



Photo by Galen Rowell

VITAL NEWS

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F T H E V I T A L G R O U N D F O U N D A T I O N • S P R I N G 2 0 0 7

Cooney Creek Project Helps Secure Critical Linkage Habitat

On the sunny, west-facing slopes of the Swan Mountains near Condon, Montana, Vital Ground has permanently protected 320 acres from subdivision and development through the bargain purchase of a conservation easement (*see map, page 5*). Located adjacent to national forest lands, the Cooney Creek Project will protect part of an important wildlife corridor and reduce the potential for conflicts between humans and the grizzlies that use the creek drainage to access the Swan Valley.

The parcel is a key piece of a grizzly linkage zone due to its location in a major drainage that helps connect Albino Basin in the Bob Marshall Wilderness with the Swan Valley—an area renowned for relatively high grizzly densities. One of the goals of our Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative is to maintain opportunities for bears in the Mission Mountain and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas to interact.

The drainage is also important seasonal range for elk, deer, and moose, and the area's mix of riparian zones, upland forests and forest openings provide diverse habitat for other native forest carnivores including wolves, lynx, fisher, pine marten, mountain lion, and wolverine. Additionally, Cooney Creek contains one of the few remaining genetically pure strains of westslope cutthroat trout in the Swan Valley and constitutes important rearing habitat for juvenile bull trout and other aquatic species.

“While our management goals and that of Vital Ground are the same, one never knows what the future may hold,” said landowner David Hirschfeld. “We were happy to be able to secure this wild area for future generations while also maintaining the privileges of ownership that are important to us.”

Because the conservation easement also ensures the property will remain available for timber production, the project partners—the landowners, Vital Ground and the Montana



Photo courtesy of Norman Wheeler and Associates

The Cooney Creek conservation easement now protects 320 acres of forest land and wildlife habitat on the slopes of the Swan Mountains, Montana.

Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)—were able to execute an agreement to help leverage additional conservation funding directed to the Swan Valley through the Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. This federal program is administered in Montana by FWP to conserve forest land, wildlife habitat and timber resources while sustaining working forests. Throughout western Montana, the program has helped conserve more than 160,000 acres of wildlife habitat and working forests during the last seven years.

Funding and support for Vital Ground's Swan Valley Initiative has been provided by the Cinnabar Foundation, The William H. Donner Foundation, First Interstate Banc-System, Montana Coffee Traders, Montana Land Reliance, the Oberweiler Foundation, The Qureshi Family Foundation, The Steele-Reese Foundation, the Wildlife Land Trust and many individual Vital Ground donors and members. 🐾

—Ryan Lutey

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER



It is almost impossible to pick up a newspaper these days without seeing something about global warming and climate change. Hotly disputed for years, the climate change debate is finally shifting from “Are humans to blame?” to “What are we going to do about it?”

This year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the first two of three ground-breaking reports. Established in 1988, the IPCC represents more than 2,000 international scientists and more than 100 governments. The panel's role is to assess the best available scientific, technical and socio-economic information to understand climate change, its potential impacts, and options for mitigation.

The first report, *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis*, released in February, presents the most compelling evidence to date that humans are contributing significantly to the increase in greenhouse gases that cause global warming. The report finds that warming of the climate is unequivocal—evident from increases in average global air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising average global sea level. Further, global concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750, and increases in CO₂ are due primarily to fossil fuel use and land-use change. Lastly, most of the increase in average global temperature since the mid-20th century is most likely due to human-caused greenhouse gas concentrations.

The second report, *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, released in April, reports that a world-wide assessment of data collected since 1970 shows that human-caused warming has a discernable influence on many physical and biological systems. The panel predicts that the resilience of many ecosystems will be exceeded within this century by an unprecedented combination of changing climate, subsequent disturbances, and other “global change drivers” (e.g., land-use change, pollution, and over-exploitation of resources). They conclude that rising temperatures will imperil wildlife and ecosystems, and if global average temperature increases exceed 1.5–2.5°C, approximately 20–30% of plant and animal species are probably at increased risk of extinction.

I believe that dealing with global warming and the associated climate changes is the most pressing conservation challenge of the 21st century—perhaps of any time in human history. So, how do Vital Ground's efforts to conserve habitat for grizzly bears fit in with this overarching world-wide challenge?

The IPCC considers land-use change to be a global change driver that contributes to increases in global CO₂ concentration. Although Vital Ground's conservation projects are focused on protecting core habitats, linkage zones and corridors for the grizzly bear, the fact is these conservation easements and land acquisitions slow land-use change by restricting subdivision, development, and road construction to keep these lands wild. By maintaining natural ecosystems complete with their diversity of plant and animal life, and by sustaining habitats that serve as carbon sinks, Vital Ground's mission helps combat global warming.

The IPCC also predicts that there is an increased risk of species extinctions as global temperatures rise. Habitat fragmentation, coupled with global climate change, could spell the end for untold numbers of species. Under long-term drought, bears could

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THE MISSION OF VITAL GROUND IS TO PROTECT AND RESTORE
NORTH AMERICA'S GRIZZLY BEAR POPULATIONS BY CONSERVING WILDLIFE HABITAT.

find difficulty foraging in shrinking wetlands or shriveling berry crops. Warming oceans could disrupt salmon runs. Increased wildfire and insect outbreaks could extensively alter forest ecosystems; and species' ranges may shift with elevation and latitude—some expanding, some shrinking. The landscape linkages and habitat that Vital Ground strives to protect for grizzly bears are also important to a myriad number of interdependent plant and animal species. As our planet changes in unpredictable ways, these lands and linkages will become even more crucial for species to have room to move, adjust and adapt.

While no one person or organization can single-handedly reverse climate change, we can each do our part to minimize our contribution to greenhouse gases and reduce the impacts of global warming. The third IPCC Working Group report, *Mitigation of Climate Change*, was released just as we go to press with this newsletter. I'm especially interested in studying this report since it will focus on what we can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stabilize, or reverse, our negative impacts on the Earth's climate. In the global view, climate change may seem to dwarf all other conservation challenges, yet doing what we do—saving habitat for brown bears—will be absolutely critical for grizzlies and the other species that share their habitat to persist on a rapidly changing planet.

Visit www.ipcc.ch to learn more about climate change, the IPCC and their assessments. 🐾



Gary J. Wolfe

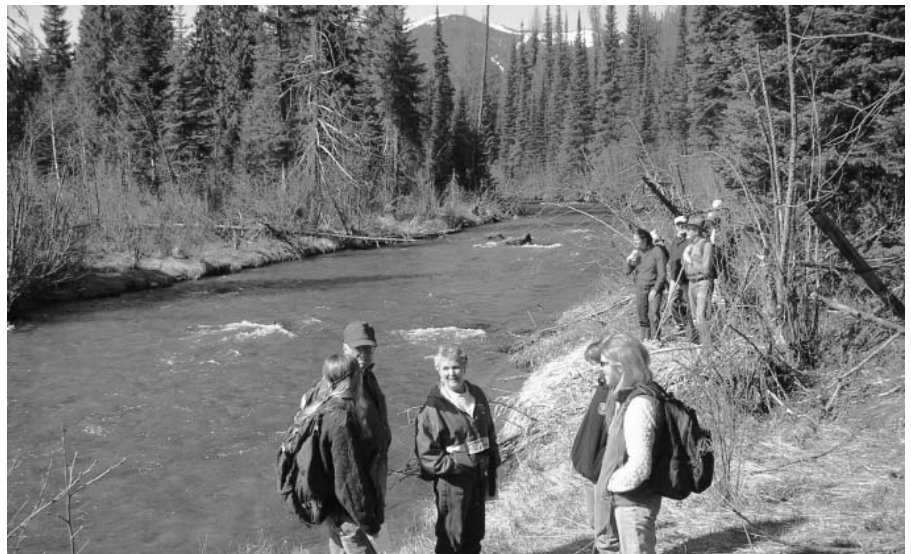


Photo courtesy of Swan Ecosystem Center

Swan Valley residents inspect a section of the Swan River flowing through the Elk Creek Conservation Area Project.

Elk Creek Conservation Area—Phase I Complete

A coalition of partners recently completed Phase I of the Elk Creek Conservation Area project—an effort to protect 1,920 acres of biologically rich land in western Montana's Swan Valley (see map, page 5). Last September the Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) acquired an initial 640-acre parcel from Plum Creek Timber Company. The SEC and CSKT now each hold one half of the square-mile parcel, while Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), the primary funder for the acquisition through its habitat mitigation program, holds a conservation easement that prohibits subdivision.

Elk Creek lies at the heart of Vital Ground's Swan Valley Initiative, anchoring several projects that we are working on to secure a protected wildlife corridor spanning the valley between the Mission Mountains and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. The area sits adjacent to Vital Ground's Coyote Forest conservation easement (completed in 2005), and is immediately across the valley from our Cooney Creek project (see article, page 1).

The objectives for Elk Creek are to preserve and restore the area's ecological integrity, help maintain a local forest-based economy, and ensure public access and recreational opportunities. The drainage encompasses outstanding habitat for a rich variety of wildlife, from grizzlies and lynx to moose, goshawk and wolverine, and it supports one of the strongest bull trout populations in Montana. Anne Dahl, executive director of the SEC, states, "Elk Creek is a very important resource for grizzly, native fish, other wildlife and for the community. This project makes a significant contribution to protecting habitat and public access in the heart of the Swan Valley."

The final two phases of the project will be completed when two remaining Plum Creek sections are acquired. At that point, the entire tributary will be protected from development. Tom McDonald, division manager of Fish, Wildlife & Conservation for CSKT asserts, "We need cooperative projects like this, particularly in these times, when it's getting harder and harder to pull off conservation projects of this size." Vital Ground is working with several partners to seek grants and funding to help permanently protect the remaining sections of the Elk Creek Conservation Area. 🐾

—Kiffin Hope

TNC and VG Protect 8,500 Acres on Rocky Mountain Front

In late 2006, Vital Ground and The Nature Conservancy of Montana joined forces on two projects to protect more than 8,500 acres of high quality grizzly bear range along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front through conservation easements (*see map, page 5*). To date, Vital Ground has helped conserve more than 25,000 acres of wildlife habitat in this crucial part of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE). Vital Ground's financial contributions to this partnership helped leverage substantial additional funding for both these and future TNC projects to protect wildlife habitat. Our contribution to TNC was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Wildlife Land Trust.

On the 4,354-acre Hager Ranch, owned by the Swanson and Field families, a new conservation easement covers a significant block of native grassland, three and a half miles of Dupuyer Creek and associated wetlands. The property lies eight miles north of the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area and close to other private properties protected by conservation easements, including the Boone and Crockett Club's Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch. The rich wetlands straddling Dupuyer Creek are used extensively by grizzly and black bear, mountain lions, white-tailed deer and other wildlife. The creek bottoms are full of cottonwood, river birch and



Photo courtesy The Nature Conservancy of Montana.

Dupuyer Creek flows east through the 4,354-acre Hager Ranch on Montana's spectacular Rocky Mountain Front, part of 8,500 acres secured in conservation easements by The Nature Conservancy and Vital Ground.

willows, including autumn willow, a rare species in Montana.

The partnership also secured a 4,229-acre conservation easement on the Ingersoll Ranch. This ranch anchors the southern end of the Front and stretches westward to the Continental Divide near Roger's Pass. It includes nearly three miles of riparian habitat along the Middle Fork of the Dearborn River and Hargrove Creek, an important corridor for travel, forage, and security of grizzly bears and other wildlife. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identified the property in the top 20 percent of potential easement opportunities on the Front. Addition-

ally, a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' analysis of grizzly habitat in the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem shows high grizzly bear resource values on the property. The ranch's higher forested areas provide habitat for wolverine, raptors and elk, while the lower elevations support sandhill cranes, other riparian and grassland birds, as well as antelope, mule and white-tailed deer.

Word travels fast in the small Dearborn community and the Ingersoll transaction has already catalyzed interest in conservation easements among nearby landowners. 🐾

—Kiffin Hope



Photo by Dave Campbell

Book Now for the 2008 Wild Bear Adventure!

We will host our Seventh Annual Wild Bear Adventure to Knight Inlet Lodge, British Columbia, May 11-17, 2008. This is an unforgettable journey into Canada's longest fjord and the Great Bear Rainforest—a coastal wilderness teeming with wildlife. Guided by professional naturalists, participants will explore the area in small motorboats or kayaks to watch grizzlies, marine mammals and many of the 200

species of birds found in the area. Knight Inlet Lodge generously donates all net profits from this special trip to Vital Ground.

Space is limited and we are accepting reservations now. Please visit our website at www.vitalground.org for trip details. You can book your reservation by contacting us at 406-549-8650 or info@vitalground.org. 🐾

Clifty View Project Protects Traditional Agriculture and Wildlife Habitat

What do ornamental landscaping trees, timber management and grizzly bears have in common? In the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone near Bonners Ferry, Idaho, they are all conservation priorities for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and The Vital Ground Foundation. Vital Ground is facilitating the state's acquisition of a conservation easement designed to protect both wildlife habitat and traditional agricultural activities on Clifty View Nursery—a wholesale tree farm specializing in quaking aspen and Colorado blue spruce.

The nursery and associated timber grounds encompass more than 1,700 acres bordering the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Boulder Creek Grizzly Bear Management Unit. Boasting spectacular scenery, the area also sustains a wide variety of wildlife, including several large carnivore species, elk, deer, moose, songbirds, waterfowl, and at least three sensitive fish species.

Early in 2005, the landowners, Lon and Donna Merrifield, submitted a proposal to Idaho's Forest Legacy Program to permanently protect the nursery and timber holdings with a conservation easement. Forest Legacy is a voluntary federal program administered by the USFS in partnership with the states that supports efforts to protect environmentally sensitive forest lands. By mid-2006, the project ranked as Idaho's top conservation priority and seventh nationally in the Forest Legacy review process. In early April, the



Photo by Ryan Lutey

A Forest Legacy Program conservation easement will protect agricultural activities vital to Boundary County, Idaho, while protecting wildlife habitat on Clifty View Nursery.

Forest Service announced that funding for the project was officially allocated in the federal 2007 FY budget, and Vital Ground is now working to complete the due diligence required for IDL to acquire the conservation easement in July. Stay tuned for a full report in our fall newsletter! 🐾

—Ryan Lutey

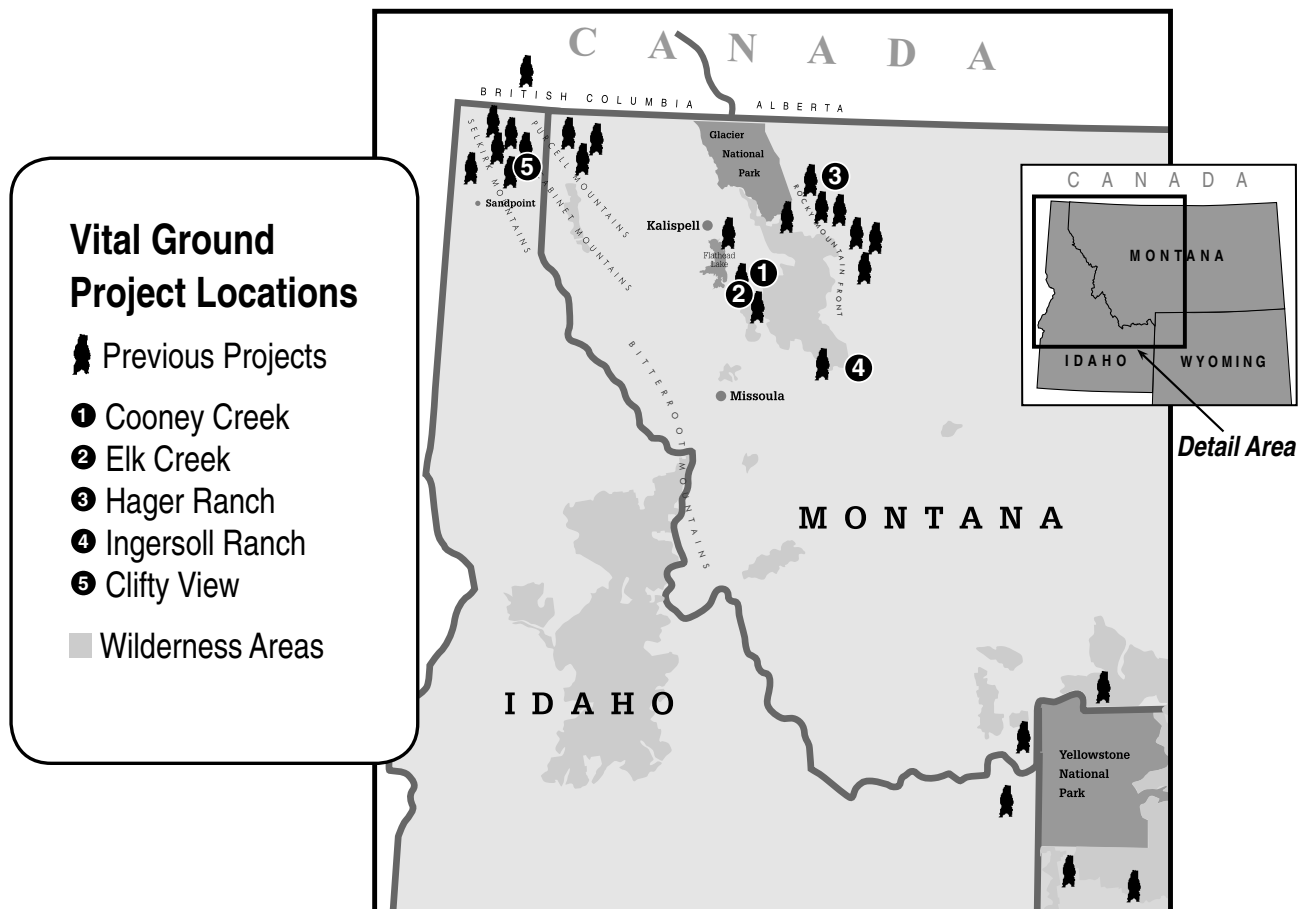




Photo by Dr. Syau-fu Ma

Jules Fleischer celebrates life on one of his many outdoor adventures.

Remembering Jules G. Fleischer

We are saddened by the passing of Jules G. Fleischer, a new friend to Vital Ground. Jules always loved wildlife and nature. He spent many years running rivers and canoeing in Canada, the U.S., Costa Rica, and Papua New Guinea, and was also an avid scuba diver. Jules and his wife, Dr. Syau-fu Ma, traveled widely to enjoy wildlife. Over the past few years, they journeyed to Yellowstone National Park to watch wolves; to Africa, including the Serengeti; to Churchill, Manitoba to view polar bears; and to the coast of British Columbia to see the white-phase black bears known as the Kermode bear or Spirit Bear. Sadly, Jules' failing health prevented them from taking a planned trip to the Arctic to see polar bears at sea.

Jules and Syau-fu learned of Vital Ground through their friends Thea Leonard and Andy Beerman, who told them about their friendship with Doug and Lynne Seus, Vital Ground's co-founders. Jules mentioned how much he would like to meet Bart the Bear 2 while his health allowed, and in mid-November 2006, about a week before he passed away, he and Syau-fu made the trip to visit the Seuses and Bart. Syau-fu says that it was a spectacular day with a wonderful welcome from Doug and Lynne. Jules and Doug developed an instant bond, as did Jules and Bart.

Jules passed away on November 23, 2006 in Park City, Utah. He enjoyed a full life lived with integrity and gener-

osity, and his intolerance of social injustice was as strong as his belief in humankind. Jules' values and dedication to his family and friends will be a lasting gift. Inspired by his love of nature and his special meeting with the Seuses and Bart, Jules requested that donations in his memory be made to Vital Ground. 🐾

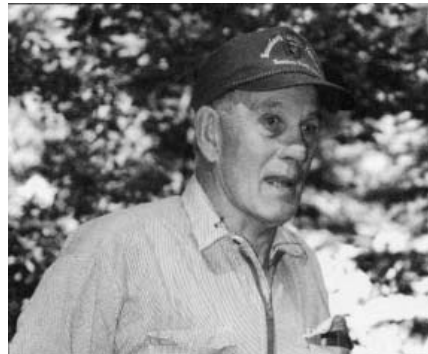


Photo by Banu Qureshi

Rancher Julien Bucher integrated wildlife habitat conservation with a successful cattle, timber and farm operation.

Julien Bucher Remembered as Keeper of Vital Ground

In north Idaho, very close to the Canadian border, there is a farm at the east foot of the Selkirk Mountains where grizzlies, cattle and people have shared the landscape for more than a century. For almost 80 years of that time, the Selkirk bears and the Bucher Family went about their business with little notice of each other—only once getting too close for comfort when a wayward bear took up residence in the hayloft over the farm's cattle barn.

Much of the credit for this peaceful co-existence goes to Julien Bucher, who passed away in an accident on the farm in early January. Vital Ground and Julien teamed up for the first time in 2003 to cooperatively tackle issues common to the Bucher farm and Selkirk grizzlies. The partnership will be greatly missed by Vital Ground staff, volunteers and donors lucky enough to experience Julien's guidance and friendship.

Julien was born in Porthill, Idaho in 1933, very near the homestead he grew up farming. After retiring from a career in the Air Force in 1974, he returned to the farm where he began implementing progressive management practices benefiting both wildlife and farm operations. During that time, Julien was tireless in his service to the Boundary County community. He participated in committees and organizations that included the hospital board, Better Boundary County, Human Rights Task Force, co-op board, Democratic Party, weed board and the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative's Grizzly Bear Conservation Committee.

In 2003, Vital Ground and the Bucher Family entered a management agreement for the Bucher farm that served as a test drive for a conservation easement. Under the terms of the agreement—which were modeled on Julien's existing management practices—ranching continued according to livestock limits set by the family, and timber could be managed under a seasonal schedule to minimize conflicts with grizzlies that use the area. Julien often took significant time away from his own overwhelming springtime ranching duties to help control noxious weeds and handle other stewardship activities on nearby parcels that Vital Ground owns and manages for wildlife.

As for the bear that briefly inhabited the Bucher hayloft, it eluded state wildlife managers' repeated efforts to trap it. During its time on the farm, the bear moved primarily at night, ignoring deer carcasses in the culvert trap while it quietly slipped out among the cattle to seek out forage in wetter portions of the pasture. The bear eventually moved out of the barn of its own accord and headed back into the Selkirk Mountains without incident—another one of the valley's stakeholders that benefited from Julien's patience and tolerance. 🐾



Photo by Christine Paige

New Vital Ground Board of Trustees' Chair Bob Koons at the spring board meeting.

VG Welcomes New Board Chair, Bob Koons

Robert W. Koons was elected chair of the Vital Ground Board of Trustees during the fall 2006 board meeting in Missoula, Montana. Bob originally joined the board in 2004 and served as treasurer. He is executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Wildlife Land Trust (WLT) and has a diverse background in leadership and management in both for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

"It's a challenging yet exciting time to be working on grizzly bear protection," Bob says. "Through our efforts at Vital Ground, we are facilitating partnerships between landowners and conservationists, resulting in long-term protection of a truly magical animal and the knowledge that nature's web will remain intact for generations to come. We can't turn back the clock and restore the pristine environment of centuries ago, but we can certainly protect the grizzly habitat that remains."

Bob is a graduate of Colby College with executive management training from Harvard Business School. Formerly board chair of The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Bob is a conservationist with tremendous experience in the governance of land trusts and wildlife conservation organizations. In the two and a half years he has headed WLT, the organization increased the number of states it serves by 40% and expanded its protected lands from 53,000 to 978,000 acres. He resides in Washington, D.C. and Flagstaff, Arizona. 🐾

New Board of Trustees Appointments and Elections

The Vital Ground Board of Trustees made several other new appointments during last fall's board meeting in Missoula. **Stuart D. Strahl, Ph.D.**, and **Jonathan W. Landers** were elected as new trustees, and Vital Ground co-founder **Lynne Seus** rejoined the board. Lynne's husband and fellow co-founder, **Doug Seus**, accepted the honorary title "trustee emeritus."

Stuart Strahl is a career conservationist with 25 years in national and international programs and deep experience in applied science, restoration ecology, public policy and nonprofit management. He currently serves as president and CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society and director of the Brookfield Zoo. Stuart is dedicated to making conservation a mainstream public issue. From 1996 to 2003, Stuart was founding president and CEO of Audubon of Florida, leading the organization into national prominence in the largest ecological restoration initiative in history, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. He gained international experience as a research fellow and founding director of Latin American Programs for the Wildlife Conservation Society between 1985 and 1992, bringing together diverse U.S. and Latin American interests that resulted in preservation of over 30 million acres of wildlife habitat and over \$15 billion in conservation funding. Stuart is a member of the board of directors of the Society for Conservation Biology and the Everglades Foundation, an elective member of the American Ornithologist's Union and a regular member of the Boone and Crockett Club. Stuart and his family reside just outside of Chicago in Brookfield, Illinois.

Jonathan Landers brings to the board extensive management experience in both the nonprofit and for-profit worlds. He served as group vice president of New Business Development and Corporate Marketing for the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C. and as deputy direc-

tor of the Experience Music Project, a museum in Seattle, Washington. Jon is currently the managing principal for the Washington, D.C. office of Economics Research Associates, where he consults on strategic planning and revenue potential for museums and cultural destinations. He is also an adjunct professor at George Washington University's Graduate Museum Studies Program where he teaches marketing and public relations for nonprofit institutions. Jon received his B.A. from Bowdoin College and his M.B.A. from Columbia University. He resides in Severna Park, Maryland with his wife, Barb.

The board also appointed sitting trustee **John E. Swallow** of Los Angeles, California as vice chair and re-elected **James R. Holbrook, J.D.** of Salt Lake City, Utah as secretary. Outgoing chair **Banu Qureshi** of Potomac, Maryland was elected treasurer. Vital Ground's other sitting trustees are **Douglas H. Chadwick** of Whitefish, Montana and **Kelly A. Wilson** of Park City, Utah. 🐾

Staff Changes

Shelly Wear recently joined our staff as our new administrative assistant. Shelly has always devoted herself to work with conservation and community organizations. She began her career in 1979 with the Great Falls Tribune, and subsequently worked with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, and most recently with a company that builds affordable housing throughout Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming. Shelly lives near Missoula with her husband Dick, and their son, Evan, along with two canine family members, Wally and Rusty. Shelly spends her spare time volunteering with her church and enjoying Montana's beautiful outdoors with her family.

Jill Scott is departing Vital Ground to devote full time to parenting her new son, Jaegar. We thank Jill for her terrific work the past two years, and wish Jill and her husband, Jess, our warmest wishes on raising their little cub.

VG Supports Open Lands Initiative for Missoula County

In fall 2006, Vital Ground provided a grant to Montanans for Land, Water, and Wildlife to support the group's efforts to pass a new open space bond initiative in Missoula County. Why should Vital Ground, devoted to grizzly habitat conservation, be concerned with a local open space initiative?

Missoula County is a poster child for urban/wildland interface. It encompasses the city of Missoula, several small towns, and extensive rural areas and wild lands, including the Swan Valley, one of our focal areas for grizzly habitat conservation. Due to concerns about the rapid loss of open space from booming growth in western Montana, citizens, land trusts and planners worked together to draft an updated open space plan for the greater Missoula area.

The Missoula open space plan was originally conceived in 1995 and for

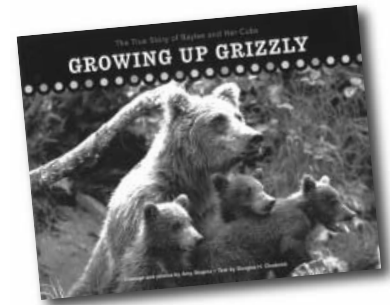
ten years served as the guideline for acquiring open lands to protect surrounding hillsides, wildlife habitat, river corridors, and rural and farm/ranch properties. Last November, Missoula County voters approved a new \$10 million, 20-year open space bond by an overwhelming majority, and the money will be split evenly between county and city projects. On rural county lands, open space projects will likely focus on conservation easements to help protect larger properties from development. Vital Ground has already submitted an application for funding to assist with the Cooney Creek conservation easement project (*see article, page 1*).

In a recent article in the Missoulian newspaper, Missoula Mayor John Engen said that he has heard the same message time and time again: protect open space! "People understand the impact Missoula's open spaces and conservation lands have on their quality of life," he says. "The passage of the new open space bond will create a legacy that people 100 years from now will be thankful for." 🐾



Photo by Kiffin Hope

The Swan Valley lies within Missoula County where a \$10 million open space bond has created new opportunities for lands conservation across the county.



Growing Up Grizzly: The True Story of Baylee and Her Cubs

We are excited to announce the publication of *Growing Up Grizzly: The True Story of Baylee and Her Cubs*, a new children's book by Amy Shapira and Douglas H. Chadwick, longtime supporters of Vital Ground. The book is the true tale of a young bear alone in the Alaskan wilderness and the big-hearted grizzly family that embraced him as their own.

Although grizzly mothers usually do not tolerate outsider bears, Baylee adopted the juvenile Emmett and raised him along with her own three cubs until he was ready to live on his own. What happens next reveals that just like people, every grizzly bear has its own personality.

Award-winning photographer Amy Shapira returned to the same remote cove in southeastern Alaska for six consecutive summers, capturing this incredible story as it unfolded. Through Amy's stunning photos and the graceful words of author and wildlife biologist Doug Chadwick, this heartwarming tale of young grizzlies growing up in the Alaska wilds comes alive.

You can purchase the book directly from Vital Ground's Bear Mart at www.vitalground.org, or by contacting us at 406-549-8650 or programs@vitalground.org. The authors will donate a portion of the proceeds from each book sold to Vital Ground. (Story suitable for all ages; hardcover; 48 color pages. \$14.95.) 🐾



Amy Shapira is passionate about grizzlies. Although she has been a long-time member and dedicated supporter of Vital Ground, her enthusiasm for bears has carried her to places she might never have dreamed of only a few years ago.

Born and raised in New York City, Amy worked as a psychotherapist for twenty years, a career that allowed her to employ her deep sense of empathy in work with inmates at Rikers Island and training monkeys to be aides for the handicapped. Yet since childhood, Amy says she has always been happiest when in the presence of wildlife. “My earliest memory is of connecting with animals,” she recalls.

Ten years ago, Amy, her husband Israel, and her son Danny left New York and resettled in Carbondale, Colorado where their nearest neighbors are now elk and deer. But Amy had yet to see a grizzly in the wild. Not long after the move, Israel urged her, “Please go find your bear.”

Her husband’s encouragement took Amy to a small coastal cove in Alaska for her first encounter with grizzlies in the wild, and her life took an entirely new turn. Wolverine Cove, a shallow bay that attracts grizzlies during the salmon run, serves as a maternity ward for mothers, their cubs and juveniles. “I spent several days watching one juvenile the locals called ‘Swimmer,’ and I truly lost my heart to him. Yet when I returned the next year I learned that Swimmer had been killed by a hunter.”

The cove is popular with sport fishermen and bear-watchers, and the bears quickly become habituated to people. “The cubs are raised the entire summer with people nearby,” she reports. But once hunting season opens, the bears are sitting targets. “One day it’s fishing rods and cameras, and the next it’s rifles.” Amy also regularly witnessed people with a complete disregard for the bears—often bears couldn’t get



Photo by Lynn Rogers

Amy Shapira, award-winning wildlife photographer and author, is a long-time supporter of Vital Ground.

into the water for all the boats, and fishermen competed with the bears for salmon.

Amy has returned to Wolverine Cove every summer for the past six years, not only to follow the lives of the grizzlies she has come to know and love, but to advocate for better management to reduce conflicts between people and bears. While a selected committee of commercial and recreational stakeholders worked with Alaska Department of Fish and Game to develop visitor use guidelines, Amy worked the grassroots to push for change—writing letters, submitting suggestions and urging other visitors to do the same. The Wolverine Cove bears remain vulnerable to hunting—attempts to prohibit hunting in the cove haven’t yet been successful. But the state has issued new guidelines that set boundaries for fishermen and outline proper visitor etiquette that are a step toward reducing some conflicts.

Amy’s Alaska adventures also spawned a new career as a wildlife photographer. “That first summer I came home with one beautiful photo of Swimmer, and a bookshop owner urged me to make it into a note card for sale.” Soon Grizzly Cove Greetings was born and Amy’s photography blossomed. Her intimate and playful grizzly portraits deftly capture each bear’s individual

personality. Amy now sells her striking images as cards and prints and contributes a portion of her proceeds to Vital Ground. She also graciously donates several hundred of her cards to us for our holiday greetings each year—taking it on herself to personally hand-address each one—and generously allows us the use of her images for our newsletter, brochures, and t-shirts.

Over several years at Wolverine Cove, Amy followed the lives of Baylee, a young sow grizzly with three cubs, and their interactions with a lonely juvenile named Emmett. Turning biologist’s assumptions about mother grizzlies’ behavior upside-down, Baylee and her cubs adopted Emmett into their family—feeding, playing and hibernating together for two years until Emmett and the cubs moved off on their own.

Having captured their story in photographs, Amy felt strongly that she should share this unusual tale of bear friendship with others. She approached Douglas H. Chadwick to write the text for a children’s book. Doug, a biologist, prolific writer and Vital Ground board member, was the logical choice, she says. “I knew he could tell Baylee’s story with grace and respect.” Recently published, *Growing Up Grizzly: the True Story of Baylee and Her Cubs* is now available through Vital Ground’s Bear Mart and at bookstores (see sidebar, page 8).

Modest about her talents, Amy would be the last to claim kudos for her work. “None of this journey was possible without my husband—he is the most supportive and loving spirit,” she says. “And I have to thank Lynne and Doug Seus and Bart the Bear’s eternal spirit as well. Grizzlies have such sanctity and nobility, and we simply need to protect them.” Through her images, philanthropy and advocacy, Amy is giving wild grizzlies a better chance to survive, and we thank her for all she does for bears and for Vital Ground. 🐾

—Christine Paige

OUR VITAL GROUND AMBASSADORS

For thirty years Doug and Lynne Seus have trained wild creatures for the film industry, and their grizzlies—Bart the Bear 2, Honey Bump and Tank—serve as our Vital Ground Ambassadors. Doug, a bearish man himself, speaks grizzly in his every gesture as he works with the broad range of the bears' natural behaviors and intelligence to produce true animal acting. It is a close, trusted conversation between human and bear, and the bears clearly love it—relishing Doug's praise and treats of grapes, peaches and blueberries. The bears move everyone who has the opportunity to meet or work with them, as their individual personalities shine beyond their sheer impressive presence. We hope that seeing these remarkable bears in film will help inspire more people to support protection of wild grizzly country. 🐾



Photo by John Swallow

The largest of the Seus's bears, Bart the Bear 2 can act the terrifying bruin. "Bart will anticipate my behavior," reports Doug. "He also understands when other actors break out of character, but he won't follow." (Don't try this at home--or in the wild! These bears have been professionally trained since they were bottle-fed cubs!)



Photo by Derek Reich

Honey Bump is a more petite bear at half the weight of her big brother, Bart. She can charm with honey sweetness, but has all of the power and assertiveness of a female grizzly.



Photo by John Swallow

Rolling in snow, Bart shows his playful side. Last summer, while on location in Alaska to shoot "Into the Wild," directed by Sean Penn, Bart encountered his native environment. "He loved it," reported Lynne. "He would bounce on the spongy muskeg, and pop spruce trees out of the permafrost to use as back-scratchers."



Photo by Christine Paige

Tank plays peek-a-boo, one of dozens of movements the bears are taught.



Photo by John Swallow

Despite her size, Bump (left) can put her enormous brother in his place and delights in terrorizing Bart.



Photo by Derek Reich

Bump loves the water and does forward plunges into the swimming hole. She also shares all of the acting talent of her brother.



Photo by Christine Paige

Standing tall, Tank moves through his paces like a pro. Tank shows a special ability to work closely with people—he starred as “Archie” in “Dr. Dolittle 2” and appeared on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, sitting on the sofa for his interview.



Photo by Christine Paige

A “mama’s bear,” Tank shows his affection for Lynne, who calls him their “Buddhist” for his calm, gentle nature. Tank loves to laze in the dandelions and watch birds. “Wherever he is,” Lynne says, “is ok.”



Photo by John Swallow

Resting after work and play, Doug and Bart hang out. “My passion is knowing bears intimately—having such a rapport that they trust you and they’ll come through for you,” says Doug.

Herklotz Challenge Surpassed!

Heartfelt thanks to all our members, donors, and foundation and corporate partners who helped us not only meet, but far exceed, the \$150,000 Herklotz Matching Gift Challenge. As of the December 31, 2006 deadline, Vital Ground received matching contributions from 400 individuals, businesses and foundations totaling \$195,821—putting us over the required match by almost \$46,000!

Speaking with us recently, John Herklotz said, “I salute the folks that helped make the Herklotz Matching Gift Challenge the greatest fundraising success that Vital Ground has ever experienced, and thank them for their ongoing support of an organization that is truly making an on-the-ground difference in protecting grizzly range.” 🐾

VG Receives \$200,000 Gift for Swan Valley Initiative

In December 2006, a donor who wishes to remain anonymous contributed \$200,000 to Vital Ground for work associated with the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative. This gift represents the single largest cash donation in the organization’s history. Vital Ground applied the funds toward the Cooney Creek Conservation Easement project which closed in January 2007 (*see article, page 1*). The easement protects 320 acres of prime grizzly habitat in the Cooney Creek drainage on property that adjoins national forest land on three sides. On behalf of all Vital Ground supporters, we would like to extend heartfelt thanks to our donor for this very special contribution. 🐾

VG Establishes Permanent Endowment Fund

Thanks to a generous gift from The Qureshi Family Foundation, Vital Ground recently established a Permanent Endowment Fund. As a true endowment, the fund will be held in perpetuity and invested in a manner that protects the principal, while the investment income provides ongoing support for projects approved by the board of trustees.

On behalf of all our supporters, the board and staff extend our warmest thanks to the Qureshi family for their contribution and their continuing dedication to Vital Ground and the Great Bear. Please contact us if you would like to contribute to Vital Ground’s Permanent Endowment Fund. 🐾

Our First \$1 Million Year

The year 2006 will definitely stand out for Vital Ground. For the first time in our seventeen-year history the organization broke the \$1 million mark! Between memberships, appeals, general contributions, the value of donated easements, foundation grants, corporate support, and the Herklotz Matching Gift Challenge, Vital Ground’s gross income in 2006 came to nearly \$1.4 million. This represents a 69% increase from 2005.

This income increases our capacity to meet the mounting conservation challenges in grizzly country. As development pressure and land values rise throughout grizzly range, it becomes increasingly difficult and expensive to preserve and protect open lands. Each year, Vital Ground is able to secure its operating budget only through the generosity and dedication of its donors and partners. We hope 2006 represents a new level of possibility for grizzly habitat conservation! 🐾

Correction

A graphic of two bear cubs in our spring 2006 issue of Vital News (page 8) should have been credited to Carol Bailey of Carson City, Nevada. We sincerely apologize for the mix-up and our lack of acknowledgement. The original photograph on which the image was based, shown here, was shot in the Katmai region of Alaska. Born in 2002, these two cubs, Snow and Ash, are rare white-phase brown bears.



Photo by Carol Bailey

Ash and Snow, two unusual white-phase Alaskan brown bear cubs.

As of 2006, Carol reports, they were independent adults and doing well, although they have dispersed to remote areas. Very active with the Photographic Society of America, Carol is an award-winning nature photographer and has exhibited her work internationally. She leads trips to Alaska every year to photograph bears and other wildlife. If you would be interested in joining one of Carol’s tours, please contact her at bcarolb@pyramid.net or 775-882-8962. 🐾

Thanks to Our Foundation Supporters!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our 2006 foundation supporters. Foundations play a key role in helping Vital Ground fund existing initiatives, develop new programs, and pioneer new methods of saving land and protecting habitat for grizzlies and other wildlife. Deep thanks to the following foundations for their generous support: The Cinnabar Foundation; The William H. Donner Foundation; Fanwood Foundation/West; The Eugene and Estelle Ferkauf Foundation; First Interstate BancSystem Foundation; Johnson Family Foundation; Kinkle Family Trust; Alan and Cindra Ladd Family Foundation; The Norcross Wildlife Foundation; Oberweiler Foundation; The Qureshi Family Foundation; The Steele-Reese Foundation; Clayton A. Struve Family Foundation; Wiancko Charitable Foundation; and Wilburforce Foundation via Heart of the Rockies Initiative. 🐾

New Tax Incentives for Conservation Easements May Become Permanent

On August 3, 2006, through the Pension Protection Act, Congress approved a temporary expansion of federal tax incentives for conservation easement donations that can significantly help moderate-income families protect their land. On August 17, the President signed the act into law. This is a great victory for conservation! Among other things, the new law:

- Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their adjusted gross income in any year to 50%;
- Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and

- Extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take tax deductions for voluntary conservation agreements from 5 to 15 years.

These temporary incentives are scheduled to expire at the end of 2007. Efforts are now under way to make these changes a permanent part of the tax code. A new bill, S.469, introduced by Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Charles Grassley (R-IA), would permanently extend the conservation easement incentives. Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Dave Camp (R-MI) introduced H.R.1576, a parallel bill in the House, and President Bush has endorsed making the new tax incentives permanent in his fiscal year 2008 budget.

With these incentives in place, family farmers, ranchers, and other moderate-income landowners will be better able to conserve the land they love while obtaining a significant tax benefit for making the charitable donation of a conservation easement.

Please ask your senators and representatives to become cosponsors of Senate Bill S.469 or House Bill H.R.1576. Let them know how much this means to your land trust and land conservation in America. Contact us if you would like more information on this legislation. 🐾

Special Note to Montana Residents: Montana Endowment Tax Credit

Through the end of 2007, a Montana resident who makes a planned gift to a qualified charitable endowment is allowed a tax credit of 40% of the present value of the gift, up to a maximum credit of \$10,000. Planned gifts include charitable trusts, gift annuities, and pre-paid life insurance policies. Montana businesses that make gifts to qualified endowments may claim a tax credit of 20% of the value of the gift, to a maximum credit of \$10,000. Businesses may also take the credit for gifts of cash.

This incentive is currently set to expire December 31, 2007, so take advantage of this tax credit this year while making an important gift to Vital Ground. For more information on the Montana Endowment Tax Credit, go to www.endowmentmontana.org/faqs.html, and be sure to consult with your tax advisor. 🐾



Photo by Derek Reich

As more people are lured to the beauty of grizzly country, land values and development pressures rise, increasing our challenge to protect these lands as wild habitat.

Many Ways to Support Vital Ground

Americans are philanthropists. On average, we donate nearly \$2,000 per person per year to charities. That adds up to tens of thousands of dollars in a lifetime, which ultimately transforms your every day giving into true personal philanthropy. Your support of Vital Ground is an investment, not only in habitat conservation and grizzly bear recovery, but in the qualities and values that help shape and define the future of our communities, wildlife and wildlands. We want you to make the most of your generosity to Vital Ground by understanding a few of the many ways that you can support our work, how you can give most effectively, and how to get more from your contributions.

Memberships

Beginning at \$35 a year, membership is a great way to get to know Vital Ground and support habitat conservation and grizzly bear recovery. Members receive Vital News twice a year, as well as special updates and alerts.

Gift Memberships

Introduce someone you know to our work and give the gift of conservation. Recipients receive a personalized gift membership and member packet to welcome them to Vital Ground.

Monthly Giving

Our monthly givers program allows you to make a contribution in automatic monthly installments from your credit or debit card, and helps provide a stable flow of support to Vital Ground. A minimum monthly contribution starts at only \$10 and is ongoing until you let us know otherwise.

Employer Matching Gifts

Many employers will match your donation through a matching charitable gift program, often dollar-for-dollar. Contact your human resources department to determine if your gifts to Vital Ground qualify.

Annual Appeals

Twice a year, Vital Ground makes a special plea to our supporters through our spring funding appeal and our autumn Bart the Bear Memorial Appeal. These funding drives provide Vital Ground with a source of unrestricted income that supports our habitat conservation projects and operations.

Memorials and Honoraria

You can pay tribute to family and friends through a memorial or honorary gift or gift fund. The gift may be made in memory of a relative or friend, or in honor of a special occasion such as a birthday or wedding anniversary.

Planned Giving

Making a planned gift to Vital Ground offers a flexible way to combine your philanthropy with financial and tax planning. Planned gifts can include donations of stock or real estate, a life-income arrangement, or naming Vital Ground as a beneficiary in your will or IRA. We can work with you and your tax and financial advisors to craft a gift plan that meets your financial needs and your philanthropic goals.

Endowment

Endowments allow a donor to combine their vision and philanthropic goals

with an organization's needs and objectives, while helping to sustain the organization over the long term. You can make a gift to our Permanent Endowment Fund in honor or memory of an individual or family. An enduring gift, an endowment builds a conservation legacy for future generations.

Conservation Buyers

Vital Ground works to match properties of high conservation value with buyers who wish to permanently protect vital wildlife habitat through their real estate investments. Conservation buyers typically donate a conservation easement to ensure that the habitat values of their new property are protected in perpetuity. Conservation acquisitions and easements may be eligible for significant tax benefits. 🐾



Photo by John Swallow.

Bart 2 says thanks for supporting Vital Ground!

A Grizzly Cup of Joe



Each time you brew up a cup of java, that rich aroma can remind you you're helping wild grizzlies. Montana Coffee Traders donates \$1 to Vital Ground for each pound of their Grizzly Blend coffee sold. Grizzly Blend is an earthy, full-bodied medium roast. You can specify regular or decaf coffee from organic/fair trade or non-organic sources, and order as whole beans or one of several grinds. Prices start at \$11.25 per pound, with discounts for 5-pound bags. Order with a click of your mouse at www.coffeetraders.com and go to "Special Project Coffees," or call MCT toll-free at 800-645-5282. Buy Grizzly Blend today, and help us protect bear habitat! 🐾

How do biologists study a large, wide-ranging animal that is often solitary, occurs in the wildest places, and is downright dangerous to encounter? Gathering data on grizzlies is expensive, physically demanding, and often frustrating. Yet new technologies, some low-tech and some high, are helping researchers answer long-held questions.

For many years, telemetry has been an essential tool for understanding wildlife movements—especially grizzlies—yet it entails trapping, anesthetizing, and fitting the animal with a collar and transmitter. The transmitter's signal, picked up either by a VHS radio receiver or a satellite, relays the bear's position. Transmitters have become quite sophisticated—many can store Global Positioning System (GPS) data until the collar is removed—and collars can now be set to drop off automatically, reducing the need for re-capture. Although capture and handling is risky, telemetry gives us information on an individual's movements that cannot be gathered in any other way. Additionally, researchers can learn about reproductive rates, survival and causes of mortality. They can also estimate population sizes from the ratio of marked to unmarked bears they encounter or capture.

Recently, DNA technology has revolutionized wildlife research and new survey methods are reducing the need to handle animals. The most ambitious grizzly DNA study to date is led by Kate Kendall of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)—a population survey of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), some of the most inaccessible grizzly country in the lower 48 states.

Hundreds of volunteers collected hair from bear rub trees and set out more than 600 hair traps—barbed wire hair snares baited with an irresistible scent lure of cattle blood and fish oil. With thousands of hair samples collected, DNA analysis will provide the most accurate population count ever in the region, as well as a picture of grizzly sex ratios, bear distribution, and genetic variation—an indication of a population's resilience and health. In a lucky bonus, the DNA analysis has already identified several “lost” bears—grizzlies that had dropped their radio collars and yet are still alive and doing well. All without having to capture, collar and handle bears.

Hair analysis can also shed light on bear diets. “Stable isotope analysis” compares different forms, or isotopes, of an element in chemical compounds. Charles Robbins of Washington State University uses nitrogen isotopes in bear hair to distinguish how much fish, meat, and vegetation bears in different populations consume. In Yellowstone for example, Robbins found that female grizzlies and young bears eat about 60% vegetation and 40% meat (ranging from cutworm moths and trout to ground squirrels and elk), while adult males (which are more willing to defend scavenged carcasses or risk hunting bison and elk) consume about 80% meat. On the other hand, Glacier National Park grizzlies get about 97% of their food from plants and, not surprisingly, salmon comprises 60% of coastal grizzly diets.



Photo by Derek Reich

This female grizzly was captured in Glacier National Park for a population trend study. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologists Tim Manley (left) and Heather Reich (right) fit a GPS collar and take hair samples for DNA while wildlife veterinarian Mark Atkinson (center) monitors the bear's vital signs. The eye cover protects the bear's eyes and reduces stress during anesthesia.

Lately there's a new detective on the scene—scat-sniffing dogs. Humans have used the power of pooch noses for tracking since ancient times, and now biologists are training dogs to hunt up scat of bears, desert tortoises, Amur tigers, and even North Atlantic right whales. In addition to DNA sampling, scat can be used to study reproduction, disease and toxins.

In the Centennial Mountains, a critical habitat link west of Yellowstone, Jon Beckmann of the Wildlife Conservation Society uses detection dogs to acquire scat samples of four large carnivores—grizzly, black bear, mountain lion and gray wolf—and determine each species' abundance, sex ratio and density. The dogs have proven almost too good. Able to find even the smallest scrap of old and dried-up poop, they overwhelmed the research team with samples—yet only fresh scat provides adequate DNA for analysis. Nevertheless, detection dogs allow Beckmann to survey the presence of several rare species at once in this remote region, with far less cost and risk than capture methods.

As exhilarating as it is to track critters in the wild, hands-off technologies help biologists learn about species without putting animals at risk. These days biologists may spend their field time collecting bits of hair and feces, or setting up remote cameras, and may be as familiar with isotopes, nuclear DNA, Geographic Information Systems, and multivariate statistics as with binoculars and measuring tapes. Yet at the root of it all is the drive to answer mysteries, and once in awhile the heart-stopping thrill of watching a big ol' grizz, hairtips glinting gold in the late afternoon light, ambling up a high mountain slope as if out for a little stroll. 🐾

—Christine Paige



*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

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