

The Fate of the Yellowstone Grizzly

It's Time to Put the Great Bear Back on the Endangered Species List

By Doug Peacock

Dear Friends,

Ed Abbey told us the wilderness needs no defense just defenders. I feel approximately the same way about the material in the enclosed letter. If we could get the information before the appropriate Department of Interior secretary, this might be quite simple. So, if you approve and choose, please pass the article (Lead piece on Counterpoint.com yesterday) to interested friends. If anyone has a better way (than the Tom Strickland email) to contact the DOI, please let me know. Again, I apologize for the mass mailing.

For the wild,
Doug Peacock

The Yellowstone grizzly bear population is again in serious trouble. During 2008, the bears suffered a double disaster: grizzlies died in record numbers and global warming dealt what could be a death blow to the bear's most important food source.

Some 54 grizzly bears were known to have died in 2008, the highest mortality ever recorded; this number probably exceeds the extensive killings of forty years ago when Yellowstone National Park closed down its garbage dumps and bears wandered into towns and campgrounds. The Yellowstone grizzly population sharply declined in the early 1970s and, consequently, the bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975.

Related to the high mortality of 2008 was the massive die off of whitebark pine trees, whose nuts are the bear's principal fall food. Mountain pine beetles killed the trees; the warm winters of the past decade allowed the insects to move up the mountains into the higher whitebark pine forests.

But how could this record mortality have happened? In April of 2007, the Department of Interior's U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed Endangered Species Act protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. The agency's decision to delist suggested all was well with the great bear.

In 2008, hunters and other humans shot bears in record numbers. People killed grizzlies because they could—sadly, a not uncommon human attitude in the American West—and since Yellowstone's grizzlies had been removed from the protection of the ESA listing, there were virtually no penalties for shooting them. Bear management had been turned over to fish and game agencies of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana who tend to accept any hunter explanation of self-defense in grizzly country. In short, the grizzlies were easy to kill because their lives were made less valuable by delisting. Incidentally, "known" mortality is, as a rule of thumb, generally about half of actual grizzly bears dead. A hundred dead bears per year, no matter if the total number in the ecosystem is 200 or 600, means the population is crashing downhill. This is especially true for the grizzly, one of the world's slowest-reproducing mammals.



eliminated from grizzly bear diets—and this seems to be the case—grizzlies in this island ecosystem will be severely stressed. The bears could be on their way out.

What does U. S. Fish and Wildlife (this is the lead agency for the Yellowstone Grizzly Coordinating Committee and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team; it is to this collective entity I refer) have to say about the dead grizzlies and dying pine trees? On April 15, 2009, the agencies gathered in Bozeman, Montana to discuss Yellowstone grizzly mortality. They call the alarming number of dead bears in Yellowstone a "spike," which they would reduce by recommending better hunter education, use of bear spray as a deterrent and opening a limited grizzly bear hunt in the three adjacent states. The committee coordinator Chris Servheen admitted that the 2008 mortality was the highest they had seen but pointed out that today's grizzly population is larger than that of the early 1970s. Mortality spikes are often tied to low whitebark pine cone production and the consensus was that human-caused bear mortality will drop when the number of cones per tree bounces back. When pressed (by one of the handful of non-agency people, including myself, at the meeting) about the possible role of global warming on whitebark pine, team leader

Chuck Schwartz reluctantly admitted the low production of pine nuts could be the beginning of a trend.

Frankly, it doesn't matter how many cones grow on the surviving trees when 80 percent of the whitebark forest is already dead. No one brought this up. Nor was there the whisper of a suggestion that the removal of ESA protection for the Yellowstone grizzly had anything to do with the record number of bears shot. Nobody thought of asking the public, especially elk hunters, to take responsibility for causing these encounters with grizzlies or to give up anything in terms of hunting hours or access to reduce grizzly mortality (in my opinion, getting too close to a grizzly and precipitating a charge is always the fault of the human). The agencies seem to believe it is the inalienable right of hunters to kill grizzlies whenever they feel the need or desire to. The possibility of returning the Yellowstone grizzly to the ESA protections is unthinkable to this group.

I'm saying the Department of Interior's principal public agency responsible for protecting Yellowstone's grizzlies is currently incapable of doing so. The Interagency Team/Committee has become an insular institution deaf to public opinion; it has pandered to state game departments who speciously argue that "socially acceptable" local opinion should replace the best available science to determine where grizzlies may live.

With the quality of grizzly habitat eroding due to global warming, the bears will require more public land to roam. The most important single move government could make is to relist the bear immediately, once more afford the Yellowstone grizzly protection under the ESA. Relisting alone will reduce the record human-caused mortality; the government's proposals will not.

**Yellowstone's grizzly bears are in trouble—
people are killing them off in record numbers and global warming is
burning up the food they need to survive.
The Secretary of the Interior needs to instruct the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
to withdraw their rule delisting the Yellowstone grizzly bear population.**

The reason the pine nuts are not available to grizzly bears is because the whitebark trees in the Yellowstone region have succumbed to global warming. Global warming was glossed over by Fish and Wildlife when they delisted the Yellowstone grizzly. But this, too, is not rocket-science. Last fall behind my house on the northern flank of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, far up the mountain, the forest turned red. So did the tops of all the other mountain ranges in and around nearby Yellowstone park. You could see it from the highways. The region's whitebark pine trees surrendered to an invasive pine beetle on a scale of death none of us thought we'd ever see. And it happened so fast, not in decades but just a few years, that it took both concerned citizens and scientists by complete surprise.

The reason the trees died is because the winters warmed up during the last seven years and the mountain pine beetle, already active in the lower lodgepole pine forest, moved up a life zone into the whitebark and killed the trees. Nature controls the beetle by freezing the larva—cold temperatures of minus 30-35 degrees Fahrenheit for about five days in winter, depending on the thickness of the tree bark. It is well documented that good whitebark cone crops decrease grizzly mortality and increase the number of bear cubs per litter. But whitebark pine in the Yellowstone Park area is nearly gone: no amount of science or management will bring the trees back in our lifetime. With whitebark pine nuts


Yellowstone's grizzly bears are in trouble—people are killing them off in record numbers and global warming is burning up the food they need to survive. The Secretary of the Interior needs to instruct the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to withdraw their rule delisting the Yellowstone grizzly bear population.

Whether the present Interagency Team or Committee is up to this task is another question; they fought for delisting in the face of undeniable threats to the bear's future as a species. Fresh, outside leadership is urgently needed.

Doug Peacock is the author of *Grizzly Years: In Search of the American Wilderness* and co-author of *The Essential Grizzly: the Mingled Fates of Men and Bears*.

What you can do: Write a brief email to Assistant Interior Secretary Thomas L. Strickland demanding the Obama Administration move immediately to relist the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear as a threatened species enjoying the full protection of the Endangered Species Act.

Email: feedback@ios.doi.gov.

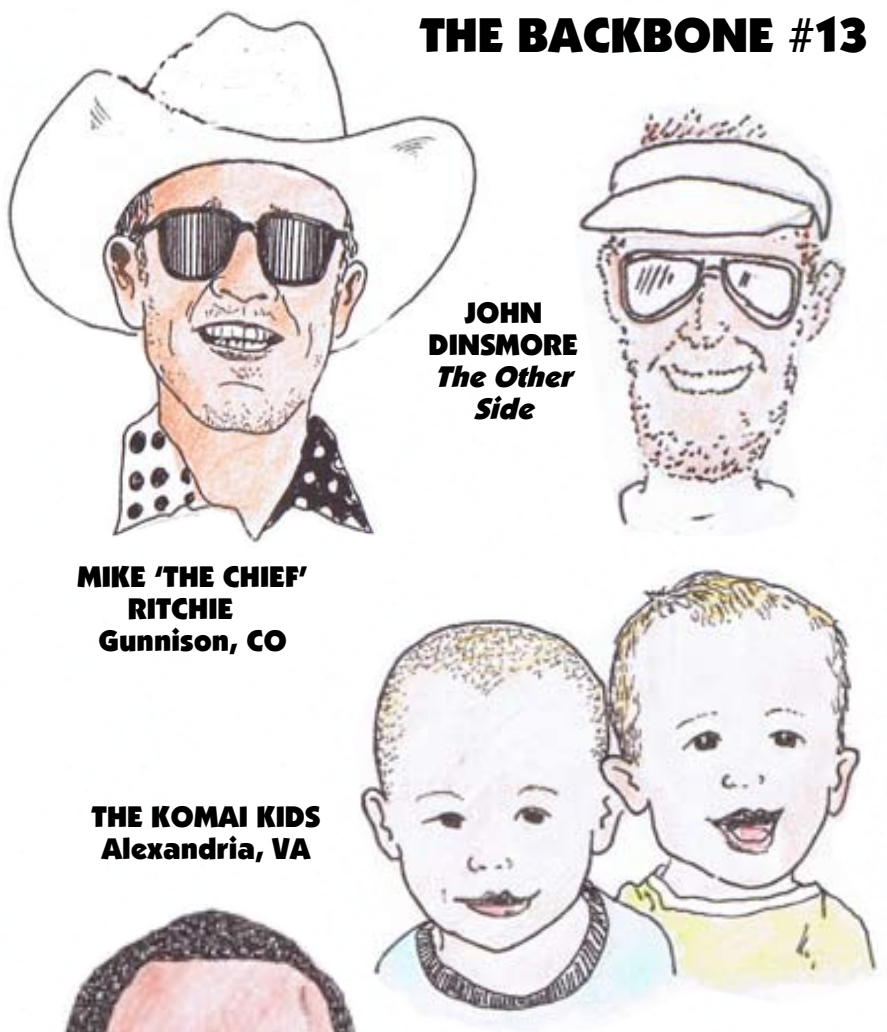


GENE SCHAFFER
Automotive Repair

"I once beat a bear in a "Who's the Grumpiest SOB in Monticello, Utah" contest. They had to bring him all the way from Montana just so I had some competition.

MONTICELLO, UTAH
Phone: Look it up yourself
Email: what are you...nuts?


THE BACKBONE #13



MIKE 'THE CHIEF' RITCHIE
Gunnison, CO

JOHN DINSMORE
The Other Side

THE KOMAI KIDS
Alexandria, VA




MEADE MORGAN
Missoula, MT

JOHN HARRINGTON
SLC, UT

THE BACKBONE #11



**IT'S TIME THE ZEPHYR HAD A 'STIMULUS PACKAGE' OF ITS OWN!
JOIN THE BACKBONE OR TAKE OUT AN AD...
HELP KEEP THE ZEPHYR THE 'VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.'**




The Canyon Country Zephyr is Now On Facebook!!!???

Meet other folks from around the country and the globe who believe in the spirit of the Z and participate in discussions about current events in the world and in Moab. Get late-breaking news and updates, share story ideas and more! You'll even get a message when the next issue of the Zephyr is available online!

Sign on at www.facebook.com and go to the group "Friends of the Canyon Country Zephyr."
See you in cyberspace...

THE FINGER



Sherman Beye...Oconomowoc, WI
Sarah Jilke...Glade Park, CO
James A Jordan...Green Valley, AZ
Lewis Downey...SLC, UT
Michaelene Pendleton...Moab, UT
Dennis Young...Grand Jct, CO
Robert Vance...Flagstaff, AZ
Anne Madsen...Berkeley, CA
Dorothy Dahlenburg...St. Paul, MN
John Allen...Rangely, CO
Izzy Nelson...Moab, UT
Greg Gnesios...Grand Jct., Co
Krista Davis...Monticello, UT
Karen Cox...Nevada City, CA
Tamara Desrosier
Lelah Sullivan
Fritz Stever...Nucla, CO
John Gould...Albq, NM
Ken Tucker...Durango, CO
Michael Benier...Aspen, CO
Doug Mackay...SLC, UT
Milos Kokotovic...San Diego, CA
Robert Skaggs...Jackson, WY
Randall Lompe...Kaycee, WY
Lina Wallen...Flagstaff, AZ
Hugh D Young...Pittsburgh, PA
Jim Macey...Keeler, CA

NEW FOR JUNE!
Grace Burgevin...Hotchkiss, CO
Sara Bartels...Paicines, CA
David Lanning...Prescott Valley, AZ
David Kozlowski...Santa fe, NM



ANOTHER FAKE TESTIMONIAL:

**Hello there!
When I am not ranting and raving like a LUNATIC or scaring half the world's population, I like to spend a quiet evening reading the ONLINE Zephyr.**

I like the recipe essays by Willie Flocko the best!