The Vital Ground Foundation

Biennial Report

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Where the Grizzly Can Walk, The Earth is Healthy and Whole

Welcome

It is an exciting and challenging time to be working in wildlife conservation, as the daunting pressures on wild habitats build. Vital Ground prides itself in being a lean yet highly successful organization dedicated to one mission: conserving habitat for the grizzly—habitat that will also sustain nature's web for all other creatures in grizzly country.

Vital Ground is effective because we focus on connections. We connect people through partnerships and connect ecosystems through lands conservation. On every project, we build collaboration between landowners, conservationists, agencies and businesses. Our success lies in our ability to work with a broad variety of allies, always seeking the greater good for wildlife and eschewing "ownership" of any specific project.

The 2006–2007 biennium was the most productive in Vital Ground's history with nearly 189,000 acres conserved. We facilitated a 1,647-acre Forest Legacy conservation easement in Idaho; secured multiple conservation easements in Montana's Swan Valley; launched our first land conservation project in Canada; and continued productive partnerships with The Nature Conservancy along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front and with National Wildlife Federation in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. While accomplishing great things for wildlife and wild places, we were also able to build our capacity and increase our net assets by 34%.

We are proud of our ability to have a positive influence on the survival and health of grizzly bears and their ecosystems in the United States and Canada.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our loyal members and donors, and we pledge to put every dollar to work efficiently for the bears and for the wilds.

Robert W. Koons
Chair, Vital Ground Board of Trustees

Our Vision

Vital Ground's mission is to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations by conserving wildlife habitat. We are focused on protecting lands that grizzlies need to survive—not only for the great bears themselves, but for elk, lynx, trout, and all the other creatures that share their world.

Vital Ground believes the grizzly bear, as an umbrella species, is nature's barometer of a healthy and complete ecosystem. Because the grizzly's home range covers several hundred square miles, from alpine meadows to valley bottoms, protecting grizzly habitat benefits entire plant and animal communities in the wildest, most scenic places left on the continent.

Grizzly and brown bear populations persist only in the continent's last wilderness ecosystems. Between, within, and at the edges of these ecosystems, roads and development are rapidly filling open lands and valley floors, frittering away once-wild landscapes and creating "habitat fracture zones."

Habitat links between these wild grizzly sanctuaries—lands that provide food, shelter and security for seasonal foraging and movement—are the crux point of grizzly survival and recovery. Today these lands are clad in streamside willows and cottonwoods, pastures, grasslands, wet meadows, clear waters, and conifer forests—habitat for innumerable species. Tomorrow they could be peppered with homes, roads, and other developments.

This is where we target our resources and efforts. Acre by acre, we protect jigsaw puzzle pieces of habitat to maintain the lifelines between grizzly ecosystems. Lifelines that will help sustain bears and everything else that depends on grizzly country.

Cover photo by Derek Reich, zooprax.com

One Bear's Legacy

Vital Ground evolved from a unique relationship between a man and a bear. In 1977, a Kodiak brown bear cub born in captivity arrived in the lives of Doug and Lynne Seus, professional animal trainers. Dubbing him Bart, the Seuses raised the cub from a six-pound ball of fuzz to a 1,500-pound adult and trained him for work in the film business. Bart quickly became a beloved member of the Seus family and developed a lifelong bond of trust and loyalty with Doug.

If a countryside can still support wild 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 Wildlife biologist, author and Vital Ground founding board member

Bart loved the applause of film crews as much as his salmon and blueberries, and he eventually appeared in more than 35 films, including *Legends of the Fall*, *The Edge* and *The Bear*. "For 23 years he took us on grand adventures—from the majestic peaks of the Austrian Alps and the Alaska wilds, to the bejeweled backstage of the Academy Awards," says Lynne.

Inspired to act on behalf of Bart's wild relatives, in 1990 the Seuses launched The Vital Ground Foundation with an initial purchase of 240 acres of prime grizzly bear habitat in Montana—habitat that adjoins other protected land along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains. The Seuses felt that Bart, as a member of a species truly symbolic of wilderness, could deliver a powerful message in support of land conservation. Bart took on an important new role as ambassador for Vital Ground. Until his death in 2000, his public appearances with Doug and Lynne sought to convey the urgent predicament of our rapidly diminishing natural areas, while promoting a message of hope that we might become better stewards of these great lands.

Vital Ground will remain the finest thing we have ever done with our lives.

—Doug and Lynne Seus Founders of Vital Ground

Over the past eighteen years, Vital Ground has helped protect and enhance more than 466,000 acres of wildlife habitat. Although Bart lived his life in captivity, he left a legacy that allows many of his wild brothers and sisters to roam free.

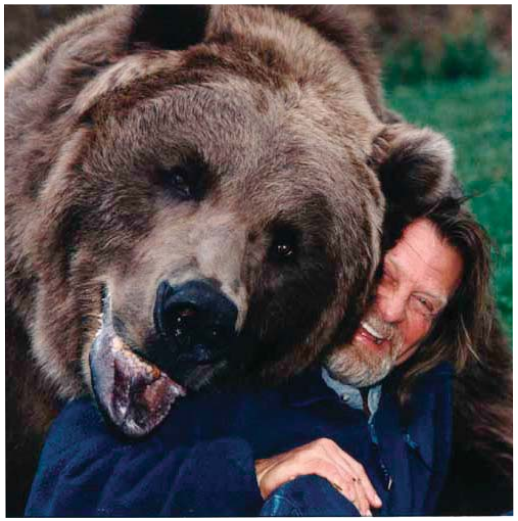


Photo by Jon Freeman

Bart the Bear and Doug Seus

Where Grizzlies Walk

Photo by demanczuk.com

Before European settlement, 50,000 to 100,000 grizzly bears ranged from Mexico to Alaska, across North America's vast prairies, wetlands, forests and mountainsides. Also known as the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), the grizzly is considered a "keystone species" that influences the diversity of other species in the ecosystems it inhabits. As a top predator, the grizzly affects the number and distribution of prey species and other predators. Foraging on berries and herbs, bears disperse seeds and so promote a variety of plant life. As grizzlies dig for tubers, insects and rodents, they loosen topsoil and help renew nutrients. And where coastal grizzlies dine on salmon, they spread nitrogen and other marine elements well beyond streams into upland habitats.

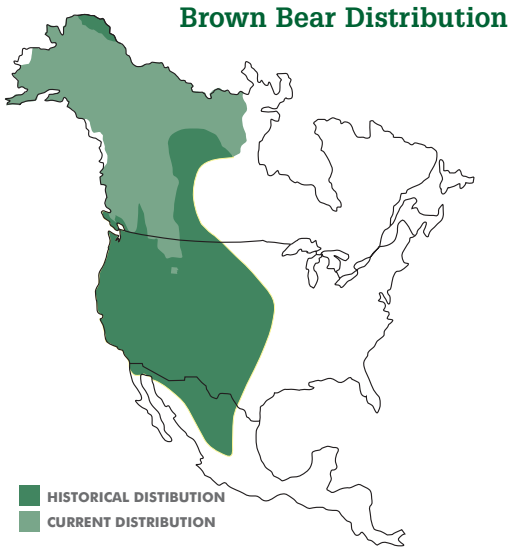
Due to the grizzly's extensive home range and need for wild land, undisturbed denning habitat, and abundant native berry crops and prey—from grubs and ground squirrels to deer and elk—the condition of a grizzly population is nature's barometer of a healthy and complete ecosystem.

Today, approximately 1,500 grizzlies remain in the lower 48 states, refugees of a long history of persecution and the sweep of settlement and development that consumed 98% of the bear's historic range in the conterminous states. In 1975, the grizzly was listed under the Endangered Species Act as "threatened" in the U.S. south of Canada. The populations that remain survive in five distinct ecosystems, sustained by wild habitat in our national parks, national forests and wilderness areas:

- Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem
- Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem
- Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem
- Selkirk Ecosystem
- Northern Cascades Ecosystem

So far, only one of these populations has met the criteria for delisting under the federal recovery plan. Through years of cooperative management and investment, the Yellowstone population slowly grew from fewer than 200 to at least 600 bears (Servheen 2006), and was delisted in March 2007. However, the decision remains controversial due to concerns about threats to habitat and Yellowstone's isolation from other ecosystems. As the population expands, secure habitat outside protected parks and wilderness areas will become increasingly important.

The Selway-Bitterroot Ecosystem straddling the Montana-Idaho border is designated as a sixth recovery zone. Although grizzlies were once widespread and abundant in the region, for 60 years there was no verified evidence of the Great Bear in the Selway-Bitterroot. That



changed in 2007 when a grizzly was mistakenly shot by a black-bear hunter in the northern Bitterroot Mountains. DNA analysis revealed that this bear had traveled from the Selkirk Mountains, more than 140 air miles northwest of the Bitterroots, spotlighting the potential for grizzlies to reclaim historic range and the urgent need to protect habitat links between populations.

Despite a core of protected lands in each of these ecosystems, the long-term persistence of the grizzly depends on plenty of room to roam. Connections between these ecosystems and with populations in Canada are vital to the bear's survival.

Today, some of the most productive seasonal feeding habitats and linkage zones lie on private ground. Lands along streams, valley bottoms, and in lower elevations provide essential spring and summer range and corridors for movement. Yet people also love these special places for their stunning beauty, abundant wildlife, and recreational opportunities. Development is consuming lowland wildlife habitats at a breathtaking rate, isolating grizzly ecosystems from one another and jeopardizing the enduring survival of these populations.

Alaska remains the U.S. stronghold for the Great Bear, with an estimated 25,000 to 39,000 brown bears—about 95% of the U.S. population (Miller and Schoen 1999.) Yet as the state continues to develop, humans and bears come into increasing conflict over vital habitat. Even Alaska's wilds are not limitless, and habitat conservation is becoming ever more important for brown bears to continue to thrive in the land of the midnight sun.

Making Connections: Conserving Vital Ground

We need to preserve the wilderness and its monarchs for ourselves, and for the dreams of children. We should fight for these things as if our life depended upon it, because it does.

—Wayne Lynch
Bears: Monarchs of the Northern Wildernes

Vital Ground protects critical grizzly bear habitat through cooperative conservation partnerships. We focus on strategically located lands whose conservation values transcend property boundaries. On private properties, we partner with landowners to protect vital habitat through conservation easements and fee title acquisitions, either by purchase or donation. Vital Ground also participates in selected projects on public lands designed to reduce conflicts between bears and people, improve habitat quality, protect or enhance resident populations, or increase the land's carrying capacity for grizzly bears.

Vital Ground works wherever there is an opportunity to protect habitat for grizzlies, but we direct particular attention to imperiled lands that serve as connections between grizzly ecosystems, special foraging areas or seasonal bear habitat—lifelines that grizzlies, and everything else in grizzly country, depend upon. Much of our attention is devoted to projects in the Rocky Mountain states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, yet we have also made important contributions to habitat projects in Alaska and Canada. By directing Vital Ground's resources toward protecting the crucial links that connect grizzly ecosystems, we hope to help sustain grizzly populations from Yellowstone to Canada and Alaska.

Vital Ground conducts all of its activities in accordance with the Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices, the guiding principles of the industry. Our strategy is directed by the best scientific information available concerning grizzly bear biology, habitat requirements and conservation strategies. Vital Ground does not engage in partisan politics. Rather, we seek practical, local solutions that allow people, grizzlies, and other wildlife to coexist.

Partnerships are essential to our success. Rapidly rising land values throughout grizzly country pose ever greater challenges for lands conservation. We collaborate with landowners, state and federal agencies and other nonprofit groups to leverage funds and build cooperative conservation projects. Working with our many partners, Vital Ground has so far helped conserve more than 466,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

As the pressures of rural development, resource extraction, and climate change continue to threaten wild places, Vital Ground remains committed to securing habitat for the Great Bear and other wildlife can rely upon.

If we can enable the long-term survival and growth of grizzly bear populations, we can help sustain North America's wild heritage for our children and many future generations.

Photo by lanceschelvan.com

Bear Tracks: Highlights of our 2006–2007 conservation achievements

In 2006 and 2007, Vital Ground made great strides in on-the-ground habitat conservation for grizzly bears and other wildlife. Since relocating our office from Utah to Montana in 2005 and adding new staff, Vital Ground's capacity and projects have flourished. During the 2006–2007 biennium, Vital Ground helped to protect and enhance almost 189,000 acres of crucial wildlife habitat. Here are highlights of our 2006–2007 conservation achievements.

NORTHERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE ECOSYSTEM (NCDE)

This diverse and rugged region sits astride the "Crown of the Continent" of northwestern Montana and encompasses roughly 9,600 square miles, including Glacier National Park, surrounding national forests, the Bob Marshall wilderness complex and other wilderness areas, and intermingled private lands. The ecosystem supports at least 550 grizzlies (Servheen 2006). The population appears to be expanding out of the wilderness heart of the NCDE into historic range, and bears seeking new territories are increasingly using habitats on private lands. Highways, a major railroad, and rapid development in these once-wild landscapes are fragmenting the ecosystem and pose considerable hazards to grizzlies. During the past eighteen years, Vital Ground has helped protect 30,602 acres of grizzly habitat throughout the NCDE.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT INITIATIVE

Since 1991, Vital Ground has worked to protect grizzly habitat on the spectacular Rocky Mountain Front, where the Rockies meet the vast prairie ocean of the Great Plains, and grizzlies make their way from mountain heights down riparian ribbons into wetlands and prairie grasslands on private ranches and on the Blackfeet Nation. Vital Ground has a long history of partnering with The Nature Conservancy of Montana to protect the Front's unique mosaic of forest, riparian and grasslands habitats. In total, Vital Ground has contributed to conservation projects totaling more than 25,500 acres along the Front.

Toy Property Permanent Protection 1

Shortly after founding Vital Ground in 1990, Doug and Lynne Seus launched the organization's habitat conservation work by donating the funds for Vital Ground to purchase 240 acres of prime Montana grizzly bear habitat along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains. The Toy property adjoins The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Pine Butte Swamp Preserve west of Choteau, Montana. Here, in view of the soaring peaks of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, grizzlies have a sanctuary where they can reclaim their prairie haunts, and bears regularly move through the lush riparian corridor into the prairie ecosystem. Vital Ground negotiated a conservation easement with

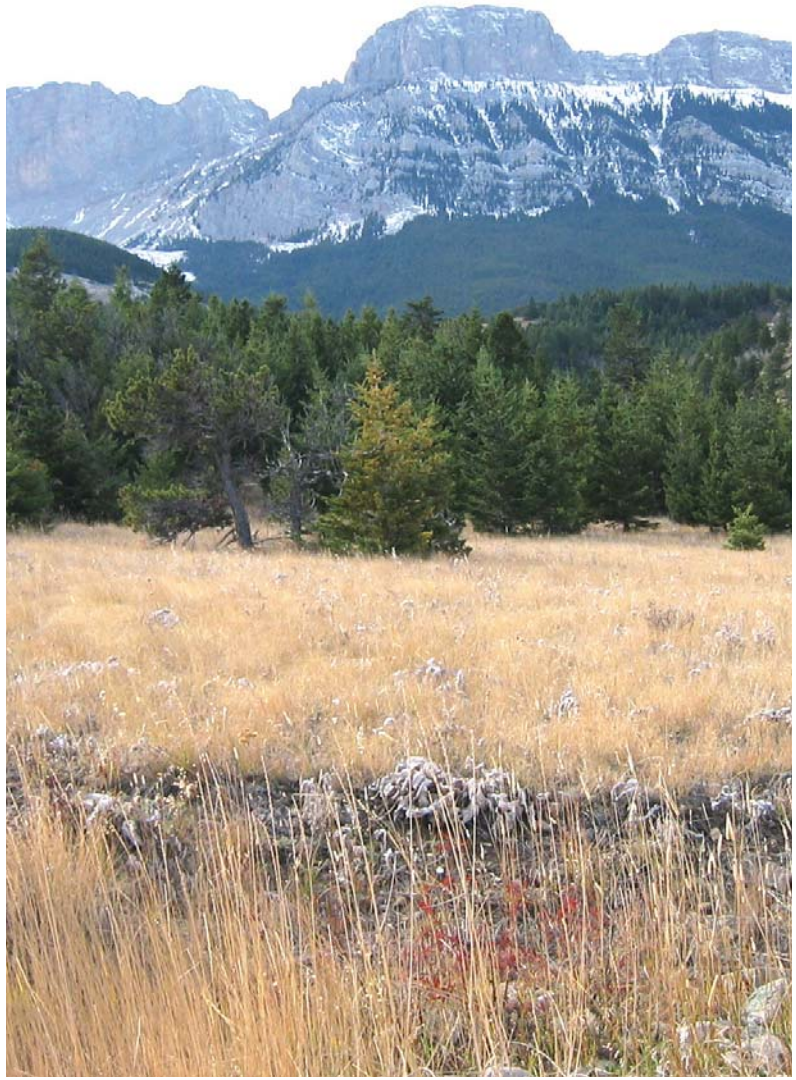


Photo by Randy Stekly

We are so pleased to know that the Toy property will still be permanently protected and managed for grizzly bears by TNC, and yet new funds from the property's sale will be used by Vital Ground to acquire additional grizzly habitat in other areas.

—Lynne and Doug Seus
Founders of Vital Ground

The work of Vital Ground is tailor-made for helping Missoula County achieve its goals of assisting rural landowners who wish to remain on their working lands and of protecting internationally-recognized natural resources.

—Pat O'Herren
Director, Missoula County Rural Initiatives

TNC, and TNC and Vital Ground have been partners in managing the property for the past sixteen years. This partnership culminated in the sale of the Toy property to TNC in 2007 to be managed as an ecological extension of Pine Butte Swamp Preserve. The sale provides Vital Ground with funds that will be reinvested in new conservation projects, bringing the project full circle, yet with benefits that continue to ripple outward.

Ingersoll Ranch Conservation Easement 2

In 2006, Vital Ground made a financial contribution to The Nature Conservancy of Montana to secure a 4,229-acre conservation easement on the Ingersoll Ranch. The ranch stretches from the prairie to the Continental Divide, and includes nearly three miles of lush 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. At higher elevations, the property supports wolverine, elk and other montane species, while the prairie grassland and riparian habitats sustain pronghorn, mule deer, and a rich diversity of birdlife.

Hagar Ranch Conservation Easement 3

Partnering again with The Nature Conservancy of Montana, in 2006 Vital Ground provided a grant to help protect the 4,354-acre Hagar Ranch owned by the Swanson and Field families. The ranch encompasses a significant block of native grassland, three and a half miles of Dupuyer Creek and associated wetlands. The broad riparian bottom and wetlands—lush with cottonwood, river birch and willows—are used extensively by grizzly and black bear, mountain lion, white-tailed deer and a host of riparian birds and other wildlife. Dupuyer Creek ranks as some of the highest-quality grizzly habitat along the Rocky Mountain Front.

SWAN VALLEY INITIATIVE

The Swan Valley in western Montana lies between two great mountain wilderness areas and core grizzly habitats: the Mission Mountains and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Grizzlies use the valley-bottom habitats of the Swan throughout the seasons, some taking up residence year round. Wetlands, streams, and a dense mix of coniferous woodlands, aspen and cottonwood provide important resources for bears and a rich array of other wildlife species. The region has traditionally based its economy on timber resources, yet as with many beautiful mountain valleys, the Swan is undergoing rapid change and growth.

In 2004, Vital Ground launched the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative to work with local partners and landowners to protect wildlife habitat while sustaining the rural nature of the valley. Vital Ground's efforts so far total 750 acres of permanently protected habitat in the Swan. One project has lead to another as neighbors learned of Vital Ground's habitat protection work in the valley, and our efforts have enjoyed local community support. To date, the Swan Valley Initiative has been funded by several national foundations, private donors, and the Missoula County Open Space Bond Fund.

Missoula Open Space Bond

In fall 2006, Vital Ground provided a grant to Montanans for Land, Water, and Wildlife to support community education efforts toward passage of an open space bond initiative during the November 2006 election cycle. Missoula County encompasses the rapidly developing Swan Valley, where Vital Ground is working to protect valley bottom habitats and corridors for grizzlies and other wildlife. Missoula County voters overwhelmingly approved the $10 million, 20-year open space bond, and funds will be evenly divided between county and city open space projects. Subsequently, Vital Ground successfully competed for Missoula Open Space grants to help complete conservation easement projects in the Swan Valley.

Photo by lanceschelvan.com

Cooney Creek Conservation Easement 4

In late January 2007, Vital Ground completed the Cooney Creek Conservation Easement on this tributary of the Swan River. Located in a remote area of the Swan Mountains near the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the easement permanently protects 320 acres of key habitat within a federally identified grizzly bear linkage zone, and approximately one-half mile of riparian woodland associated with Cooney Creek. Cooney Creek itself is important rearing habitat for westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout and other fish species. The property sustains habitat for many other species as well, including white-tailed and mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, wolverine, beaver, waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds.

McKay Creek Conservation Easement 5

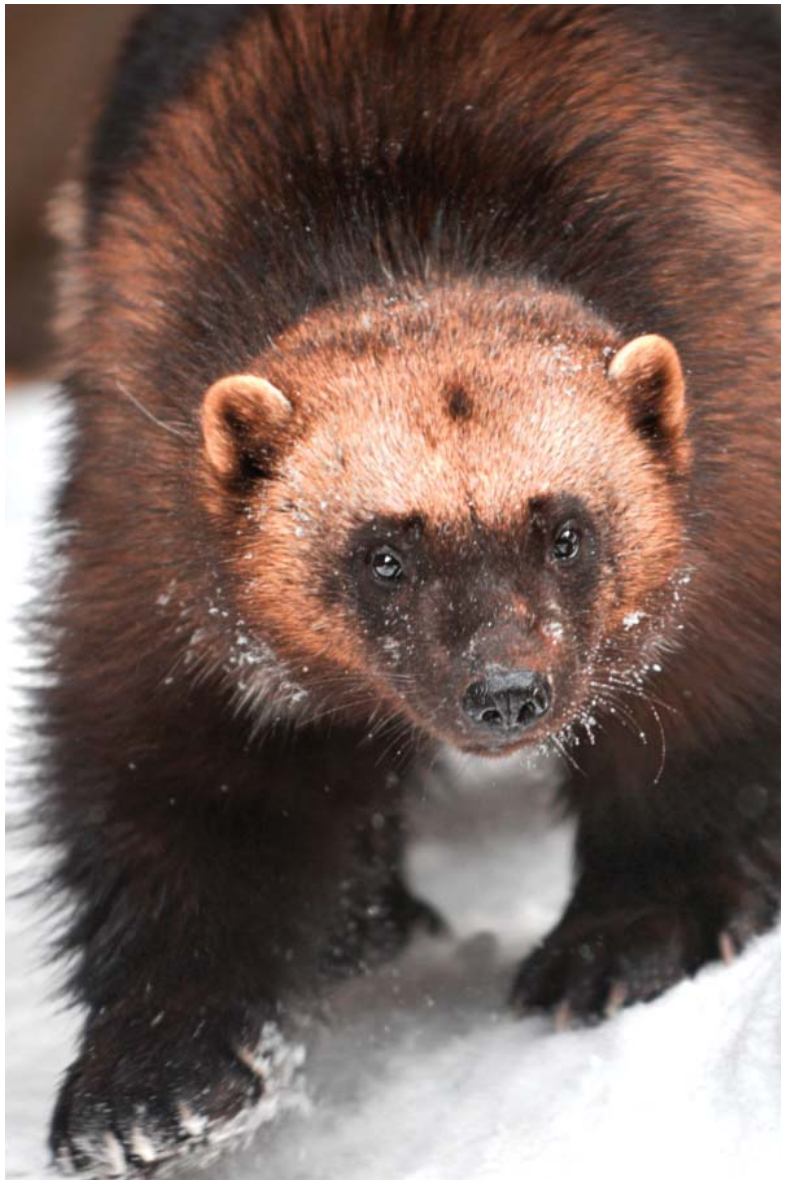
In mid-December 2007, Vital Ground completed the 110-acre McKay Creek Conservation Easement, directly adjacent to the Cooney Creek easement. McKay Creek, a tributary of the Swan River, is a major corridor for grizzly bears, elk, and other wildlife moving between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the valley bottom. Together, the McKay and Cooney Creek easements permanently protect a vital block of continuous grizzly habitat in this corridor. In addition to critical grizzly habitat, the property harbors a suite of rich wildlife resources, including a complex of wetland and riparian habitats, seasonal range for elk, deer, and moose, and montane forests that shelter wolves, lynx, fisher, pine martin and mountain lion.

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.

—David Hirschfeld
Cooney Creek landowner

Although the use of our property is as light-handed as possible, it's comforting to know that our conservation easement ensures that subsequent owners will also maintain the property in essentially its current natural condition.

—Gene Tingle
McKay Creek landowner



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Condon Creek Conservation Easement 6

In late December, Vital Ground closed on its third Swan Valley conservation easement for 2007. The 160-acre Condon Creek property lies just south of the Missoula–Lake County line and provides habitat for rare, threatened and endangered wildlife species, including grizzly, Canada lynx, and gray wolf. Native plant communities are largely undisturbed on the property and a rare and threatened plant species, water howelia (*Howellia aquatilis*), has been found there. The property also contains a healthy half-mile segment of Condon Creek.

SELKIRK ECOSYSTEM

Located in northernmost Idaho and the northeast corner of Washington, the 2,200- square-mile Selkirk Ecosystem is the smallest of the grizzly recovery zones and home to a population of only 40 to 50 grizzlies (Servheen 2006) on the U.S. side of the border. This region is a narrow peninsula of grizzly habitat that extends down from Canada, yet recent research indicates that the Selkirk bears in the U.S. are now genetically isolated from other populations. Maintaining habitat connections to bears in Canada to the north and in the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem to the east is essential to sustain and recover the Selkirk population. Thus far, Vital Ground has helped protect 1,330 acres in the ecosystem.

SELKIRK INITIATIVE

The Selkirk Initiative was launched in 2001 to address habitat protection for this vulnerable population. The heart of the Selkirk Mountains provides a safe haven for grizzlies, yet the population's survival depends on two critical steps: 1) protecting access to food-rich lowland habitats the bears need during spring and fall, and 2) conserving dwindling linkage zones to re-establish connections and genetic flow with neighboring grizzly populations.

The initiative was launched with the acquisition of two privately held parcels in 2001 and 2003, totaling 791 acres in Idaho's Kootenai Valley. Much of Vital Ground's effort in the region during 2006–2007 focused on the stewardship of our four established Selkirk properties and the continued development of landowner and community relations. Working with partners in British Columbia, we also launched our first project in Canada. In addition, in 2007 we launched a new partnership with the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y). A capacity-building grant from Y2Y allowed Vital Ground to bring on a new Land Conservation Specialist in 2008 to increase Vital Ground's capacity and effectiveness in the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak regions.

Kidd Creek Acquisition 7

In late January 2007, Vital Ground entered into our first conservation partnership in Canada. Vital Ground, the Nature Trust of British Columbia, The Nature Conservancy of Montana (TNC) and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) collaborated to protect 87 acres of critical grizzly linkage habitat near Creston, British Columbia. The property was identified by Dr. Michael Proctor of the Trans-border Grizzly Bear Project as one of the very few places in that region where grizzly bears can safely cross B.C. Highway 3.

The Purcell grizzly population uses habitat in both the U.S. and Canada, and is sustained by the movement of bears from areas just north of the highway. Crossing the highway, grizzlies can then freely travel into the U.S. portion of the Cabinet-Purcell corridor and intermix with resident grizzlies. Vital Ground, TNC Montana and Y2Y each provided equal funds to secure the option agreement and, with the help of Vital Ground, Y2Y raised the remaining funds necessary for the land purchase and an operating endowment. The Nature Trust of British Columbia will hold and manage the property.

Photo by lanceschelvan.com

Y2Y and Vital Ground have a common interest in conserving lands that preserve biodiversity and promote wildlife population connectivity in a way that will keep habitat in the hands of private landowners and permit traditional uses of the land.

—Sarah Elmeligi
Conservation Program Manager, Yellowstone to Yukon

CABINET–YAAK ECOSYSTEM

The 2,600-square-mile Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem encompasses the Cabinet and Purcell mountain ranges in northwestern Montana and northern Idaho. Only 35 to 45 bears survive in the ecosystem, and even this small population is divided. About 25 to 30 bears live in the northern part of the ecosystem, which is contiguous with grizzly habitat in Canada. Yet the 10 to 15 grizzlies remaining in the Cabinets are apparently isolated south of the Kootenai River (Servheen 2006). Increasing development, highway traffic and a major railway with more than 40 trains a day fragment the ecosystem and exacerbate the challenges facing these few bears. To date, Vital Ground has helped protect lands totaling 2,082 acres in the region.

If people can accept the relatively small risks that accompany co-existence with grizzlies, they'll find that bears, for the most part, tolerate us as well. We can afford to be as gracious in sharing this land.

—Colleen Matt
Wildlife Manager

Clifty View Foothills Forest Legacy Project 8

In September 2007, Vital Ground closed its largest conservation easement project to date, both in terms of dollars and acreage. The Clifty View Foothills Project encompasses 1,647 acres of key wildlife habitat and agricultural land in northern Idaho. The Lon and Donna Merrifield family, Clifty View Nursery, U.S. Forest Service, and Idaho Department of Lands teamed up with Vital Ground to make the project a success. Acquired through the Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, the conservation easement will permanently protect these lands for forestry, tree farming, and wildlife habitat. The project was Idaho's top choice for Forest Legacy protection in 2005 and, in stiff national competition with other proposals, Clifty View ranked 7th of 31 projects awarded federal funding. Vital Ground negotiated the easement with the landowner and the state, while federal and state agencies, The Nature Conservancy, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative and other nonprofit partners contributed critical support. The easement will be held by the Idaho Department of Lands, and Vital Ground will monitor the easement in perpetuity.

GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM (GYE)

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks form the heart of this vast ecosystem that stretches across nearly 20 million acres, and includes parts of four national forests, as well as wildlife refuges and private lands. From a low point in the 1970s, the Yellowstone grizzly population has gradually recovered, expanding both numbers and range, and now totals at least 600 bears (Servheen 2006). This is the only grizzly population in the lower 48 states that has met all the criteria set for recovery and has now been delisted from threatened status under the Endangered Species Act. Nevertheless, as bears seek new habitat beyond core protected areas and encounter escalating human development and activities in areas throughout the ecosystem, Vital Ground will continue our efforts to provide GYE grizzlies room to roam.

Grazing Allotment Retirements

Vital Ground has made several grants to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) to help retire grazing leases in high-conflict areas on public lands in the GYE, where bear and wolf depredations on livestock often result in the loss of native predators. These leases are valuable to ranchers, yet are often in high-value wildlife habitats that not only support populations of grizzlies and wolves, but also sustain elk, moose, big horn sheep, bison and pronghorn. Where conflicts between predators and livestock are prolonged, both ranchers and wildlife managers are eager to find solutions. NWF brokers agreements that fairly compensate ranchers for their grazing permits, allows them to secure new leases in areas without grizzlies or wolves, and allows the U.S. Forest Service to retire the original allotment from grazing. At an average cost of $2 to $4 per acre, this is an especially cost-effective means of enhancing habitat for wildlife. Since 2003, Vital Ground has contributed to six successful allotment buyouts in the GYE, totaling 427,926 acres.

Bacon Creek/Fish Creek Grazing Allotment Retirement 9

In May 2007, Vital Ground provided a grant to the National Wildlife Federation for the retirement of a 178,000-acre grazing allotment in Wyoming. The Bacon Creek/Fish Creek allotment on the Bridger-Teton National Forest spans the upper Gros Ventre River watershed east of Grand Teton National Park—a stronghold for grizzlies and three wolf packs, as well as exceptional winter range for elk and moose. Since 1999, predator conflicts with cattle grazing on this allotment engendered more than $1.1 million in claims for predation damage submitted to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. With funding from Vital Ground and numerous other partners, NWF brokered an agreement to compensate the permittee for the lease and permanently retire the allotment. Not only will the lease retirement remove livestock from the area and eliminate conflicts with predators, but it will reduce grazing pressure on critical winter range for elk and other ungulates.

References

Miller, Sterling D. and John Schoen. 1999. Status and management of the brown bear in Alaska. Pages 40-46 in C. Servheen, S. Herrero, and B. Peyton, eds. Bears, Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan. IUCN Species Survival Commission Bear Specialist Group, World Conservation Union, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge UK.

Servheen, C. Personal communication, August 2006. Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Missoula, Montana.

Photo by demanczuk.com

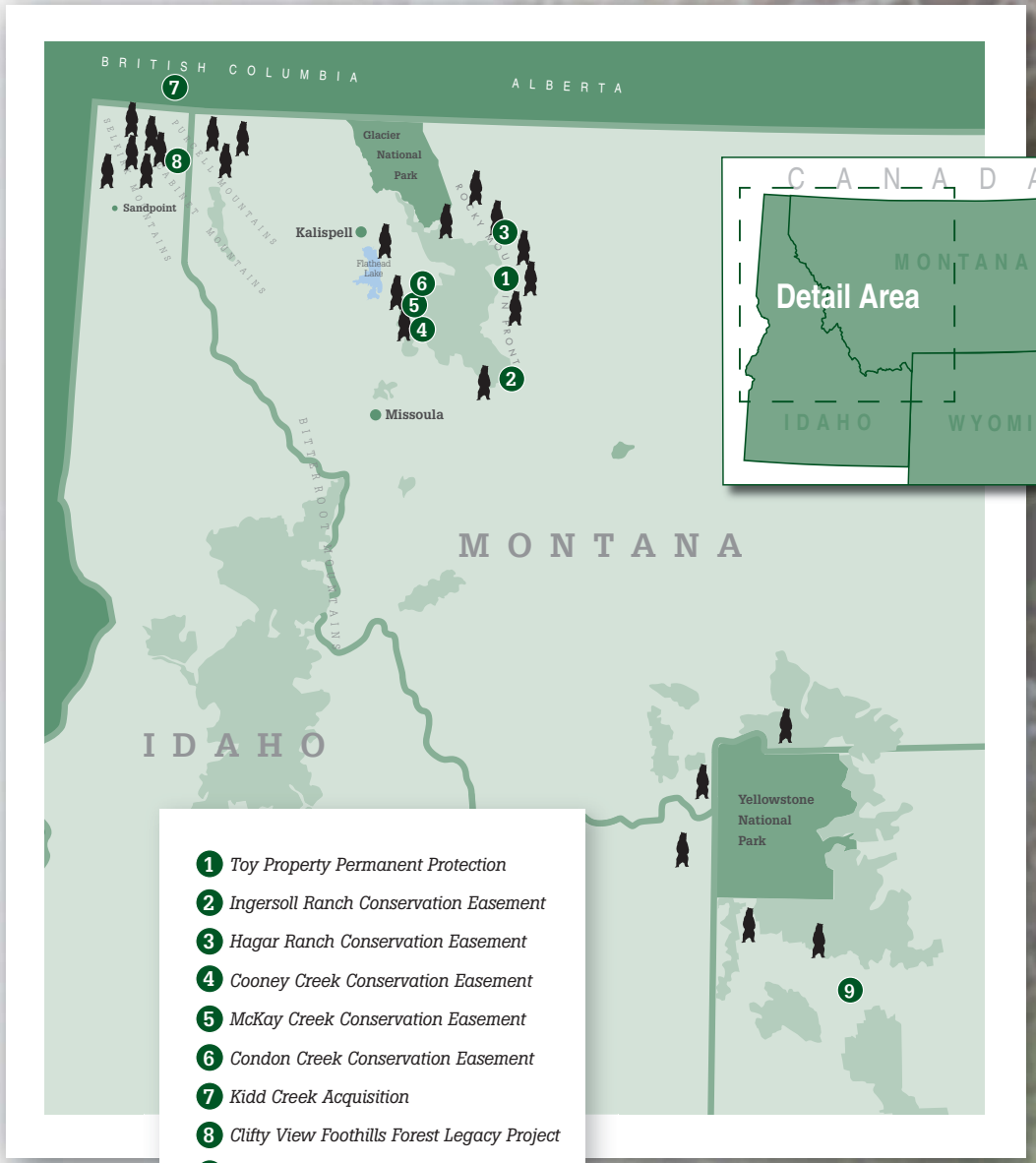
Bear Tracks

VITAL GROUND PROJECT LOCATIONS

Previous Projects

2006–2007 Projects

Wilderness Areas



1. *Toy Property Permanent Protection*
2. *Ingersoll Ranch Conservation Easement*
3. *Hagar Ranch Conservation Easement*
4. *Cooney Creek Conservation Easement*
5. *McKay Creek Conservation Easement*
6. *Condon Creek Conservation Easement*
7. *Kidd Creek Acquisition*
8. *Clifty View Foothills Forest Legacy Project*
9. *Bacon Creek/Fish Creek Grazing Allotment Retirement*

Photo montage images by demanczuk.com, lanceschelvan.com, jamiescarrow.com

Vital Ground was a perfect match to help us bring this project to completion. Their team of professionals were able to carry out all aspects of the many-faceted requirements of the project. We sincerely thank Vital Ground for enabling our family to see this project finalized in a form that will protect the family farm, the working forest and great wildlife habitat.

—Lon Merrifield
Clifty View landowner

Photo by Vital Ground

Habitat Conservation Hand in Hand with Agriculture

In 2007, the Lon and Donna Merrifield family closed a conservation easement with Vital Ground to protect 1,647 acres of key wildlife habitat on Clifty View Nursery in northern Idaho. This project is not only Vital Ground's largest conservation easement to date, it successfully combines wildlife habitat protection with preserving a third-generation tree farm and nursery, and the Merrifield's way of life.

The Merrifields, Vital Ground, the U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Department of Lands and several nonprofit cooperators teamed up to make the Clifty View Foothills Project a success. The conservation easement, acquired through the Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, will ensure that Clifty View Nursery will be conserved for forestry, tree farming, and wildlife habitat despite increasing development pressure in the region.

Situated at the northwest end of the Cabinet Mountains and partly within the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, the Clifty View property spans the transitional zone from the Kootenai River floodplain to the steep northwest slopes of the Cabinet Mountains, rising from 1,900 to 4,600 feet in elevation. The lands provide a corridor and seasonal habitat for Cabinet grizzlies, and winter range for elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer and moose. Forested uplands, riparian areas, ponds, and meadows sustain a wide variety of other wildlife as well, including Canada lynx, gray wolf, mink, pine marten, fisher, coyote, bobcat, black bear, mountain lion, red fox, wolverine, raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds. The property also encompasses parts of the headwater basins of three tributaries of the Kootenai River, which support Kootenai River white sturgeon, burbot, and bull trout—three sensitive fish species faced with threat of extinction.

In an effort to bolster the perilously small Cabinet grizzly population, in 2005 and 2006 two young female grizzlies were relocated by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks into the western Cabinet Mountains—just across the Idaho/Montana border from Clifty View. During the winter of 2006–2007, one of these new resident grizzlies denned in rugged terrain approximately two miles from the property. The protection of Clifty View from development will increase the buffer of open lands and seasonal habitats for these grizzlies.

The Forest Legacy Program, a partnership program between the Forest Service and the states, is designed to protect private working forests for their many values, including timber resources, soil and watershed protection, wildlife habitat, recreation and their contribution to local economies. Since its first federal appropriations in 1992, the program has conserved nearly 1.5 million acres across 35 states and territories through conservation easements and land acquisitions. "The Clifty View Foothills Project is an excellent addition to Idaho's Forest Legacy Program," says George Bacon, Director of the Idaho Department of Lands. "All the citizens of Idaho will benefit from this protection of wildlife habitat, the preservation of open space, and by the continued economic contributions of the nursery and managed timberlands."

Profiles in Planned Giving

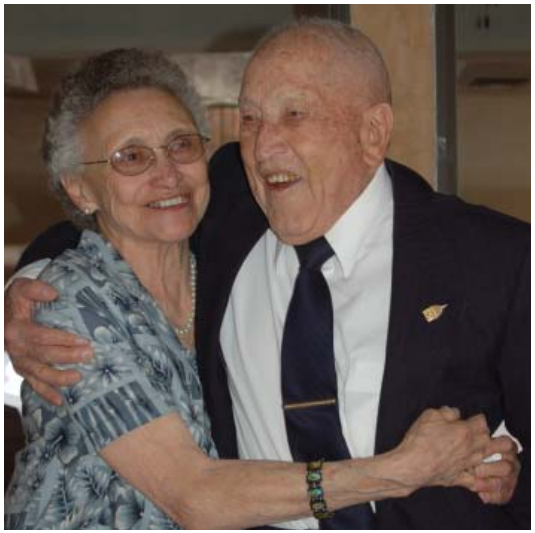


Photo by Rita Wolfe

Nazario and Sabina C' de Baca

In the summer of 2007, Nazario and Sabina C'de Baca of Bernalillo, New Mexico, established a generous charitable gift annuity (CGA) with Vital Ground, our first CGA contribution. While the C' de Bacas will receive a lifetime stream of income from their charitable gift annuity, the residuum will be placed in Vital Ground's Permanent Endowment Fund to support our conservation activities.

Nazario and Sabina's gift reflects a lifetime of service and devotion. Nazario earned agronomy and rural sociology degrees from New Mexico State University and Michigan State University. Sabina studied nursing at St. Vincent's Hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and became a Registered Nurse. They became sweethearts when Nazario's sister, Mary, also a nursing student, introduced them. Yet World War II intervened and sent them both into service and down separate roads. Nazario served under General George Patton in the 11th Armored Division, and Sabina joined the Civil Service nurses corps and was assigned to the Marine Hospital in Galveston, Texas.

For nearly 50 years, Nazario and Sabina followed independent paths, pursuing their careers, marrying and raising families. Sabina devoted her life to her nursing career and to her children. Nazario traveled the world with the U.S. Department of Agriculture as an extension specialist, establishing extension services and youth programs throughout Latin America, as well as in Jamaica and Sudan. After finishing his career in Washington, D.C., he and his wife retired to their farm in Bernalillo, New Mexico.

After both Nazario and Sabina were widowed, they reestablished contact and, old feelings sparking anew, married in 1994. Today they remain active and involved with their families, church and community. "Every day you should do something that is good, that contributes to your life," advises Nazario. "You shouldn't let a day go by when you don't do something constructive, at least one thing."

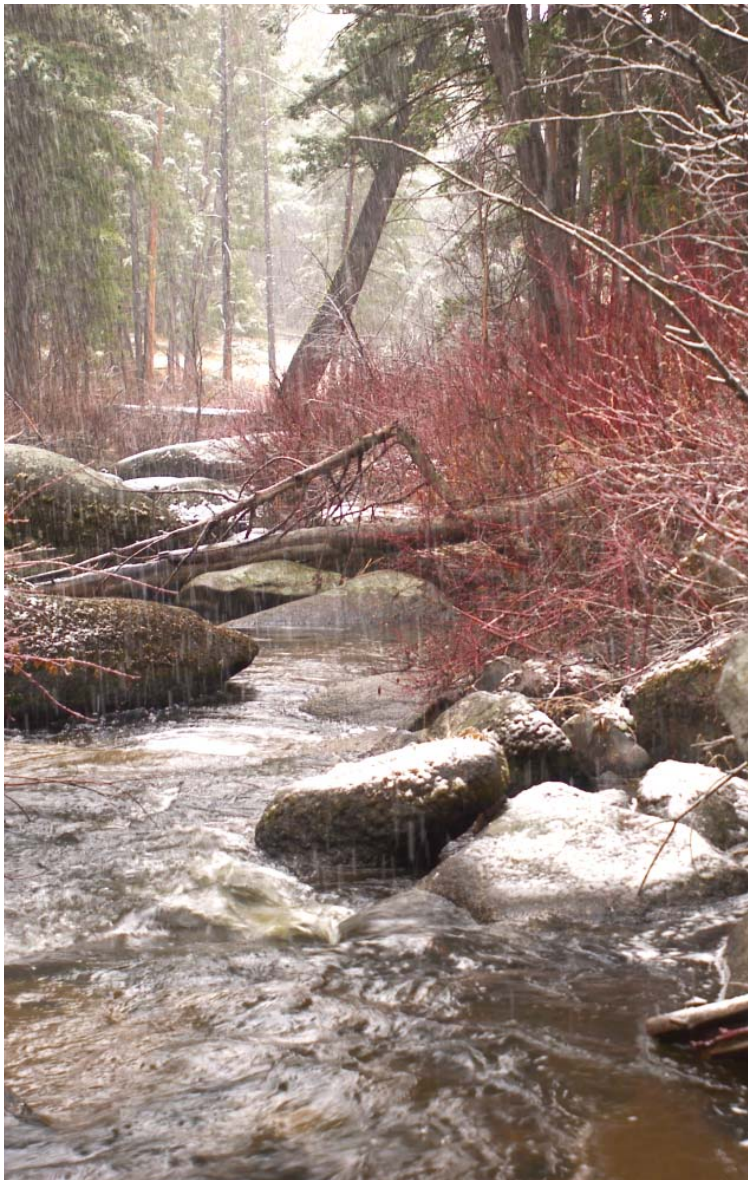


Photo by lanceschelvan.com

Profiles in Planned Giving

Photo courtesy of Dan Wilkins

John C. Herklotz

Early in 2006, philanthropist John C. Herklotz utilized a Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust to make a surprise $150,000 Challenge Grant Pledge to Vital Ground. As a challenge grant, Vital Ground was required to raise at least an equal amount of matching funds by year's end, and our generous members and donors came through. By the deadline, 400 individuals, businesses and foundations contributed a total of $195,821—putting us over the top by nearly $46,000, and making this the largest and most successful fundraising campaign in Vital Ground's history.

John has established a respected legacy by helping numerous worthy causes. John's interests are broad and, in addition to his support of wildlife conservation, he contributes to medical research, children's medical charities, the arts, education and scholarship programs. The Vatican conferred the Papal Knight of St. Gregory on John for his significant service and assistance to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

When we contacted John to let him know that Vital Ground had met and surpassed his challenge, he was pleased but not surprised. "Vital Ground members and supporters are definitely dedicated folks. They believe deeply in protecting the grizzly and in habitat conservation, and their commitment to both is expressed in their generosity. My hat goes off to them for all they have helped Vital Ground achieve. I'm just glad to have been involved, and hope this will inspire other Vital Ground members to utilize planned giving as a way to support the organization."

The funds generated through the Herklotz Matching Gift Challenge allowed Vital Ground to achieve several important goals, including organizational capacity building, enhancing outreach and communications efforts, establishing a full-time development position, securing new relationships with landowners in grizzly habitat, and supporting our habitat conservation work.

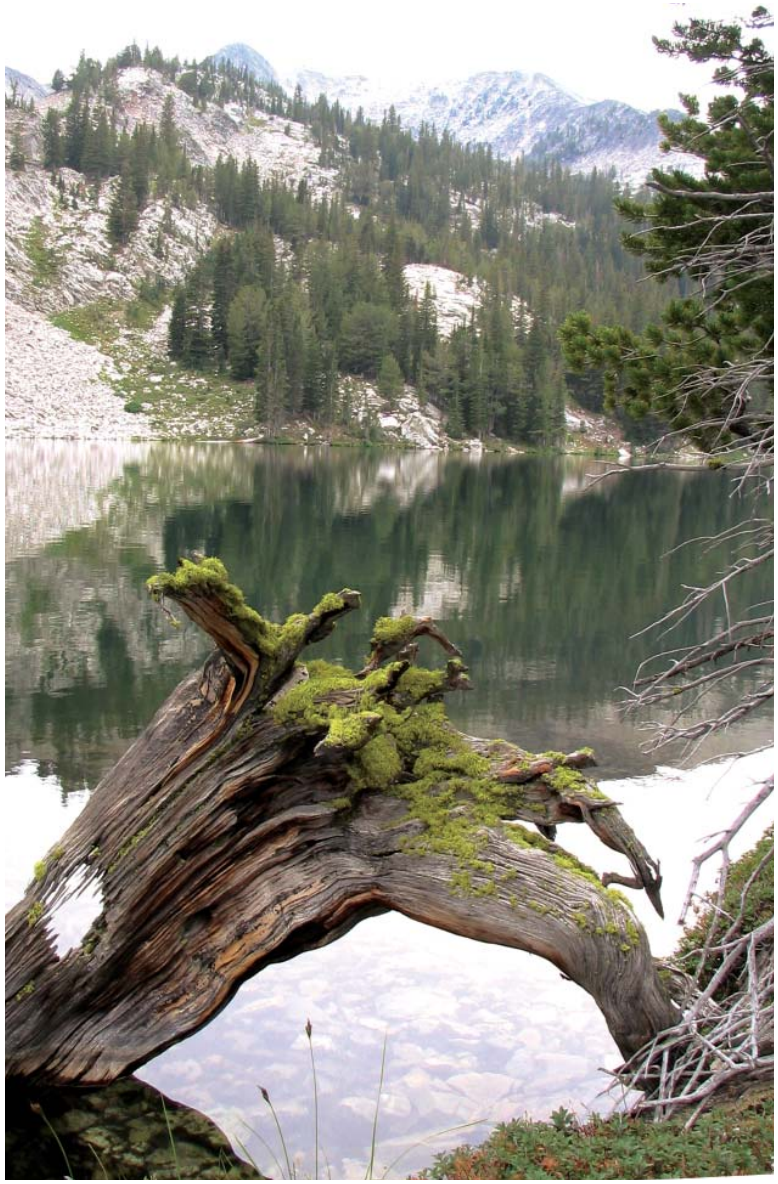


Photo by Christine Paige

The Silvertip Legacy Circle

In September 2007, Vital Ground officially launched the Silvertip Legacy Circle to recognize those donors who make a lasting commitment to Vital Ground by pledging their support through wills, trusts, charitable gift annuities, or other planned gifts. By doing so, Circle members ensure future income to Vital Ground for projects that will enhance the survival of North America's grizzly populations and biodiversity for generations to come.

Our Silvertip Legacy Circle charter members are:

- Lynn Anderson
- Stormy Barton Apgar
- Dan and Loraine Barnes
- Nazario and Sabina C'de Baca
- Colleen Coghlan
- Charlotte Heldstab
- John C. Herklotz
- Robert and Jan Koons
- Melia Lewis
- Mimi McMillen
- M. Banu Qureshi
- Doug and Lynne Seus
- Amy and Israel Shapira
- Stuart and Melissa Strahl
- Robert and Rosanne Stocker
- Gary and Rita Wolfe

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The Vital Ground Foundation gratefully acknowledges the many donors and partners who supported our work to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations by conserving wildlife habitat. Unfortunately, limited space prevents us from providing a complete listing of all donors. Listed donors contributed at least $100 during the 2006–2007 biennium. We regret any inadvertent omissions or errors, and ask that you bring these to our attention by calling 406-549-8650.

Land and Easement Donors

The following individuals generously donated land, easements, or easement value to Vital Ground.

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$100,000 - and above

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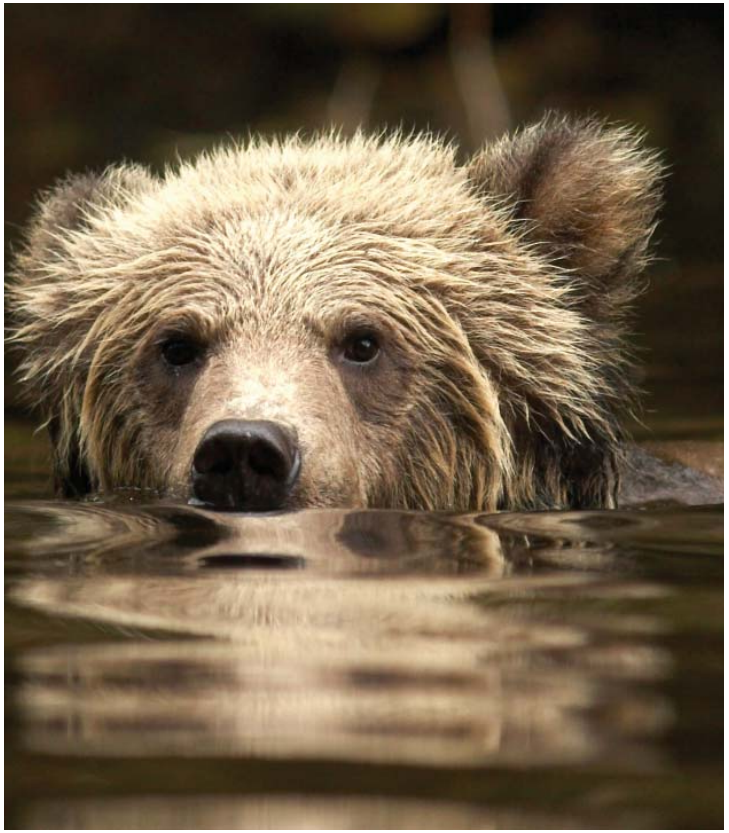

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$100 - $499 (continued)

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Charles A. Zelonis, Jr.
Marjorie and Manny Ziegler
Ronald and Andrea Zysk

Bart Legacy Society

The following individuals made a five year pledge to Vital Ground of at least $1000 per annum.

Kelly Balliet, MD
Molly Bundy-Toral
Bill and Nancy Coughlin
Tom and Lynn Fey
Dennis and Sherrie Gardner
James R. Holbrook
Shannon Hopson
Lori Kirk
Robert and Jan Koons
Banu Qureshi and Mike Jansa
Doug and Lynne Seus
Stuart and Melissa Strahl
Debi Strong
John and Lori Swallow
David and Mary Dale Wesley
Kelly and Bernard Wilson
Gary and Rita Wolfe

Corporate Matching Gifts

The following companies supported Vital Ground by matching their employees' contributions.

American Express
Amgen
BP Foundation
Centennial Ventures
Dun and Bradstreet Corporation
GE Foundation
Microsoft Corporation
Schwab Fund for Charitable Giving
United Airlines Matching Gift Program
WellPoint Associate Giving Campaign

Business Partners

The following businesses and individuals donated products, services, rights for use, artwork, photography, or sale proceeds to Vital Ground.

All American Dog E-School
Americana Studies Collectors
Showroom and Design
Arden Entertainment
Jennifer Aniston
Baer Bronze
Carol Bailey
B.C. Images
Big Prints Plus
Big Sky Brewing
Brookfield Zoo
Dave Campbell
Douglas H. Chadwick
Coleman Studios
Philip DeManczuk Photography
Monte Dolack
Emerson Valuation
Galusha, Higgins & Galusha, PC
William Gamradt
GB Skincare, LLC
Bill Geer
Ghost Wolf Publishing
GoodSearch
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Grizzly Cove Greetings
Dan Grotewohl
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Rocky Hawkins
House of FINE ART
Sir Anthony Hopkins
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Chuck Jonkel
Knight Inlet Lodge
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Montana Coffee Traders
Mountain Light
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Jack Noll
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Brad Pitt
Rattlesnake Gardens
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Curtis Richter
Rock 36 Photography
Lance Schelvan Photography
Doug and Lynne Seus
Amy Shapira
Tom Smart
Scott "Smitty" Smith
John Swallow Photography
Ten Spoon Vineyard+Winery
Texas Coffee Traders
Treasure Mountain Inn
Wasatch Rocky Mountain Wildlife
Watermark Advertising Corporation
Ed Wolff
Xmission Internet
Zöoprax Productions

Conservation Partners

The following organizations and agencies collaborated with Vital Ground on wildlife and habitat conservation projects.

Clifty View Nursery
Idaho Department of Lands
Missoula County Rural Initiatives
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
National Wildlife Federation
Nature Conservancy of Montana, The
Nature Trust of British Columbia, The
Swan Ecosystem Center
USDA Forest Service-
Forest Legacy Program
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife Land Trust
Yellowstone to Yukon
Conservation Initiative

Financial Overview 2006–2007

The Vital Ground Foundation's public support and revenues totaled $2,893,105 during the 2006–2007 biennium. Of that amount, $1,141,800 was attributed to the value of the donated portions of three bargain-purchase conservation easements.

During this period, $2,276,218 (86.5% of all expenditures) was spent on Vital Ground's conservation mission, plus an additional multi-million dollar conservation easement was facilitated and secured for the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. The value of the Forest Legacy easement was not recorded on Vital Ground's financial statements.

Vital Ground's 86.5% program expense ratio exceeds the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability, which suggests that charitable organizations should spend at least 65% of total expenses on program activities.

The organization's Total Net Assets on December 31, 2007 were $1,018,278 representing a 34.4% increase from December 31, 2005.

Vital Ground depends upon private contributions to finance our wildlife habitat conservation work. As a charitable nonprofit organization, our success depends upon the generous support of our many individual donors, foundations, and business partners. Donations to Vital Ground qualify as charitable contributions and may be tax-deductible. There are many ways to support our mission. A few of these are:

Individuals
- Cash Contributions
- Gifts of Securities or Real Estate
- Donated Conservation Easements
- Bequests
- Charitable Remainder Trusts
- Charitable Gift Annuities

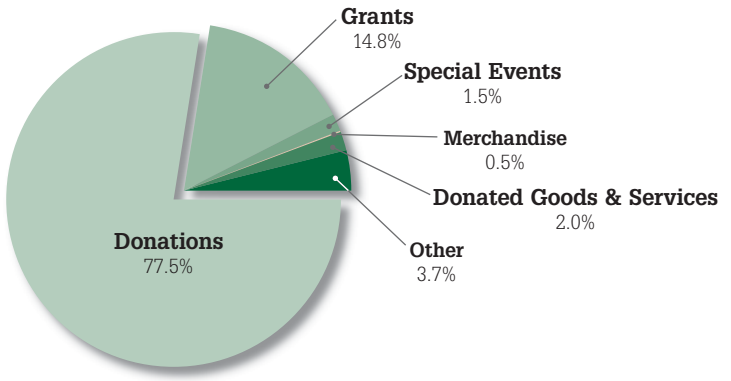
Businesses
- Business Partnerships
- Sponsorships
- Employer Matching Gifts

Foundations
- General Operations and Project Grants
- Matching Gift Support
- Endowment Funding

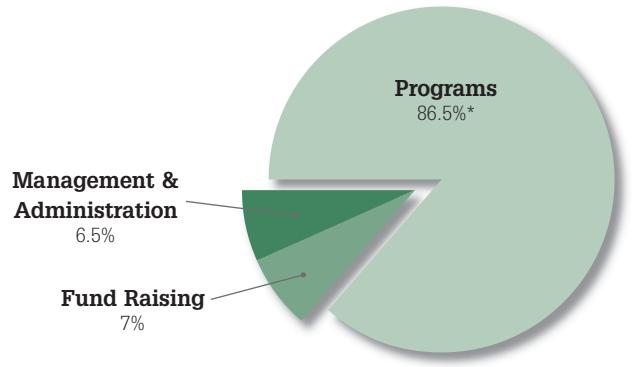
Vital Ground is audited annually. To receive a copy of Vital Ground's most recent audited financial statements or IRS Form 990, please visit our website or contact our office.

Vital Ground is a 501(c)(3) organization.
Our federal tax ID number is 87-0483446.

SOURCE OF FUNDS - $2,893,105



USE OF FUNDS - $2,631,988



**The Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability suggest that a charity should spend at least 65% of its total expenses on program activities.*

Statement of Financial Position

December 31, 2007

Photo by jamiescarrow.com

ASSETS	
Cash	457,683
Investments	37,894
Inventories	21,083
Receivables	291,825
Prepaid Expenses	8,389
Property, Plant and Equipment	20,138
Conservation Land	554,931
TOTAL ASSETS	**$1,391,943**
LIABILITIES	
Current	131,854
Long-term Debt	241,811
TOTAL LIABILITIES	**$ 373,665**
NET ASSETS	
Unrestricted	562,191
Temporarily Restricted	280,768
Permanently Restricted	175,319
TOTAL NET ASSETS	**$1,018,278**

Vital Ground Online

In late September, 2007, Vital Ground launched a new website to better reach our supporters and wildlife enthusiasts worldwide. Our website offers detailed information on the organization, current project updates, and interactive project maps. There are educational pages on the natural history and conservation of grizzlies and other bear species, and links to our video library. Visitors to the site can access current announcements, regularly updated grizzly news, Vital Ground newsletters and other publications. Visitors can also shop our online store—Bear Mart—for nature-related merchandise and artwork, or learn about the many avenues for individuals and businesses to contribute to Vital Ground. Please visit us at *www.vitalground.org*.

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Biennial Report
Author and Editor, Christine Paige, Ravenworks Ecology
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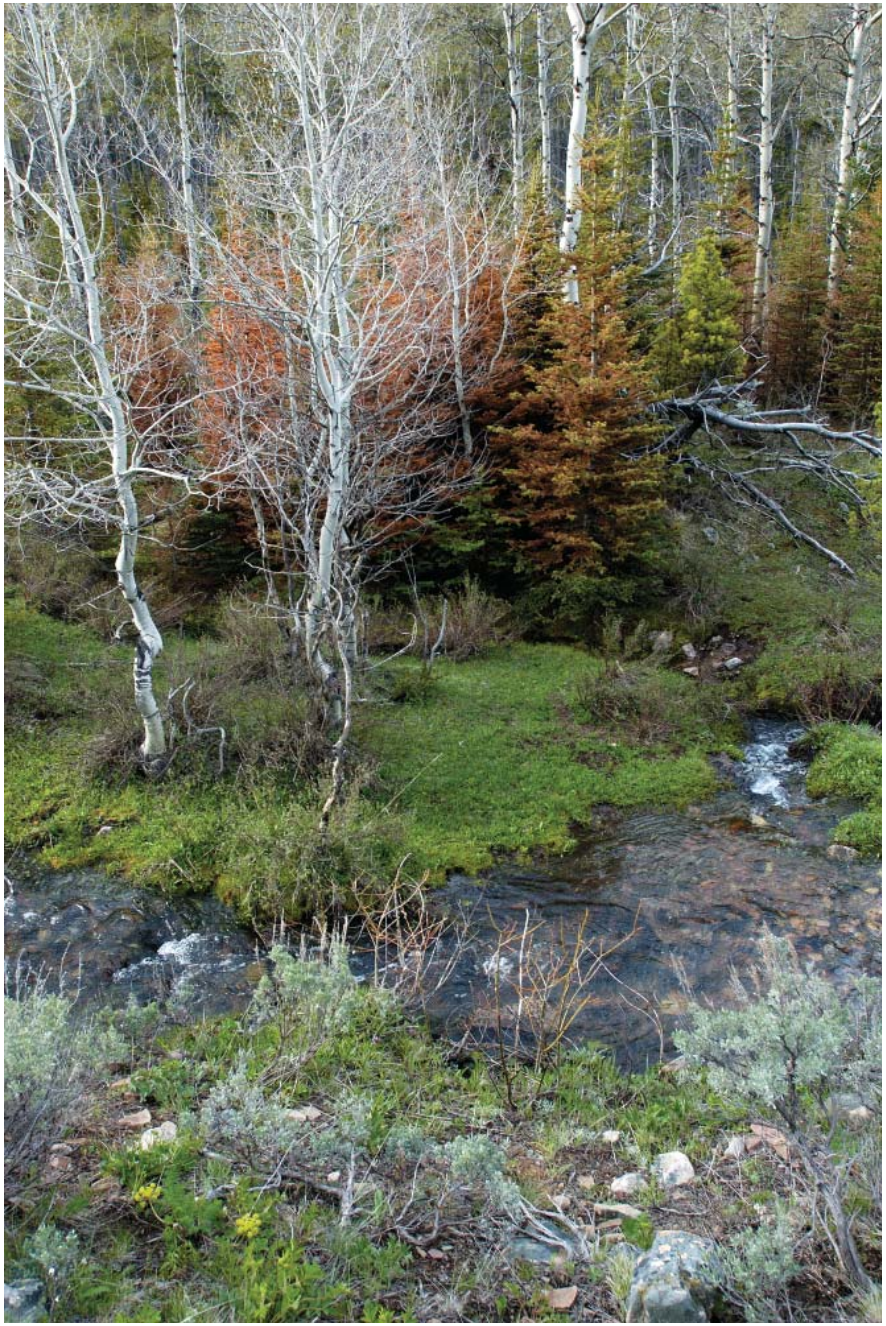

Photo by lanceschelvan.com

The Vital Ground Foundation's mission is to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations by conserving wildlife habitat. In support of this mission, we:

- *Protect lands that grizzlies need to survive, not only for bears but for all other species that share their world;*
- *Work where human impacts encroach on some of the wildest places left on the continent;*
- *Target projects that sustain habitat connections, conserve critical lands, and reduce conflicts between bears and people;*
- *Ground our projects on current science and strong partnerships.*

Please join us! As a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit, our success depends on you!

VITAL GROUND

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Missoula, MT 59804
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Email: info@vitalground.org
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Fax: (406) 549-8787

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CONNECTING WILDLIFE,
CONNECTING PEOPLE™

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