



2018 ANNUAL REPORT

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When I joined Vital Ground as Director of Lands 14 years ago, I could only imagine the organization posting a year like 2018.

Three crucial land purchases totaling more than 500 acres of newly-protected habitat; a dozen conflict prevention partnerships to keep bears out of trouble from southwestern Montana to northeastern Washington; and the launch of Vital Ground's audacious One Landscape Initiative based on a rigorous, science-based plan to protect habitat across 188,000 vital acres and prevent conflicts in 21 key locations. Thanks to supporters like you, Vital Ground has grown into a visionary leader pushing grizzly bear and wildlife conservation forward with tangible long-term investments.

I hope you'll read this report and see for yourself just how significant the past year was, and how exciting the future looks. We wouldn't be here without Stuart Strahl, who recently moved into an advisory role after chairing Vital Ground's Board of Trustees over seven stellar years. We are deeply grateful for his leadership and enduring vision. Board cornerstone Kelly Johnson now brings her keen eye for detail and tireless energy to the chair's role, working alongside a dynamic slate of new and returning trustees.

From board to staff to individual supporters like you, it is going to take a massive team effort to achieve the permanent protection of a connected Northern Rockies landscape that benefits grizzlies, other wildlife and people alike. But through the One Landscape Initiative, a roadmap to that vision is clear. And it will start by all of us working together to log more years like 2018!

Thank you for continuing to push Vital Ground forward on behalf of all things wild.

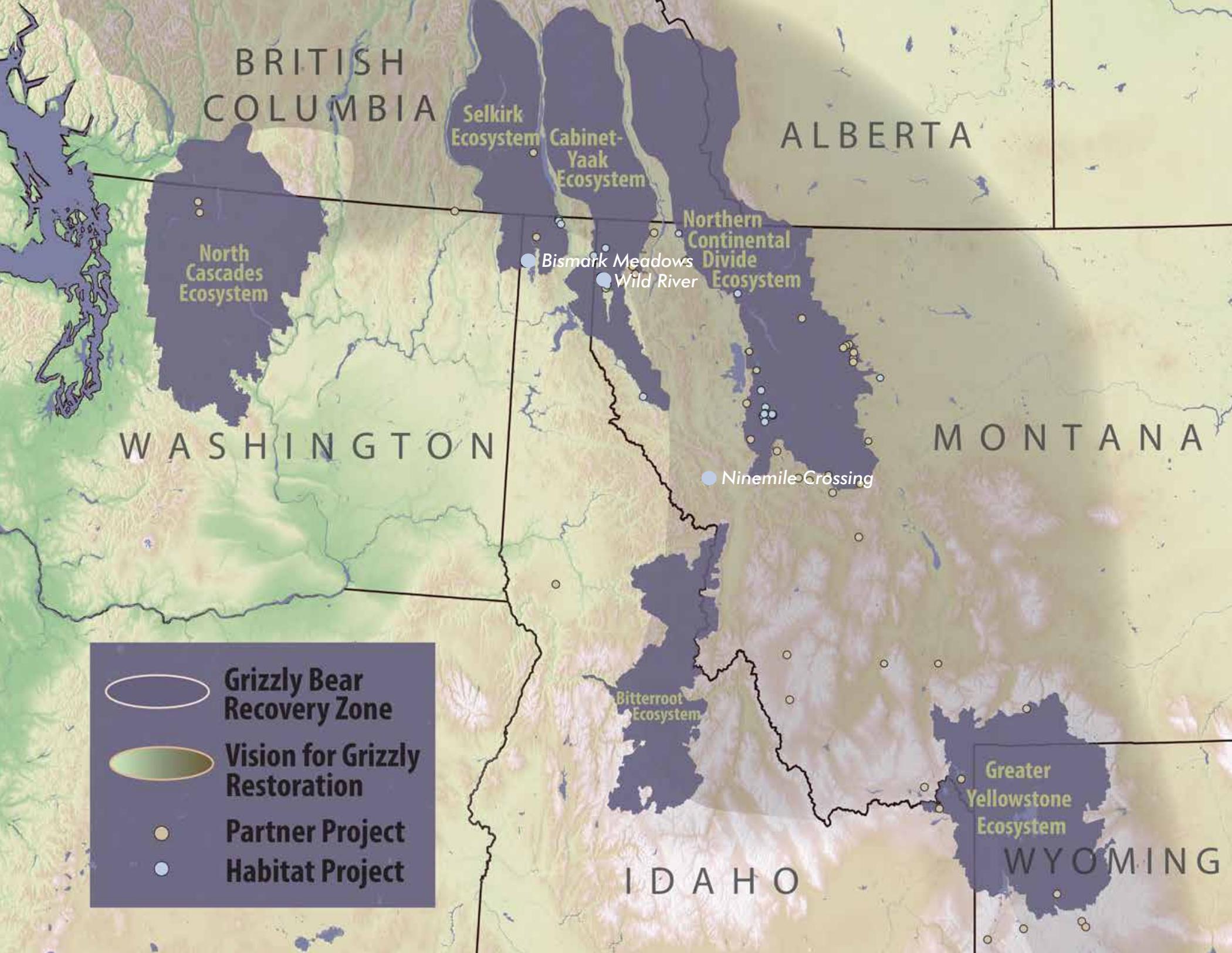


Ryan Lutey, Executive Director





Bismark Meadows, Idaho (see p. 6) / Josh Smith Photography



BRITISH COLUMBIA

ALBERTA

North Cascades Ecosystem

Selkirk Ecosystem

Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem

Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem

Bismark Meadows

Wild River

WASHINGTON

MONTANA

Ninemile Crossing

Bitterroot Ecosystem

Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

IDAHO

WYOMING

-  Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone
-  Vision for Grizzly Restoration
-  Partner Project
-  Habitat Project

LAND PROTECTED: NINEMILE CROSSING



Herrera

Just 20 miles west of Missoula, Interstate 90 crosses the Clark Fork near its confluence with Ninemile Creek. The Ninemile Range extends north toward both the Cabinet and Mission Mountains, while the Bitterroots rise into Idaho on the other side of the river and highway.

Linking three vast ecosystems, this area figures prominently in many projected

pathways connecting Greater Yellowstone, Cabinet-Yaak and Northern Continental Divide bears (see project map).

Fortunately, wildlife can easily cross under the two I-90 bridges via a small strip of land on the Bitterroot side, with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks recently documenting one grizzly and numerous other species utilizing

the existing underpass.

Late in 2018, Vital Ground and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) jumped at the chance to purchase and protect 52 acres abutting the underpass. Its value is showing, with a young male grizzly passing near the site and continuing south into the Bitterroots in June 2019!

LAND PROTECTED: BISMARK MEADOWS

The Idaho Panhandle is remote country, and its most remote and wild corner centers on Priest Lake, deep in the Selkirk Mountains. Just west of the 40-square mile lake, Bismark Meadows is something rare: a large, low-lying wetland that has not been drained and developed. Grizzlies rely on it for spring forage, cutthroat trout swim up its streams,

and six rare aquatic plant species sprout from its marshy soil. It is an irreplaceable setting.

Vital Ground has been working to protect this lush landscape for over a decade, completing our fifth and largest land acquisition in 2018, a 455-acre purchase that brings our total impact to nearly 1,000 acres conserved at the site.

In recent years, biologists have tracked at least eight different grizzlies foraging at Bismark Meadows, from a total of 60 bears estimated to live in the Selkirk Ecosystem of Idaho, Washington and British Columbia. Connecting Canadian wildlands with the American Cabinet-Yaak and Bitterroot areas, the Selkirks are vital ground indeed.



Kevin Rhoades

LAND PROTECTED: WILD RIVER



Y2Y/Gem Vision Productions

Vital Ground's flagship project of 2017 gathered more steam in 2018 as we again partnered with Y2Y to purchase and protect crucial habitat in the Wild River corridor of Montana's northwestern corner.

Once slated for dense development, the area is a vital pathway between the Purcell and Cabinet mountains, crucial to connecting

the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem's isolated subpopulations of around 25 grizzlies that persist on either side of the Kootenai River.

The cleared but largely undeveloped land will now be restored as native habitat. With 2018's purchase of five lots adding to the seven protected in 2017, 42.5 acres are now in conservation rather than subdivision.

Combined with Vital Ground's Yaak Mountain property directly to the north, a fully-protected pathway now connects public forestlands on either side of the Kootenai, benefitting not just grizzlies, but also Canada lynx, bull trout and endangered white sturgeon that migrate up the river. Two final lots remain unprotected, however, so stay tuned!

CONFLICTS PREVENTED: 2018 PARTNER GRANTS

In 2018, Vital Ground funded 12 partners focused on preventing bear-related conflicts. Thanks to generous support from the ALSAM Foundation and individual contributors like you, our Conservation Partners Grant Program is not just preventing conflicts—it's doing so in the most critical places for grizzlies. New partnerships are backing crucial work in 10 of the 21 priority locations from our *One Landscape Initiative* (p. 11).

West of Yellowstone, east of Glacier, and along the Montana-Idaho border, conflict prevention can pave the way for safe wildlife travel, genetic exchange and coexistence with people as grizzlies return to historic range.

In southwestern Montana, the **Madison Valley Ranchlands Group** runs a carcass

management program, maintaining a composting site and collecting livestock carcasses from area ranches where they might otherwise attract predators. In the nearby Ruby Valley, the **Greater Yellowstone Coalition** will convene a landowner workshop focused on bear behavior and conflict mitigation. Throughout this linkage region, your support of Vital Ground is also backing the **Wildlife Management Institute's** traveling Bear Safety Education Program, bringing bear spray training and educational opportunities to rural communities in grizzly country.

With the Bitterroot Valley representing a key crossroads of future bear dispersal, we're partnering with **People & Carnivores** on two electric fencing projects in the area. On the other side of I-90, you're supporting the **Great Bear Foundation's** apple pickup program in Missoula's foothills. And in an area with especially high conflict numbers in 2018, the **Blackfoot Challenge** continues electric fencing efforts and livestock carcass removal work in conjunction with

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Moving north, your contributions help extend Vital Ground's conservation legacy in the Swan Valley, where we support **Swan Valley Bear Resources** in a bear-resistant garbage container loaner program as well as electric fencing and community education and outreach. West of Glacier, we're backing a new effort, the **Trego Range Riding Collaborative**, whose carcass removal and outreach program helps protect bears and other wildlife in a key northern linkage area between the Northern Continental Divide and Cabinet-Yaak areas.

Farther afield, **Be Bear Aware** runs a mobile educational trailer that brings bear spray training and other outreach to events in western Montana, northern Idaho and eastern Washington. You're also supporting the grizzly's natural return to the North Cascades through **Conservation Northwest's** work with three First Nations communities in southern British Columbia on electric fencing, fruit pick-ups, student outreach, signage and news coverage.

Partnerships like these represent a vital piece of the grizzly's recovery puzzle. Thanks to your support in 2018, bears and people will be able to share more of the landscape!



Patti Sowka

VITAL FAMILY: SILVERTIP LEGACY CIRCLE + GRIZZLY COUNCIL

For decades, **Banu Qureshi** has been a powerful force for conservation, having served Vital Ground as a board member for 15 years, including seven years as Board Chair, and a short stint as acting executive director.

“I have seen Vital Ground evolve from a small group of folks with a big dream into a well-respected and very successful land trust, without sacrificing or changing the underlying mission,” says Banu. She continues to support Vital Ground as a volunteer, donor, and member of the Silvertip Legacy Circle. “With everything going on in the world, protecting the environment is my highest priority,” she says. “Vital Ground isn’t trying to save the whole landscape, just the most important pieces, which can make a lasting difference by protecting key wildlife habitat and corridors.” By including Vital Ground in her estate planning, Banu is thinking long-term. “Leaving that legacy not only for one’s children but for future generations is really important to me,” she says.

The Silvertip Legacy Circle is a group of extraordinary people who have made a lifelong commitment to Vital Ground in their estate plans. Thank you, Banu, for your decades of support and the conservation legacy you have built!



The **McLean Family** from North Carolina are long-standing supporters of grizzly bear and wildlife conservation, having contributed to Vital Ground’s efforts since 2004 and recently joined our Grizzly Council.

“We just love the bears,” Ellen McLean explained. “We fell in love with Bart and appreciated how the Seuses raised bears.” The family travelled out to the opening of Vital Ground’s Missoula office in 2004 (pictured above with Doug Seus). Daughter Hartley says, “We love Vital Ground’s efforts to keep bears in a wild environment.”

Members of Vital Ground’s Grizzly Council have protected thousands of acres of habitat for the Great Bear and other wildlife. This incredible group of donors has partnered with Vital Ground by providing the funding or land donations for critical conservation easements and acquisitions. Grizzly Council members give philanthropic contributions of \$25,000 or more, or donate land or conservation easements valued at over \$100,000.

To view a full list of Silvertip Legacy Circle and Grizzly Council members, as well as other donors and partners, please go online to vitalground.org/annual-reports

2018 FINANCIAL POSITION

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, The Vital Ground Foundation ended 2018 in a strong financial position. Public support and revenues totaled \$2,862,923.

During this period, 77.06%* of all expenditures was spent on conservation and education programs.

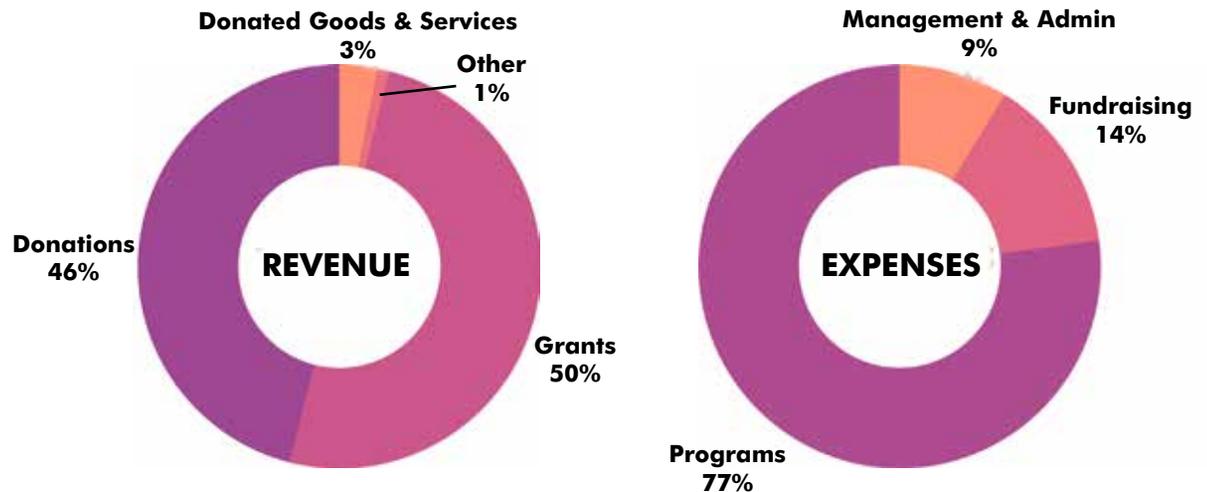
Land held for preservation by Vital Ground represents an asset of \$5,309,996 as of December 31, 2018.

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.

* 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.

Note: 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. Vital Ground maintains a "Gold"-rated profile with GuideStar, an online database of more than 1.8 million nonprofit organizations.

	12/31/18	12/31/17
ASSETS		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,011,404	825,988
Investments	932,242	1,147,369
TOTAL	1,943,646	1,973,357
LIABILITIES and NET ASSETS		
Receivables and Prepaids	107,080	119,549
Total Land and Land Improvements	5,332,385	3,941,638
Property, Equipment, Other Assets	443,469	39,502
TOTAL ASSETS	7,826,580	6,074,046
LIABILITIES and NET ASSETS		
Total Liabilities	131,913	181,899
Net Assets	7,694,667	5,892,147
TOTAL LIABILITIES and NET ASSETS	7,826,580	6,074,046



LOOKING AHEAD: THE ONE LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE



Lance Schelvan

In 2018, Vital Ground turned the best available science and extensive collaboration with federal, tribal and state biologists into a blueprint for durable grizzly bear recovery.

The One Landscape Initiative prioritizes **188,000 acres** of habitat for protection on private lands and **21 crucial locations** for conflict prevention. Investment in these needs will create safe, connected pathways for grizzly bears and for all species with whom they share space, from wolves and elk to trout and hummingbirds.

Rapid development and climate impacts on

diet are forcing bears and other species to travel farther to satisfy basic needs of food, shelter and space. The One Landscape Initiative aims to protect and connect habitat for biodiversity while simultaneously investing in community efforts to keep bears, other wildlife and people safe.

Broad partnerships are required to reach our ambitious vision of a connected, protected landscape and a single, resilient grizzly population in the Northern Rockies. We are teaming up with private landowners and other land trusts to protect crucial habitat, with

other conservation and community groups to prevent conflicts, with businesses and charitable foundations committed to environmental stewardship, and our main conservation-minded supporters who leave such an important conservation legacy on the landscape.

Our 2019 projects begin with additional acres to protect at Bismark Meadows and Wild River as well as several new locations in western Montana and northern Idaho. Thank you for supporting the important work of protecting priority areas and stitching together a connected landscape!

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. To accomplish this, 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 on the continent;
- Target projects that sustain habitat connections and conserve critical lands;
- Ground projects on current science and strong partnerships.

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

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