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

The Vital Ground Foundation

2004-2005

Biennial

Report

Vital Ground

Message from the Chair and Executive Director

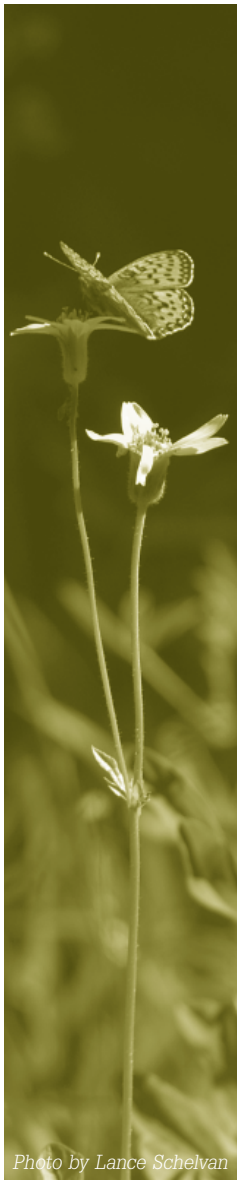


Photo by Lance Schelvan

The Vital Ground Foundation works to protect habitat for grizzly bears and for all of the other species in grizzly country that need healthy, whole, wild lands to survive. Vital Ground marked its 15th anniversary in 2005, and thanks to the support of our many friends, donors and partners, we have helped to protect and enhance nearly 230,000 acres of crucial wildlife habitat in Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming over the history of the organization.

The 2004-2005 biennium brought an exciting time of transition and growth to Vital Ground. In 2004, we restructured the board of trustees and hired a new executive director. We also made an important programmatic shift from acting primarily as a grant-making partner to operating as a full-fledged land trust, initiating and leading complex land conservation projects. In 2005, we relocated the Vital Ground headquarters from Park City, Utah, to Missoula, Montana. We also hired and trained new staff, developed new business relationships, and restructured and strengthened the infrastructure as necessary to support the organization's transition to a land trust. Relocating the office was a strategic decision to place Vital Ground in the heart of grizzly country to enhance our land conservation program. We can now more easily access the landscapes we are working to protect, meet and interact with our conservation partners and landowners, and participate in community-based initiatives.

All of our strategically-driven structural changes have brought immediate programmatic benefits. During the biennium, Vital Ground launched several new land projects, including the negotiation of the first conservation easement that the organization will hold in perpetuity. This easement, on a property known as Coyote Forest in Montana's Swan Valley, was a direct result of Vital Ground's visibility and presence in the Northern Rockies. Overall, Vital Ground participated in twenty conservation projects during 2004-2005, protecting and enhancing more than 86,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

Each year America loses more than two million acres of open space and wildlife habitat to development and sprawl. In grizzly country, the lure of scenic beauty, pristine wild lands and spectacular wildlife has accelerated the land rush and resulted in rapid habitat loss. Rural land prices are skyrocketing and, in some areas of key grizzly bear range, are upwards of $15,000 per acre. With so much critical wildlife habitat at risk, we must work cooperatively with others.

Partnerships have always been Vital Ground's best strategy for ensuring our collective success. As the cost of land protection escalates, strategic partnerships are essential. We collaborate with landowners, state and federal agencies, and other nonprofit groups to leverage scarce resources and tackle large, complex conservation projects. We focus on protection of critical grizzly bear habitat on private lands through conservation easements and fee title acquisitions, either by purchase or donation. We also participate in selected projects on public lands designed to reduce conflicts between bears and humans, transfer private inholdings to public ownership, improve habitat quality, protect or enhance resident populations, or increase the land's carrying capacity for grizzlies.

There is no more direct way to ensure a future for grizzlies and all of the other wildlife dependent on these ecosystems than to protect land, acre by acre. With your continued support, we are confident that we will accomplish even more for the great bear and its habitat in the coming years.

Banu Qureshi
Board Chair

Gary J. Wolfe, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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, glacier lilies 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.

Vital Ground works to conserve these interdependent communities, protecting critical habitat—acre by acre—where grizzlies and other wildlife can forever find free passage and safe harbor.

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

—Douglas H. Chadwick
wildlife biologist, writer and
Vital Ground board member

About the Cover Photo
Guardian of Knight Inlet *by Tom Mangelsen*

Yes, that is a black bear in our cover photo. Why would an organization that has the grizzly bear as its conservation icon put a black bear on the cover of its Biennial Report?

The photo was taken by internationally acclaimed wildlife photographer Tom Mangelsen during Vital Ground's 2005 Wild Bear Adventure at Knight Inlet Lodge, British Columbia. Knight Inlet is one of North America's most spectacular locations for observing brown bears...and black bears...and marine mammals...and avifauna. So this photo underscores Vital Ground's commitment to protecting lands, not only for the great bears themselves, but for all the other creatures that share their world.

Guardian of Knight Inlet *is available for purchase through Vital Ground's Web site. Note that the cover photo is actually a "reverse image" of Tom's original photo as marketed.*

Photo by Derek Reich

One Bear's Legacy

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

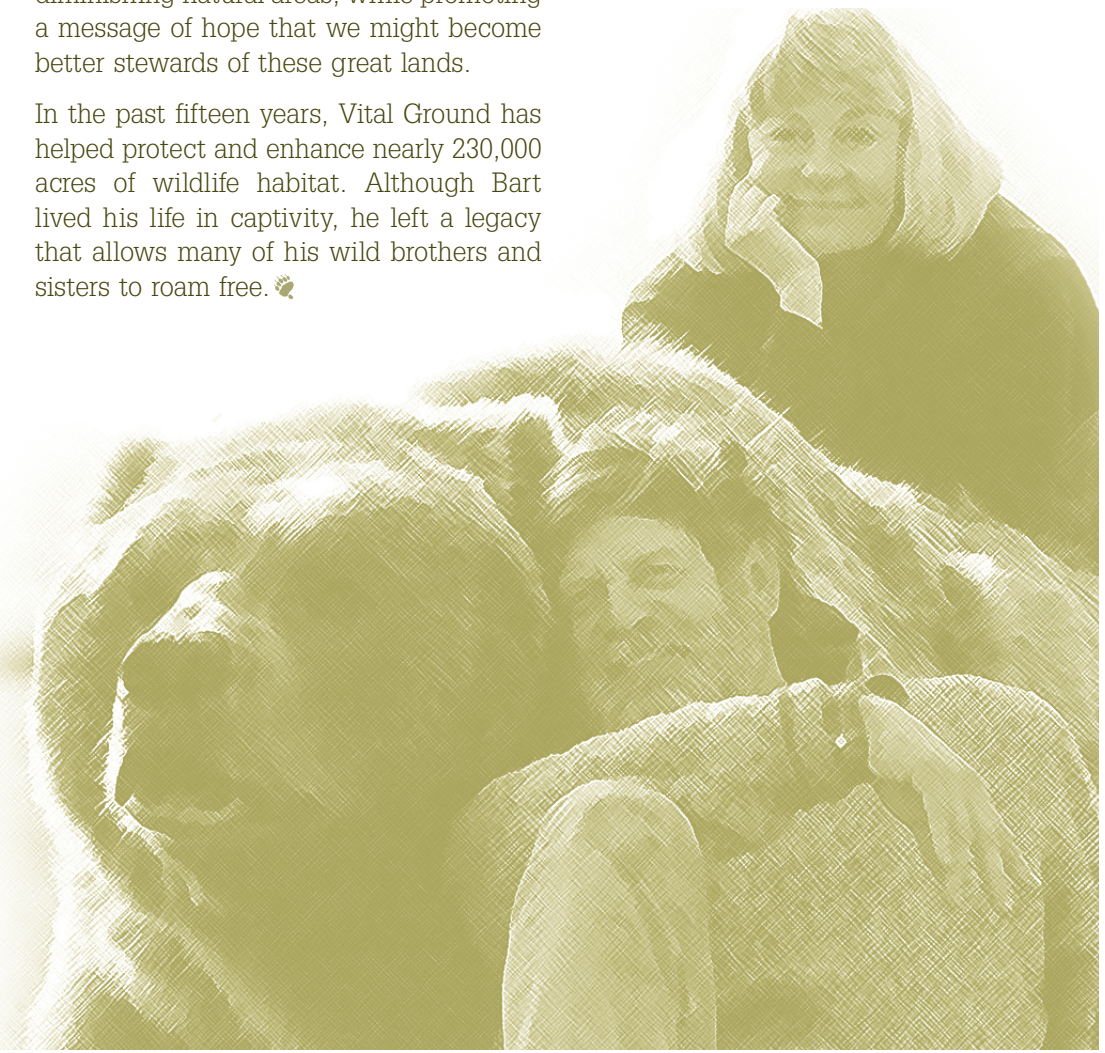
—Doug and Lynne Seus founders of Vital Ground

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.

Bart loved the applause of film crews as much as his salmon and blueberries, and 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 Vital Ground 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 the 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.

In the past fifteen years, Vital Ground has helped protect and enhance nearly 230,000 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.



Where Grizzlies Walk

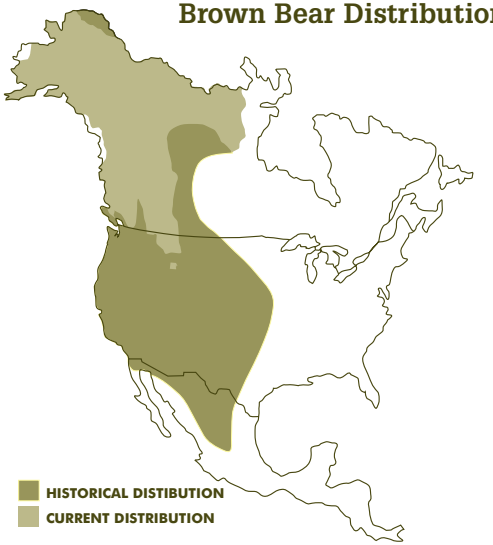
Only 200 years ago, more than 100,000 grizzly bears, also known as brown bears (*Ursus arctos*), ranged from Mexico to Alaska, at home in North America's vast prairies, wetlands, forests and mountainsides. Considered a keystone species, the grizzly influences the diversity of species in ecosystems it inhabits. As a major predator and scavenger, the grizzly affects the numbers and distribution of prey species and other predators. Feeding on berries and herbs, the grizzly disperses seeds, which affects the variety of plants in a community. The grizzly is also an "earth engineer," tilling the soil while digging for roots and rodents, which loosens topsoil and helps renew nutrients. Coastal grizzlies that feed on salmon fertilize large areas around salmon streams by spreading nitrogen and other marine elements from the fish, nourishing the growth of trees and shrubs.

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 salmon and elk—the condition of a grizzly population is nature's barometer of a healthy and complete ecosystem.

Today, only about 1,300 grizzlies remain in the lower 48 states. Most of the habitat that bears historically called home has slowly disappeared under a blanket of development. During the last 100 years, 98% of the bear's range has been lost in the contiguous United States, and 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 protected habitat in our national parks, national forests and wilderness areas:

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

Additionally, the Selway-Bitterroot region is designated as a sixth recovery zone,



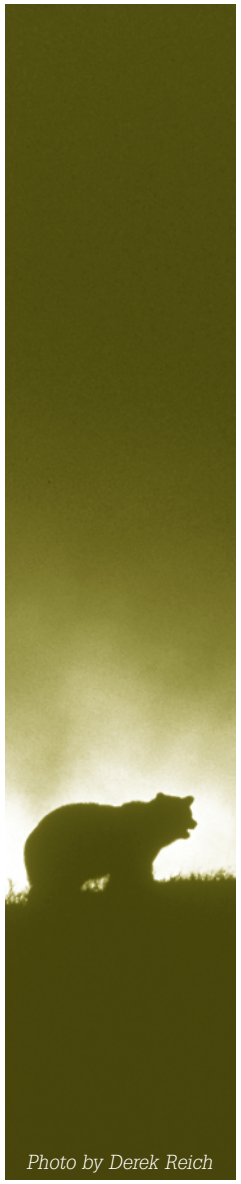


Photo by Derek Reich

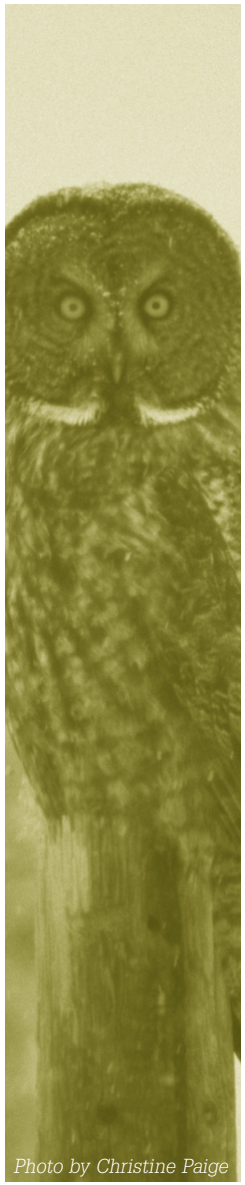


Photo by Christine Paige

although it is currently unoccupied by grizzlies. Despite a core of protected lands in each of these ecosystems, some of the most important seasonal feeding habitats and linkage zones—areas that allow bears to move between ecosystems—lie on private ground. Lands along streams and at lower elevations tend to be some of the most productive bear habitat, providing important spring and summer range and essential connections between populations. With rapidly rising land values in the Mountain West, development is consuming lowland wildlife habitats at a breathtaking rate, which threatens to isolate remaining grizzly populations from one another and seriously jeopardizes the future of the grizzlies in the contiguous U.S.

Alaska is home to an estimated 25,000 to 39,000 brown bears (Miller and Schoen 1999)—about 95 percent of the U.S. population. Thus the state has a special responsibility to sustain this stronghold of the great bear. Yet as Alaska continues to develop, humans and bears are coming into conflict over vital habitat. The wilds of Alaska are not limitless, and habitat conservation is becoming increasingly important for brown bears to continue to thrive in the land of the midnight sun.

Vital Ground is a land trust. We focus on protecting critical grizzly bear habitat on private lands 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 humans, 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 and enhance habitat for grizzles, but we focus particular attention on imperiled lands that serve as special feeding or seasonal bear habitat, linkage zones and connections to protected areas to help sustain grizzly populations. Much of our attention is devoted to projects in the grizzly bear recovery zones in the Rocky Mountain states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, yet we have also made important contributions to habitat projects in 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. 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 helped conserve nearly 230,000 acres of wildlife habitat to date.

Vital Ground remains committed to securing habitat that a bear can rely on. By focusing on protecting the land that grizzlies need to survive, we can maximize our effectiveness for the benefit of America's 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.

Bear Tracks: Highlights of our 2004–2005 conservation achievements

In 2004 and 2005, Vital Ground made significant on-the-ground progress in habitat conservation for grizzlies and other wildlife. Relocating the office closer to our project areas and adding new staff has given the organization fresh momentum. Vital Ground is able, as never before, to undertake substantial conservation projects and partnerships and build a sustainable organization for the future. We are proud to report that during the 2004-2005 biennium, Vital Ground participated in twenty conservation projects protecting and enhancing more than 86,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

Vital Ground also hired a new executive director and staff. Gary Wolfe, a wildlife biologist with a long career in wildlife management and conservation, joined Vital Ground as executive director in October, 2004. Gary soon hired Ryan Lutey as director of lands, Shannon Foley as office manager, and Jill Scott as bookkeeper. The move and our new team have brought fresh energy to the organization and launched Vital Ground on a bright new future.

NORTHERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE ECOSYSTEM

This region rides astride the "Crown of the Continent" in northwestern Montana, encompassing Glacier National Park and surrounding national forests, designated wilderness areas, and intermingled private lands. The ecosystem supports at least 550 grizzlies (Servheen 2006), yet highways, a major railroad, and rapid development in surrounding once-wild country are fragmenting wildlife habitats.

Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation 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. Recent research has also revealed that many grizzlies reside within the Swan Valley year-round. Wetlands, streams, and a dense mix of coniferous woodlands, aspen and cottonwood provide important valley bottom habitat for bears and a diversity 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. Vital Ground has launched the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative to work with local partners and landowners to protect wildlife habitat and the rural nature of the valley.

Coyote Forest Conservation Easement 1

In 2005, Vital Ground finalized an agreement with Bud Moore to place a conservation easement on his 80-acre Coyote Forest property in the Swan Valley, a working forest that supports a small timber and sawmill operation. Coyote Forest is part of a grizzly linkage zone and researchers have regularly recorded grizzlies using the property and surrounding lands. Vital Ground arranged a bargain-sale transaction in which the easement was partly donated and partly purchased. The first conservation easement both negotiated and held by Vital Ground, the agreement protects the wildlife values of Coyote Forest, while allowing ecological forest management to continue to provide income. Local interest in the Coyote Forest agreement has generated several inquiries to Vital Ground from other landowners. We are capitalizing on this momentum to negotiate additional conservation easements which will help consolidate habitat protection on several neighboring properties.

Windfall Creek Conservation Easement 2

Gene and Patricia Tingle undertook a voluntary agreement to protect their 80-acre property in the Swan Valley for wildlife. This property along Windfall Creek sits adjacent to one of four grizzly linkage zones that connect the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountain Wilderness Areas. In 2004, Vital Ground provided financial support to complete the conservation easement, which is held by the Montana Land Reliance.

STRATEGIC CHANGES

In April 2005, Vital Ground moved its headquarters from Park City, Utah to Missoula, Montana. The relocation was a strategic decision to place Vital Ground in the heart of grizzly country. Vital Ground was fortunate to find office space at historic Fort Missoula, a gracious campus that is also home to Bureau of Land Management and Lolo National Forest offices and numerous nonprofit organizations.

VITAL GROUND PROJECT LOCATIONS

- *Previous Projects*
- *2004-2005 Projects*
- *Wilderness Areas*

NORTHERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE ECOSYSTEM (*continued*)

Rising Wolf Ranch Conservation Easement 3

In 2004, Vital Ground contributed funds to The Nature Conservancy of Montana to help secure a conservation easement on the 164-acre Rising Wolf Ranch on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. The property contains native grasslands, aspen, coniferous forests, and cottonwood woodlands along the South Fork of the Two Medicine River. The ranch is especially important for grizzlies as a habitat link between Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex. The conservation easement is held by The Nature Conservancy.

Mud Lake Conservation Easement 4

This 484-acre property lies adjacent to Mud Lake in the Flathead Valley of northwestern Montana, one of the state's fastest developing regions. The property provides a safe haven for grizzlies that wander out of the nearby Swan Mountains into the valley bottom. Vital Ground contributed funds to help Montana Land Reliance secure a conservation easement to protect riparian wildlife habitat and the agricultural nature of the land.

Blackfoot–Clearwater Acquisition 5

In 2004, Vital Ground joined a coalition of public and private cooperators to protect 3,834 acres of privately held land within Montana's Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area. The coalition included the Blackfoot Challenge (a community watershed conservation initiative), the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The acquisition was made possible by a significant grant from the U.S. Forest Service through its Forest Legacy Program, and the property was placed into public ownership, consolidating the largest state wildlife management area in Montana. The Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA provides winter range for more than 1,000 elk and abundant habitat for bears and other carnivores. More than a half dozen grizzlies are known to use the area.

Photo by Christine Paige

It's been my privilege to work with The Vital Ground Foundation on protecting key grizzly bear habitat for over twelve years. Vital Ground has been an important partner in our shared conservation initiatives on the Front.

—David Carr
Rocky Mountain Front
Project Director
The Nature Conservancy
of Montana

Vital Ground's contribution demonstrates a continuing legacy in partnering to protect critical habitat in the West.

—Grant Parker
Chief Legal Counsel
Rocky Mountain
Elk Foundation

Photo by Randy Stekly

SELKIRK ECOSYSTEM

Located in northernmost Idaho and the northeast corner of Washington, the Selkirk Ecosystem is the smallest of the recovery zones, and home to a population of just 40 to 50 grizzlies (Servheen 2006) on the U.S. side of the border. This region is a narrow finger of habitat extending south from the Canadian Selkirks. Recent research indicates that the southern Selkirk bears are now genetically isolated, jeopardizing the population's future.

Selkirk Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative

In 2001, Vital Ground launched an initiative to focus protection on the vulnerable Selkirk grizzly population. Although the core of the Selkirk Mountains provides a safe haven for grizzlies, the population's future depends on two vital 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 genetic flow between the Selkirk ecosystem, the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem to the east, and Canadian grizzly populations to the north. The initiative was launched with the acquisition of two privately held parcels in 2001 and 2003, totaling 791 acres, adjacent to the Boundary Creek Wildlife Management Area in Idaho's Kootenai Valley. Vital Ground's land projects in the area are restoring wildlife habitat on properties once used for agriculture and residences, reversing the development trend on some lands.

Bismark Meadows 6

In 2001, Vital Ground began a multi-phase effort to protect the habitat values of northern Idaho's Bismark Meadows from being destroyed by encroaching development. Located just west of Priest Lake, the area is a rich complex of grassland meadows and wetlands that harbors a diverse array of rare plants and wildlife, including several endangered plant species and habitat for moose, elk, deer, black bear, wolf, lynx, westslope cutthroat trout, and bald eagle. The area is particularly important for grizzlies, providing critical spring forage for bears emerging from hibernation in the snowbound Selkirk Mountain Range. Federal and state grizzly researchers regard Bismark Meadows as essential habitat for the remaining 40 to 50 grizzly bears of the U.S. Selkirk sub-population.

In 2001, a 57-acre parcel was purchased by a conservation buyer who agreed to hold it intact while Vital Ground developed a strategy to protect other privately owned parcels. Subsequently, wetland portions of the meadows were placed under a conservation easement funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wetlands Reserve Program. Early in 2005, Vital Ground obtained a two-year, interest-free loan to help purchase a 19-acre parcel along State Highway 5—a location especially vulnerable to commercial development—and to secure option agreements with other willing sellers in the area. Vital Ground now leases out a log home on this property to the Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG) for use as a biological station and patrol cabin. The lease agreement provides IDFG with a base of operations on the northwest side of the Selkirks, and relieves Vital Ground of many of the property maintenance costs.

The future of the Selkirk grizzly population depends on permanent protection of low elevation lands like Bismark Meadows. Vital Ground continues to work for protection of other properties in the meadows and adjacent uplands from additional development and fragmentation.

Kootenai Homestead Acquisition 7

In 2005, Sig and Anne Weiler of Illinois charitably donated title to their 43-acre property along the eastern edge of the Selkirk Mountains to Vital Ground. The property is located close to two wildlife management areas and adjacent to other public lands. The property harbors grizzlies, black bears and a diverse array of other wildlife, and the Weilers wished to permanently safeguard the land

as wildlife habitat. Prior to the donation, the Weilers removed an old building on the property, helping to reclaim the habitat values of the land. This donation provides another milestone in Vital Ground's Selkirk Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative.

Canyon Creek Ranch Management Agreement 8

This 392-acre ranch adjacent to Smith Creek Wildlife Management Area in Idaho's Kootenai Valley provides local grizzlies with abundant seasonal forage. In 2004, Vital Ground and ranch owner Julien Bucher entered into a two-year land management agreement to ensure that the ranch remains available for both wildlife and traditional agricultural uses. Using this agreement as a foundation, Vital Ground and the Bucher Family are currently negotiating a conservation easement on the property.

Selkirk Grizzly Bear Education & Outreach Project 9

To reduce human-caused bear mortalities in the Selkirk ecosystem, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game placed a full-time conservation officer in the field dedicated to educating hunters, homeowners and recreationists about preventing conflicts with grizzly bears, bear identification and safety. Through a generous donation to Vital Ground in 2004, we provided a grant to help support this important program, which reaches more than 3,000 people each year.

CABINET-YAAK ECOSYSTEM

The Cabinet-Yaak encompasses the Cabinet and Purcell mountain ranges in northwestern Montana and northeastern Idaho. Although the Yaak Valley is contiguous with grizzly habitat in Canada, the Cabinet population is now isolated from the Yaak. Combined, the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem is home to only 30 to 40 grizzlies, with only 10 to 15 bears in the Cabinet Mountains (Servheen 2006). Increasing development in mountain valleys is fracturing this ecosystem.

Fowler Creek Conservation Easement 10

Mary Campbell and Pam Fuqua's 160-acre property in the Yaak harbors a rich wetland complex and a riparian stream corridor, prime habitat for grizzlies and a wide array of other wildlife. In 2004 and 2005, Vital Ground contributed funds to help Montana Land Reliance secure a conservation easement on the property. Montana Land Reliance holds the easement.

GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM

Yellowstone National Park is the heart of this region, yet the ecosystem covers a vast area of approximately 20 million acres, including Grand Teton National Park, parts of four national forests, several wildlife refuges and state and private lands in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. The Yellowstone grizzly population has expanded its numbers and range since the 1970s, and now totals at least 600 bears (Servheen 2006). To date, this is the only grizzly population that has been proposed for delisting from threatened status because it has met all of the criteria set for recovery. A final ruling on delisting has not yet been made. Nonetheless, as human development continues to encroach into areas surrounding the Yellowstone ecosystem, Vital Ground remains committed to ensuring that Yellowstone's grizzly population always has room to roam.

Grazing Allotment Retirements

Vital Ground has made several grants to the National Wildlife Federation to help retire grazing leases in high conflict areas on public lands in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, where bear and wolf depredations on livestock have resulted in the loss of native predators. The Federation brokers agreements with ranchers and the U.S. Forest Service that fairly compensate ranchers for the grazing permits, allow them to secure grazing in areas

Ducks Unlimited has a very productive, professional working relationship with Vital Ground conserving and restoring wetland and upland habitats in Idaho. The Vital Ground Foundation is a very effective conservation organization and Ducks Unlimited looks forward to continuing to work with them conserving critical wildlife habitats in the West.

—Thomas J. Dwyer, Director
Conservation Programs
Pacific NW and Hawaii
Ducks Unlimited

without grizzlies or wolves, and retire the original allotment from livestock grazing. At an average cost of $2 to $4 per acre, allotment retirements are an especially cost-effective means of enhancing vital lands for wildlife. This program produces practical, long-term solutions for both local livestock producers and wildlife.

Horse Butte Grazing Allotment 11

In 2004, Vital Ground helped the National Wildlife Federation fund the buyout of the 2,200-acre Horse Butte cattle grazing allotment on the Gallatin National Forest bordering Yellowstone National Park. Several grizzlies range through this area, including at least one breeding female. The allotment has also been a major site of conflict between livestock interests and conservationists over management of Yellowstone bison that wander out of the park.

Vital Ground was there when we needed them. They have demonstrated a remarkable ability to respond quickly in support of habitat transactions that are critical to grizzly bears and other large mammals.

—Hank Fischer
Special Projects Coordinator
The National Wildlife Federation

Ash Mountain/Iron Mountain Grazing Allotment 12

Spanning 74,000 acres of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness on the Gallatin National Forest, this sheep grazing allotment was located immediately adjacent to Yellowstone National Park's highest density grizzly and wolf populations. From 1999 to 2003, more than 100 conflicts between domestic sheep and grizzly bears or wolves were documented on the allotment. In 2005, with partial funding from Vital Ground, the National Wildlife Federation finalized an agreement to permanently retire the allotment.

ALASKA

Alaska remains the stronghold of the brown bear in North America, with an estimated population of 25,000 to 39,000 brown bears (Miller and Schoen 1999)—about 95 percent of the U.S. population. Brown bears range from the tundra to the coastal rainforests, and it is in the salmon-rich coastal zones that these bears reach legendary size. Yet as Alaska continues to develop, with increased pressures on salmon streams and other vital habitat, humans and bears are coming into conflict.

For several years, Vital Ground has worked with The Conservation Fund and other conservation partners to purchase small privately held parcels of critical grizzly and other wildlife habitat in southwestern Alaska. Strategically important to brown bears, these acquisitions protect access to important fisheries and habitat and consolidate the properties with neighboring state and federal public lands.

Wood Tikchik Acquisitions 13 14

In 2004, Vital Ground helped fund the acquisition of two private inholdings within Wood Tikchik State Park through its partner, The Conservation Fund. The first, a 241-acre parcel, helps protect wild salmon and trout fisheries on the Agulowak River. The second, 110 acres on the shoreline of Lake Nerka, protects the lakefront property from development and helps conserve the wilderness character of the area for wildlife. The lands were deeded to the state park, securing them for wildlife and public recreation.

Togiak Acquisitions 15 16 17

In 2005, Vital Ground helped fund the purchase of three privately held properties located within Togiak National Wildlife Refuge through grants to The Conservation Fund. The first two purchases (30 and 40 acres, respectively) are located on Goodnews Lake. The third acquired 160 acres on the Togiak River. Now part of the refuge, these lands help protect important bear travel corridors and salmon spawning streams that flow into Bristol Bay.

Alagnak River Acquisition 18

In 2005, Vital Ground helped purchase 100 acres on the Alagnak River through a grant to The Conservation Fund. Bordering Katmai National Park on the Alaska Peninsula, the Alagnak is part of a designated Wild and Scenic River corridor managed by the park.

Bear Tracks

Lake Clark Acquisition 19

This strategic five-acre inholding straddles Priest Creek within Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. A contribution from the Wildlife Land Trust enabled Vital Ground to make a grant to The Conservation Fund in 2005 to help purchase the Priest Creek property and deed it over to the park.

Perenosa Bay Acquisition 20

In 2005, a long-standing coalition of conservation partners finally celebrated victory in protecting 4,400 acres on Afognak Island in Alaska's Kodiak Archipelago. Vital Ground joined this partnership in 2002, making three successive grants toward the acquisition of coastal property and timber rights on Perenosa Bay. The purchase conserves spectacular coastal forests, rivers and wetlands that support salmon spawning habitat, Kodiak brown bear foraging areas, Roosevelt elk calving and wintering habitat, breeding and nursery areas for sea otters, marbled murrelet nesting habitat and wintering areas for sea ducks. Spearheaded by the American Land Conservancy, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Kodiak Brown Bear Trust, the coalition raised both federal and private dollars to complete the acquisition. The lands and timber rights were purchased from the Afognak Joint Venture, a group of seven Alaska Native corporations. The property was transferred to Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and timber rights were either retired or held by partner organizations to preclude future harvest of these state-owned forests

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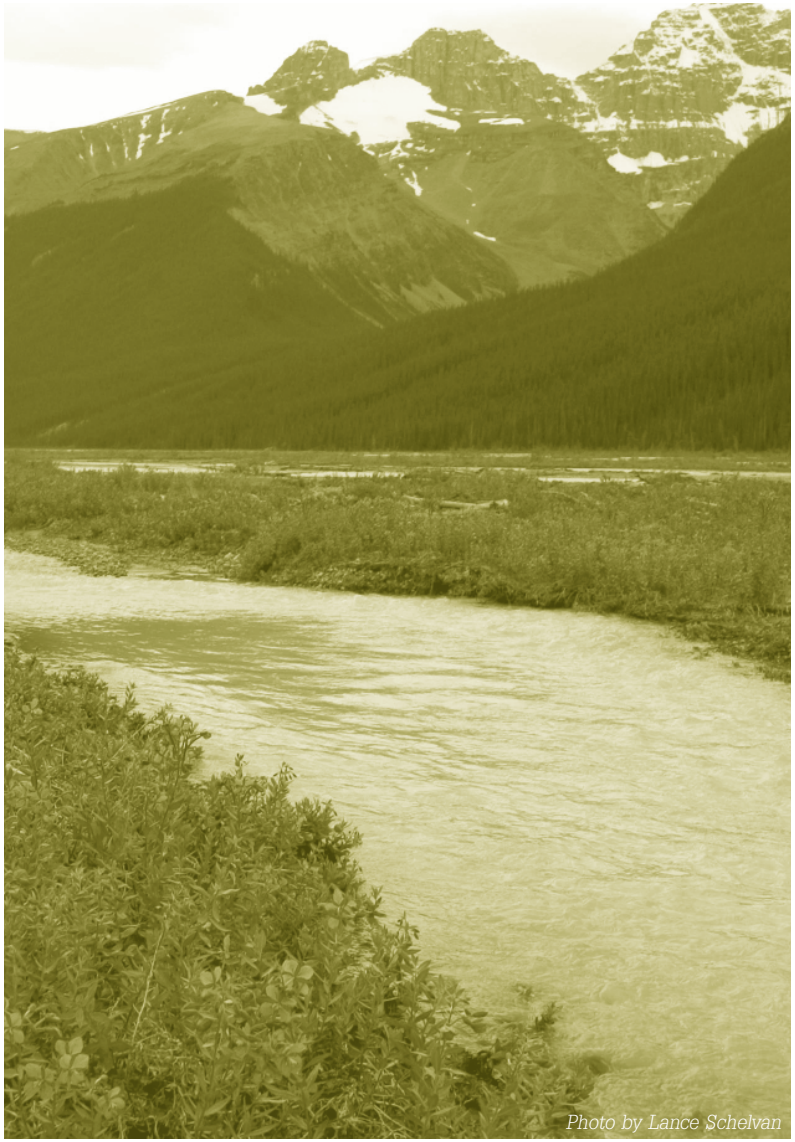

Photo by Lance Schelvan

I want to extend my sincere thanks to Vital Ground for your investment in protecting habitat that is key to brown bears and wild salmon. Support like Vital Ground's is essential to protect the great salmon runs of Southwest Alaska and the robust brown bear populations that rely upon them.

—Glenn Elison
Alaska State Director
The Conservation Fund

Photo by Lance Schelvan

Conserving a Working Forest

Deep in the pine and fir woods of Montana's Swan Valley, Bud Moore's cabin sits on a low ridge, overlooking a quiet pond edged with alder and willow. Every visitor is greeted like an old friend, and it's not long before you're carried away on tales of Bud's life as a wilderness ranger, a forester, and especially of his years caring for "Coyote Forest," his 80-acre working forest.

Bud runs a small family sawmill operation for special-order timbers, boards and mantel pieces. Bud's career caring for public lands gave him a deep and abiding land ethic—an ethic that is put to work at Coyote Forest. Rather than managing only for timber, he manages for the entire ecosystem. "You look out the window and you can see values of all kinds right there in front of your eyes," Bud explains. "We realize that all those values are intertwined and dependent on each other."

Coniferous woodlands, three ponds, seasonal streams and a channel of the Swan River create a mosaic of habitats for wildlife at Coyote Forest. Grizzlies regularly move through the area. The property neighbors a linkage zone that connects grizzly habitat in the Swan Mountains with the Mission Mountains, and several grizzlies make the valley bottom home year-round.

Interested in permanent protection of the wildlife values of his land, Bud approached Vital Ground about a conservation easement. Vital Ground was able to arrange a bargain sale easement—a combination of purchase and donation. This is the first conservation easement negotiated and held solely by Vital Ground. The Montana Land Reliance, Wildlife Land Trust, Cinnabar Foundation, Montana Coffee Traders, Steele-Reese Foundation and William H. Donner Foundation all helped make the conservation easement possible.

The agreement protects Coyote Forest from future development, while allowing ecological forest management to continue to provide income through the sawmill operation. Bud is clear that Coyote Forest is a for-profit operation, but that doesn't rule out conserving habitat for wildlife.

"The way I see our conservation easement is as a long-term partnership with Vital Ground to try to live a little better with the Earth. I see that as a partnership between Vital Ground and my heirs."

Photo on facing page:
Grizzly At Home *by Derek Reich.*

A wild grizzly bear strides through blazing fall colors in Denali National Park, Alaska; the mountains of the Alaska Range tower behind in shadow. In great condition going into the winter, the bear is fat with a rich coat. A leaf is stuck to his head from feeding on berries, which are a critical food source for interior grizzlies in the fall. This photo was captured by filmmaker, wildlife photographer and Vital Ground advisory board member Derek Reich, Zooprax Productions. It is available as a full-color Ultrachrome print through Vital Ground's Web site.

Donors and Partners 2004–2005

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, space considerations prevent us from providing a complete listing of all donors. Listed donors contributed at least $100 during the 2004-2005 biennium. We regret any inadvertent omissions or errors, and ask that you bring these to our attention by calling 406-549-8650.

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Photo by Derek Reich

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The following individuals made a five year pledge to Vital Ground of at least $1,000 per year.

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

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Conservation Partners

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

Alaska Department of Natural Resources
American Land Conservancy
Bear Trust International
Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Idaho Fish and Game
Kodiak Brown Bear Trust
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Foundation
Montana Land Reliance
National Wildlife Federation
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
The Conservation Fund-Alaska
The Nature Conservancy of Montana
Wildlife Land Trust

Land and Easement Donors

The following individuals generously donated either land or easements to Vital Ground.

Bud Moore
Sig & Anne Weiler

Financial Overview 2004–2005

Photo by Chuck Bartlebaugh

The Vital Ground Foundation's revenues totaled $1,219,860 during the 2004-2005 biennium. Expenses totaled $907,734, with $672,307 (74.1%) expended on program activities. Additionally, Vital Ground acquired conservation land valued at $375,192. This amount is not recorded as a program expense, but appears as an asset on the Statement of Financial Position. The organization's Total Net Assets on December 31, 2005 were $757,161, representing a 30 percent increase from the previous year.

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. Contributions to Vital Ground are 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 Easement
- Bequests
- Charitable Remainder Trusts
- Charitable Gift Annuities

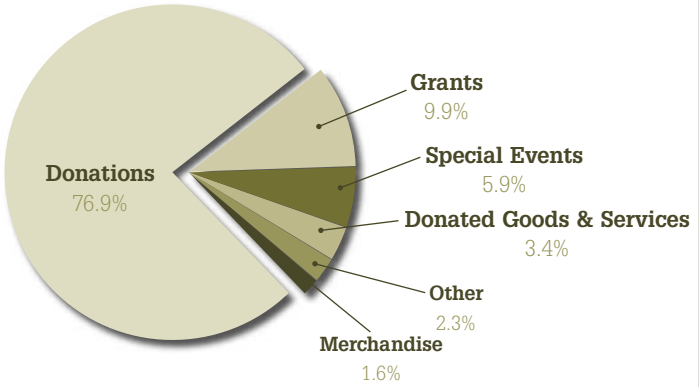
Businesses & Institutions

- Business Partnerships
- Program or Activity Sponsorships
- Employer Matching Gifts
- Foundation Grants

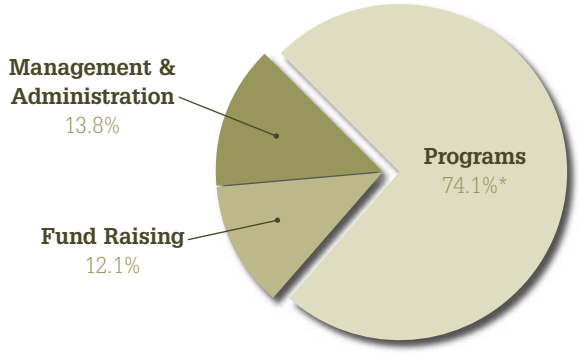
Vital Ground is audited annually. To receive a copy of Vital Ground's most recent audited financial statements or IRS Form 990, please contact our office.

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

SOURCE OF FUNDS - $1,219,860



USE OF FUNDS - $907,734



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

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2005

ASSETS	
Cash	337,431
Securities	-------
Inventories	13,984
Receivables	-------
Prepaid Expenses	3,403
Property, Plant and Equipment	23,625
Conservation Land	611,942
TOTAL ASSETS	**$990,385**
LIABILITIES	
Current	48,224
Long-term	185,000
TOTAL LIABILITIES	**$233,224**
NET ASSETS	
Unrestricted	405,025
Temporarily Restricted	262,570
Permanently Restricted	89,566
TOTAL NET ASSETS	**$757,161**

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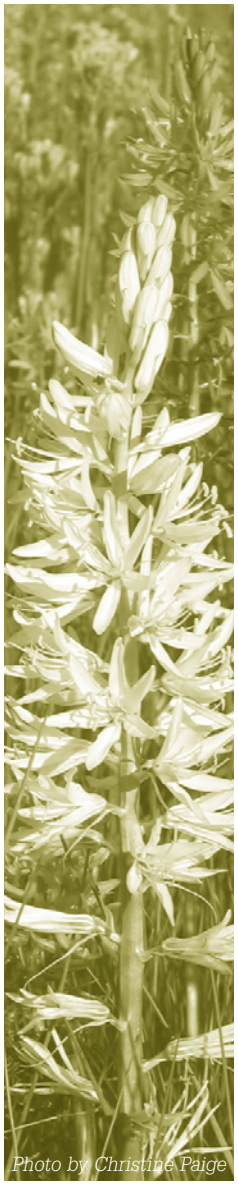

Photo by Christine Paige

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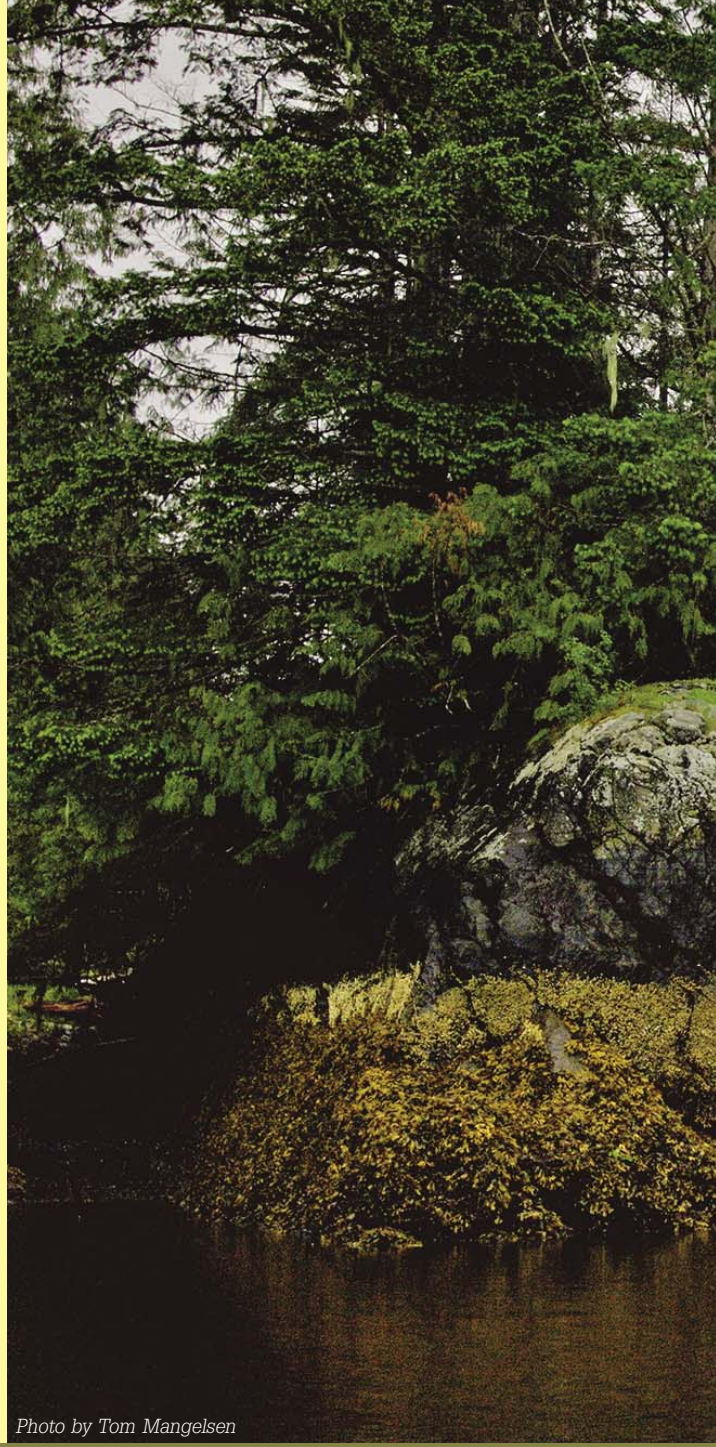

Photo by Tom Mangelsen