



Photo by Gaten Powell



VITAL NEWS

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Vital Ground working to protect 1,100-acre Bismark Meadows SELKIRK GRIZZLY BEAR HABITAT CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

In 2001, Vital Ground launched the Selkirk Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative to focus protection on one of the most vulnerable grizzly populations in the lower 48 states. Currently, Vital Ground is working to protect Bismark Meadows, an 1,100-acre complex of wetlands and meadows in northern Idaho that provides critical spring and fall bear habitat.

The Selkirk Initiative

Idaho's Selkirk Mountains are home to a small but relatively stable population of 50–80 grizzlies. Just to the east, in western Montana's Cabinet-Yaak

Ecosystem, grizzlies are in serious jeopardy, with only an estimated 30–40 bears remaining. However, recent research suggests that these populations may be more genetically isolated than anyone previously suspected, and genetic diversity in these bears is dwindling. One essential key to the survival and recovery of both of these populations is to protect the diminishing linkage zones between the two landscapes in an effort to re-establish genetic flow.

In 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that grizzly bear populations in the Selkirk and Cabinet-

Yaak Ecosystems warranted a listing upgrade from “threatened” to “endangered.” However, both populations were precluded from reclassification due to higher priorities for other species. Although the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystems are classified separately for grizzly recovery, it is becoming clear that each is a “peninsula” of a single ecosystem bridged by Canada's Purcell Mountain Range, although movement between these areas is currently limited.

So far, the Selkirk grizzly population has survived for three reasons: (1) protection under the Endangered Species Act; (2) secure foraging and denning habitat in the Selkirk Crest Management Area, located between Priest Lake and the Kootenai River Valley; and (3) access to low elevation food sources during the critical spring and fall periods that dictate grizzlies' survival.

Although the core of the Selkirk Mountains is a relatively safe haven for grizzlies, the bears that range there depend on lowlands in the Kootenai River Valley and Priest Lake area to provide adequate spring and autumn forage. When grizzlies emerge from hibernation in spring they must immediately find food to recharge their body weight. This need is particularly acute in lactating females with cubs, whose survival is crucial to the viability of the population.



Staff photo

The Selkirk Mountains are often snowbound until mid-May, so grizzlies must seek food in lower elevations when they emerge from hibernation. In spring, lowlands such as Bismark Meadows erupt with grasses, forbs, mushrooms, and tree buds that sustain bears until berry crops ripen in summer. (The Selkirk bear population is largely vegetarian, with berries and other plant foods comprising the bulk of their caloric intake.) Without continued access to low elevation food sources in spring and again in autumn, the Selkirk population will fail.

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VITAL GROUND

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WOW! It's been a busy spring and summer for Vital Ground, and we will do our best to bring you up-to-date on many exciting happenings in this issue of Vital News.

In late April, we loaded up two 6' x 12' U-Haul trailers and moved Vital Ground's office 575 miles from Park City, Utah, to our new home in Missoula, Montana. We were fortunate to find great office space at historic Fort Missoula. We are located at the old Post Headquarters building, which is on the National Registry of Historic Places (see *Vital Ground Moves* on page 6). The Montana Natural History Center had occupied this space during the past few years, but they relocated to a larger facility about the time Vital Ground was looking for a new home. What a fortunate coincidence for Vital Ground!

Not only did we face the normal challenges of building new business relationships in a new community, we had to hire and train an entirely new staff. Our Park City staff of Heidi Skaggs, Chris Skaggs, and Robin Zaft decided not to make the move to Montana. They did an outstanding job for Vital Ground over the years and will certainly be missed—but Shannon Foley (office manager) and Jill Scott (bookkeeping and data entry) have done a fantastic job of quickly learning the ropes and getting the new office organized and running smoothly (see *New Faces* on page 6).

Our relocation to the heart of grizzly country has already paid off. By being more centrally located, we have had many opportunities to meet and interact with our conservation partners, and we are actively participating in community working groups focused on grizzly bear and habitat conservation. We can quickly and efficiently get to the landscapes and habitats we are working to protect. Ryan Lutey, our Director of Lands, has spent many days in the field meeting with landowners, touring prospective conservation properties, and providing some "hands-on" attention to the lands Vital Ground currently owns. And in early April, we acquired our first property at Bismark Meadows (see cover story).

We can't forget that 2005 is Vital Ground's 15th Anniversary. In mid-June, I had the pleasure of visiting Vital Ground's inaugural conservation project, a 240-acre parcel of grizzly bear habitat that Vital Ground purchased in 1991. The property is located about 185 miles northeast of Missoula, adjacent to The Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp Preserve. We left Missoula early in the morning, and during the relatively short drive up the Blackfoot River and then into the foothills of the Rocky Mountain Front, we saw elk, moose, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, coyotes, prairie dogs, yellow-bellied marmots, bald and golden eagles, ring-necked pheasants, Canada geese, snow geese, white pelicans, sandhill cranes, great blue herons and numerous species of ducks and other birds.

The journey reinforced what a wonderful wildlife treasure we have, and how important it is to protect our remaining wild lands and wildlife habitats. Once on the property, in the shadow of the impressive mountains rising along the Rocky Mountain Front, it was easy to see why Doug and Lynne Seus were so inspired 15 years ago. It is these landscapes and conservation opportunities that constantly renew our commitment to our mission! Thank you for your support.

Gary J. Wolfe

Selkirk (from page 1)

Vital Ground launched the Selkirk Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative by protecting several properties with prime grizzly habitat in the region. In 2001, the Foundation purchased a 20-acre inholding in the Boundary Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) on the east side of the Selkirks near the U.S./Canadian border. Two years later, we partnered with Ducks Unlimited to acquire 770 acres located immediately south of the Boundary Creek WMA. We are currently working with landowners to develop “bear-friendly” management agreements and conservation easements on nearby properties, and participating in local county-based grizzly bear conservation committee meetings.

Bismark Meadows: A Selkirk Gem

Located just west of Priest Lake, Bismark Meadows is a rich complex of meadows and wetlands that features a dramatic array of rare flora and fauna. It supports several endangered plant species and provides habitat for moose, elk, deer, black bear, wolves, lynx, westslope cutthroat trout, and eagles, as well as grizzlies. The Idaho Fish and Game Department (IDFG) documented radio-collared female grizzlies with cubs using Bismark Meadows, and recorded numerous accounts of other grizzlies using the area. Federal and state grizzly researchers concur that Bismark Meadows is critically important to the remaining 50–80 grizzly bears of the Selkirk sub-population.

In August 2000, Vital Ground began a multi-phase effort to protect the habitat values of Bismark Meadows from being choked off by encroaching development. We first commissioned an inventory and real estate evaluation of the private properties encompassing the Meadows and adjacent upland zones.

In 2002, wetland portions of the Meadows were partially protected by a conservation easement funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). However, the adjacent upland



Vital Ground leases the Bismark Meadows homestead it recently purchased to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for use as a patrol cabin.

portions of the six properties comprising Bismark Meadows remained open to development and other uses that are incompatible with use by grizzly bears and other endangered and sensitive species.

Two properties have since been acquired for conservation purposes. The first 57-acre parcel was purchased by a conservation buyer who will hold it intact while Vital Ground fundraises to consolidate ownership.

This past spring, Vital Ground acquired a 19-acre parcel bordering State Highway 57—a location especially vulnerable to commercial development. Vital Ground now leases a log home on the property to the IDFG for use as a patrol cabin. Our agreement provides IDFG with a base of operations on the northwest side of the Selkirks, and relieves Vital Ground of many of the property maintenance costs. We will also coordinate with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to continue wetland rehabilitation efforts on the portions of properties protected by WRP easements. In the future, plans for a wildlife viewing area would provide educational opportunities without impacting the habitat values of the Meadows.

Vital Ground obtained a two-year,

interest-free loan to pay for the 19-acre property and secure option agreements with other willing sellers in the area. The Foundation is now actively fundraising to repay this loan and to launch the next phase of the project.

The clock is ticking. In the final analysis, the future of the Selkirk grizzly population depends on permanent protection of these low elevation lands. Vital Ground stands alone as the only land conservation organization exclusively focused on protecting critical grizzly bear habitat. The participation of numerous foundations, private landowners and public land managers is the key to success, but we also need your help to save Bismark Meadows for the future of the Selkirk bears.

Help us protect Bismark Meadows!

Vital Ground is working against time to protect the meadows from inappropriate development and fragmentation. This is our major funding focus for 2005/2006. Please consider a donation for the future of the Selkirk bears.



Magic in Knight Inlet My 2005 Wild Bear Adventure

My trip to Knight Inlet last May was an unforgettable wilderness experience. Set in British Columbia's coastal temperate rainforest, where spectacular mountains plunge to the sea, Knight Inlet is the longest fjord on the B.C. coast and teems with wildlife. For a week, our only neighbors were grizzly and black bears, seals, otters, dolphins, bald eagles and the multitude of other animals that make Knight Inlet their home.

Our group of 19 gathered the first night at the charming Painter's Lodge in Campbell River on Vancouver Island, and got acquainted over a reception dinner and tour at the local historical museum—a great way to launch our trip. The next morning we embarked on a breath-taking float plane flight into the Inlet, giving us a bird's-eye view of sea and wilderness.

Knight Inlet's environmentally friendly, floating lodge is nestled in Glendale Cove, one of the few protected anchorages in the 100-mile-long fjord. The knowledgeable staff and expert guides immediately made us feel like part of the family. Our days were customized to fit the preferences of each guest, be they bear watching, bear tracking, hiking the rainforest, photography, fishing, boat trips, or kayaking. In the



Photo by John Swallow

"Marilyn" and her cubs forage and rest at waters edge.

evenings, after 5-star gourmet dinners, we were treated to a wide array of natural history presentations.

Glendale Cove is home to one of the largest concentrations of brown bears in British Columbia, and this was my first experience seeing grizzlies in the wild. Setting out in boats, we spotted grizzlies, black bears, bald eagles, osprey, mink, seals, otters, dolphins and dozens of other species as we toured the estuary. The boats gave us close-up views of bears feeding on luxuriant spring growth on the shoreline, while allowing us to keep a respectful distance. We were able to take our time to watch animals' behavior and interactions as they went about their lives in this marine wilderness.

We grew especially fond of a blond grizzly sow nicknamed "Marilyn" and her twin two-year-old cubs. Our guides told us that this would be the

last spring the cubs would be with their mother and we all felt they were surely too little to be pushed out—yet we understood that this is the circle of life. It would soon be time for Marilyn to mate again and hopefully raise yet another family. With luck, the cubs will also become successful breeding adults. The thrill of seeing these bears for the first time after working so hard to preserve the land they walk on truly brought tears to my eyes.

Our time spent in this paradise added fuel to my passion for grizzlies and their wild homes. My Wild Bear Adventure was an exhilarating journey I will never forget.

—Kelly Wilson

Kelly Wilson has been a Vital Ground board member since 2002. Kelly lives in Park City, Utah, where she is a licensed realtor.

Be Part of the 2006 Wild Bear Adventure

Looking for a great vacation? Try a journey into the heart of Canada's Great Bear Rainforest wilderness. Join us for the 5th Annual Wild Bear Adventure to Knight Inlet, May 13–19, 2006. Visit our website at www.vitalground.org to discover more about Knight Inlet, and book your reservation by calling Vital Ground at (406) 549-8650 or email info@vitalground.org. Space is limited, so we hope to hear from you soon!



Photo by Dave Campbell

2005 Wild Bear Adventure participants are all smiles at the end of a fun-filled week.



Dear Friends,

Fall is upon us and with that, the final weeks of gorging by bears in preparation for their long hibernation. Grizzlies and black bears may be entering a long-anticipated period of R&R, but for Vital Ground, fall and winter are our busiest periods. We are initiating and closing land transactions, and raising the funds needed to complete these conservation projects.

Autumn is also a great time to look back on where we've been, and determine where and how we want to focus our efforts for the coming year.

Over Vital Ground's fifteen-year history, we have forged many partnerships in order to conserve the grizzly habitat most in need of protection. We have worked on multiple projects in the largest recovery zones in the contiguous U.S.: Greater Yellowstone and the Northern Continental Divide. We have led the private land conservation effort within Northern Idaho's Selkirk Ecosystem. We have also participated in several initiatives in Alaska to protect critical salmon-spawning habitat on Kodiak Island, Afognak Island, and in the southwest peninsula.

But there is so much more work ahead. It is often difficult to select one project over another, and sometimes the decision boils down to which project is actually doable. Which landowner is willing to donate or sell an easement at appraised value even though the market value may be much higher? Which rancher holds a conservation ethic strong enough that he or she will protect the biological value of the land in the face of mounting pressure to subdivide and cash in? And which transaction is financially and logistically within Vital Ground's reach?

As a small and focused organization, Vital Ground leverages our resources as much as possible. We partner with other conservation organizations, foster relationships with conservation buyers and lenders, structure multi-year payouts and option purchases, and obtain challenge grants. Although we can't protect the original range of the grizzly, we can target the habitat that is most critical to grizzly recovery today.

During 2006, we will continue our efforts to conserve Bismark Meadows, a wetland meadow system in northern Idaho that has been labeled one of the top conservation priorities by state wildlife biologists. In the Swan Valley of northern Montana, we are working with a landowner to place a conservation easement on a key private parcel in grizzly linkage habitat. In Idaho's Kootenai Valley, we will be adding 43 acres to our existing holdings of valuable grizzly habitat adjoining National Forest land. And in Alaska, we will press for the completion of the Afognak Island forest conservation project. We are also ready to respond to immediate conservation priorities that may arise throughout the grizzly's range.

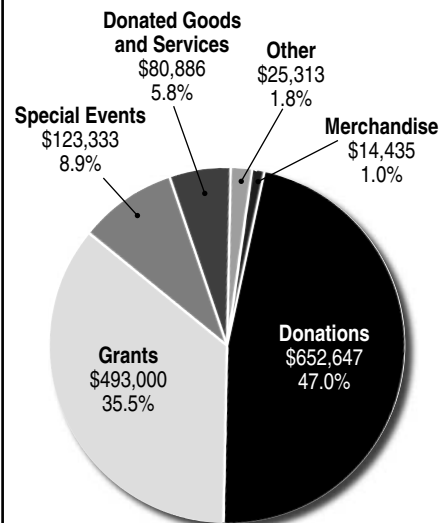
Without our members and partners, we could never have helped protect over 240,000 acres to date. We hope that you will continue to support our efforts to ensure long-term survival of our brown bear populations. In the years ahead, we will continue the battle to safeguard critical habitat for the grizzly and the many other species of wildlife that share the great bear's range.

Thank you for your loyalty and dedication to our mission!

Banu Qureshi

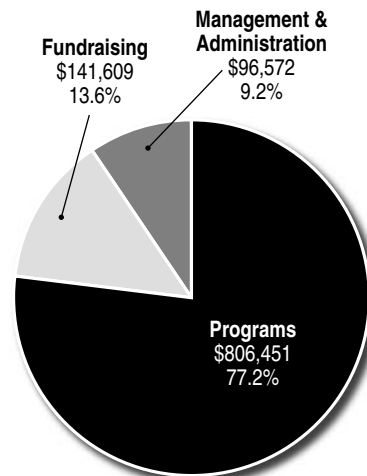
Vital Ground Financial Summary 2003-2004

Source of Funds



Total - \$1,389,614

Use of Funds



Total - \$1,044,632

The Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability, suggests that a charity should spend at least 65 percent of its total expenses on program activities. To receive a copy of The Vital Ground Foundation's most recent audited financial statements or IRS Form 990, please contact our office.

New Faces

Vital Ground is pleased to welcome a new board member and three new staff members.

Nancy McLaughlin joined our board in April 2005. Nancy is a professor of law at the University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law and a faculty member of the college's Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources, and the Environment. A graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law, she now teaches federal income tax, trusts and estates, estate planning, and private land conservation. She also writes and lectures widely on private land protection measures. Nancy also serves as probate editor for the American Bar Association's Real Property Probate & Trust Journal and is on the Board of Directors of Utah Open Lands.



New Vital Ground Employees: (left to right) Shannon Foley, Jill Scott, Ryan Lutey.

Ryan Lutey joined Vital Ground in February 2005 as Director of Lands. Ryan is a member of the Montana Bar Association and a 2004 graduate of the University of Montana School of Law. He specialized in Environmental and Natural Resources Law and served as editor-in-chief of the University Public Land and Resources Law Review. Ryan previously served as director of media relations for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. An avid outdoors enthusiast, Ryan spends his free time fishing, hunting and whitewater rafting in Montana and Idaho.

Shannon Foley now keeps things humming as our office manager. Shannon comes to Vital Ground with a variety of office management experience. She worked for several years in the

medical/dental field before turning her attention to conservation organizations. Shannon has had experience working in different realms of the conservation field at both the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and The Boone and Crockett Club. Her free time is spent camping, volunteering and enjoying the great outdoors with her family and friends.

Jill Scott joined the Vital Ground team in May 2005 to oversee our bookkeeping, membership and data management. Jill worked from 1995 to 2004 at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation where she gained her experience in accounting and event coordination. She also received her certification as a Pharmacy Technician in 2003, and does fill-in work at a local pharmacy. Jill spends her free time fly-fishing, hunting, and enjoying time with friends and family.

Vital Ground Moves to Historic Fort Missoula

When Vital Ground made the decision to relocate from Park City to Missoula, we looked high and low for suitable office space. Our search included industrial complexes, downtown basements, a former dental office, and even an apartment above a convenience store. We needed adequate space and reasonable rent, and hoped for a building and location whose character matched that of Vital Ground. Just when we thought we would have to settle for something short of our goal, we found the perfect spot. The Montana Natural History Center was moving into larger quarters and was vacating offices they had rented at Fort Missoula. Now Building T-2, historically known as Post Headquarters, is Vital Ground's new home.

Not only have we found a spacious habitat for Vital Ground, but we are surrounded by gracious grounds and a many-faceted history. Fort Missoula was founded in 1877, when two companies of the U.S. Army's Seventh Infantry were stationed here during the



Formerly the Post Headquarters, this historic building now houses Vital Ground.

American Indian conflicts. In turn, the Fort was home to the 24th and 25th Black Infantry Regiments in the 1880s and 1890s; a World War I training school for Army auto mechanics; and the Fourth Infantry Regiment, which supervised Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers during the Great Depression. During World War II, Fort Missoula served as an internment camp for Italian detainees and Japanese-American citizens. After 1947, it continued as a base for Army National Guard and Naval Reserve units.

Today, Fort Missoula is a beautiful campus that is home to the Lolo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management's regional headquarters, the National Guard, and numerous nonprofit organizations. In April 2000, the Northern Rockies Heritage Center received title to much of the property, now designated as the Fort Missoula Historic District and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The grounds encompass thirteen historic buildings, open spaces, tree-lined roads, a small military cemetery, and a parade ground surrounded by an arc of elegant buildings on "Officer's Row."

Built in 1906, our building originally served as the Post Exchange and a recreation hall for soldiers, and in 1962 became the Post Headquarters. Over the years, it also housed a Naval Reserve training center, Forest Service offices, the U.S. Army facilities manager, the Montana Natural History Center—and now Vital Ground. In addition to Vital Ground's offices, the building contains the spacious Heritage Hall—a wonderful space for special events, managed by the Heritage Center. Please come visit us and our new home!

1990 - 2005



CELEBRATING 15 YEARS



Peaks to Prairie: Making the Right Connections

Long, long ago, it now seems, Doug Seus and I went hiking up a big, ice-carved valley in Glacier National Park. It was autumn. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep in new coats ready for winter grazed along the limestone ledges that rose for a vertical mile on either side. Near the base of one peak, where a gorge broadened into a talus slope, a grizzly appeared. It was moving on a course that led straight up the mountainside, past the huckleberry bushes dropping their burgundy leaves, past the beargrass stalks in an old avalanche fan, over rock rubble and belts of reddish strata, and on above the mountain goat bands. A storm was blowing in across the upper elevations, but the great bear never paused, never even slowed its stride. It powered up into the fresh snowfields and tracked them with its wide paws and long claws as it kept climbing, tireless, beautiful in its strength, indomitable, until the clouds wrapped around its form, and the bear vanished into the realm of the summit.

Together with his wife Lynne, Doug had worked with grizzly bears for much of his life, training them for television and movies. But the work was so demanding that the Seuses had rarely found time to observe those bears' relatives in the wild. After watching this one, Doug, who regularly wrestled with a 1,500-pound Kodiak named Bart, was struck nearly speechless. "What an animal," was all he could say when he found his voice.

"It was like the mountain wasn't even there."

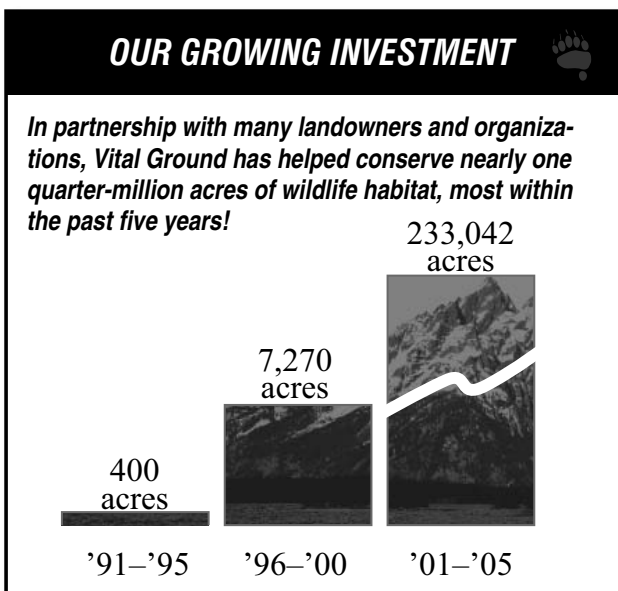
Doug and I traveled on south of Glacier Park along the Rocky Mountain Front, where the eastern edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness looms like a wave

prairie edges and lush valley bottoms as well to recover their health. They need them because animals such as deer and elk pass the cold months there, leaving winter-killed carcasses for the bears to scavenge when they emerge

from their dens each spring. They need lower elevations because they are where plants first sprout as the snows melt away. They need those warmer habitats at times through summer, because the variety and abundance of green shoots, roots, bulbs, and insect food is so much greater at the mountains' feet than toward their crests. They need the lowlands again in the fall as frosts shrivel the vegetation higher up. And, always, they need them as crossings to reach other mountain chains to explore new homelands, meet mates from other populations, and exchange genes. That's simply how megamammals with home ranges

encompassing several hundred square miles work. They don't have a choice.

Doug and I realized two things: First, grizzlies aren't high country creatures. They rely upon the whole ecosystem, from its summits to its foothills and valley floodplains. Second, if a countryside can still support grizzlies, it will be good and whole and rich and wild and free enough to support all the other creatures struggling to hold on to a place in this world, be they speckled trout, wild orchids, or wide-wandering



of stone poised to break upon the Great Plains. And though we had just seen the grizzly in its role as the master of tall, rugged landscapes, we thought about how this species once lived on the buffalo grasslands as far east as the Mississippi. The Front, we knew, represented the last place in the contiguous states where the bears still travel out onto the prairie foothills.

Lofty mountain strongholds offer refuge and summer habitat for this species, listed as threatened since 1975. But grizzlies require places such as

Continued on page 8



PEAKS (from page 7)

wolverines. The next thing I knew, the Seuses had purchased a property used by grizzlies along the Front and arranged a conservation easement to protect it. And they were asking me to help them come up with a name and logo for an organization dedicated to protecting more private land, mostly at lower elevations, to round out and link the ecosystems where great bears still roamed. The plan was to identify the critical habitat most at risk and then try to acquire it directly or through easements from willing sellers. The name we settled on was Vital Ground.

Vital Ground's founding Board of Directors believed so strongly in the value of our goal and the power of the grizzly as an ambassador for the wildest of North America's wildlife communities, we were sure people would flood our mailbox with money to help. Well, we received some support, safeguarded a few hundred acres directly, and contributed to projects with partners to reduce conflicts between grizzly bears and landowners in key habitats. But like other small, start-up groups with more enthusiasm than experience, we had a lot to learn about the practicalities of fund-raising and membership acquisition. Not to mention all the ways a land transaction can fall apart before the final documents are signed.

With time, we became more effective, raising the total acreage we helped protect from hundreds during the first five years to thousands during the next five years. We also got better at partnering with other, usually larger, better established groups. All of us take great pride in the way Vital Ground developed its ability to carry out joint projects with a tremendous range of wildlife and conservation organizations, from state and federal agencies to such groups as Ducks Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation, and

The Nature Conservancy. This is partly because we insist on cooperation rather than competition, and partly because Vital Ground does not practice political advocacy or become involved in public debates over specific issues. Most of

located in Missoula, Montana, near the heart of Rocky Mountain grizzly country. It's still a relatively small staff, which keeps overhead expenses to a minimum. But we have a talented Board and a number of volunteers to share the workload, and we regularly contract out more specialized tasks.

Looking back, Vital Ground has come an incredibly long way since Doug Seus and I watched that silvertipped bear climb a mountain as though it were a mere hill. We've had our own mountains to climb since then. While we have never moved as strongly and surely as a grizzly and probably never will, we like to think that we share the great bear's unshakeable drive to get where it wants to go. We're well on our way. If we keep moving ahead at the rate we have been lately, we and the bears and all the smaller creatures that depend upon the same landscapes will surely reach new heights together.

—Douglas H. Chadwick

Douglas Chadwick, one of Vital Ground's founding board members, is a wildlife biologist and prolific author. He has written eight books and produced more than 300 articles for a variety of publications, including National Geographic, Audubon and Reader's Digest. Douglas lives in Whitefish, Montana.



all, it is because we recognize that conservationists of all stripes must band together more closely and more often if we are to have any hope of contending with the pace of development threatening to fragment ecosystems. We have to work smarter, and we have to work on a larger scale than ever before. That's what the great bears keep telling us: the challenge is not only to round out ecosystems, but to connect one with the next so the wild inhabitants can adjust to shifts in vegetation, climate, and other conditions over time and maintain genetic interchange throughout a region.

By joining forces with many partners, Vital Ground has now helped protect nearly a quarter of a million acres of habitat. Formerly, our paid staff consisted of one multi-tasking executive director and one secretary at offices in Park City, Utah, near the Seuses' home. Equally overworked, unpaid Board members took on all the other duties involved. As of 2005, we have a new executive director, Gary Wolfe, a full-time lands specialist, Ryan Lutey, and office staff Shannon Foley and Jill Scott. And our headquarters are now

Teaming Up for Conservation

Our success and accomplishments during the past 15 years have been made possible by the support of our many partners and donors:

- Nonprofit Conservation Organizations _____ 10
- Philanthropic Foundations _____ 26
- Business Partners _____ 30
- Individual Donors _____ 2,989

Thank you for your generous support!



Photo by Derek Reich

Photo by Derek Reich

Photo by Keith Highley

Looking Back: The Beginning of Bart's Legacy

Vital Ground probably started with cardboard boxes in our kitchen. Inside the boxes, nestled in sweet hay, bright eyes of yellow and green peeked out at us. Orphaned wild things, which because of cars, trucks, bulldozers or poaching, found themselves in our human world. Raccoons who lived on our shoulders; a bobcat kitten that slept in our slippers; a baby badger who dened behind the toilet; a fawn that sucked our kids' ears and wolf cubs that shared their beds. With the arrival of a 6-pound Kodiak bear, whom we named Bart, our destiny was met and we provided for our family, both two-legged and four-legged, by training wild animals for the film business.

After we did a movie called "The Bear," we found ourselves for the first time in our lives with a savings account. Bigger than the savings account was a deep sense of obligation to the animals that, through no choice of their own, were living in captivity. Their lives in our world had to matter for something more than movies.

We searched for the right organization. Pretty simple stuff: set aside land by outright purchase or easement—land that was wild enough for the Grizzly to roam free as guardian of all else that was wild with him. Unable to find a group with

such a focused mission, we rounded up our friends with true wilderness in their hearts and founded Vital Ground with the purchase of 240 acres on the Teton River in Montana. Now that land is forever wild.

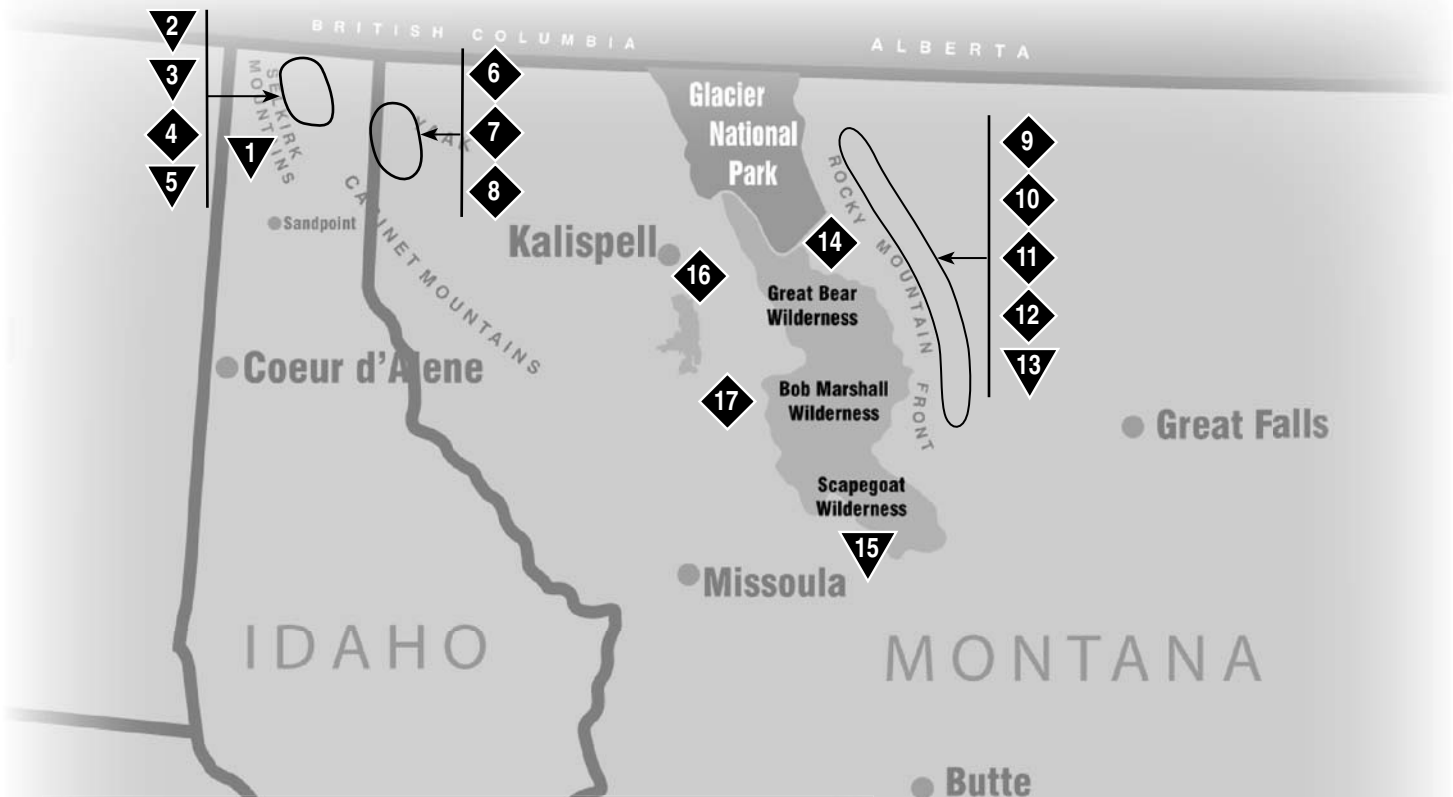
That was 15 years ago. Today Vital Ground has been involved in the conservation of over 240,000 acres—a thousand-fold increase from our first project!



We are extremely proud of our select and dedicated Board of Directors and are thrilled to have Gary Wolfe at our helm. Our spirits are ever rekindled. A few days ago we received an e-mail from a VG supporter in the Netherlands. He wrote, "Please keep up the great work you are doing. This is so needed and so valuable to the rest of the world for you to show us what a lot of people have already forgotten...the awesome beauty of the planet we live on which mankind tries so hard to dismantle into a hanging ball of devastated rocks."

Thanks to all of you, Vital Ground will continue to make a difference and will remain the finest thing we have ever done with our lives.

*Yours for the wild,
Doug and Lynne Seus*



Vital Ground's partnership projects to conserve grizzly and wildlife habitat.

Selkirk Ecosystem, ID

- 1 Bismark Meadows ▼
- 2 Boundary Creek ▼
- 3 Smith Creek ▼
- 4 Canyon Creek ◆
- 5 West Kootenai ▼

Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystems, MT

- 6 Poston/Lance ◆
- 7 Bass ◆
- 8 Fowler Creek ◆

Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem

- 9 Scoffin Creek ◆
- 10 Dupuyer Creek ◆
- 11 Cow/Blackleaf Creek ◆
- 12 Blackleaf Area ◆
- 13 Pine Butte ▼
- 14 Rising Wolf ◆
- 15 Blackfoot-Clearwater ▼
- 16 Wolf Creek ◆

- 17 Windfall Creek ◆

Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

- 18 Moose Creek ●
- 19 Blackrock/Spread Creek ●
- 20 Horse Butte ●
- 21 Island Park ●

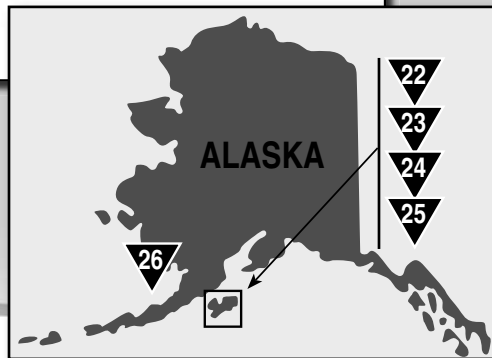
Alaska

- 22 Sturgeon Lagoon ▼
- 23 Brown's Lagoon ▼
- 24 Uyak Bay ▼
- 25 Perenosa Bay ▼
- 26 Wood-Tikchick State Park ▼

◆ Conservation Easement

▼ Land Acquisition

● Grazing Allotment Retirement





Partnership with Montana Land Reliance Secures Three Easements

There is strength in numbers, and successful land conservation is most often accomplished by collaborating with partners to leverage funding, expand connections and augment talent. This past year, Vital Ground provided financial support to the Montana Land Reliance (MLR) and several conservation-minded landowners to complete conservation easements on three properties in northwestern Montana. MLR is a nonpartisan, nonprofit land trust that has been conserving ecologically and historically important lands in Montana for the past 27 years.

This cooperative project protects a total of 724 acres in the Yaak, Swan and Flathead Valleys. All three properties help protect rich valley-bottom wetlands and riparian areas—habitats that are quickly disappearing with the high pace of development in the region. Two of these voluntary land use agreements were completed in 2004 and the third is expected to be completed by the end of 2005. While MLR will maintain the conservation easements, Vital Ground covered essential costs to complete the projects.

Gene and Patricia Tingle undertook a voluntary land use agreement with MLR to protect forested wetlands and ponds for wildlife on their property in the Swan Valley. Their land is adjacent to one of four critical grizzly travel corridors that connect the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountain Wilderness Areas. This project not only protects habitat for the grizzly linkage zone, but helps conserve diminishing valley bottom wetlands used by fish, marten, moose, grouse, waterfowl, songbirds and other wildlife.



The largest of the three properties, Ray Ghafoori's land sits adjacent to Mud Lake in the Flathead Valley, one of Montana's fastest growing areas. A conservation easement will protect wildlife habitat along Wolf Creek, which flows from Mud Lake into the Swan River, as well as the agricultural nature of the land. Protecting this property provides a buffer for wildlife between the rapid development in the valley and the public lands of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. Such lands are important safe havens for grizzlies that wander out of the nearby Swan Mountains in search of food and new territory.

We look forward to the completion of an agreement with Mary Campbell and Pam Fuqua this year who wish to protect wildlife habitat on their property in the Yaak Valley. Surrounded by prime grizzly country and the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Recovery Zone, the Yaak Valley is a critical corridor for bears and other wildlife, but is threatened by increasing development. A conservation easement on the Campbell-Fuqua property will safeguard a complex of rich wetlands and the stream corridor of Fowler Creek, which flows into the South Fork of the Yaak River. Their land hosts grizzly and black bears, mink, marten, elk, moose, osprey and eagles, as well as waterfowl, songbirds and woodpeckers.

Idaho Project Seeks to Reduce Grizzly Bear Mortality

Using radio-telemetry, biologists have been able to track the fate of dozens of bears in the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystems over the years. Between 1982 and 1999, most known grizzly mortalities in these two ecosystems were caused by humans, and many were shootings—the result of mistaken identity during black bear hunts, accidental shootings, and intentional poaching.

To address this unsustainable situation, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) launched the Selkirk Grizzly Bear Enforcement and Education Program. Through a generous donation from Mr. Keith Johnson, Vital Ground was able to grant \$3,000 to help support the program in December 2004.

From spring through fall, the project puts a conservation officer in the field to run enforcement patrols and educate hunters and recreationists on bear identification and safety. Come winter, the focus shifts to public presentations at schools, rod and gun clubs, and hunter education classes. IDFG estimates that the program reaches more than 3,000 people each year and is appreciably increasing local awareness of grizzly identification and conservation.

Brian Johnson, coordinator of the project, says, "The program seems quite popular throughout the region. Public awareness concerning grizzly bears seems much higher than prior to its implementation. Measuring the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts is difficult, but the bears are recovering. I would like to think that our efforts have helped."



More Elbow Room for Bears

Grazing Allotment Retirements

Conflicts with livestock pose one of the most significant threats to the recovery of grizzly populations in Northern Rockies ecosystems. Bears occasionally prey on sheep and cattle, and when they do, they typically lose. Managers will attempt to relocate “problem” bears, but in the end these bears are usually destroyed if conflicts with people and their livestock persist. But what if we addressed the other half of this dilemma?

In the Northern Rockies, as in much of the West, much of our public land is leased to ranchers for seasonal grazing. These leases are valuable and essential assets to livestock operations, and many have been held by family ranch concerns for decades. With funding assistance from Vital Ground and other



National Wildlife Federation photo

partners, the National Wildlife Federation’s (NWF) Northern Rockies Project Office has spear-headed a program to “buy out” grazing allotments from willing sellers to reduce wildlife conflicts. NWF focuses on areas adjacent to

protected areas, such as Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, where bears, wolves and bison are in repeated conflict with high densities of livestock. The purchased allotments are then retired from future grazing by the public lands agencies, providing more room for wildlife. Having received a fair market price for the allotments, ranchers can then use the funds to acquire grazing permits in other areas.

Since 2003, Vital Ground has contributed significant funds to four successful allotment buyouts in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, totaling 125,000 acres. Another 74,000-acre project is in the works in an area adjacent to one of Yellowstone’s highest-density grizzly populations. At a cost of only \$2 to \$4 per acre, allotment retirements are a particularly cost-effective means of protecting critical lands for grizzlies, wolves and other wildlife. We think this is a visionary program, and we need your help to continue funding allotment buyouts that cut a fair deal for both ranchers and bears.

Can You Help?

Bronze Sculpture Could Fund Grizzly Habitat

Can you help us with a unique funding opportunity?

Would you like to obtain an outstanding piece of art and help Vital Ground at the same time? Artist Michael Coleman is offering his magnificent bronze sculpture, “Grizzly on the Roof,” to help fund grizzly habitat conservation projects. If we can find a buyer, the artist will donate all proceeds above the foundry costs to Vital Ground.

The life-sized sculpture depicts a bear sitting on the roof of a beaver lodge, with two beavers going on about their business below him. Weighing 1,000 pounds, the sculpture stands 7’ x 4.5’ x 4.5’ and retails for \$90,000. The artist is producing a limited edition of only

18 casts, and is nearing the end of the edition.

Michael Coleman is the recipient of the Prix de West Award at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. His work is in both public and private collections, including the National Wildlife Art Museum, the U.S. Embassy in Canada, and the collections of Clint Eastwood, Burt Reynolds and President George Bush, Sr. You can view the artist’s work at www.ColemanArt.com.

Please contact us at 406-549-8650 or info@vitalground.org if you would like color images of the bronze, or if you know an individual or institution who can help us capitalize on this generous offer from Michael Coleman.



Photo by Michael Coleman

“Grizzly on the Roof”



Autumn Is For Gluttons

Brown bears are truly the gourmands of the natural world, able to consume an enormous quantity and variety of foods. But as summer days shorten and the nights begin to cool, bears go on a real epicurean bender to fatten up for their long winter fast. This autumn food-binge is called “hyperphagia,” a period of ravenous hunger and intense foraging.

During their nearly six-month hibernation, bears must live off stored body fat. By the time they emerge in spring, males may have lost 30 percent of their body weight and females that bore cubs as much as 40 percent. At first, grizzlies seek out winterkill and areas with young grasses and leafy plants, high in protein and moisture. For bears in the continent’s interior, as much as 75 to 90 percent of their diet may be plant foods, including greens, roots, nuts and berries. Grizzlies round out this fare with animal protein wherever they can find it—from carrion, fish, moose, elk and deer, to ground squirrels, marmots, mice, and insects. Yet through spring and early summer, grizzlies will continue to lose or simply maintain their weight.

Come late summer and early fall, when Nature’s bounty spills over, brown bears forage nearly around the clock to pack on the pounds. Interior bears can put away 20,000 to

30,000 calories each day, and coastal bears gorging on fat-laden salmon can consume twice that much. In the high Rockies, while warm summer days last, grizzlies will roam alpine slopes to turn over rocks from dawn to dusk, seeking out concentrations of army cutworm moths. A bear may slurp up 300,000 calories worth of moths in a month, downing a quarter of the calories it needs to survive for the year.

As summer slips into autumn, grizzly appetites shift into high gear. Whitebark pine nuts and wild berries become especially important bear foods. Because whitebark pines don’t drop their seeds the year they ripen, and grizzlies generally don’t climb trees, bears instead rob middens where squirrels cache hundreds of pine nuts for the winter. Throughout the Rockies, however, many whitebark pine forests stand dead and dying, killed by mountain pine beetle invasions and blister rust fungus—a deep concern for the future of bear populations. Berries, especially huckleberries, may make up 60 percent of a bear’s pre-hibernation diet, and in a fruitful year the berry feast sends bears

to their dens rippling with blubber. But a poor crop can set bears off on a frantic search for other rations to help them put on

weight. Then bears are sorely tempted by the pickings near homes and ranches—such as livestock, beehives, orchards, bird feeders, pet food, and garbage—and landowners need to be especially aware of eliminating bear attractants.

This need for a wide variety of high-calorie seasonal foods is the principal reason grizzlies require large home ranges encompassing a diversity of habitats. Especially in the season of hyperphagia, bears are likely to roam widely in search of food. But wandering brown bears run a gauntlet of potential trouble. As grizzly habitat dwindles and busy roads crisscross bear landscapes, bears are more likely to be hit by vehicles or simply not find adequate resources when they most need them. In addition, with people abroad in the fine autumn weather hunting, fishing, berry-picking and hiking—enjoying the very habitats bears use—the probability of human-bear encounters increases. In these crucial weeks before hibernation, people need to be especially bear-aware.

Access to secure foraging habitat for bears throughout the spring, summer and fall is essential to bear survival, and yet many seasonal habitats and critical travel corridors happen to be in low-elevation areas and on private lands outside of protected areas. It is this vital ground that our foundation targets for conservation. We are working to keep landscapes intact for bears and ensure we have well-fed bruins throughout the seasons.

—Christine Paige

Christine Paige is a consulting wildlife biologist and freelance natural history writer. Her work has been published in technical journals and magazines such as Audubon, Montana Magazine, and Wild Outdoor World. Christine lives in Stevensville, Montana.



Photo by Derek Reich

Bart Memorial Campaign Enters Sixth Year

Once again, Vital Ground is gearing up for the Bart Memorial, our year-end fundraising campaign. The Bart Memorial ensures that Vital Ground is well-positioned to start the new year on the cutting edge of land conservation, able to respond in a timely manner to urgent land protection opportunities. Last year, Vital Ground changed the format of the campaign, splitting it into the Bart Memorial Appeal and the Bart Memorial Challenge.

The Bart Memorial Appeal, now in its sixth year, allows many individuals an opportunity to remember Doug and Lynne's first grizzly, Bart the Bear, through a donation in his honor. A 1,500-pound Kodiak brown bear, Bart wowed movie audiences around the world. But his most noteworthy role was as Ambassador to Vital Ground:

a celebrity "spokesperson" for his wild cousins whose survival hinges on protection of critical habitat and linkage



areas. Although Bart lost his battle with cancer in 2000, his spirit continues to inspire those who knew him.

Launched last December, the Bart Memorial Challenge was our first

ever multi-year pledge campaign. Members who pledge ongoing financial support join the Bart Legacy Society and become part of a close-knit team dedicated to supporting Vital Ground's mission of habitat conservation.

As people and wildlife compete for the same land, typically wildlife loses out. Yet acre by acre, Vital Ground is making a difference for grizzly bears, wolves, elk, bison, bald eagles and many other species. From the family who must stretch to make a year-end Appeal gift in the amount of \$25, to the individual who joins the Bart Legacy Society with a significant multi-year pledge, your support keeps us going.

In honor of Bart and his legacy of conserving vital ground, we hope that all of our friends will respond as generously as possible to the 2005 Bart Memorial Campaign.

A Gift of Java can help Vital Ground

Does your morning coffee help grizzly habitat conservation? Montana Coffee Traders roasts a special Grizzly Blend Coffee and donates \$1 from each pound sold to Vital Ground. Grizzly Blend is an earthy, full-bodied, medium-roasted blend. Sold by the pound, it is available in regular, decaf and organic varieties and in whole bean bags or one of several grinds.

Gift packs featuring Grizzly Blend make wonderful seasonal treats. Each gift pack includes a gift card that notes the support of Vital Ground's habitat conservation work:

- **Grizzly Gift Bag – \$12.00.**

A 12-oz. bag of Grizzly Blend Coffee in festive wrapping with a huge chocolate caramel bear paw.

- **Vital Ground Gift Pack - \$23.00.**

Two 12-oz. bags of Grizzly Blend and a chocolate caramel bear paw. \$6.50 from the sale of each Vital Pack is donated to Vital Ground.

To purchase Grizzly Blend Coffee, visit the Montana Coffee Traders website at www.coffeetraders.com or call them toll-free at 800-345-5282.



Lasting Gifts

One of the most enduring ways to make a gift to brown bear habitat conservation is through your Will or Living Trust. These gifts, usually credited toward Vital Ground's endowment, provide continuing support for the organization's mission. They can be given as a Specific Bequest, Residuary Bequest, or Contingent Bequest, and can offer tax savings on your estate. In considering such a gift, it is important to engage a qualified attorney to discuss your needs. For more information, please call or email us.





In Memory of Jane Johnson

Board and staff members of Vital Ground offer deepest sympathy to Mr. Keith Johnson, whose wife, Jane Johnson, passed away in May from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease, which she endured with courage, dignity and grace. Keith is a long-time supporter of Vital Ground, at both the corporate and individual levels, and has participated in our strategic planning sessions. He initiated and funded our grant to the Grizzly Bear Enforcement and Education Project (see page 11).

A loving wife and mother of two boys, Jane was an active community leader in San Diego, California. She was a successful fundraiser and board member for a variety of charitable organizations, and was the recipient of the Channel 10 Community Leadership Award. Jane was especially dedicated to improving the educational system for students with dyslexia and other learning conditions.

Keith is a former CEO of Fieldstone Communities. The Fieldstone Foundation honored Jane by creating a match opportunity for employees to join her family in funding the construction of six multi-sensory classrooms for medically fragile children, known as "Jane's Rooms." Keith, their friends and many of Jane's "tennis buddies" have also contributed over a half million dollars for the Jane Johnson Tennis Center at Cathedral High school to honor her. Jane was a nationally ranked competitive tennis player.

We all wish Keith, his sons and other family members strength in the months ahead, and express our gratitude for the legacy that Jane Johnson has left for future generations.



In Memory of Kim Williamson

Kim Williamson, 48, of Olathe, Kansas passed away May 30, 2005. As a lasting memorial, Kim's family requested that donations be made in her name to Vital Ground. Her husband, Fred Williamson, shared these thoughts with us:

"Kim was a pre-school teacher who really encouraged young people to understand, appreciate, and preserve nature—from raising Monarch butterflies in her classroom for release into the wild, to discussions around preserving the habitat of all animals. She came to love the grizzly bear and "Bart" was a natural avenue for what she believed in once she found out about The Vital Ground Foundation's mission. Kim always wanted to come and see the bears, but her failing health made this impossible. Kim developed an immune problem and died of pneumonia and asthma at the age of 48.

"Like most mothers, Kim was the strength of our family. Even in her declining health, she maintained a great sense of humor and her support of her family was un-wavering. Kim was very passionate about her beliefs and what she thought was the right thing to do, such as supporting Vital Ground's mission. She loved the bears and always wanted to observe grizzly bears feeding in British Columbia.

"Financially, we were never able to contribute to Vital Ground due to medical expenses. So when Kim passed away, we as family knew what she would have wanted, so the memorial to Vital Ground was established. We have three children, Andrea (she got the membership to Vital Ground for her mother), Brian, and Carrie. We are expecting our first grandchild on October 3rd. All Kim ever wanted was to be a grandmother and to move back to Colorado to enjoy the lifestyle of the area."

We send our deepest condolences to Kim's family on their loss, and want to express our gratitude for their memorial gift, which will be invested in habitat conservation for grizzlies and all things wild.



Kim Williamson



Lasting Tribute on a Special Day

We want to extend our gratitude to Lindsay Gorham and Jeff Thompson of Wenatchee, Washington, who put their hearts into bear conservation when they tied the knot this summer. Lindsay and Jeff asked their friends to send a donation to Vital Ground in lieu of wedding gifts. We are honored and grateful for this generous gift, and wish Lindsay and Jeff a long and happy union!



If you would like to make a donation to Vital Ground as a tribute to a loved one, please contact us at info@vitalground.org, or 406-549-8650.

A contribution to bear habitat conservation is a gift that will last for generations to come.



I

*f a countryside can still support grizzlies, it will be good and whole
and rich and wild and free enough to support all the other
creatures struggling to hold on to a place in this world.*

—Douglas H. Chadwick

Photo by Derek Reich

Upcoming Events:

October 7, 2005

Open House celebrating our move, Missoula, Montana

November/December 2005

Bart Memorial Campaign

May 13-19, 2006

5th Annual Wild Bear Adventure

Knight Inlet Lodge, British Columbia, Canada

August 11-13, 2006

Walk on Vital Ground

Rocky Mountain Front, Montana

Please visit our website or contact our office for details.



Our new address:

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www.vitalground.org

*Please send all mailing address and
email address changes to us
at the above address.*



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Wm. GERRARDT



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