

Last week: How do we live with grizzly bears?

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This week: How do griz live with us?



COURTESY PEOPLE AND CARNIVORES

One of several grizzly bears that have been roaming Avon this year is captured on a game camera by People and Carnivores, a Montana nonprofit dedicated to reducing conflicts between people and large carnivores.

Guard dogs fix some, not all bear problems at Avon ranch

MICHAEL CAST

Rancher Brian Quigley doesn't beat around the bush — he believes it's time to take a firm hand with grizzlies.

"Problem bears, regardless of whether it's a sow or a boar or whatever, need to be shot," he said.

He isn't advocating for extirpation of the species, however. And he's willing to fight fur with fur — employing a pack of specially bred guard dogs to defend his cows.

"The grizzly bear has as much a right to be here as you, me and anybody else. When they start destroying my property, and they're killing my livestock, they're in violation of my constitutional right," he said.

American jurisprudence has found wildlife are a public trust, belonging to all Americans, however. That builds tension between the hundreds of millions of people who want grizzly bears protected and the thousands of ranchers who live with grizzlies in their midst.

Quigley said the big bears have been present on the landscape near Avon throughout his lifetime. Now there are just more of them. He has had at least three on his property this year.

Though he hasn't confirmed cattle losses in 2021, he said grizzlies have been responsible for losses on his property the last two years, and in years before that as well.

Delisting the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone ecosystems' grizzly populations is long overdue, Quigley believes. He also thinks the official counts underestimate grizzly numbers and supports the slate of new Montana laws allowing livestock owners to kill bears that pose a problem and prevent FWP from taking "a problem bear from my neighborhood



COURTESY PEOPLE AND CARNIVORES

One of the grizzlies that has been active at Brian Quigley's ranch in Avon is seen in Quigley's stackyard trying to break into a bear-resistant garbage container holding food for livestock guardian dogs. Quigley has been working with nonprofit People and Carnivores to protect his property from grizzly bears.

and dumping it into somebody else's neighborhood."

He also believes in a grizzly bear hunting season.

But since the grizzly is protected by the federal Endangered Species Act, the Montana Legislature lacks authority to give landowners killing rights. And given the growing divide between Montana's anti-predator wildlife policies and the federal government's ESA duties, the chance of grizzlies getting delisted, and therefore becoming huntable, has declined.

Quigley has taken steps to protect his property within the bounds of current laws.

He has used livestock guardian dogs for six years to protect his animals from wolves and other predators, including grizzlies.

"They're not a cure-all," he said. "They're kind of a neutralizer. They try to push the predators out."

This year, his game cameras captured video evidence: his dogs going berserk on a grizzly in his stockyard while a bear

tried to get into a bear-resistant container holding their feed.

Quigley has been working with Kim Johnson of the nonprofit organization People and Carnivores to reduce grizzly threats. Johnson connected Quigley with a breeder for some additional guardian dogs — Turkish Boz-Kangal crosses.

"These dogs seem to be really effective with these apex predators like wolves and bears," Johnson said. "They're also good patrolling dogs, which is good for cattle."

Nothing is easy on a ranch. With roaming guardian dogs, it's necessary to have the dogs' food secured out on the landscape as well — another potential lure for predators.

Quigley secured the feed in bear-resistant containers, but a grizzly managed to get into two containers stationed in remote locations late this summer.

"You'll never catch me saying 'bear proof' and there's a reason," Johnson explained. "When they do the certifica-

tion testing on the containers, the criteria is that they test it with actual live grizzly bears for 60 minutes of paws-on, full-force contact."

She wasn't out there in the night, but Johnson speculated that the grizzly, motivated by a food reward, put in some serious time and work.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks bear manager Rory Trimbo dropped off some heavy-duty metal tool boxes early September as replacements. So far, they've worked as expected.

Johnson knows grizzlies. Before joining People and Carnivores, she was a bear management technician with FWP and worked at the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center in West Yellowstone, Montana. She loves collaborating with working landowners.

"When you get on the ground and visit with these people — most ranchers, people in Montana, they appreciate the wildlife we have," Johnson said "It's just finding solutions when it's

their family or their kids and their property (at stake)."

Ranchers often have an excellent understanding of the movement of local wildlife, she added.

Quigley has likewise enjoyed working with Johnson, and said he benefited from her grizzly expertise.

"She's been very helpful to me," he said.

They've been hard at work training the new dogs, and are using a phone app and SPOT GPS tracking system Johnson rigged up for dog collars that's more affordable than traditional tracking systems and has a longer battery life.

On Sept. 11, one of Quigley's older livestock guardian dogs was killed by a grizzly, and the depredation was confirmed by U.S. Wildlife Services trapper Bart Smith. The trapper was unable to capture the bear that was responsible.

"They're important to my business as a livestock producer," Quigley said. "Right now I have six dogs left. I'll probably have to replace what I lost."

Confirmation allows the rancher to seek reimbursement from the Montana Livestock Loss Board for the dog that was killed.

Quigley and Johnson continue to work together, and grizzlies were still digging for caraway roots in Quigley's hay fields as of early October, very close to his home.

"If you kill one bear, another bear is just going to come in," Johnson said. "It might help for the moment, but a lot of times it doesn't help them in the long-term. I've talked to a lot of ranchers that see that lethal control is not the only solution. We really do think conflict prevention is much more effective than killing bears to help that rancher sleep at night."

Grizzlies

From C4

This July's grizzly mauling death of a bicycle camper in Ovando happened a few months after the Montana Legislature passed a collection of measures directing the state Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks to take a much more aggressive approach to predator control than it had in the past. Public policy in Wyoming and Idaho have also taken a harder stance toward grizzlies. Yet in Washington, D.C. the winds have shifted in the opposite direction.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lost its latest bid to delist the grizzly bears of the

Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) two years ago, and to date hasn't announced how it plans to go forward. A five-year status report on grizzly recovery released last March found that while the NCDE and GYE grizzly populations were biologically recovered, grizzly populations in four other recovery areas remained precarious or non-existent. As when they were first listed, human-caused mortality and habitat loss remain the top threats to grizzly survival. In sum, it recommended keeping grizzlies under the Endangered Species Act.

The GYE delisting effort was initiated under President Barack Obama, but collapsed under President Donald

Trump. Trump's Interior Secretary David Bernhardt visited Montana and promised more federal effort to kill problem grizzlies. President Joe Biden's Interior Secretary Deb Haaland co-sponsored legislation to protect grizzlies in perpetuity when she was a Congresswoman from Arizona.

The two biggest recovery areas, the NCDE and GYE, both anchor around popular national parks. Millions of tourists come each year, supporting thousands of local businesses and employees. Many dream of seeing a bear, and they post their success on social media with videos that professional biologists used to spend entire careers hoping to see. In August, amateur videographers caught two grizzlies

fighting over a bison carcass in the Yellowstone River and a sow grizzly digging a marmot out of its burrow in Glacier Park while its cubs watched. Grizzly 399 in Grand Teton National Park has her own series of bumper stickers, among other fan memorabilia.

The University of Montana survey also found Montanans supported trying mitigation tactics like carrying bear spray, following food storage guidelines and securing attractants from property. Each of those proposals drew at least 90% agreement.

More livestock-related tactics such as changing ranching practices or using carcass-removal programs drew more opposition, but still had at least two-

thirds of Montanans in favor.

Wildlife managers and wildlife biologists have widely differing attitudes about the effectiveness of grizzly hunting to achieve desired goals. While big-game species such as deer and elk number in the tens of thousands across Montana, the state holds about 1,000 grizzlies. Grizzlies are the slowest-reproducing mammal in North America.

"There's an overwhelming agreement that grizzly bears are a positive contribution to the economy of Montana," Metcalf said of the survey results. "There's also a great deal of support for encouraging conflict-reduction. We're trying to balance the costs of bears and the value of bears."