

# TRACKS

## CORN BEAR *Bryce Andrews*

The corn came up looking innocent, even inconsequential. When delicate blades broke through spring's hardpan soil, I couldn't help but think: This is what brings the grizzlies out of the mountains in droves? This is the field that sees 12 resident bears and \$10,000 in crop damage each fall? This is what state, tribal, and federal biologists consider a major risk for bears and farmers in the Mission Valley?

Through July, I worked my way around the cornfield, pounding fence posts and stringing wire. The bear-deterrent fence was a novel design: three electrified wires, the uppermost just 24 inches above the ground, offset 2 feet from an existing barbed-wire fence. Though the layout had performed well in smaller applications and research studies in the nearby Blackfoot Valley, it had yet to be tested at scale. The relatively inexpensive fence, which can be built at less than half the cost of some other bear deterrent designs, had us excited about the prospect of expanding the scope of coexistence efforts. Our collaborators—the cornfield's owner; the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks—were equally eager to see how the new fence fared.



**Caught in the act! But he was one of only a couple who got in, down from several in prior years.**



**Evidence of corn crop loss due to grizzly bear consumption.**

While I worked, the corn grew quickly. It rose past my knee, waist, and chest before the fence was up and running. Just after the tassels passed head height and the ears started to ripen, bear scat appeared on the county road. Tracks along the fence line showed us that the grizzlies had arrived, and that they were determined to find ways into the field.

Not long afterward, we had our first breach. A large grizzly jumped the fence at a pivot crossing, disappearing into 90 acres of mature stalks and leaves. We reacted quickly, retrofitting trouble spots with electrified mats and working with partners to install trail cameras at key points in the fence. Flying over the field, we were able to monitor the amount and location of bear damage.

By early September, our adjustments were proving useful. Trampled grass bore witness to places where bears had been turned away by the painful but harmless shocks. Though the fence wasn't completely effective in deterring corn-habituated grizzlies, it has significantly decreased crop damage. The landowner reported that the loss of corn was reduced by 75%—from 20% of the crop last year to just 5% this year! And the chances of human-bear encounters were greatly reduced.

The project has also given us a chance to experiment with new techniques for bear-proofing pivot and ditch crossings. Perhaps most importantly, it has allowed us to develop relationships with new partners and share information across agency departments, organizations, and watershed communities. We look forward to perfecting the fence before next summer and to sharing the lessons learned from a season's worth of matching wits with corn bears.



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## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

People and Carnivores is about solutions. On any given day that may be building bear poles in the backcountry, designing a custom fence to keep grizzlies out of a cornfield, or herding livestock away from a wolf den. But there is a bigger picture too. All of our work is about helping carnivores get from point A to point B without incident so that they can find food, mates, and security—and in the process expand their range and (re)connect with other populations for long-term health.

This summer our supporter survey revealed that we all share this vision for wild carnivores in the West. More specifically, many of you are passionate about healthy ecosystems and helping predator species play their natural role within those ecosystems, while helping us humans maintain a sense of mystery and wildness. We were gratified to learn that you “connect the dots” of bear proofing garbage dumps, building carcass composting sites, and fencing calving pastures to this larger vision of carnivore conservation.

This year we have doubled down on that vision by creating a handful of short films that share coexistence success stories from rural community members learning to live with wolves and bears. Using films and putting together projects that involve a diverse network of partners, we are focused on “connecting people, ideas, and resources” from within and across communities for a broader geographic impact.

In the 18 months since our merger with Keystone Conservation, we have worked diligently to enhance and expand our work ensuring a future for large carnivores in the Rocky Mountain West. We know we have more to do, so your feedback and insight is much appreciated. Many thanks to those of you who participated in the survey. You can read some of the responses below to learn more about what supporters think of our work and what we could do differently or better.

Thank you for all your support in these vital efforts to build a world in which people and carnivores coexist.

*Lisa.*

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## IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO HEAR FROM YOU

I support People and Carnivores because...

- You actually work WITH the predators
- Managing wildlife conflicts is essential to increasing the social tolerance for wildlife
- You have good on-the-ground people who understand the landscape and the issues and consider multiple points of view, from ranchers to conservationists to predators to cows
- Your unique program could be a model for other states

People and Carnivores' work is important because...

- Top predators are vital to wilderness conservation
- Large Carnivores are key elements in the natural world
- All carnivores play a part in the ecological balance, and they are beautiful magnificent beings
- Wolves, bears, and cougars represent for me what was once wild and beautiful about our country, and they are important predators in keeping nature in balance
- They are key to keeping prey species' numbers controlled, and improve the overall health of prey species' herds

To be even more effective, People and Carnivores could...

- Help people understand why you work so directly with the ranchers and other stakeholders, and why you choose a bottom-up method
- Stay focused on your mission and don't be drawn into the slippery slope of political environmentalism
- Provide more information about successes and failures; perhaps things you didn't expect to achieve
- Do more outreach!
- Continue to educate the public about the urgency of your mission

**“LARGE CARNIVORES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF A HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM”**

- Thomas J. Scanlin, supporter



## REDUCING HUNTER CONFLICTS WITH GRIZZLIES Steve Primm

Shorter days and golden leaves tell us it's autumn here in the Rockies. Grizzlies know it, too. Their built-in responses to decreasing daylight tell them to feed intensively now so they'll have enough fat stored for a winter-long snooze in their dens. This metabolic race against the calendar means bears are on the go for much of the day, and possibly more prone to getting into trouble with people.

Fall also means that hunters are taking to the hills, usually moving very quietly, sometimes mimicking the sounds or scents of prey animals like elk. And if hunters are successful, they'll also be transporting a payload of fresh red meat. It's no surprise, then, that grizzly-people conflicts tend to increase right after Labor Day.

Many hunters are used to sharing the land with the more docile black bear. Grizzlies are a different critter in many respects. In contrast to the forest-adapted black bear, grizzlies took shape, evolutionarily, in a relatively treeless landscape populated with bigger, stronger carnivores that vanished long ago.

While short-faced bears and *Homotherium* lions disappeared millennia ago, today's grizzlies still come fully equipped to face those foes. Grizzlies tend to respond aggressively to perceived threats, unlike the more avoidant black bear whose attitude and physiology help it climb trees to escape danger.

To keep themselves and grizzlies safe, hunters can do a number of things. First, keep informed about where grizzlies are. In Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, grizzlies are now turning up in places they haven't been for decades. Already this fall, a pair of elk hunters in southwest Montana's Big Hole Valley encountered a grizzly stalking the same elk they were. And grizzlies continue to pop up on the plains east of Glacier National Park as well.

Second, hunters should heed the advice and lessons of others who have had up-close, tooth-and-nail grizzly encounters. Look no further than a short film *People and Carnivores* just released, featuring two experienced Montana elk hunters who had an injury encounter with a grizzly in 2011. It's a compelling story that highlights the need for preparedness in the backcountry.

**"I LIKE YOUR APPROACH OF TOLERANCE, EDUCATION, COMPROMISE, AND ACTION TO THE AGE-OLD CONFLICT BETWEEN HUMANS AND WILD PREDATORS"**

- Cody Ferguson, supporter

## KEY LESSONS FOR HUNTING SAFELY IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

1. Know your hunting area
2. Hunt with a reliable partner
3. Come equipped to defend yourself—keep bear spray accessible, practice with it, and have a backup
4. Carry appropriate First Aid supplies, and know how to use them
5. Come equipped to shelter in place, with fire-making equipment and protection from weather

To hear Greg and Marty share their experience with backcountry preparedness, please access the the full (7 minute) film on our homepage at [peopleandcarnivores.org](http://peopleandcarnivores.org)



# “MANAGING WILDLIFE CONFLICTS IS ESSENTIAL TO INCREASING THE SOCIAL TOLERANCE FOR WILDLIFE”

- Whitney Ciofalo, supporter

## RIDING THE GREEN **Matt Barnes**

This year we expanded our work in the Wind River Range to the Upper Green River cattle allotment in the Bridger-Teton National Forest of Wyoming, which is the largest allotment in the West. The Wind River Range, at the southern end of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), has the southernmost grizzly bears in both the GYE and the U.S., and is a potential route for wolves to recolonize the Southern Rockies. The Upper Green has been a hotspot of conflict with grizzly bears and wolves since both carnivore populations expanded south from Yellowstone National Park in the last decade. There have been high numbers of both livestock and wildlife losses.



**Concentrating cattle is a vital part of our rangeland strategy.**

In partnership with the cattle association, and state and federal agencies, we developed a pilot project in which a range rider bunches and herds cattle daily, moving the herd around the landscape over time rather than letting cattle scatter across the landscape. This method takes advantage of a prey species' natural defense—safety in numbers—which we believe has contributed to fewer livestock-carnivore conflicts in previous projects.

Our conception of a range rider is a specific type of rider: one who actively bunches and herds cattle, rather than one who simply checks on and doctors cattle. Ideally, the rider uses low-stress livestock handling when gathering and moving the cattle, as this method is better for animal welfare, makes herding more effective, and increases the chances that cattle are being retrained to stay bunched together.



**Three wolves caught on a trail camera in the Upper Green River area of Wyoming.**

The Upper Green project is not only an example of using the same practice to effectively manage livestock and reduce carnivore conflicts, but it's also an example of our collaborative conservation approach. By working directly with rural communities, we increase the ability of local people to live with wolves and bears, and we increase the habitat available to carnivores. When we remove obstacles (potential sources of conflict) for carnivores between point A and point B, they can move about to expand further into historic range and reconnect with other populations.

This is the first year of the Upper Green project, so it's too early to draw conclusions about the affects of the herding. We're encouraged, though, as the number of carnivore-livestock conflicts to date is down compared to the last couple of years.



**Actively herding cattle and keeping them bunched can reduce conflicts with wolves and bears.**

# “YOU ARE WHAT I CONSIDER TO BE A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION THAT SUCCESSFULLY BRINGS TOGETHER TWO SIDES OF A DIFFICULT SITUATION.”

- Christina Evans, supporter

# SCALING UP: THE COEXISTENCE EXCHANGE Martha Sellers

One of the greatest challenges conservation groups face in the Rocky Mountain West is effectively engaging and working with rural residents on environmentally oriented initiatives such as wildlife conservation. Decades of debate about how to protect wildlife and wildlands is too often conducted with an us-versus-them approach, which tends to entrench people in their positions. The valley communities of the Northern Rockies are full of people who can point to generations of family working this land, and we have found that working collaboratively with them, agency personnel, and scientists is the most effective approach to getting people to try new tools and practices. Spending time in communities, listening and learning, is essential for sustainable coexistence with large carnivores. In January, we embarked on a

focused, collaborative, learning-based approach to finding lasting solutions that work at scale for both people and wildlife.

“Scaling up” means that we match coexistence efforts to (1) the home ranges of large carnivores, and (2) the size of communities. It means that, instead of supporting isolated projects here and there, we work with whole communities to implement conflict prevention strategies. And we facilitate lessons learned in one community being shared in another. Our goal is large-scale geographic impact, and over the next few years we will engage up to 10 valley communities in this initiative. Eventually we seek to build a framework from the ground up for an equitable (probably national) funding mechanism for large carnivore coexistence work.

**“I ONLY WISH I WAS YOUNGER SO I COULD BE OUT THERE IN THE WEST WORKING ON THESE ISSUES WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION”**

- Kathleen Schwery, supporter



**Fladry can be very effective for short periods of time; wolves tend to avoid the fluttering flags.**



**MCC field crew members test their bear spray skills.**



**Electrified mats can work well to deter bears from entering gaps in fence lines.**

## OTHER PROJECTS FROM THE FIELD

It's been a busy and productive year as we have expanded our work into new areas. In addition to the projects we've highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter, we have been working on several other initiatives. Here are a few.

### On the Ranch

We set up fladry fencing around a calving pasture on a ranch in Northwest Montana to prevent wolf depredations. There were no conflicts during use of the fladry.

We held a workshop in Dubois, Wyoming, for ranchers wishing to learn Low-Stress Livestock Handling, which is a method of livestock management that can retrain the animals to stay bunched together. This method is an essential part of our range riding vision.

We continued developing two carcass management programs in Southwest Montana.

### In the Backcountry

We have continued our bear safety and bear spray demonstration talks at REI, along with providing bear safety education to others. This spring we collaborated with the U.S. Forest Service and the Montana Conservation Corps to train the Corps' backcountry field crew.

As we do each fall, we made two trips into the backcountry to build bear poles and check on backcountry outfitter camps prior to hunting season. Stay tuned for our film about the Why and How of bear poles across the High Divide of Montana. We've built roughly 200 poles!

### At Home

Thanks to our innovative problem solving on the Corn Bear project, we developed a number of “unwelcome mat” designs to keep bears from entering premises such as corn fields, garbage dumps, and other high-attractant areas.

We are currently working with city personnel in one Southwest Montana community to test our electrified mat design to see if it will keep bears out of a garbage dump that has been repeatedly closed due to bear activity.

This fall we expect to install and assemble a bear proofing cage around the Palisades dump in Madison County, Montana.

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A cougar from one of our trail cameras in Montana



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