# The Vital Ground Foundation

***Biennial Report***
***Compiled***
***December 2014***

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

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Bart the Bear™

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*Cover photo by Larry Aumiller*

# Welcome!

The majestic grizzly bear is Vital Ground's icon and compass – its range and habits help us identify some of the most ecologically important wildlife habitat in grizzly country. Conserving these strategic habitats benefits not only the grizzly, but also the myriad plant and animal species that share the landscape with the "Great Bear."

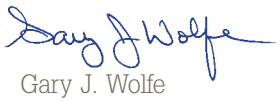
Vital Ground's mission is *to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations for future generations by conserving wildlife habitat, and by supporting programs that reduce conflicts between bears and humans.* We accomplish this primarily through the "land trust model" of conserving strategic wildlife habitat on private lands with conservation easements and fee-title purchases. But Vital Ground is more than just a land trust – it is the premier grizzly bear conservation organization in the world. So in addition to our habitat work, we support select research, management, and community outreach projects that benefit grizzly bear recovery and conservation. And we have also extended our resources to Mongolia to help save the rare Gobi Grizzly (see "Mongolia's Gobi Grizzlies," p. 15).

As we look back on Vital Ground's many accomplishments during the 2012-2013 biennium, several stand out. First, land conservation projects can take years to develop and complete, leading to a cycle of "feast or famine" in regard to the number of transactions that close during any specific year. 2013 was certainly a conservation "feast," as Vital Ground closed more transactions than during any previous year in the organization's history. This was the culmination of many years of relationship building in the vicinity of Vital Ground's first conservation easement in Montana's Swan Valley (see "Swan Valley – Elk Flats," p. 8-9). But acquiring strategic lands and conservation easements is only part of the process of conserving wildlife habitat. Those lands and easements must be carefully stewarded in perpetuity (see "Caring for the Land," p. 16-17).

The Land Trust Accreditation program requires that land trusts meet high quality standards and provides the public with an independent verification of a land trust's professionalism and capability to permanently steward its conservation lands. Vital Ground's staff spent hundreds of hours during the biennium preparing the organization for accreditation – a comprehensive, rigorous and lengthy process – and I'm pleased to report Vital Ground was awarded the prestigious "Seal of Accreditation" in March 2014. According to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, "accreditation is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It recognizes organizations for meeting national standards for excellence, upholding the public trust, and ensuring that conservation efforts are permanent."

Vital Ground's trustees and staff are committed to the conservation mission while operating a lean organization – and we are proud to share our financial report (see "Financial Overview," p. 26-27). We appreciate your continuing generous support, and pledge to put every dollar to work as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Thank you!



Gary J. Wolfe
Executive Director

# Our Vision

*Photo by Lance Schelvan*

Vital Ground is the premier grizzly bear conservation organization in the world. We work to ensure the recovery and long-term survival of grizzly bears, together with the many native species that share their range, through the protection and restoration of core habitats and landscapes.

**Our mission is to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations for future generations by conserving wildlife habitat and by supporting programs that reduce conflicts between bears and humans.** We protect crucial lands that grizzlies need to survive – not only for the bears themselves, but for birds and butterflies, 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 a grizzly's home range covers several hundred square miles – from alpine meadows to valley bottoms – protecting grizzly country benefits entire plant and animal communities in the wildest, most scenic places left on the continent.

Grizzly and other brown bears inhabit some of North America's last wild places. But roads and brisk development on private lands both inside and near natural areas fracture many once-open landscapes.

Habitat links between these wild grizzly sanctuaries – private lands that provide food, shelter and security for seasonal foraging and movement – are the focal point of grizzly survival and recovery. Today many of these lands still feature streamside willows and cottonwoods, pastures, grasslands, wet meadows, clear waters, and coniferous forests – habitat for innumerable species. Tomorrow, if not protected, they could be peppered with roads, housing developments, and sprawl that put grizzlies at greater risk.

This is where Vital Ground targets its resources and efforts. Acre by acre, we protect the jigsaw puzzle pieces of habitat that maintain lifelines between grizzly ecosystems. Links that will help sustain bears along with a robust variety of plants and animals that thrive in grizzly country.

# One Bear's Legacy

Photo by Tim Smart

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 bear and trained him for work in the movie industry. Bart quickly became a beloved member of the Seus family and developed a lifelong bond of trust and loyalty with Doug.

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," recalls 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 – land adjoining other protected areas 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 America's wild 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 24 years, Vital Ground has helped protect, enhance and restore hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat. Bart had no choice but to live his life in captivity, but he left a legacy that allows many of his wild brothers and sisters to roam free.

# Making Connections: Vital Ground for Grizzly Bears

Vital Ground protects crucial grizzly bear habitat through cooperative conservation partnerships. We focus on strategically located lands where conservation values transcend property boundaries, and our organization collaborates with landowners, state and federal agencies and other nonprofits to leverage funds and build cooperative conservation projects.

On private properties, we partner with willing landowners to protect vital habitat through conservation easements and fee-title acquisitions, either by purchase or donation. Traditional land uses such as foresty and other agricultural practices are not generally prohibited under conservation easements, but simply done thoughtfully and sustainably under a conservation-minded management plan arranged with the landowner.

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 wildlife populations, or increase the land's carrying capacity for grizzly bears.

We work wherever there is an opportunity to protect habitat for grizzlies, but focus attention on private lands that serve as connections between grizzly ecosystems, special foraging areas or seasonal bear habitat – lifelines that grizzlies and other plant and animal species depend on. Much of our attention is devoted to projects in the Lower 48 states of Montana, Idaho, Washington and Wyoming – yet we have also made important contributions to habitat and grizzly bear conservation projects in Alaska, British Columbia and Mongolia.

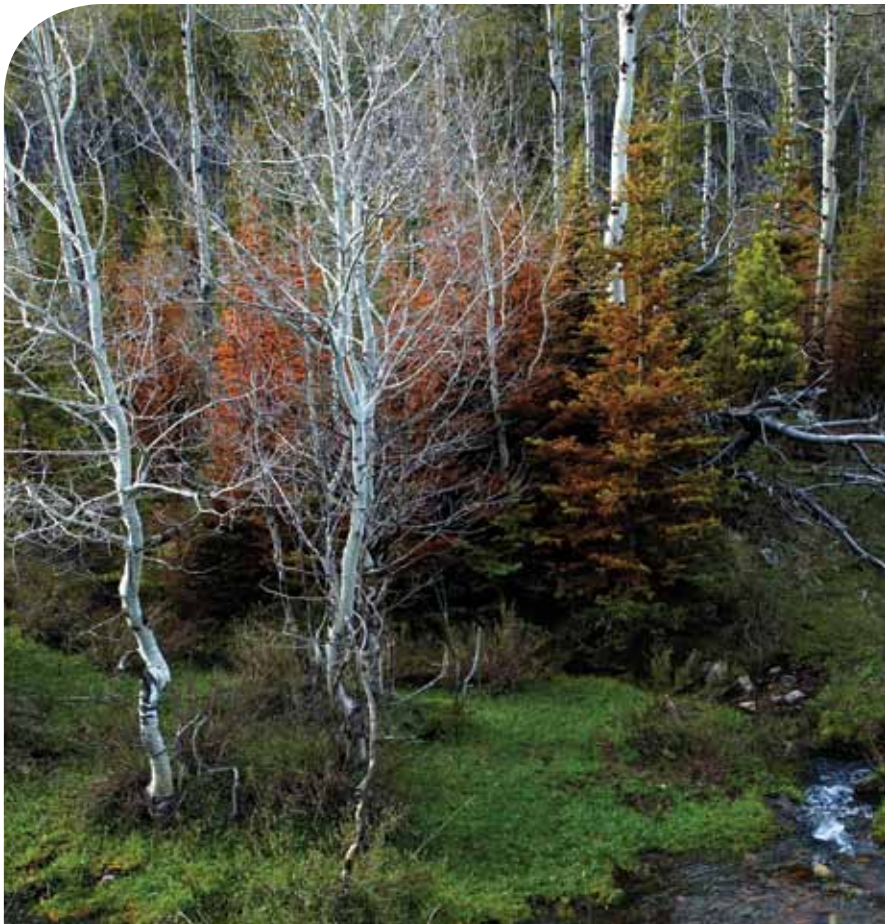
Vital Ground collaborates with scientists to identify strategically located private lands – the right places – that, if permanently protected, will help sustain and help reconnect threatened grizzly bear populations.

Vital Ground is an accredited* land trust and conducts all of its activities in accordance with the Land Trust Alliance's *Standards and Practices*, the guiding principles of the land trust community. 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 fundraising challenges for habitat conservation. As the pressures of rural development, resource extraction, and climate change continue to threaten wild places, Vital Ground remains committed to securing natural areas for bears and other wildlife. 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.

**Accreditation awarded in March 2014*

*Photo by Lance Schelvan*



# Where Grizzlies Walk

*Photo by Jamie Scarrow*

Before European settlement, about 100,000 grizzly bears ranged from Mexico to Alaska across North America's vast prairies, wetlands, forests and mountainsides, with about 50,000 bears occupying what are now the "Lower 48" states. Also known as the brown bear (Ursus arctos), the grizzly is considered a keystone species that influences the diversity of other animals in ecosystems it inhabits. As a top carnivore, the grizzly affects the number and distribution of prey species and other carnivores. Foraging on berries and herbs, bears disperse seeds and therefore 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 1,850 grizzlies remain in the Lower 48 states, refugees of a long history of persecution and the sweep of settlement and development that consumed 98 percent of the bear's historic range in the contiguous states. In 1975, the number of grizzly bears in the Lower 48 states was estimated to be only 675, and the grizzly was listed under the Endangered Species Act as "threatened" in the U.S. south of Canada. Bears that remain survive in six distinct recovery zones, 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
- Bitterroot Ecosystem
- North Cascades Ecosystem

The Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone grizzly populations are currently the most robust of all in the Lower 48, having grown steadily through the benefit of years of cooperative agency management and investment in recovery.

The majority of the bears in the Lower 48 states live in these two areas. Vital Ground has worked hard the past 23 years in fulfillment of its mission "to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations…." But more importantly, grizzlies in these two ecosystems have slowly expanded their ranges out of protected areas and increasingly into landscapes during Vital Ground's history. Population recovery has been so successful

in Greater Yellowstone and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem that these two zones are candidates to be "delisted" from protections offered under the Endangered Species Act.

It is important to recognize that as the discussion of delisting moves forward, it will be evaluated on a "recovery area by recovery area" basis. For example, even if bears in these two zones are proposed for delisting, grizzlies in the Cabinet-Yaak, Selkirks, Bitterroots and North Cascades will still have the protection of the Endangered Species Act. And it is notable that an environmental impact statement to evaluate the possible augmentation of grizzlies to the North Cascades is being launched at the same time delisting discussions are ongoing in other parts of grizzly bears' range.

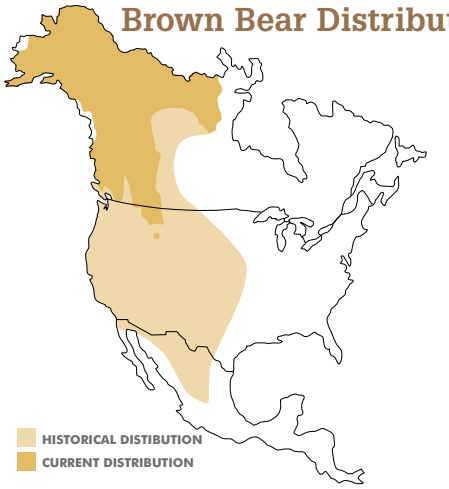
We also note the number of grizzly bears on the U.S. side of the Selkirk and Cabinet -Yaak ecosystems are at dangerous lows and number less than 50 each. Without protections for years to come, these populations are threatened to decline further due to isolation, fractured habitat and human activities.

And in Washington's North Cascades, grizzlies may be absent except for an occasional wanderer from Canada, and grizzly bears have not yet been reestablished in the Bitterroot Ecosystem.

Lands along streams, valley bottoms, and in lower elevations in the Cabinet-Yaak, Selkirks, and Bitterroot ecosystems 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 staggering rate, isolating grizzly ecosystems from one another and jeopardizing survival.

Even if some grizzly populations are delisted, they will still need vital habitat. As grizzly bears increase their numbers and expand their ranges, Vital Ground's work to protect crucial wildlife habitat on private land will be just as important as ever – and efforts to encourage and support "bear aware" communities will be even more necessary to help minimize conflicts between grizzlies and humans, and build local support and tolerance for living with bears.

## Historic and Current Brown Bear Distribution




## Grizzly Recovery Zones

# The Right Places: Highlights of Our 2012–2013 Conservation Achievements

## NORTHERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE ECOSYSTEM

### 1 *Swan Valley – Elk Flats*

In December 2013, Vital Ground teamed up with six landowners in Montana's Swan Valley to further its goals under the organization's Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative. Through a combination of five permanent conservation easements and one fee-title acquisition, the effort protected approximately 316 acres located in the headwaters of Cold Creek, an important tributary to the Swan River.

Through generous bargain sales involving significant donations of portions of each conservation easement, the landowners and Vital Ground built on the organization's very first conservation easement at Coyote Forest, which was completed in 2005 in partnership with Bud Moore. It is fitting that one of the ownerships included in the Elk Flats Neighbors Project is held by Bud's son, Bill, and his wife, Jean.

Reflecting on the momentum sparked by Bud's initial commitment to protecting the Elk Flats neighborhood, Bill said, "Pop [Bud Moore] and Vital Ground pioneered a unique and successful relationship in the protection of conservation values in the Swan. We are continuing the concept of maintaining vital wildlife habitat as well as productive private forests. We are 'Listening to the Land' and striking a sustainable balance in our part of the upper Swan Valley."

Photo by Ryan Lutey

*The Elk Flats Neighbors Project protects several permanent and ephemeral ponds and stream segments, including this 2 1/2-acre glacial pothole formerly known as Long Meadows when it was historically drained for hay production by early homesteaders.*

Joining Vital Ground and Bill and Jean Moore in the collaboration were neighbors Larry and Helen Rasmussen, Mark and Carolyn Lawrence, Linn Lawrence, Don Schmitz and Michael Stevenson.

Since Vital Ground's first conservation easement at Coyote Forest, significant conservation investments in the immediate area have also been made by organizations and agencies including The Nature Conservancy of Montana, Swan Ecosystem Center, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, U.S. Forest Service and Bonneville Power Administration.

In total, the parcels included in the Elk

Flats Neighbors Project share common boundaries with nearly two miles of U.S. Forest Service holdings leading to much larger protected blocks of wildlife habitat. In conjunction with other public and private conservation holdings in the area, this effort will help bridge the valley floor between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the Mission Mountains Wilderness.

The properties are located approximately three miles west of Condon in Missoula County, in an area with extensive documentation and anecdotal evidence of grizzly bear use. Based on Vital Ground's previous work at this location, we know that the project will benefit myriad other wildlife species including whitetail and mule deer, elk, moose, wolves, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, wolverine, and beaver, along with sensitive fish species, and diverse waterfowl, raptor and songbird species.

In addition to generous donations of the landowners and many individual donors, the Elk Flats Neighbors Project is also supported by the Charlotte Y. Martin Foundation, Cinnabar Foundation, Cutler Foundation, Metabolic Studio, Missoula Open Space Bond Fund, Montana Coffee Traders, Oberweiler Foundation, Travelers for Open Lands and the William H. Donner Foundation.

*"Pop [Bud Moore] and Vital Ground pioneered a unique and successful relationship in the protection of conservation values in the Swan. We are continuing the concept of maintaining vital wildlife habitat as well as productive private forests. We are 'Listening to the Land' and striking a sustainable balance in our part of the Upper Swan Valley."*

*– Bill Moore*

iStock photo

*The 316 acres protected will benefit myriad wildlife species, including whitetail and mule deer, elk, moose, wolves, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, beaver and wolverine.*

## 2 *Swan Valley – Simmons Meadows*

Already a proud member of Vital Ground's Silvertip Legacy Circle, Richard "Whitey" Boughton fulfilled a long-held vision to conserve a special piece of high-value wetlands and upland forest habitat at the Swan Valley's Simmons Meadows in December 2013. Mr. Boughton worked with Vital Ground to reunite these three previously subdivided parcels by fully donating the conservation easement, which is strategically situated between larger forested blocks owned by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Located 15 miles north of Vital Ground's 2013 Elk Flats Neighbors Project, the 25-acre holding contains a mix of native vegetation, including western larch, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, Douglas fir, grand fir, birch, quaking aspen, mountain willow, and black cottonwood.

The property sees frequent use by the Valley's diverse wildlife species and its protection contributes to both water quality and quantity of the Swan River.

The landowner and nearby residents consistently report grizzly signs and sightings on their properties and in the surrounding area. Protecting these parcels from further development will allow sensitive species such as grizzlies, Canada lynx, grey wolves and wolverine to use this habitat for foraging, shelter and movement across the Swan Valley.

*Photo by Lance Schelvan*

*iStockphoto*

*The Simmons Meadows conservation easement contains about 15 acres of dense mixed-aged tree species and a lavish variety of other plant and animal species.*

## 3 *Deer Creek*

In northwest Montana's Clearwater River Valley, Deer Creek flows through the rolling foothills and boreal forest that descend the east side of the Mission Mountains. Those fortunate enough to experience the area in autumn will see western larch illuminated in gold, a stunning contrast to the spruce-fir forest that line the slender river valley between the Missions to the west and the Bob Marshall Wilderness to the east.

One of the crown jewels of the Clearwater River Valley is the Deer Creek Parcel and adjoining large blocks of land, known for their extraordinary value to fish and wildlife. Deer Creek supports one of the most important bull trout populations in the region and also produces a genetically pure strain of native westslope cutthroat trout. The area is rich in elk, moose, deer and a variety of smaller species, including snowshoe hare. Huge hunks of adjacent acreage serve as crossroads for Canada lynx moving from the Mission Mountains into the valley, and the area is a key linkage zone for grizzly bears traveling between the Missions and the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

That's why in November 2012 Vital Ground partnered with several organizations and agencies to help support the Deer Creek Conservation Project, which is located six miles northwest of Seeley Lake and along the southern boundary of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone.

Vital Ground contributed $15,000 to the Montana Dept. Fish, Wildlife and Parks to assist with acquisition of 640 contiguous acres adjacent to Lolo National Forest and Plum Creek Timber Company lands. Most importantly, this parcel adds a key section to the 24,000-acre Marshall Creek Wildlife Management Area that was acquired by Montana's Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) from Plum Creek as part of the Montana Legacy Project.

In addition to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Vital Ground proudly partnered with Five Valleys Land Trust and other groups to help protect this key wildlife habitat in northwest Montana's Clearwater River Valley. The William H. Donner Foundation provided a key grant to help us support the project.

Photos by Kevin Rhoades

**Top:** *In November 2012 Vital Ground partnered with several organizations and agencies to help support the Deer Creek Conservation Project, which adds a key section to the 24,000-acre Marshall Creek Wildlife Management Area.*

**Inset:** *Vital Ground's board of trustees and staff visited the Deer Creek Conservation parcel where Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologist Jay Kolbe discussed the importance of the area to grizzlies, Canada lynx and other wildlife.*

## CABINET YAAK ECOSYSTEM

### 4 *Yaak Mountain Restoration*

In the spring of 2013, intensive restoration work was completed on Vital Ground's Yaak Mountain property – 71 acres of productive meadows, hills and forest cover that was acquired by Vital Ground during 2011 to protect linkage habitat for large carnivores and other wildlife.

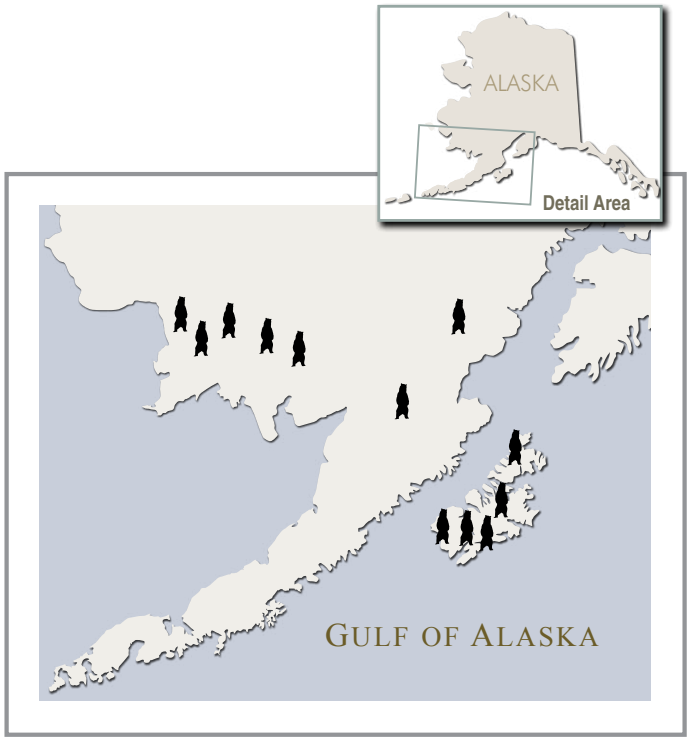
The property is situated along U.S. Highway 2 on the floor of the Kootenai Valley, just northwest of Troy, Mont. Its location at the junction of the southern terminus of the Purcell Mountains and the north end of the West Cabinet Range within the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone makes it an important bridge in the 2,600 square-mile area south of the Canada border that is estimated to host a grizzly sub-population consisting of fewer than 50 animals.

In total, Vital Ground removed seven structures from the property, including a house, large shop, barn and other deteriorating outbuildings. The majority of the material from the structures was removed and reconstructed or otherwise reused at other locations, and a significant amount of rustic barn wood from the agricultural structures was reclaimed for later resale. Removal of this development, combined with vegetation restoration and ongoing weed treatment has increased the site's utility for wildlife and will ensure the property remains connected to large blocks of unfragmented wildlife habitat on either side of the Kootenai Valley. Additionally, the property provides excellent low-elevation, seasonal habitat for deer, elk, moose and wild turkey.

Vital Ground thanks the following donors for their generous support of the Cabinet-Purcell-Selkirk Wildlife Linkage Initiative and Yaak Mountain property acquisition: Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, Wildlife Conservation Society, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, William H. Donner Foundation, Wilburforce Foundation via the Heart of the Rockies Initiative, Qureshi Family Foundation, Johnson Family Foundation, Montana Coffee Traders, Chicago Zoological Society, Brookfield Chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers, the Cinnabar Foundation, Trust for Public Land, and numerous individual contributors.

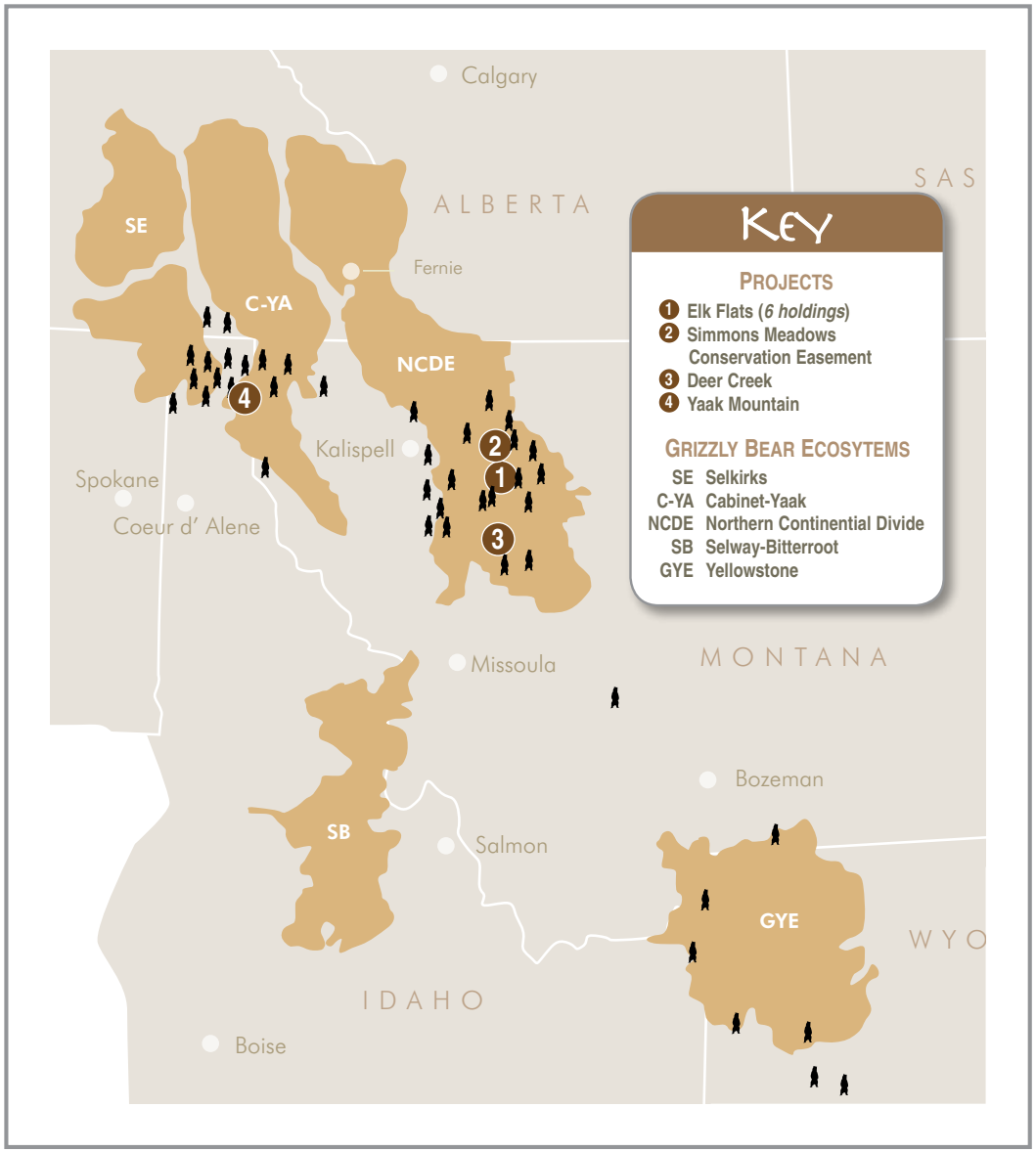
Photos by Ryan Lutey

*Restoration of the Yaak Mountain property, before and after. A deteriorated house, outbuildings and water tanks were removed. The acquisition ensures that development on this property will be restricted and will connect relatively unfragmented grizzly bear habitat.*




**VITAL GROUND PROJECT LOCATIONS**

- *Previous Projects*
- *2012–2013 Projects*
- *Grizzly Bear Recovery Ecosystems*



## 5 *Bear Science – Hair Snagging Study*

***Vital Ground Contributes $10,000 to Project***

During the summer of 2012 an intrepid crew of 70 set up and monitored bear hair-snagging stations across 2.4 million acres in the Cabinet and Purcell mountains of northwest Montana and north Idaho, centered on the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem, a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service-designated grizzly bear recovery zone.

From June through September the crew collected hair samples every two weeks from over 2,000 sampling stations. These were a combination of man-made scent-lured "corral" stations and bear-made "rub" stations. Both techniques used barbed wire to capture tufts of bear hair without injury to the animals.

Over 10,000 hair samples were submitted for genetic analysis, which established the species of bear hair (black or grizzly) and individual grizzly bear identities, including gender. The analysis specifically identified 42 distinct grizzly bears in the study area.

Additionally, because researchers repeatedly collected hair at field sampling stations and could identify each grizzly bear that left hair there, they could evaluate their success at detecting the entire population. This allowed scientists to estimate the number of bears that were missed by sampling and, through statistical analyses, arrive at a probable population number.

Researchers determined that at any given time during the summer of 2012 there were likely 44 grizzly bears roaming around the study area. And because bears could come and go from the study area, it is likely that, in total, 48 grizzly bears had been present in the study area over the course of the entire summer.

Full peer-reviewed study results including much more information on the Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear population are expected to be published in a scientific journal in 2015.

The William H. Donner Foundation provided a $25,000 grant to Vital Ground during 2012 of which $10,000 went to this project to help pay for data analysis. Vital Ground's contribution was applied to the cost of laboratory DNA analysis.

*- Kristina Boyd, who contributed to this piece, managed the Cabinet Yaak Grizzly Bear DNA Study, and is now development director of the Yaak Valley Forest Council.*

Photo by Kris Boyd

*Field technician Drew Carter pulls hair from a rub tree in the study area of Montana's Cabinet Mountains.*

## MONGOLIA'S GOBI GRIZZLIES

### 6 *Rarest Grizzlies on Earth Benefit from Vital Ground's support*

The Mongolian government designated 2013 as "The Year of Protecting the Gobi Bear," making Mongolia among two countries to recognize conservation of a bear as a national priority.

Gobi bears are critically endangered; the species has less than 45 individuals left and is confined to an area of about 15,000 square kilometers in the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area. Until 1970, these bears had 30,000 square kilometers to roam.

Saving the Gobi bear has been a priority for Mongolia since 2003, when the country's government teamed up with United Nations Development Program and the Global Environmental Facility to fund a project called "Conservation of the Great Gobi and its Umbrella Species." Research for the Gobi Bear Project started in 2005 and became vital to the success of conservation of the habitat and preservation of the species.

During 2013, the Gobi Bear Project team conducted several genetic and demographic studies and explored several methods of reclaiming the land the bears occupied prior to 1970. Iridium satellite collars were used to track bears, and remote trail cameras were used to monitor them. The team documented family groups, showing that the population is successfully reproducing.

The issue of people interfering with the habitat is still a problem. Illegal mining has increased dramatically. Miners rely on the same springs the bears rely on for water and food. Human presence in the bears' habitat could exclude bears and other wildlife from using those areas and potentially lead to deaths of animals.

In 2012, a bill was proposed to place mining operations on much of the remaining Gobi habitat. But Mongolia's will to conserve the Gobi habitat prevented the bill from passing. Harry Reynolds, who started the Gobi Bear Project, said while things are going well now, they still need help. "The mining companies have the money and resources to keep trying," he said. "As biologists, we don't have those resources."

Funding for rangers who protect Gobi habitat is extremely low, making it difficult to enforce the law. Patrols only last a few days and rangers' motorcycles are often too slow to catch violators. Reynolds said plans are underway to better equip rangers.

"The success we've had since 2012 wouldn't have been possible without the help from Vital Ground," he said.

*Photos by Gobi Bear Project, Cori Lausen & Hunter J. Causey*

*Vital Ground has contributed $35,000 to the Gobi Bear Project through the end of 2013.*

# Caring for the Land

Whenever a land trust like Vital Ground closes a project it warrants a celebration – months and years of outreach, fundraising, relationship-building, negotiation and due diligence have finally been rewarded by permanent protection for open space, wildlife habitat, a scenic vista, or a working forest, farm or ranch. It's time to file away the project closing documents, prepare a news release, host a dedication ceremony and get to work on the next project.

But closing a project is really the beginning of a long-term relationship. What happens when we visit a new acquisition the following spring and discover a new noxious weed infestation, abuse by trespassing off-road vehicles, or that a neighbor's cattle wandering through the property grazing sensitive riparian areas? What would happen if a property covered by a conservation easement transfers to a new landowner who decides not to abide by the restrictions of the conservation easement?

Land trusts face continual responsibilities to steward the projects they close. A land trust must ensure that its projects continue to provide the public benefits for which the property was protected, and that guidelines safeguarding those qualities are being honored. These stewardship responsibilities exist for numerous projects spanning daunting geographies, and staff time and financial obligations required to protect these lands year in and year out quickly multiply.

Photo by Kevin Rhoades

### *Fee Title Properties*

At times, the purchase of property provides the only opportunity to conserve critical wildlife habitat. However, property acquisition and ownership is much more expensive than conservation easements and requires perpetual responsibilities and expenses for management.

Every property owned by a land trust involves different neighbors, and each property presents unique management challenges. Financial demands range from maintenance costs to property taxes, and because these properties are unoccupied, they often require frequent monitoring. Required maintenance might include controlling public access, removing dilapidated fencing, controlling invasive plants, installing gates, and cleaning up garbage.

To help finance these activities, Vital Ground reserves a stewardship endowment for each property it acquires. The exact amount of the endowment depends on the property's size and location, taxes, and unique management needs. To help defray

stewardship costs, Vital Ground relies on partnerships. We work to maintain open relationships with property owners adjacent to our holdings, and we rely on neighbors to keep us abreast of certain issues.

### *Conservation Easements*

Each conservation easement involves a different individual or family with whom we strive to develop a solid relationship, and each easement requires monitoring to ensure the conservation agreements and its values are upheld. We must also meet the expectations of federal law. The IRS requires we document time and money spent monitoring and defending conservation easements, and federal law requires that land trusts possess resources necessary to monitor and defend conservation easements for which tax deductions are taken. To help meet these requirements, Vital Ground also reserves a stewardship endowment for each conservation easement accepted.

Vital Ground dedicates a minimum of $5,000 per project to ensure that each easement permanently benefits wildlife habitat. The exact amount depends upon the complexity of the conservation easement agreement, distance from Vital Ground's main office, and proximity to other projects. Interest generated on those funds can be used to pay for field inspections, travel, communications, and administrative expenses – costs that may be less glamorous than initially protecting the land, but add up quickly.

Photo by Kevin Rhoades

*Completing a project is a big hurdle for any land trust to clear, but ensuring our projects continue to sustain wild grizzlies and benefit future generations are priorities for Vital Ground.*

### *The Bottom Line*

Our commitment to our conservation lands is for the long haul – not just this year or next year, but for succeeding generations. Yet stewardship funding is often more difficult to raise than funding to initially complete a specific lands project. It's natural to want to secure something tangible with a donation – to help protect a particular piece of ground or a certain number of acres of habitat. Stewardship contributions are more akin to saving for a rainy day, a kind of housekeeping fund for each conservation project, but they are also an investment in the future. Completing an individual project is a big hurdle for any land trust to clear, but ensuring our projects continue to sustain wild grizzlies and benefit future generations comprise the true finish lines in the race to protect wildlife habitat.

# The Silvertip Legacy Circle

The Silvertip Legacy Circle recognizes 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.

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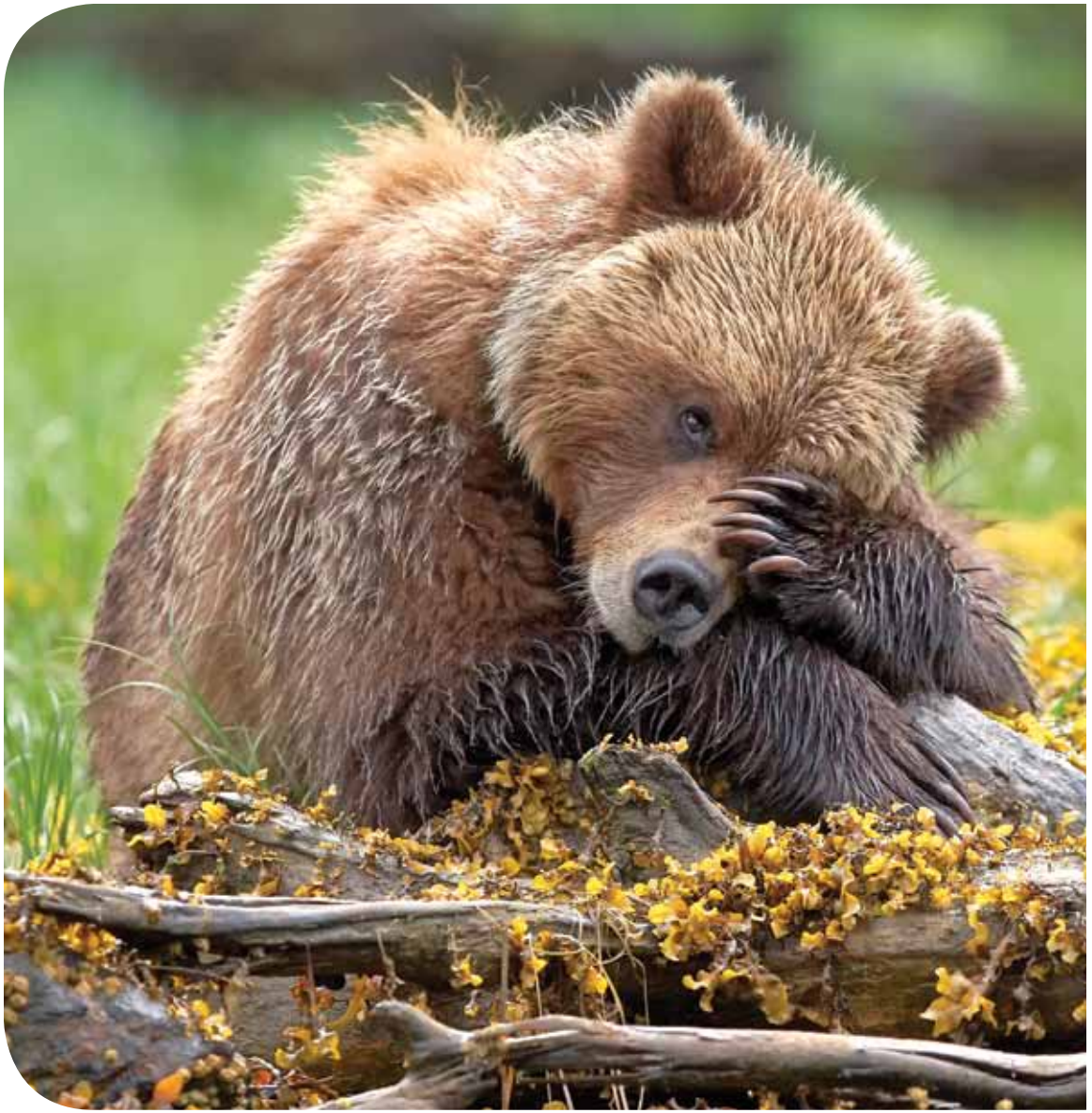

*Photo by Ray Rafiti*

# Planned Giving

*Vital Ground received some special gifts during this biennium that help continue the organization's objective to protect and restore grizzly bear populations by conserving wildlife habitat. For us, there is no greater compliment than being deemed worthy enough to be included in the legacy of special donors through their wills, trusts and other planned gifts. We are often blessed beyond words by the sizeable nature of such gifts. Giving back to the land and landscapes that have inspired all of us throughout our lives is the ultimate legacy one can leave on this earth, and we want to share a special bequest with you.*

***Bob Reinke (1947-2011)***

*Bequested $299,000 to Vital Ground*

Robert Dean Reinke had a great respect for the earth and all living things. Throughout his life, he enjoyed competitive shooting, hunting, fishing, backpacking and camping. As physical limitations slowed him down, he pursued bird watching from as close as his office window, where the crows provided daily entertainment, to as far away as Costa Rica. He once described one of his hobbies as simply watching.

When wolves were introduced to Yellowstone National Park, Bob added wolf-watching to his list. He traveled many times to Yellowstone, often accompanied by his faithful yet diminutive canine companion Ginger, who he laughingly dubbed "The Buffalo Dog" for her ability to guard the car from buffalo. After each visit, Bob eagerly shared what he had seen and talked about the new knowledge gained from what the wolf packs were teaching us. Wolves were his spiritual connection, and Bob always returned from his sojourns to Yellowstone rejuvenated and a bit younger.

Another important spot to Bob was Tizer Botanical Garden and Arboretum in Clancy, Montana. He was a beloved friend of the owners and spent many Sundays playing his flute in the gazebo, sometimes filling in as an impromptu musician for weddings.

During the annual Fairy Festival, Bob was the legendary Bridge Troll, and true to his teaching background, would let kids cross only if they answered his quiz questions correctly. He made up for the troll thing by being an enthusiastic member of the board of directors for Tizer Nature Connection, helping put their educational program in place.

At home, Bob was an avid reader, enjoying books on nature and history, not to mention a good mystery or two. He enjoyed watching cooking shows, trying out what he learned, and was also happy to simply spend the day with his dogs, Ginger and Jasmine.

Sharing his knowledge about a plethora of subjects was firmly embedded in Bob's personality, so it is not surprising his first career was in education. In 1970, Bob earned a bachelor's of science degree in secondary education with an emphasis in biology and history from Minot State University, and he taught high school science in Antler, Ray, and Mandaree, North Dakota. Bob also held jobs in law enforcement in North Dakota and Colorado.

From 1990 to 2011, Bob worked as a hazardous waste inspector and compliance specialist for the state of Montana. At the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Bob is remembered for his attention to details, his love of discussing regulatory interpretation, and his pride in doing the best job possible. His environmental compliance work earned him high respect from his peers at Montana DEQ, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Justice.

Bob was born on June 7, 1947 in Minot, N.D., and passed away in 2011 in Helena, Montana. His family and friends remember him for his sensitive soul and his unfailing desire to teach. Bob left a legacy to domestic and wild creatures as their enduring friend and champion with contributions to the local Humane Society and to The Vital Ground Foundation.

He didn't leave details why he chose to leave an inheritance to Vital Ground. But we do know their mission to conserve linkages between fragmented habitats would have resonated with Bob. The ecological and mythical connections between the wolf and the grizzly bear would also have played a part in his decision. When one thinks about it, though, the answer can probably be found on the scrap of paper which hung on his office wall. It said, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." And Bob Reinke, in his quiet determined way, was never the man to do nothing. He would be delighted to see the good work Vital Ground accomplishes with his bequest.

*– written by Bob's friends at the Montana Department of Environmental Quality*

# Donors and Partners 2012–2013

The Vital Ground Foundation gratefully acknowledges donors and partners who supported our work to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations for future generations by conserving wildlife habitat, and by supporting programs that reduce conflicts between bears and humans. Unfortunately, limited space prevents us from providing a complete listing of all donors. Listed donors contributed at least $100 during the 2012-2013 biennium. We regret any inadvertent omissions or errors, and ask you bring these to our attention by phoning 406-549-8650.

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Lewis and Kate Whetman
White Pine Veterinary Clinic
Eddy White
Lornie White
Kenneth H. Wilcox
Gary S. Williams
Robin and Leonard Williams
Steve Willrett
Cecil B. Wilson, M.D., and Betty Jane Wilson
Connie Wilson
Dana D. and Dennis Wilson
Sharon L. Wilson
Kai and Renate Winkler
Bonnie Winsor
Gary J. and Rita Wolfe
Marcia H Wolfe
Marcia and Charles Wood
Mary Ann Wood – Ebert
Kathy Woolcock
Pam Wright
Richard Yarnell
William Yates
Colleen Young
Gary and Christine Younger
YourCause LLC – Trustee for Hewlett – Packard
Takashi Yumibe
Kol Zarember
J.K. Zimmerman, MD

## *Corporate Matching Gifts*

Bank of America
Conrad Hilton Foundation
GE Foundation
Google Matching Gift Program
Hewlett Packard
Home Depot
Microsoft Giving
Timken Foundation

## *Business Partners*

Baer Bronze
Big Prints Plus
Blackfoot Communications
Brookfield AAZK Chapter
Philip DeManczuk Photography
Monte Dolack Gallery
First Interstate Bank
Galusha ,Higgins and Galusha
Giving Library
Google, Inc.
Idaho Scenic Images
Knight Inlet Lodge
Lamar Advertising
Montana Coffee Traders
Partners Creative
Polebridge Mercantile
Ray Rafiti
REI
Jamie Scarrow Photography
Lance Schelvan Photography
Robert Scriba Photography
State of Montana Motor Vehicle Division
Ten Spoon Vineyard+Winery
Texas Coffee Traders
Treasure Mountain Inn
Joe Venus Art
Wasatch Rocky Mountain Wildlife
Zooprax Productions

## *Conservation Partners*

BEARTREK/Wildlife Media
Blackfoot Challenge
Brookfield Zoo/Chicago Zoological Society
Gobi Bear Fund
Heart of the Rockies Initiative
Idaho Coalition of Land Trusts
Idaho Department of Lands
Idaho Fish and Game
Land Trust Alliance
Montana Association of Land Trusts
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Northwest Connections
Resources Legacy Fund
Swan Ecosystem Center
Trans – border Grizzly Bear Project
Trust for Public Lands
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife Land Trust
Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

We don't need to protect thousands and thousands of additional acres, but hundreds of acres in exactly the right places.

*—Doug Chadwick, Wildlife biologist, author, and Vital Ground board member.*

# Grizzly Council

The *Grizzly Council* provides special recognition for Vital Ground's major donors and offers Council members a unique opportunity to provide valuable input to the Board of Trustees and staff on fundraising strategy and grizzly bear habitat conservation.

Participation in the *Grizzly Council* is available to donors who have made $25,000 or more in philanthropic** contributions, or donated land or conservation easements valued at $100,000 or more.

***Eligible philanthropic contributions include gifts of cash, securities, the charitable portion of planned gifts, and irrevocable pledges.*

### *Grizzly Council Members*

Anonymous
Jennifer Aniston
Augustyn Foundation Trust
Jeff & Debi Augustyn
Sou & John Barrett
George & Emily Beck
Jeff & Susan Bridges
George & Brenda Brimhall
Catherine Deans – Barrett
Brookfield AAZK
Sabina & Nazario* C' de Baca
Yvon Chouinard
Chicago Zoological Society
Cinnabar Foundation
Colleen Coghlan
Douglas Cluff*
Cutler Family Foundation
Carolyn Dobbs* & Russ Fox
Michael Downs*
William H. Donner Foundation
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
Eugene & Estelle Ferkauf Foundation
Tom & Lynn Fey
Jim & Norma Fosgate
Peter & Caroline Guynn
John Herklotz
David & Tami Hirschfeld
Ken & Julie Jenkins
Jenkins Family LLC
Johnson Family Foundation
Lori B. Kirk
Gary & Kellie Landers
Ed Levert
Jack Maertzweiler*
Tom Mangelsen
Joe Matza
Metabolic Studio
Lon & Donna Merrifield
Montana Coffee Traders
Bill & Jean Moore
Bud Moore
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Oberweiler Foundation
Owens Foundation for
Wildlife Conservation
Brad Pitt
Banu Qureshi & Mike Jansa
Qureshi Family Foundation
Larry & Helen Rasmussen
Robert Reinke*
Steven Segal
Doug & Lynne Seus
Steele – Reese Foundation
Stuart & Melissa Strahl
Clayton A. Struve Family Foundation
Sally Smyth & Tom DeMarco
John Swallow & Lori Wolford-Swallow
Ten Spoon Vineyard + Winery
(Andy Sponseller and Connie Poten)
Sam Testa
Gene & Patricia Tingle
Treasure Mountain Inn
(Andy Beerman and Thea Leonard)
Sig & Anne Weiler
Wilburforce Foundation
Brian & Meggen Wilson
Wiancko Charitable Foundation
Wildlife Conservation Society
Wildlife Land Trust
Yellowstone to Yukon
Conservation Initiative

*Deceased

*Long-time members of Vital Ground's Grizzly Council, Peter (left) and Caroline Guynn (right), welcome Dr. Stuart Strahl, president/CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society (center), who received "The Protector of Vital Ground" bronze on behalf of the Chicago Zoological Society.*

*Andy Sponseller and Connie Poten of Ten Spoon Vineyard and Winery are welcomed into Grizzly Council by Vital Ground founders Doug and Lynne Seus.*

# Financial Overview 2012–2013

The Vital Ground Foundation's public support and revenues totaled $5,235,632 during the 2012–2013 biennium. Of that amount, $764,848 was attributed to the value of the donated portions of six conservation easements.

During this period, $3,715,715 (82.7% of all expenditures) was spent on Vital Ground's conservation and education programs. Additionally, Vital Ground acquired conservation land valued at $261,000. The purchase price of this land is not included in the program expenses reported above nor in the "Use of Funds" pie chart, but is recorded as an asset (conservation land) on the Statement of Financial Position.

The organization's total net assets on Dec. 31, 2013, were $3,585,793, representing a 28% increase from the end of the last biennium (Dec. 31, 2011).

The transaction cycle in land conservation can take several years to complete. Consequently, program expense ratios vary significantly from year to year depending on how many transactions are actually finalized during the fiscal year, and the value of donated real estate and conservation easements. Additionally, in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), the purchase price of land which is a significant mission delivery expense for many land trusts is not included in program expenses, but is recorded as an asset on the organization's balance sheet. Due to these unpredictable factors and accounting practices, Charity Navigator no longer evaluates land trusts[1].

Vital Ground's 82.7% 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.

*[1] According to Charity Navigator's website:*

> *Due to the nature of their operations, land trusts and preserves have the potential to realize wild fluctuations in revenue from year to year due to inconsistencies associated with large land acquisitions and donations of valuable real property. To further complicate matters, within the sector there remains some disagreement as to how certain related expenses should be reported on the IRS Form 990. Inconsistent factors may yield inconsistent evaluations over time and so in keeping with our promise to provide reliable information and to evaluate all charities fairly, we have decided to no longer evaluate charities classified as Land Trusts and Preserves.*

Vital Ground depends on 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

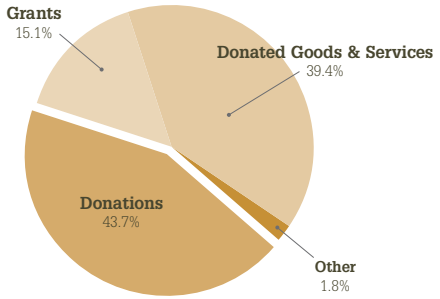
### *Businesses*

- Business Partnerships
- Sponsorships
- Employer Matching Gifts

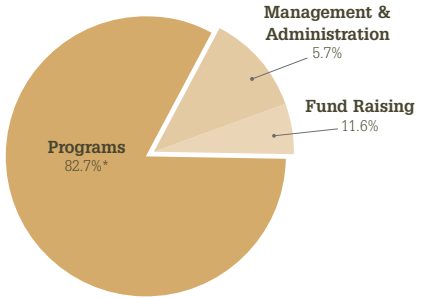
### *Foundations*

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

**SOURCE OF FUNDS – $5,235,632**




**USE OF FUNDS – $4,491,768**




**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, 2013*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Assets** | |
| Cash | 671,083 |
| Stewardship/Legal Defense Fund | 220,153 |
| Investments | 233,832 |
| Inventories | 10,747 |
| Receivables | 304,656 |
| Prepaid Expenses | 3,985 |
| Property, Plant and Equipment | 17,419 |
| Conservation Land | 2,178,409 |
| **TOTAL ASSETS** | **$3,640,284** |
| **Liabilities** | |
| Current | 32,141 |
| Long-term | 22,350 |
| **TOTAL LIABILITIES** | **$54,491** |
| **Net Assets** | |
| Unrestricted | 1,946,854 |
| Unrestricted – Board Designated | 75,000 |
| Temporarily Restricted | 1,383,534 |
| Permanently Restricted | 180,405 |
| **TOTAL NET ASSETS** | **$3,585,793** |

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.

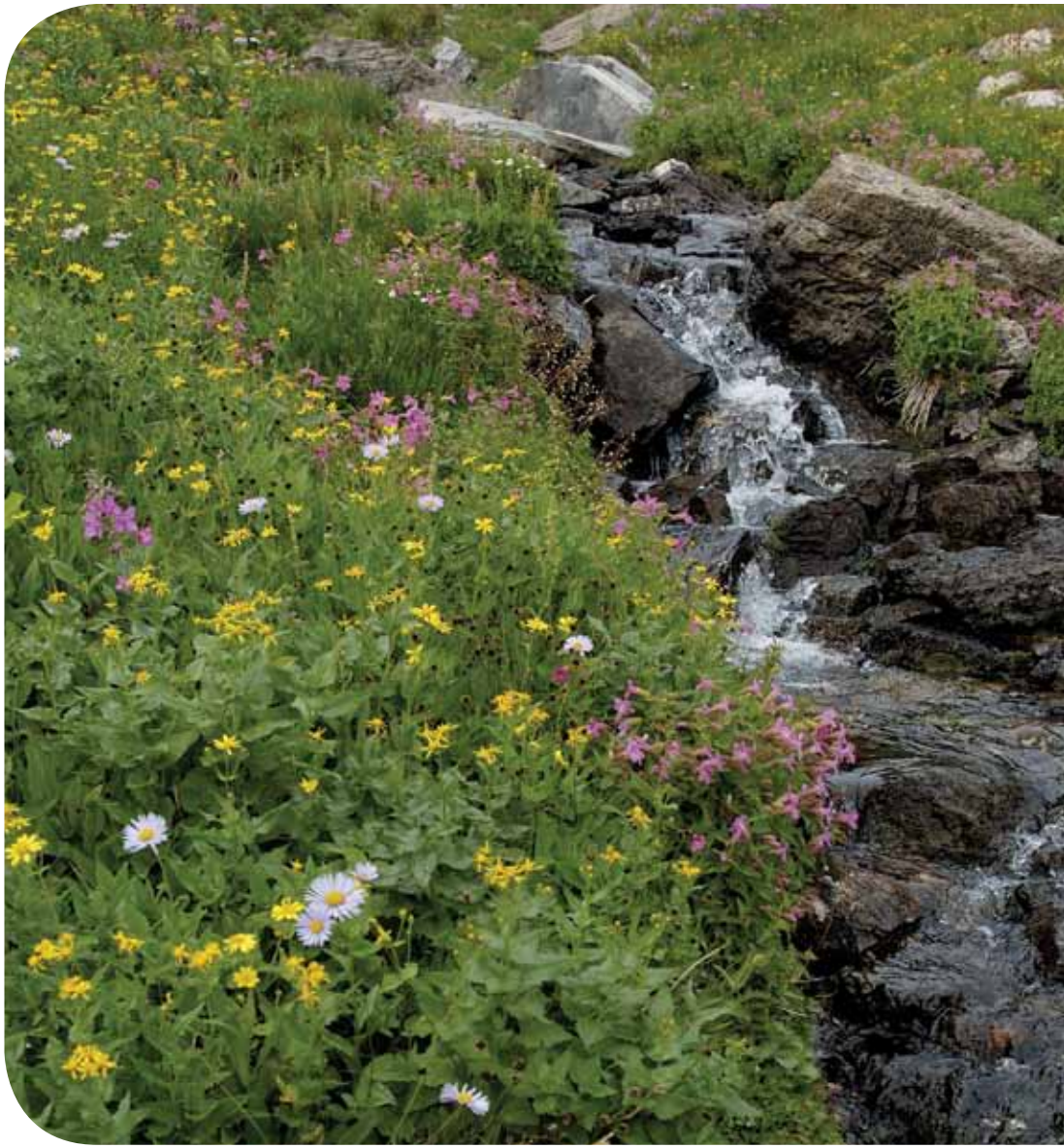


*Photo by Lance Schelvan*

The Vital Ground Foundation's mission is to protect and restore North America's grizzly bear populations for future generations by conserving wildlife habitat, and by supporting programs that reduce conflicts between bears and humans. 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 and conserve critical lands;*
- *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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# Protecting Habitat
# Connecting Landscapes
# Conserving Wildlife

*Photo by Robert Scriba*