

VITALNEWS

With your help, Vital Ground is continuing our push to protect Bismark Meadows, a rare wetland complex in Idaho's remote Selkirk Mountains!

PROTECTING HABITAT | CONNECTING LANDSCAPES | CONSERVING WILDLIFE

TURNING CONSERVATION STRATEGY INTO ACTION

As snow shrouds the peaks of the Northern Rockies and grizzly bears settle into their dens, a season of rest is far from our minds at Vital Ground, with your support powering us toward the end of a year filled with conservation victories.

Last year, Vital Ground met with wildlife professionals across the region to prioritize the grizzly's needs for habitat protection and conflict prevention. Now you're helping turn that strategy into action. From saving rare spring range in northern Idaho to stopping conflicts outside Yellowstone, your support drives conservation in the most vital places—for grizzlies, and for all wildlife that share the Great Bear's space.

In this issue, learn how you're helping protect habitat and prevent conflicts, and read up on other vital news from grizzly country. THANK YOU for fueling grizzly bear conservation!

Inside this issue:

<i>Saving Irreplaceable Habitat</i>	3
<i>Wild River: A Protected Connection</i>	5
<i>Orphan Grizzlies Find New Home</i>	7
<i>In Memory: Gary Humbar</i>	8
<i>Bear Spray Saves Lives</i>	13
<i>Grizzly Recovery After 2018's Delisting Debate</i>	14



A Big Year for Grizzlies—And Vital Ground

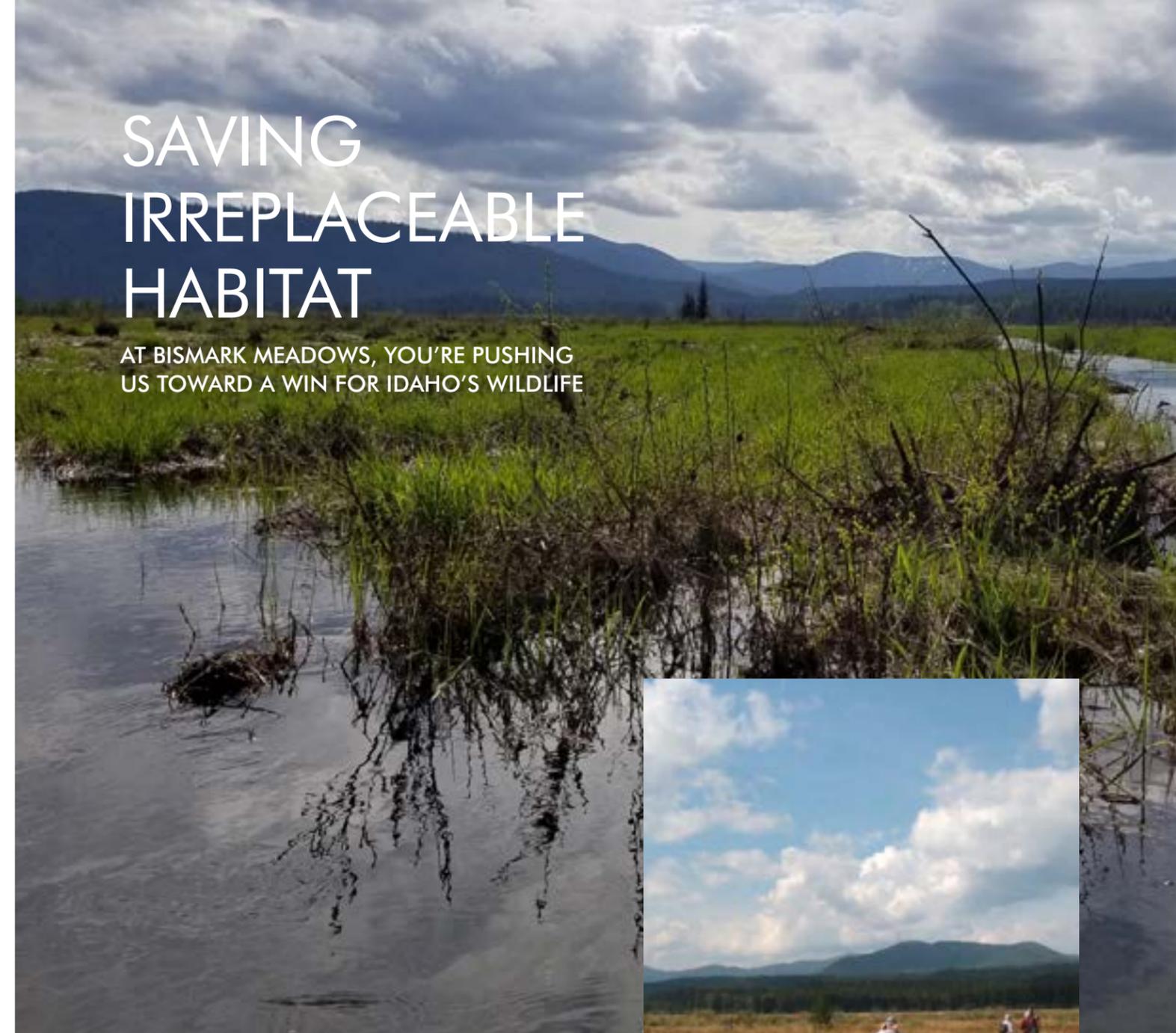
The holidays are coming and grizzlies are heading into a long winter's sleep, but here at Vital Ground we've barely had time to catch our breath. Since bears emerged from their dens and the last issue of *Vital News* reached your mailbox, grizzly country has been buzzing. While bear conflicts reached record numbers in 2018 and Yellowstone's delisting debate filled the airwaves, your support has helped Vital Ground remain focused on our long-term vision of a connected and protected regional landscape, pushing forward more boldly than ever on behalf of the Great Bear.

In the Selkirk Mountains of far northern Idaho, critical spring grizzly habitat will remain open and undeveloped thanks to the latest phase of our Bismark Meadows project (p. 3). Before year's end, Vital Ground will acquire 455 additional acres in this rare wetland complex, bringing our total to five-out-of-six properties conserved in a key sanctuary for grizzlies, moose and other wildlife of the Selkirk Ecosystem.

Thanks to you, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative and other partners, we've also surged forward on our Wild River Project (p. 5). In the northwest corner of Montana, we've mitigated a potential residential subdivision situated in the heart of a key wildlife corridor. In November, our purchase of five more lots along the Kootenai River solidified a crucial land link between the small, struggling grizzly populations of the Cabinet Mountains and the famed Yaak Valley.

Habitat projects like these remain the bedrock of grizzly recovery—and of Vital Ground's mission—but this year we've also made great progress on our work to prevent bear-related conflicts in areas where grizzlies are reclaiming historic habitat. Fueled by conservation heroes like you and the generous support of The ALSAM Foundation, we've more than doubled the size of our Conservation Partners Grant Program (p. 10). From range rider initiatives in new grizzly hotspots outside Yellowstone to electric fencing for farms along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front, these local partnerships will keep both bears and people safe long into the future.

We couldn't take these griz-sized steps forward without you! The publicity of this year's delisting debate regarding the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem's grizzlies has given us an opportunity to reflect on Vital Ground's unique position to continue focusing on our work as a land trust outside the political realm, while still pushing the needle toward regionwide recovery for the Great Bear (p. 14). Your commitment to conservation is driving that vital effort, and we are deeply grateful for your ongoing support. 🐾



SAVING IRREPLACEABLE HABITAT

AT BISMARK MEADOWS, YOU'RE PUSHING US TOWARD A WIN FOR IDAHO'S WILDLIFE



(Inset photo) During this September's **Walk on Vital Ground**, our board of trustees and friends explore Bismark Meadows, where Vital Ground has worked since 2005 to protect key wildlife habitat from subdivision and development. Photo by Matt Hart.

(Above photo) Between the rugged peaks of the Selkirk Mountains, Bismark Meadows provides critical spring habitat for the 30-40 threatened grizzly bears that typically inhabit the ecosystem south of the Canadian border. Photo by Linda Lantzy.

Imagine you're a grizzly bear ducking into your den for a long winter's nap. You've spent the whole fall loading up on calories to get you through the winter. Perhaps you're a pregnant mother who will give birth come January, when most grizzly cubs are born.

You know you've eaten enough to survive the cold months—but what will you do come April, when it's time to leave the den and nursing your

(continued on page 4)

(Habitat from page 3)

newborn cubs is sapping the last of your energy?

Every spring, those are the stakes for bears in the Selkirk Mountains of northern Idaho, one of the Lower 48's smallest grizzly populations. But thanks to you, grizzly mothers and their newborn cubs are close to having a bit more habitat security.

Because of your support, Vital Ground is closing in on a crucial conservation success at Bismark Meadows. Before the year ends, we'll protect irreplaceable spring grizzly habitat in the heart of the Selkirk Ecosystem, where biologists estimate just 30-40 grizzlies live south of the Canadian border.

Vital Ground and Bismark Meadows go way back. This privately-owned wetland complex sees some of the region's first plant growth each year, making it a crucial spring foraging site for grizzlies, moose and many other wildlife species. But it's also just a handful of miles from Priest Lake, a popular recreation destination where new vacation homes are popping up weekly. That's why we've been working to save this special place from subdivision and development since 2005.

We've already protected just under 500 acres through four different land purchases at Bismark Meadows. But with a final push to close out this

year, you'll help us nearly double that impact. We're on track for a conservation acquisition of the complex's largest property, a huge win for wildlife that will save 455 acres of critical habitat. This unique site contains both wetlands and upland forest—the link that provides wildlife with a safe pathway between the meadows and the mountain strongholds on public lands above the property.

We're almost there. Thanks to heroic contributions from The ALSAM Foundation, William H. Donner Foundation, Giles W. and Elise G. Mead Foundation and generous donors like you, we're \$75,000 away from completing this crucial project, which carries a total price tag of nearly \$1 million.

Together, we've already made big progress for grizzlies and other wildlife—in the Selkirks and beyond. By spreading the word about Bismark Meadows or by chipping in to our final push, you can ensure we finish this key project on schedule.

Success at Bismark Meadows will conserve these acres in time for the first plants to shoot forth next spring, and for the moment when a hungry mother grizzly and her infant cubs emerge from their den for the first time.

THANK YOU—for bringing us this far at Bismark Meadows, and for helping us push across the finish line. 🐾



Vital Ground's Wild River Project conserves a crucial habitat corridor between isolated grizzly bear populations in the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem. Photo by Mitch Doherty.

When Grizzly 839 began wandering away from the Cabinet Mountains in northwest Montana, he showed no interest in traveling north. The young bear, as profiled in last fall's *Vital News*, rambled east toward Flathead Lake and south into the Salish Mountains before making his way up to the Whitefish Range, just west of Glacier National Park.

North of 839's birthplace lay the Yaak Valley and the Purcell Mountains, rugged country extending up into Canada. But for all his footloose behavior, the young bear never set foot there.

It's hard to tell precisely why a grizzly goes where it goes, but this much is clear: Bears like 839 have long been denied passage between the Cabinets and the Yaak. The Kootenai Valley stands between the two areas, and ongoing human development there has meant more and more obstacles for wildlife. The result? Perilous habitat fragmentation. Just 25-30 grizzlies are estimated to persist in the Cabinets and the Yaak, putting the two groups in grave danger of inbreeding and extinction.

Grizzlies now have a better chance at connecting this historic range, with your support allowing Vital Ground to complete an enormous

conservation achievement for the Cabinet-Yaak area. The Wild River Project protects 42 acres within a wildlife corridor that biologists have long identified as critical for the region's habitat connectivity.

Located near the confluence of the Yaak and Kootenai rivers, these acres are pathways for bears, wolverine and other wide-ranging species. But before conservation entered the discussion, Wild River was slated for residential subdivision. The land was split into 12 lots, the forest was cleared, and all that was missing were buyers and houses.

Now, led by Vital Ground and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, an inspired collaborative has changed the game. This success hinged on the generosity of inspired memorial donors, many contributors like you and the following extraordinary organizations: the Cinnabar Foundation, Cross Charitable Foundation, Deupree Family Foundation, Glide Foundation, Steele-Reese Foundation, Sweetgrass Foundation, Weeden Foundation and Whitefish Community Foundation.

Now comes the fun part—restoring these acres as prime habitat, so the next wandering griz can reestablish an historic connection. 🐾





Spaghetti Dinner Raises Funds for Grizzly Conservation

There are no wild bears in Chicago—unless you’re talking about the football team—but folks in the Windy City area made a big contribution to grizzly conservation again this year when the Brookfield Chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK) hosted its 12th annual spaghetti dinner. Held in April, the event has benefited Vital Ground for the last decade. This year’s dinner filled the Brookfield Zoo Discovery Center. Thanks to a grizzly-themed silent auction, it raised \$9,500 for protecting habitat and preventing conflicts in the Northern Rockies. Thank you, Brookfield AAZK, for all you do to support the wild!



Vital Ground Welcomes Land Steward Kali Becher

Our newest staff member, Kali Becher, is no stranger to grizzly country.

Growing up in northern Idaho, she came to love the outdoors by exploring the same landscape she will now help conserve as Vital Ground’s land steward.

“I am thrilled to join the team at Vital Ground and to work throughout the lands that connect the place where I grew up to the place I now call home,” Kali says. “I look forward to getting better

acquainted with the people, places, and wildlife across the landscape.”

As land steward, Kali will oversee monitoring and stewardship of Vital Ground’s conservation easements and land purchases. She joins our team with more than a decade’s experience working in natural resource conservation, most recently as the natural resource specialist for Missoula County, where she worked with rural residents, land management agencies and conservation partners on open space conservation.



Vital Ground Applies for Renewal of Accreditation

The land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant’s policies and programs. The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Vital Ground complies with national quality standards. If you have comments, please submit those by April 21, 2019. Email: info@landtrustaccreditation.org; U.S. mail: Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866; Fax: 518-587-3183. To learn more about the accreditation program, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-elements.

WITH HELP FROM VITAL GROUND BOARD CHAIR, ORPHANED GRIZZLIES FIND NEW HOME

Three grizzly bear cubs orphaned in Montana this summer have become ex-pats.

As conservation biologists embarked on an exhaustive search to prevent the cubs from being euthanized, a message board post by Vital Ground Board Chairman Stuart Strahl led to an adoption agreement for the cubs with Zoo Sauvage de Saint-Felicien, a facility in Quebec, Canada.

The zoo features large native habitats and only houses animals indigenous to Earth’s northern regions. Located 200 miles north of Montreal, the regionally-acclaimed zoo’s name translates as “Wild Zoo of Saint-Felicien.”

“Everybody is really excited,” said Christine Gagnon, the zoo’s director of conservation and education. “This is a good opportunity for the cubs and for us.”

A happy ending for the cubs was hardly a given. Born in January, the bears’ mother was struck and killed on June 5 by a motor vehicle on State Highway 200 east of Lincoln, Mont. After a passing trucker reported the accident, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) specialists were able to capture the cubs and deliver them to FWP’s rehabilitation center, where they would only be allowed to stay for four weeks before state regulations required them to be moved elsewhere or given a lethal injection.

A return to the wild was not an option, as the grizzlies were too young to survive alone and had become reliant on human-provided food. The lucky keystrokes came on June 15, when Strahl—who is president and CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society in addition to his role with Vital Ground—posted the cubs’ need to a bear-themed message board on the website of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AZA).

“The first thing I did was check to see if we



One of three orphaned grizzly cubs waits in a culvert trap before transportation to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks rehab center. With Vital Ground’s board chair helping make the connection, the cubs moved to Zoo Sauvage de Saint-Felicien in Quebec, a large facility specializing in northern species. Photo by Klara Varga.

could house these cubs at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago,” Strahl explained. “Unfortunately, we don’t have room in our bear habitat, but I put out a bulletin to our AZA members to see if others had room. We all act as a group in that, and I’m ecstatic that we’ve found a home for the cubs.”

Two thousand miles from Montana, Gagnon read Strahl’s post and responded immediately. With accreditation from the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Zoo Sauvage met FWP’s adoption requirements, and with its two resident grizzlies nearing the end of their lives, the timing aligned. The zoo’s current grizzly pair are in their upper twenties with declining health due to old age.

“It will be a sad moment because they have been here for over 20 years,” Gagnon said of the old grizzlies’ eventual passing. “But the cubs will ease the difficulty of losing the old pair.”

The cubs have now relocated safely to Quebec. You can watch them grow via the Zoo Sauvage de Saint-Felicien Facebook page! 🐾

IN MEMORY —
GARY HUMBAR

FOR GARY HUMBAR, CHANCE GRIZZLY ENCOUNTER LED TO LASTING CONSERVATION LEGACY

Gary Humbar's life changed several years ago, when he had a close encounter with a grizzly while hiking in Glacier National Park. He and his friends surprised the bear on the Red Eagle Lake trail, which Gary wrote about:

The bear gave us grace and did not charge, although he had all the right to. We gave him space while he was fattening up on huckleberries. After my heart returned to its normal beat, I realized from that moment on that my priority in life had changed. I now support The Vital Ground Foundation, as they work to create more wild places for the grizzly bear to roam without the threat of humans.

Gary's love of wild places and wild animals came from a childhood spent near Vancouver, Wash., and time outside with three older brothers and one younger sister. He studied forestry at Southwestern Oregon Community College and worked for the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, where he spent the bulk of his career.

Gary was an avid outdoorsman and visited many national parks in the West. He loved to camp and hike, with time in the mountains strengthening his commitment to conservation. He moved to La Pine, Ore., in 2015 to spend his retirement exploring the landscape of eastern Oregon.

Gary remained connected to grizzly bears and their habitat; to him, they symbolized freedom



Gary Humbar spent countless hours exploring the Oregon Landscape, including Davis Lake.



and strength. "The grizzly is a tremendous animal in an inspiring land," he said.

When Gary died this past year, he left the bulk of his estate to Vital Ground. He hoped the funds would help secure another conservation easement so the great bears would have more freedom to move into land which they historically occupied.

Vital Ground is honored to be a part of Gary's conservation legacy. Per his request, the bequest will help fund Vital Ground's Right Place Campaign to permanently protect grizzly bear habitat from subdivision and development. Gary would be pleased to know that Vital Ground is pushing harder than ever to fulfill his wish of a world with more wild spaces for grizzlies and other wildlife.

"I want to make a difference for grizzly bears and all of the animals and plants that live with them," he said. 🐾

If you would like to consider leaving a bequest to Vital Ground in your estate planning, please visit www.vitalground.org/planned-giving or call Kim Davitt at 406-549-8650. We also have an estate planning advisor (available free of charge) who can help you meet your legacy and conservation goals.

BUSINESS PARTNERS

MONTANA COFFEE TRADERS AND VITAL GROUND CELEBRATE A 25-YEAR PARTNERSHIP!

Twenty-five years is a long time. Most wild grizzly bears don't reach the quarter-century mark in age. Meanwhile, was your favorite restaurant around 25 years ago? How about your favorite coffee roaster?

Ours was. This year marks the 25th anniversary of Vital Ground's longest-running business partnership. Our foundation's office was still located in Park City, Utah, back in 1993, when Montana Coffee Traders brewed up its first batch of Grizzly Blend dark roast.

Ever since, the partnership has allowed you—and thousands of others—to support grizzly conservation one pound of coffee at a time. For each pound of Grizzly Blend sold, a percentage is donated to Vital Ground. "We're proud to support their conservation efforts," said Heather Vrentas, general manager of Montana Coffee Traders.

Montana Coffee Traders has made a real



impact in grizzly bear recovery within the Lower 48. Just think—25 years ago, the wild grizzly populations within Yellowstone and the Glacier-Bob Marshall area were half their current size, and elsewhere in Montana and Idaho, just a handful of grizzly bears clung to life.

Now grizzlies are returning to historic range where the species hasn't roamed for more than a century, and they're beginning to solidify the landscape links needed for a connected and resilient population that will thrive for generations to come.

"Montana Coffee Traders is to be commended for their long-term dedication to the conservation of grizzly bear habitat," said Kevin Rhoades, director of communications for Vital Ground. "Every time you purchase a pound of Grizzly Blend, you're contributing to wildlife habitat conservation in the Northern Rockies."

If you're in Montana, look for Grizzly Blend at any Montana Coffee Traders' location or in your local grocery store. But if not, don't fear! Your morning cup of Joe can still protect wildlife—just visit coffeetraders.com and order Grizzly Blend shipped right to your door.

From all of us at Vital Ground, a huge thank you to Montana Coffee Traders for a quarter-century together on behalf of the Great Bear! 🐾



GRIZZLY BLEND COFFEE- by Montana Coffee Traders

Grizzly Blend is a full-bodied, dark-roasted coffee. Vital Ground receives a percentage of proceeds for each pound of Grizzly Blend sold.

Order yours at www.coffeetraders.com



FROM CONFLICTS TO COEXISTENCE

HOW YOU, THE ALSAM FOUNDATION AND 13 PARTNERS KEEP BEARS AND PEOPLE SAFE



By Matt Hart

There's no denying it: 2018 has been a rough year for grizzly bear conflicts in the Northern Rockies. In Montana and Wyoming, more than 50 grizzlies have perished due to run-ins with humans or human property.

Due in part, perhaps, to a poor summer berry crop, an extraordinary number of grizzlies have been tangled up with people this year. When natural foods are scarce, bears will turn toward options like fruit trees, livestock or discarded grain feed. Meanwhile, wildlife officials have reported record grizzly deaths due to vehicle collisions. All this before fall, when bears are more likely to get in trouble as they forage urgently before hibernation.

What can bear lovers do to help mitigate future deadly encounters? Supporting Vital Ground is a good place to start!

Our roundtables with more than 50 wildlife experts in 2017 produced a prioritized inventory of the hotbeds for grizzly conflicts across the region. Now, we're turning that data into action. Thanks

to your support and a generous contribution from The ALSAM Foundation, our Conservation Partners Grant Program upped its game in 2018—we funded 13 projects in high-priority areas for grizzly conflict prevention, addressing issues from apple trees to livestock to community education.

CURBING THE APPLE ATTRACTION

Nothing says fall like going apple-picking, right? Unfortunately, this beloved autumnal pastime is not so innocuous if you're a bear. Across grizzly country, apple trees offer an irresistible attractant. Whether standing in someone's backyard or on the remains of a historic homestead, these trees can lure hungry grizzlies into a pattern of reliance on human-sourced food, a downward spiral that often leads to the bear's untimely death.

This doesn't mean we can't have apples in the Northern Rockies. It means we have to be more diligent about fencing off trees and picking up fallen fruit. Three of this year's partner grants will help. In our own backyard of Missoula, you're helping support the **Great Bear Foundation**, whose Bears and Apples Program organizes volunteers to harvest domestic fruit, prioritizing the city's designated

Bear Buffer Zones, conflict hotspots on the edges of grizzly habitat. As a bonus, the program teams up with Western Cider to produce the Great Bear Cider from collected apples, allowing Missoulians to drink the fruits of their volunteer labor!

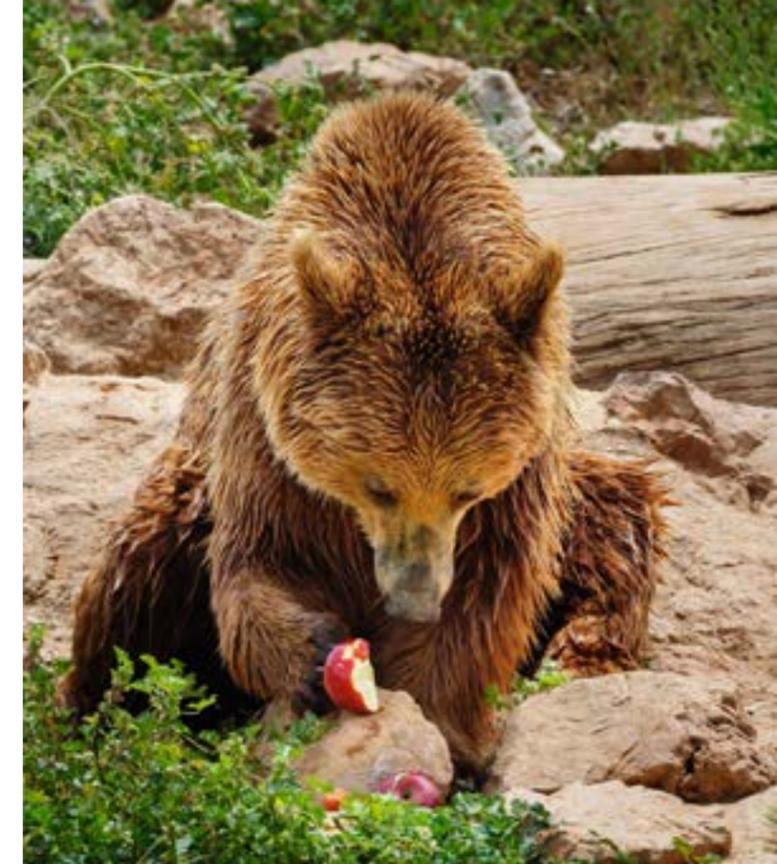
Twenty miles down the Clark Fork River, the Ninemile Valley provides a documented travel corridor between the Bitterroot Mountains and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem that sprawls from Missoula to Glacier National Park. It's a bridge that could someday connect bears from Glacier and beyond with the protected wilderness of central Idaho, where no resident grizzlies persist. But apple trees and other development in the Ninemile Area pose a roadblock, inducing conflicts and deterring free wildlife movement. Through our partnership with the **Nine Mile Community Center**, you helped create an annual Community Cider Day for the area, where volunteers will press residents' apples into cider, an incentive for homeowners to harvest fruit in a timely manner. Area bear experts will also attend the event and speak with the public about how to live peacefully alongside grizzlies.

Farther north, the **Yaak Valley Forest Council** organizes a similarly tasty blend of cider and learning at their annual Yaak Valley Apple Festival, which Vital Ground helped support in 2018. The festival includes a pie-baking contest, bear spray practice and sign-ups to help harvest apples for landowners needing assistance.

BOOTS IN THE STIRRUP

Grizzlies are on the move in new places. As the Yellowstone and Glacier-area populations continue to recover, bears are dispersing in greater numbers beyond the protected habitat strongholds of recent decades. Often, that takes them onto private ranchlands or federal grazing leases, spurring conflicts with livestock.

Range Rider programs actively prevent these incidents, putting a paid expert on the landscape to head off problems before they happen. Most importantly, these managers coordinate carcass



removals, getting dead cattle or other livestock off the range before they lure in a bear. They also act as community educators and a go-between for ranchers and wildlife officials, keeping tabs on documented predator activity and helping herd managers plan accordingly.

With support from Vital Ground, such a program has long mitigated conflicts in Montana's Blackfoot Valley. Now, with grizzlies expanding, you are helping fund four new Range Rider and carcass removal initiatives. Through our partnerships with southwestern Montana's **Big Hole Watershed Council**, **Heart of the Rockies/Jefferson River Restoration Council** and **Madison Valley Ranchlands Group**, you're helping grizzlies that roam north or west from Yellowstone stumble into fewer livestock-related conflicts. Farther north, the **Trego Range Riding Collaborative** will keep tabs on bears dispersing west from the Whitefish Range, helping offer safe travel between Glacier and the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem of Montana's northwestern corner, where fewer than 50 grizzlies still struggle to survive in two isolated subgroups.

ELECTRICITY AND EDUCATION

Apples and cattle aren't the only things getting grizzlies into trouble. Across the region, community education will pave the way for bears to travel more safely between wild strongholds.

Building bear-aware communities involves everything from teaching residents the importance of fencing off gardens and chicken coops to instructing children how to hold and discharge a can of bear spray. With your help, Vital Ground is supporting local outreach and education from the Rocky Mountain Front to northeastern Washington.

On the plains of central Montana, where grizzly conflicts peaked last fall, you're helping **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks** secure conflict-prevention equipment from electric fencing to airhorns. These important deterrents will help stave off conflicts and build tolerance among agricultural communities where residents are adjusting to life alongside grizzlies.

In southwestern Montana, you're helping the **Wildlife Management Institute** expand their bear safety education program in the area's classrooms and communities. You're also helping **People and Carnivores** educate homeowners in the Madison Valley and equip them with bear-resistant garbage containers and bear spray training. And in communities across Montana, northern Idaho and northeastern Washington, your impact will be felt when the **Be Bear Aware** educational trailer stops on one of its 30-plus events that build local awareness of bear spray protocol, bear-proof sanitation, bear safety while camping and how to minimize farm and ranch attractants.

Finally, you're helping us support a couple



Vital Ground supports bear education programs in southwestern Montana, where grizzly bears are expanding their range beyond Greater Yellowstone's boundaries. Photo by Daniel Oyler.

of longtime partners—**Defenders of Wildlife** and their Electric Fencing Incentive Program and **Flathead Land Trust**, whose new conservation easement in the Lower Flathead Valley will shore up a vital travel corridor in a conflict-prone area.

Whether it's a Range Rider Program, apple harvest or educational event, these partnerships are lifelines for grizzly bears. As human development continues in and around grizzly country, efforts to build social habitat are the vital complement to land protection, a left hand of sorts in Vital Ground's two-pronged mission to create a connected landscape with room for future generations of bears, people and all things wild.

With the help of The ALSAM Foundation and supporters like you, our work to prevent conflicts will continue expanding alongside the Great Bear's range. 🐾

IN YELLOWSTONE ATTACK, BEAR SPRAY SAVES LIVES

On August 23, hiking on a backcountry trail near Yellowstone, a family of three from Washington state startled a grizzly bear.

Protecting a cub, the sow grizzly crashed out of nearby vegetation and onto the trail, stopping the family in their tracks. As the father reached for his bear spray, his 10-year old son turned and ran down the trail, away from the bear. She pursued, knocking the boy to the ground.

What happened next was the result of preparation instead of fear. The father approached the bear, deployed the pepper spray he had rented, and the bear fled. The boy had an injured wrist and puncture wounds to his backside. He would heal.

"Two families were saved that day," says Sally Vering, founder of Bear Aware LLC, the company that rented bear spray to the Washington family. "Through the years when we were trying to get this thing launched, I had families like his in mind."

Founded in 2015, Bear Aware offers Yellowstone visitors bear spray rentals lasting from one day to two weeks. The service helps hikers save the expense of buying a bear spray canister



they may not use after their visit. With shared values of grizzly conservation and conflict prevention, Vital Ground maintains a promotional partnership with Bear Aware.

Last summer's event marked the first time that a

Bear Aware rental has directly stopped an attack. It also marked the first reported bear attack within the park since 2015, with more than 10 million people visiting Yellowstone since then, according to National Park Service data.

"As heartbreaking as it is that they went through it, I'm so thankful they had the spray and they stopped it," says Vering, who learned about the attack the day after it happened. But it wasn't until a day later, after the family returned its rental, that she found out the attack involved her clients.

As Vering would soon learn from the Washington father, it wasn't just Bear Aware's rental spray that stopped the attack. Without Bear Aware's mandatory 5-minute training course, the father didn't think he would have been able to effectively drive off the grizzly.

"During the training, he said he was rolling his eyes and thinking, 'This is overkill,'" Vering recalled. "He's an absolute believer now." 🐾



The Young Living Foundation is honored to partner with The Vital Ground Foundation. Through this partnership, the Young Living Foundation donates a portion of all proceeds from Young Living's Animal Scents™ product line sales directly to The Vital Ground Foundation.

The Young Living Foundation is committed to empowering individuals to defy limitations by providing education, wellness, conservation and business opportunities.

Since the establishment of its first farm, Young Living is dedicated to protecting plants, wildlife, and natural habitats. Known for its unique Seed to Seal® process, Young Living Essential

Oils ensures its seeds are planted in soil free from chemicals or harmful pesticides.

Prior to sale, Young Living's Animal Scents products have been through the 5-step Seed to Seal® process of purity testing.

The Animal Scents line includes: Animal Scents Ointment, Animal Scents Shampoo and essential oil blends: Infect Away™, Mendwell™, ParaGize™, Puriclean™, RepelAroma™ and T-Away™.

To purchase Animal Scents products and support The Vital Ground Foundation, visit Young Living's Animal Scents product page.

FORGING AHEAD, TOGETHER

TAKING STOCK OF GRIZZLY RECOVERY AFTER THE DELISTING DEBATE OF 2018



By Matt Hart

For grizzly bears, fall is like the end of an exam. With each elk bugle and frosty night, the time limit draws closer. Winter looms like a low cloud and soon each bear's struggle to fatten up before hibernation will be graded, pass or fail.

Now imagine taking that exam while the school board hosts a loud public debate about what future testing conditions should look like.

So it was this fall for the grizzlies of the Greater Yellowstone area. As bears dug for roots and grubs or sparred with wolves over deer, the terms of the grizzly's relationship with human beings became the center of public attention. In 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had removed Yellowstone grizzlies from the federal list of threatened species, turning management authority over to the state wildlife agencies of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. But a coalition of nonprofits and Native tribes challenged the

decision in court, leading to a public hearing in a packed Missoula courtroom on Aug. 30, 2018, just days before grizzly hunting seasons were set to begin in parts of Wyoming and Idaho near Yellowstone.

After twice delaying his ruling and the hunts that hinged on it, federal judge Dana Christensen made his decision on September 24: Citing the importance of Yellowstone grizzlies to the species' larger national recovery, Christensen returned the bears to the federal list of threatened species, blocking all hunting and mandating continued habitat protection as outlined by the Endangered Species Act.

GRIZZLY RECOVERY AND DELISTING: THE LARGER PICTURE

When grizzlies were added to the endangered species list in 1975, fewer than 700 of them lived south of Canada. Scientists estimate the species once numbered around 50,000 bears in the Lower 48, but a century of human encroachment into grizzly habitat—and general persecution of all predators—had pushed the Great Bear to the brink.

Recovery began with that first federal listing,

and in 1982 a management plan detailed the work ahead, naming six recovery zones and population targets for each. Thirty-five years later, Greater Yellowstone had met its goal of 700 bears, prompting the subpopulation's delisting in 2017. To the north, bears in Montana's Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) now number over 1,000 and delisting remains a possibility as soon as next year. The recovery of these groups, anchored by the protected habitat of Glacier and Yellowstone national parks, bears witness to both the grizzly's natural resilience and the remarkable collaborative work of government agencies and other conservation-minded groups and individuals.

But the situation is different in the other four recovery zones. Recent DNA analysis reports fewer than 50 grizzlies persisting in the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem of northwestern Montana, while the Selkirk Mountains of northern Idaho and northeastern Washington host an estimated 30 bears south of the border. Idaho's Bitterroot Ecosystem and Washington's North Cascades both feature vast cores of protected bear habitat, yet neither recovery zone sees more than rare vagrant grizzlies within its boundaries.

If grizzlies are to develop stable populations in all six recovery zones, a combination of habitat protection and conflict prevention must allow bears from Greater Yellowstone and the NCDE to naturally range across the region. Reconnecting historic habitat will also gain importance as climate change alters the grizzly's dietary landscape, forcing bears to travel farther as they adapt to shifting seasonal patterns and food availability.

WHERE VITAL GROUND STANDS

When it comes to delisting, Vital Ground does not hold an organizational position "for" or "against" specific federal proposals. As a land trust, we hold fast to our mission to protect habitat and prevent conflicts, work that endures regardless of the grizzly's protection status.

While Vital Ground recognizes the remarkable success of grizzly recovery in Greater Yellowstone and the NCDE, much work remains to achieve our vision of a linked landscape from Yellowstone into Canada across which grizzly bears and other wide-ranging species—from wolverine to mule deer to bull trout—have room to roam and adapt. The grizzly's long-term recovery in the Lower 48 will not be determined by a single listing decision but rather by sustained nationwide collaboration

between federal and state agencies, Native tribes, conservation groups and communities of grizzly country.

Here's the good news: as a Vital Ground supporter, you are fueling that work. In 2017, our roundtables with wildlife experts showed us the most urgent places for habitat protection and conflict prevention. The conservation successes detailed in this edition of *Vital News*—from Wild River to the Big Hole Valley—are the results of sharpened strategy put into action.

That makes you a key cog in the wheel that is helping push the grizzly forward. As bears hibernate this winter—hopefully passing their annual exam with flying colors—take a moment to appreciate the significance of your investment in the future of grizzlies and all things wild. You've earned it. 🐾



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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 habitat that grizzlies need to survive including other species that share their range;
- Work where private lands and human impacts meet some of the wildest places left on the continent;
- Target projects that conserve critical lands, sustain habitat connections and prevent conflicts between bears and people;
- Ground our projects on current science and strong collaborative partnerships.

As a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit, our success depends on you!
Visit www.vitalground.org to donate or become a member.

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