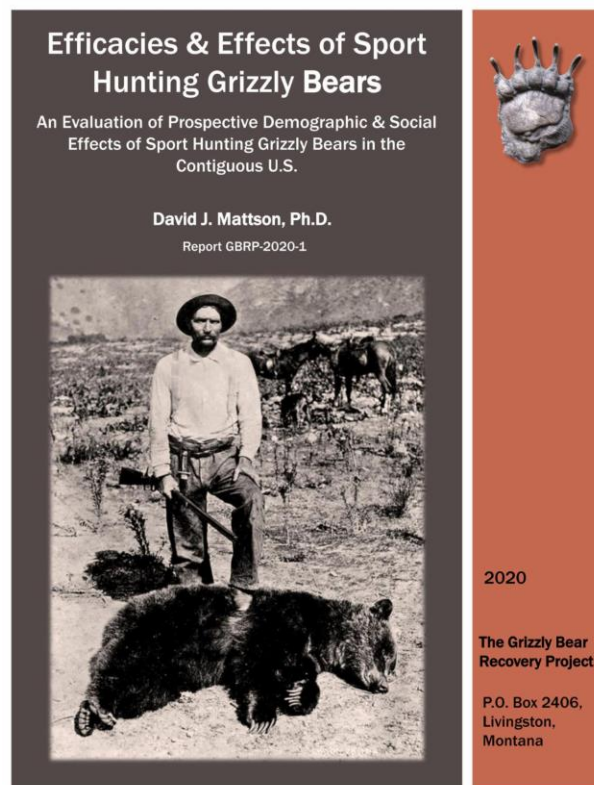
David has called this system “despotic” and explains why here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/disserving-the-public-trust-1>
And here: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/disserving-the-public-trust-2>

Concerns about what would happen if states held primary authority over management of grizzlies – and reinitiated a sport hunt – drove conservationists, scientists, and indigenous people to fight long and hard against federal plans to remove endangered species protections.

This short video shares the views of scientists, including David and Jane Goodall, about delisting: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/gunning-down-grizzlies>

This report by David, **The Efficacies and Effects of Sport Hunting Grizzlies** ([The Efficacies and Effects of Sport Hunting Grizzlies Report](#)), is the most complete you will find anywhere covering how a sport hunt would affect bears and people.

Click on the cover photo below to go to the report.



Upgrading the Practice of Coexistence

Coexisting with large carnivores such as bears, wolves, and cougars is not rocket science. The key ingredients are well known. Living with large predators comes down to the skill and diligence with which involved people deploy available tools, whether they have sufficient monetary and material resources, and whether there is aid from knowledgeable coexistence professionals when needed.

Attitudes and worldviews are also critically important, especially to the extent that they affect whether people are motivated to exert themselves on behalf of coexisting with large carnivores in the first place.

The links immediately below take you to some blogs in which David provides a useful framework for thinking about this complex topic. In the second of this series, David summarizes the key tools for coexistence, including those related to human attractants that, if well managed, would not have led to the deaths of five Jackson-area grizzlies that were killed by managers last summer because of conflicts over unsecured garbage and livestock feed.

- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2017/10/27/contingencies-of-coexistence-part-i-parsing-the-participants>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2017/10/29/contingencies-of-coexistence-part-ii-diagnosing-the-landscapes>

Louisa also delves into the costs of coexistence and some ideas on how we might fund much-needed improvements in current programs in the following two blogs: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2019/12/01/The-Grizzly-Cost-of-Coexistence-Part-One>

And: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2019/12/16/the-grizzly-cost-of-coexistence-part-two>

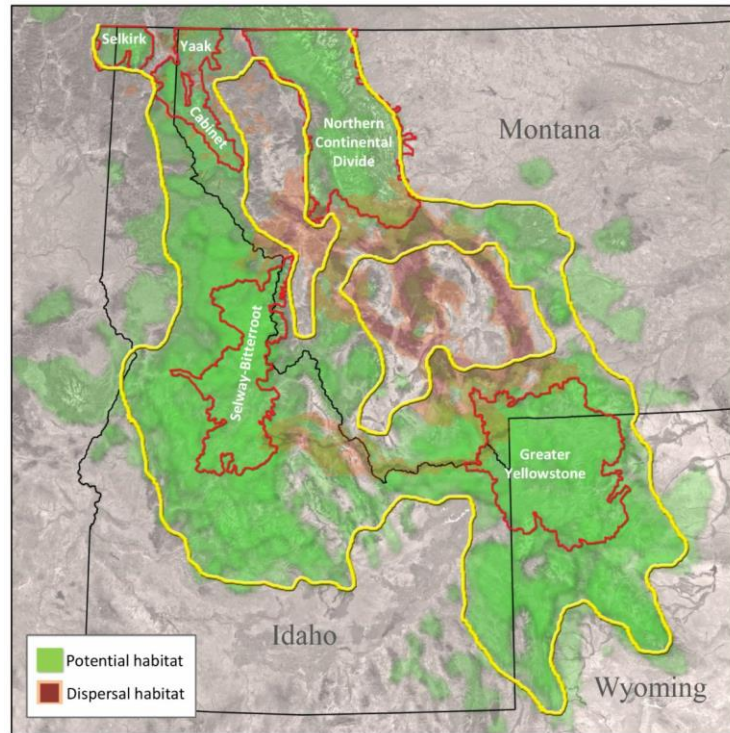
And here Louisa writes about Romania, where 7,000 brown bears (*Ursus arctos*, same species as the grizzly), live cheek-by-jowl with humans in an area as densely populated as in Appalachia. The point here is that Romanians offer a model for how people might coexist with

grizzlies: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2018/11/11/saving-romanias-brown-bears-sharing-lessons-about-coexistence-conservation>

We Can Recover Grizzlies – and Here is How

We need more bears in more places if grizzlies are to flourish in the face of threats posed by climate change and increasing human impacts. In fact, we need thousands more grizzlies. The good news is that scientists are in consensus about the existence of suitable habitat between the Yellowstone, central Idaho, and Northern Continental Divide ecosystems, sufficient to establish connectivity between these ecosystems and, as a result, form a contiguous interbreeding bear population large enough to ensure long term viability.

Importantly, achieving this vision is consistent with the larger national trend that began over 50 years ago towards relations with wild animals based more on compassion and a willing to share the land with animals in need.



Map by David Mattson

This vision for recovery is best articulated in David's report, **The Grizzly Bear Promised Land** (p. 30-34) focused on the role that the Selway Bitterroot plays in grizzly bear

recovery: https://www.grizzlytimes.org/files/ugd/d2beb3_b0c4e9dd43c447398c856fbb9aaa8a74.pdf

And here David talks about why current recovery goals are

inadequate: <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/three-percent-is-not-enough>

This sweet short film features David and coexistence maestro Steve Primm talking about this larger vision and how we can achieve it: <https://vimeo.com/422863498>

The Role of Tribes in Grizzly Bear Recovery

During the webinar we briefly mentioned the potential role of native Tribes in grizzly bear recovery, which is a natural extension of the role that indigenous people played in opposing past efforts to prematurely delist grizzly bears.

Traditional elders almost invariably view grizzlies as relatives, not as trophies to be hung on a wall.

Former Oglala Sioux Tribal Vice President Tom Poor Bear said this: “When I look at what the US government and the states intend to do to the grizzly bear, I look at what they did to our ancestors. They tried to annihilate us like they did the grizzly, the buffalo and the wolf.”

Because they own significant tracts of land and have legal claims by treaty to additional lands in and between ecosystems, Tribes can and should play a critical role in grizzly bear recovery.

But so far, federal and state governments have failed to fulfill obligations to meaningfully consult with Tribes, despite codification in numerous treaties. This failure and the disrespect it communicated is one reason why 270 Tribes, tribal societies, and traditional elders signed a Grizzly Bear Treaty in 2016 that stated opposition to trophy hunting along with support for meaningful recovery of grizzlies. This treaty is the basis of a bill introduced into Congress by Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) that would ban grizzly bear trophy hunts and ensure meaningful involvement of Tribes in conservation of grizzlies.

Louisa has written extensively on the role of Tribes in grizzly bear recovery in the following three blogs:

- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2018/01/30/tribes-stand-their-ground-for-grizzly-bears-and-us>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2020/05/20/-what-are-we-fighting-about-9th-circuit-hears-yellowstone-grizzly-bear-delisting-case>
- <https://www.grizzlytimes.org/single-post/2016/10/10/tribal-grizzly-bear-treaty-redefines-recovery-of-the-great-bear>



Chief Stan Grier of the Piikani Nation Presents the Grizzly Bear Treaty to Yellowstone Park Officials.

Take Action for Grizzlies and Their Ecosystems

These bears belong to us – the American public. We need to encourage and empower the US Fish & Wildlife Service to do its job and exercise more leadership.

Please write to the US Fish & Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator Hilary Cooley, and copy FWS Director Martha Williams, and the Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland, with three requests:

1. Redouble efforts to enforce the Endangered Species Act's ban on killing and harassing grizzlies. Unfortunately, the FWS prosecutes very few cases involving malicious killing – which is an escalating problem.
2. Devote more resources to better managing people and improving coexistence practices, including by expanding the cadre of people trained to foster coexistence.
3. Improve coordination of management among the many involved government agencies so that people with authority are pulling the recovery wagon in the same direction. There is no better place to start than in Jackson Hole where better coordination among the six agencies with authority over bears and people is desperately needed to protect 399 and other grizzlies who live in this area.

ADDRESSES:

US Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator Hilary Cooley: hilary_cooley@fws.gov

FWS Director Martha Williams: <https://www.fws.gov/duspit/contactus.htm>

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland: feedback@ios.doi.gov

Please also consider copying your letters to your Representatives in Congress with a cover letter, saying you are concerned about the plight of grizzlies and asking them to follow up with FWS on these requests.

Together, we can do it – we can ensure that future generations have a chance to see a grizzly bear in the wild, maybe even the great great great grandchildren of 399. In protecting grizzlies, we will protect the wild ecosystems of the Northern Rockies, including the one centered around our country's oldest and most beloved national park.

Join us in the campaign to protect grizzlies!

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 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!