THE VITAL GROUND FOUNDATION | FALL 2019

VITAL NEWS

CONNECTING ONE LANDSCAPE FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

CLOSING THE GAPS FOR RECOVERING GRIZZLIES

Grizzly bears are exploring the unknown in 2019. For the first time in decades, a grizzly has taken up documented residence in the Bitterroot Mountains, with biologists tracking a young male bear's travels throughout the region this past summer. West of Yellowstone, grizzlies are dispersing in greater numbers through the valleys and ranges of southwestern Montana. It won't be long before one turns north into the wilds of Idaho and meets a bear ranging south like this year's male.

Your support of Vital Ground is lighting the way for this historic reunion. In this issue, you'll find details about current projects to protect and connect key habitat (pp. 3-5), new coexistence partnerships that are keeping bears and other wildlife out of trouble (pp. 6-7), and the story of this year's low Pacific salmon runs (pp. 14-15). As always, thank you for pushing Vital Ground forward on behalf of all things wild!

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VITAL GROUND
FOUNDATION

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

L to R: David Wesley, Board Chair Kelly Johnson, Ryan Lutey and Sally Smyth at a recent Vital Ground reception where we honored David and Sally's service as board members.

A Season of Anticipation, and of Gratitude

As snow begins to pile up in the high country of the Northern Rockies, it's hard not to start looking ahead. To spring, when grizzlies will emerge from their dens and fight for another year to survive amid a changing environment and expanding human presence; to the habitat conservation projects Vital Ground is close to completing that will push back against those threats to wildlife; and to all of 2020, when we will celebrate Vital Ground's 30th anniversary by working harder than ever to connect the Northern Rockies' one landscape for wildlife and people.

But before we look too far down the road, we look back with thanks. This fall, we celebrated the remarkable contributions of Sally Smyth and David Wesley, departing members of Vital Ground's board of trustees. David and Sally's steady leadership and passion for conservation have helped turn our board into the dynamic champion for wildlife it is today. We will miss them dearly. And although we can hardly fill their shoes, we're thrilled to welcome Stuart Strahl back to the board after a year-long hiatus.

From changing faces to changing seasons, we're moving forward with great enthusiasm. With 188,000 key acres of habitat to protect as soon as we can, your support is more important than ever. Thank you for carrying Vital Ground to exciting new places.

KEEPING IT WILD

WEST OF GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, VITAL GROUND IS PARTNERING TO PROTECT KEY HABITAT

Grizzly bears don't know the difference between public and private land. Ranging down the western slopes of Glacier National Park toward the North Fork of the Flathead River *(pictured above)*, a bear—or a wolverine or moose—will eventually cross out of the park's boundaries. If the animal continues all the way to the bottom of the North Fork Valley, and perhaps up into the Whitefish Mountains on the river's far side, it will cross a checkerboard of privately-owned properties.

The North Fork Valley remains part of a thriving, intact wildlife community, but subdivision and dense development threaten the ability of animals to move freely while staying out of trouble with people. That's why Vital Ground is actively partnering to protect open space and habitat connections near the village of Polebridge.

Earlier this year, we were eager to support the Flathead Land Trust and landowners Del and Linda Coolidge on a new conservation agreement protecting 30 acres of open space in a key habitat area. Now, we're teaming up with the U.S. Forest Service to purchase two nearby properties and turn them over to public ownership, totaling 23 acres along the North Fork that lie adjacent to other USFS lands. Utilizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)—which dedicates offshore drilling royalties toward conservation—this project will prevent subdivision in a key strip of conserved lands linking the valley bottom with Glacier to the east and vast Flathead National Forest lands to the west.

Both project areas see regular traffic from bears, wolves, elk and other wildlife. Their protection adds to a local conservation tapestry that includes Polebridge Palace, an historic 142-acre forest that Vital Ground and landowner partners Jim and Lorna Rittenburg protected in 2018.

Vital Ground's partner grant to Flathead Land Trust is one of the 13 partnerships fueled by supporters like you in 2019 *(read more on pages 6-7)*. The USFS partnership, meanwhile, builds on the Forest Service's support of our Alvord Lake Community Forest project near Troy, Mont., another effort that utilized LWCF. With Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks also contributing to the Coolidge easement, these new conservation wins in the North Fork are a testament to the collaborative potential of public agencies and the Montana land trust community.

PROJECT UPDATE

KOOTENAI CONNECTIONS

ON A WORKING FARM IN THE IDAHO PANHANDLE, WILDLIFE CROSS BETWEEN MOUNTAIN RANGES. VITAL GROUND IS WORKING TO PROTECT IT FOREVER.

Kevin Rhoades

For the second time in as many years, Vital Ground has found a conservation sweet spot on working agricultural lands. In the Kootenai Valley of northern Idaho, we're protecting both wildlife connectivity and local farming in our latest project.

The 1,040-acre Hubbard Farm is part of a vital wildlife corridor between the Selkirk and Purcell mountains. Our conservation agreement will ensure this linkage is not disrupted by future development. It will also maintain farmland in a fast-growing region, with support from the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). It's Vital Ground's second recent project with ALE, following our conservation easement for Glen Willow Ranch in central Montana.

"This project is the essence of our One Landscape Initiative," says Vital Ground Conservation Manager Mitch Doherty. "By working with agricultural producers in areas like the Kootenai Valley, we can permanently secure a premier wildlife corridor that will connect recovering populations of grizzly bears forever."

A VITAL CONNECTION FOR GRIZZLIES

Biologists estimate 50-60 grizzlies roam the Selkirk Ecosystem between far northern Idaho, southern British Columbia and the northeastern corner of Washington. Just 25 grizzlies live around Montana's Yaak Valley and the ridges of the Purcell Mountains that rise above it. Another 25 dwell farther south in the Cabinet Mountains near the Montana-Idaho border.

Splitting these three populations are the buildings and roads of the Kootenai Valley. In Montana's northwestern corner, near the town of Troy and several Vital Ground projects, the Kootenai River runs westward, dividing the Cabinet and Yaak grizzly populations. But after crossing the border into Idaho, the river turns north like an L, carving a wide, fertile valley up through the Panhandle and into Canada. With the snow-capped Selkirks on one side and the rugged Purcells on the other, the Idaho portion of the Kootenai is visually stunning. It's also an essential link between the Lower 48's three smallest groups of grizzlies.

North of the border, Vital Ground Advisor Michael Proctor has conducted more than a decade of research on grizzly movement between the Selkirks and Purcells. Thanks in part to conflict-prevention programs keeping bears away

from garbage and other attractants, more grizzlies are moving between these mountain ranges than 10 years ago. But the crossings are largely made by males and most are occurring in Canada, rather than farther south where a grizzly moving east from the Selkirks might be more likely to turn toward the Cabinets instead of holing up in the Purcells.

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

The Hubbard Farm runs up against the Kootenai River on its west side and spans a sizeable chunk of the valley. It abuts other conserved lands, which include Vital Ground's Bane Creek Project, adding to a conservation patchwork that creates viable options for wildlife to cross the valley without running into people. Whether it's a grizzly, moose or wandering wolverine, that safe passage will only become more important as climate shifts alter animals' diets and seasonal patterns, forcing them to travel farther to meet basic needs. With its river frontage and proximity to lush habitat, places like the Hubbard Farm may become natural bottlenecks for animals on the move. As a result, we plan to work with partners on restoring habitat oases within the farm to better aid wildlife crossing the valley.

Of course, it's not just wildlife staring down an uncertain future. As climate change impacts global food production, the Hubbard Farm stands to provide an invaluable local food resource to future generations.

Vital Ground is on track to complete the project over the next year, with our application accepted by NRCS and final details of the pact currently under discussion. Of course, work like this would be impossible without conservation-minded landowner partners like the Hubbard Family and committed supporters like you. From public agencies to private contributors, it may take a village to get grizzlies across the Kootenai Valley, but we're well on our way!

PARTNERS SOLVING PROBLEMS

FROM WESTERN WYOMING TO BRITISH COLUMBIA, YOUR SUPPORT HELPS PREVENT CONFLICTS AND BUILD BEAR AWARENESS IN CRUCIAL LOCATIONS

Every year, there's a subset of grizzly bears that act a bit like teenagers cut loose from home for the first time.

When mother bears turn their attention to mating or younger cubs, the two- or three-year old subadults start getting ignored and kicked out. Parentless for the first time, these young grizzlies walk into a world of stimuli that they're still learning to interpret. It can be a dangerous time.

In the spring of 2019, a boater recorded video of two subadult males swimming across a reservoir in central Montana, far from shore. It's a cute video, but the lessons are more sober. Subadults can behave erratically, and when grizzlies spend time close to people, many form bad habits, especially if the incidents begin early in the bear's life. Often involving easy meals like grain feed or domestic livestock, bad habits quickly become very hard for a scavenging omnivore to break.

The end is usually a death sentence or expensive relocation for the bear, and in many parts of Montana, conflicts and mortalities hit record numbers in 2018.

It doesn't have to be that way. As grizzlies reclaim historic range from Greater Yellowstone up to and over the Canadian border, wildlife managers and communities are expanding their toolbox for preventing ursine conflicts. Through conservation partnerships across the region, your support of Vital Ground furthers those mitigation efforts. From electric fencing to bear spray education to carcass removal programs, you help us collaborate broadly to keep bears and people safe.

ADDRESSING HOTSPOTS FOR CONFLICT

This year, Vital Ground is funding 13 different community and conservation organizations focused on preventing bear conflicts. With generous support from the ALSAM Foundation, our Conservation

Partners Grant Program is not just preventing conflicts; it's doing so in the most critical places.

Over the last two years, Vital Ground has completed a groundbreaking conservation assessment, consulting more than 60 state, federal and tribal biologists and wildlife managers to locate the most important needs for habitat conservation and conflict prevention. As a land trust, our primary focus remains the utilization of conservation agreements and land purchases to protect and link habitat for grizzlies and other wildlife. But preventing conflicts is a vital complement to that mission. Safeguarded habitat isn't worth much if the moment a bear steps off of it, she stumbles into a conflict with people or their property. If the grizzly is to reconnect its fragmented range in the Lower 48 and secure a durable future here, the species needs both physical and social habitat.

Our planning has led to Vital Ground's One Landscape Initiative, a strategic effort to protect 188,000 acres of priority habitat on private lands and support conflict prevention in 21 vital areas.

Thanks to your support, we're off to a great start, as new conflict prevention partnerships will back crucial work in 10 of those 21 hotspots.

COLLABORATIVE COEXISTENCE

West of Yellowstone, east of Glacier National Park, 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 Interstate 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 between the Glacier-Bob Marshall 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 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, bears and people will be able to stay safe and share more of the landscape for generations to come!

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

CHICAGO ZOOKEEPERS WALK ON VITAL GROUND

By Matt Hart

A big-city zoo in the Midwest might seem an odd candidate to save the wilds of the northern Rocky Mountains. But that's exactly what the keepers of Chicago's Brookfield Zoo have done for the last 10 years. Earlier this summer, two of them got to see the impact of their work first-hand.

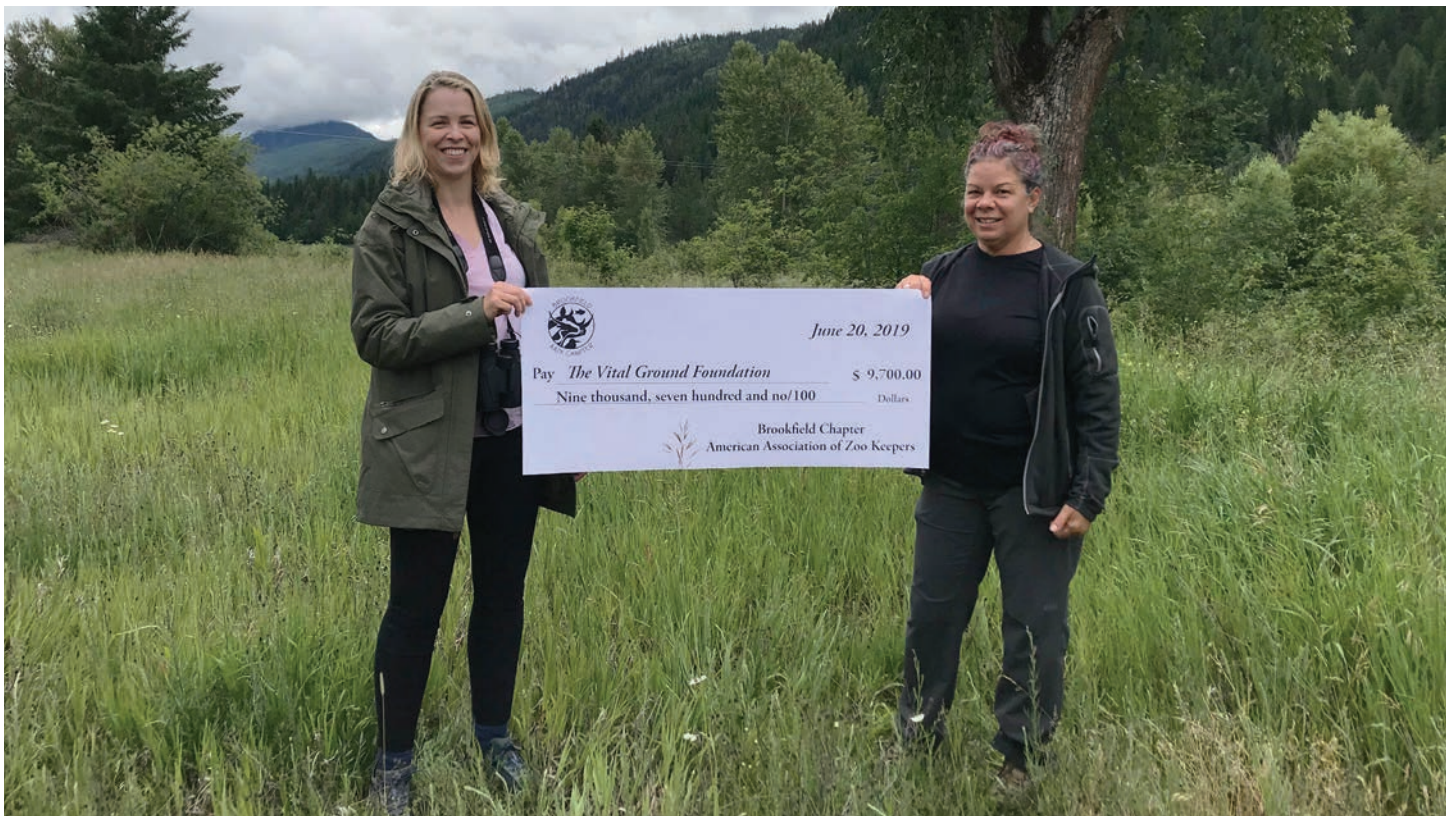
Through annual spaghetti dinners, the Brookfield chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK) has raised more than $80,000 to support conservation of grizzly bears, Canada lynx, wolverines and many other species that most Chicagoans will only be able to see in captivity at Brookfield or another zoo.

On their June trip to Montana, however, zookeepers Christy Mazrimas-Ott and Dawn Sohr watched through binoculars as a grizzly sow and two cubs foraged beneath a mountain pass in Glacier National Park. They saw mountain goats, moose, bighorn sheep and eagles. An avid birder, Sohr added several new species to her life list. And alongside Vital Ground staff, they toured some of the crucial habitats they have helped protect.

"The opportunity to see how our spaghetti dinner fundraiser is making a difference for grizzlies and the wildlife in Montana made me proud to be a member of the Brookfield AAZK Chapter," said Mazrimas-Ott, the senior large carnivore keeper at Brookfield. "Spotting the mom grizzly with her two cubs across the valley on the other side of the mountain was incredible. As a bear keeper, the partnership between Brookfield AAZK and Vital Ground is very important to me."

A DECADE OF DINNERS

Before the thrill of a wild grizzly sighting, there was excitement in the Brookfield air this April when the AAZK held its annual spaghetti dinner. Through



Brookfield zookeepers Dawn Sohr, left, and Christy Mazrimas-Ott present Vital Ground with a donation check at the Wild River project site in northwestern Montana.

ticket sales and a grizzly-themed silent auction, this year's event raised $9,700 in support of wildlife conservation in the Northern Rockies.

"The 10-year partnership that Brookfield AAZK has had with Vital Ground has been quite amazing," said Diana Tomasiewicz, a chapter member and lead organizer for the annual dinners. "Each year we find that more and more of our guests are connecting to the organization. They know it's Brookfield AAZK's Spaghetti Dinner, but they also know who Vital Ground is and what their conservation efforts are in the wild. It is quite rewarding to know that not only are we raising funds for Vital Ground, but we are also raising the conservation awareness of our dinner guests who live in our urban environment. That is a win-win and is exactly what our membership strives to achieve."

WITNESSING IMPACT

On their summer sojourn to Montana, Mazrimas-Ott and Sohr strengthened their commitment to conservation by touring several Vital Ground sites in western Montana, starting with the Ninemile Linkage Project, a conservation acquisition protecting safe passage for wildlife under Interstate 90 and between the Ninemile and Bitterroot ranges.

"I'm so impressed with the money that our spaghetti dinner has been able to raise for Vital Ground," said Sohr. "It is sometimes a challenge to feel that we as keepers make a difference with our wild areas, but having boots down on projects like Ninemile really solidifies how every little bit helps."

They also walked the Wild River Project in Montana's far northwestern corner, where Vital Ground and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative are converting a proposed subdivision into key corridor habitat along the Kootenai River.

"Being able to stand on the site of the Wild River project that we helped support was amazing," said Mazrimas-Ott. "Knowing that it was almost a development and now it will be protected for wildlife to thrive is incredible."

Christy Mazrimas-Ott, Doug Chadiwck and Dawn Sohr in Glacier National Park.

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

The Brookfield zookeepers capped their visit with a hike in Glacier National Park alongside Vital Ground trustee and veteran naturalist Douglas Chadwick. Beyond the thrill of spotting a foraging grizzly family through their binoculars, the trio bonded over their inquisitive approach to the natural world, stopping often to identify everything from scat to birdsong, and to reflect on the importance of protecting habitat beyond the invisible boundaries of national parks and designated wilderness areas.

Support from the Windy City and beyond is doing just that, helping advance Vital Ground's One Landscape Initiative to conserve 188,000 particularly crucial private-land acres that connect existing habitat for grizzlies and other wildlife.

"We've got a planet to save in a time of unprecedented environmental pressures," Chadwick summarized. "The One Landscape strategy is a big step toward securing a future for one of the most intact, wildlife-rich, and lovely regions left."

For the Midwestern zookeepers, that's reason to keep chipping in, one plate of pasta at a time.

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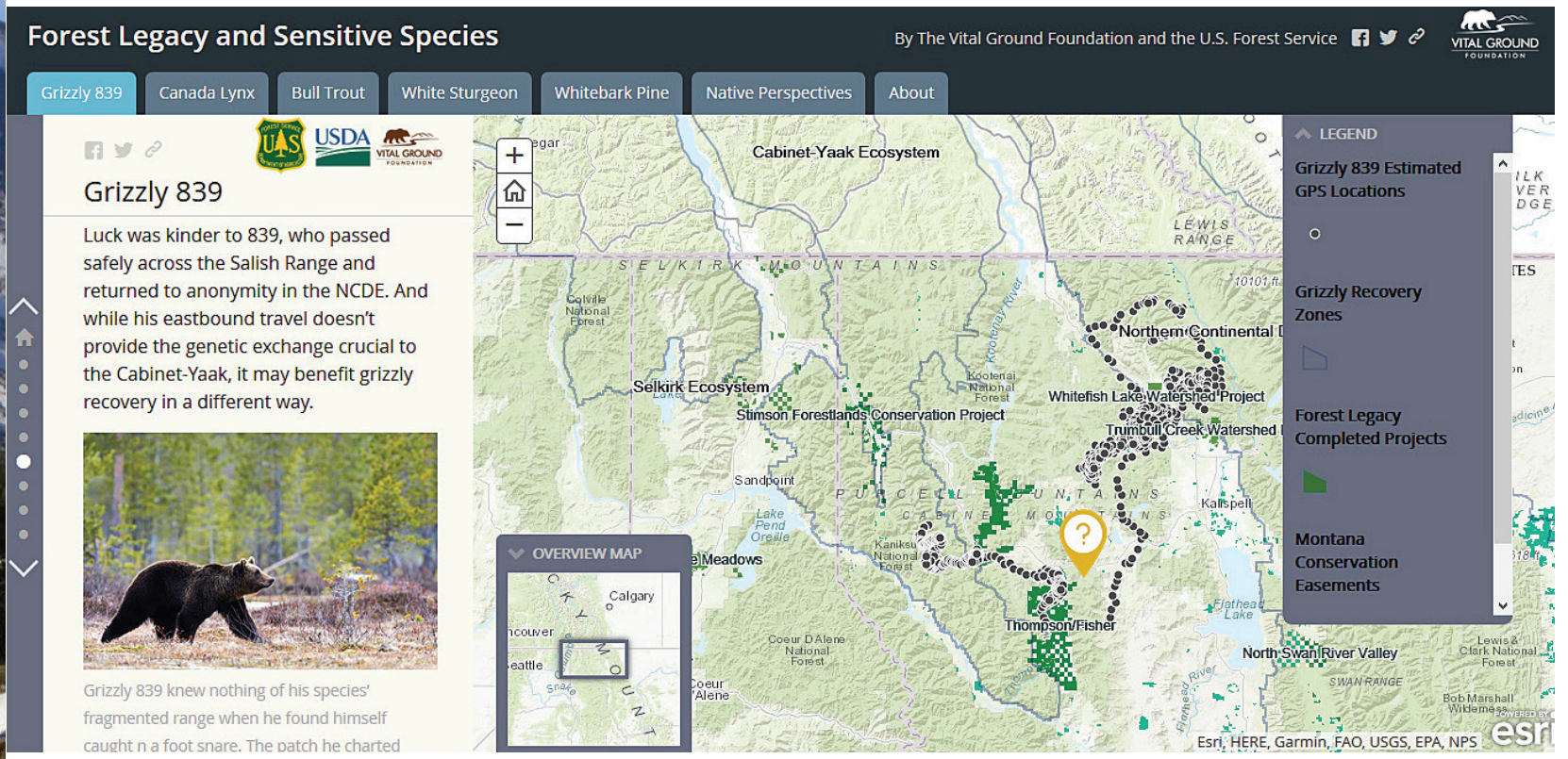

What stories light your conservation fire? Is it the tale of one animal, like the footloose Grizzly 839 that crossed highways and yards while wandering through western Montana? Or is it the story told by data, by the dots on a map that tell the fate of a species or the progress made in saving it?

However you find inspiration, those stories are just a few clicks away. Over the past two years, Vital Ground staff have partnered with the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program on a groundbreaking Story Map project. The result, now available online to the public, is an interactive six-part profile of threatened and endangered species and how forest conservation projects—like those that Forest Legacy and Vital Ground take on—benefit those species.

From the habitat connections grizzlies like 839 need to thrive to climate impacts on Canada lynx, bull trout and whitebark pine, we use maps, photos and text to show habitat conservation saving wild communities. It saves human communities, too, with Forest Legacy not just sustaining working forests but also protecting drinking water, clean air and outdoor recreation economies. For an example, look no further than Alvord Lake, where in 2015 a sister program of Forest Legacy—the Community Forest Program—joined contributors like you to help Vital Ground protect a public resource and rich habitat area in the northwestern corner of Montana.

We know that good stories sustain your passion for protecting habitat, and we hope you'll go online and check out these ones!

Check out the new Story Map online via www.vitalground.org/news

Bugs Fight Invasive Knapweed at Wild River

Once Vital Ground purchases a piece of habitat or closes on a conservation easement with a landowner, the work is really just beginning. Protected habitat is only valuable to wildlife if it helps meet their needs of food, shelter and space. Invasive plants can do a number on the biodiversity and habitat value of an area, which is why Vital Ground recently began employing a biocontrol weevil at our Wild River project site along Montana's Kootenai River. A natural alternative to pesticide, these insects will help restore habitat in

this key linkage area by mitigating the spread of invasive knapweed.

Land Steward Kali Becher explains the process: "The biocontrol bug I released is the knapweed root weevil (*Cyphocleonus achates*), which helps control spotted knapweed by tunneling and laying eggs

in the plant's roots. This can kill small knapweed plants, and overall reduces the density of the knapweed infestation and reduces plant vigor, making it easier for other plants to out-compete it."

Big thanks to our partners on this habitat restoration project: Patagonia, Missoula County Weed District and Extension, and Montana Biological Weed Control Coordination Project.

New Staff: Welcome to Vital Ground, Emma Davidson!

We're thrilled to welcome the newest member of the Vital Ground team, Emma Davidson, who began as our new administrative assistant this fall. Next time you call the office at (406) 549-8650, give Emma a hearty welcome, as she'll likely be the cheerful voice on the other end of the phone!

Emma grew up in Missoula and returned this year after spending six years in Pennsylvania. She graduated from the University of Montana in 2012 with a degree in Women and Gender Studies and worked for local women's organizations until she moved to the eastern United States.

While Emma's roots are in nonprofit work, Vital Ground is the first conservation organization she's been a part of, and she's happy to switch

gears! Growing up in Montana helped instill in her a deep appreciation for the natural world that has only strengthened over time. Emma lives in Missoula with her wife Dora and their three cats, Huckleberry Pancakes, Pants, and Crouton. Outside the office, Emma is passionate about art and live music and loves to spend her free time embroidering.

Emma's arrival coincides with the departure of Kimberly Kozub, who has moved to southwestern Montana to start a new family adventure. We're sad to see her go but excited for her next chapter and grateful for her three-plus years of dedicated service. Thank you, Kim, and welcome, Emma!

YOUNG LIVING FOUNDATION

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.

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

Robert Scriba

SHORT ON SALMON

HISTORICALLY LOW RUNS SPELL TROUBLE FOR CANADA'S COASTAL GRIZZLIES

By Tatum McConnell, Communications Intern

In early October, Alaska's Katmai National Park held its annual "Fat Bear Week," a delightful celebration of the park's healthy brown bears. For these coastal grizzlies, the summer and early fall effort to pack on the pounds usually pays off. The bears can gain up to 400 pounds from salmon, berries, insects, and other foods!

With fat stores like that, a bear can comfortably doze through winter hibernation and come out healthy in the spring. It's fun to celebrate the vigor of Katmai's bears, but right now it's a different story for those farther down the Pacific Coast. In Western Canada, climate impacts and other factors have caused precipitously low salmon runs, leaving some grizzlies emaciated. With winter fast approaching, they're in a scary situation.

Wildlife guide and photographer Rolf Hicker's recent images of alarmingly thin coastal bears brought the issue to the forefront of the conservation world. Meanwhile, the Mamalilikulla First Nation monitors grizzlies across its traditional coastal territory in central British Columbia. Chief councilor Richard Sumner told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) that bears have been traveling between islands far more often, likely in an attempt to find food. This movement can be exhausting, and leading up to hibernation grizzlies need to conserve energy however they can.

Jake Smith, guardian watchman manager for the Mamalilikulla, echoed Sumner, telling CNN, "The bears are in trouble."

The CBC reports that 2019 has seen some of Canada's worst Pacific salmon runs in recorded history. The Fraser River, British Columbia's longest, entered summer with 5 million migrating sockeye expected and instead saw just over 600,000. For the animals, plants, and people that depend on these salmon, this decrease may foreshadow a hard future.

WARM WATERS AND NEW NEIGHBORS

Pacific salmon are a keystone species, impacting countless animals and plants. Salmon provide nutrients for all parts of the forest, acting as fertilizer for riparian vegetation and a nutritious food source for many animals. One study found that up to 40 percent of streamside nitrogen, a key chemical element for plant growth, can be traced back to salmon. They're absolutely crucial to the environmental health of Canada's coastline.

So what caused this population drop in the first place? A report recently released by Canada Fisheries and Oceans highlights marine heatwaves, warming ocean temperatures, increased river sediment loads from landslides and flooding, forest fires and open-net fish farming as impacting the populations. They point out that the more time salmon spend in freshwater, the harder they're hit. This means coho, chinook, and sockeye salmon have had the largest drops, while other species that spend more of their lives in the ocean are stabler. Climate catalyzes many of these issues, with the report noting, "Canada's climate warming has been double the global average, and warming at northern latitudes has been even greater."

Biologist Alexandra Morton has spent decades studying the effects of open-net fish farming on wild Pacific salmon. She sees it as a crucial factor in the recent declines. Open-net farming means keeping salmon in pens in the open ocean rather than a dedicated facility on land, and there are concerns about wild salmon passing near these captive populations. A paper Morton coauthored in 2007 predicted the extinction of pink salmon in eight years due to sea lice transmitted from farmed fish. She explains that pressure from activists and First Nations led farms to use drugs that have delayed this extinction, but the impacts are now resurfacing.

Salmon are the lifeblood of the Northwest, crucial not just to bears but also to orcas, eagles, cedars, Douglas firs—and humans. On her blog, Morton writes, "We are losing a part of this earth, an ecosystem that generously made clean air, clean water and clean food. We are losing a fish that feeds the trees that make the oxygen we breathe."

INLAND IMPLICATIONS

Beyond those living in the Pacific Northwest, these concerns may hit home for Vital Ground supporters who have travelled on one of our Wild Bear Tours to Knight Inlet Lodge in British Columbia. Bryan Collen, general manager of Knight Inlet, explained over the phone that while he's concerned about this year's low salmon run, he's also seen plenty of healthy bears this fall.

"Females with cubs of the year are going to be more impacted, even in good salmon years," Collen said, but he's especially worried about large males dominating food resources this season. Collen hopes that increased federal funding and restoration projects in the area will help salmon rebound and prevent scarcity in the future.

The salmon crisis and its impacts on grizzlies offer a chilling example of wildlife struggling to adapt to environmental changes. In the northern Rocky Mountains, where the availability of food sources like huckleberries is shifting, connecting large habitat areas through corridor conservation is crucial to providing grizzlies and other wildlife the room they'll need to move and adapt.

Vital Ground's conservation projects create homes and corridors for countless species of plants and animals—and they have impacts on the global climate as well. By preventing development in key habitat zones, we lower the carbon footprint, prevent erosion that harms stream ecosystems, and ultimately make space for wild creatures to remain wild. And by restoring native plant species to these areas, we help store carbon that would otherwise contribute to warming. So while we may not be in a position to directly aid Canada's coastal bears this fall, your support of habitat protection in the Northern Rockies makes both a tangible impact on the ground and a broader contribution to a resilient future for people and wildlife alike.

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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!
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Contact us at:
The Vital Ground Foundation
20 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

(406) 549-8650 (Office)
info@vitalground.org
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