

TRACKS

PEOPLE, CARNIVORES, AND MORE

KIM JOHNSTON

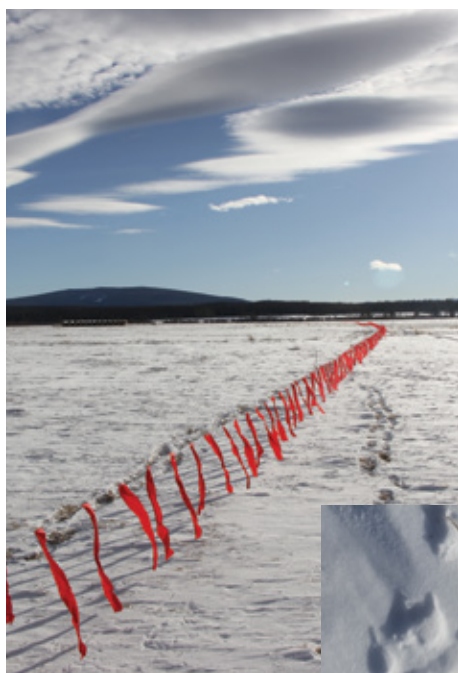
In late spring, the Big Hole Valley is beautifully green with balsam root blooming on the foothills and the snowcapped Beaverhead Mountains crowning the horizon. The Big Hole is a focus of my wolf and grizzly bear connectivity work because it's an area in which Yellowstone and Crown of the Continent grizzly bears may meet, and it also lies in between Montana wilderness and Central Idaho where we want to see grizzlies roam again someday. We've tracked at least one grizzly bear in the Big Hole this year, and it will be critical to keep that bear out of trouble so other bears follow.

Wolves have been present in the area for years. The Big Hole has a strong ranching tradition and there have been chronic conflicts between wolves and livestock, after which many wolves have been killed. This spring, a large ranch in the valley became one of the centers of my conflict work, and thus far has displayed how effective prevention tools can be.

I started talking with the multi-generational family cattle ranch this past winter. At first, the ranchers were resistant to trying the tools, but eventually they agreed to give them a shot. Together, we installed an 80-acre fladry fence to keep wolves away from calves. We then set up trail cameras to monitor activity, and the photos showed wolves frequently approaching the fladry perimeter, but we were successful in preventing conflicts, with no losses on either side of the fence. We added Foxlights (random flashing lights) when wolves appeared to be coming close. After the fladry, we cost-shared on four livestock guardian dogs to keep livestock and wolves separated. No wolves have been lethally removed this year, and the wolf pack had pups this spring.



This grizzly bear came out of hibernation near the ranch, one of only a few grizzlies seen in this area in recent years.



This fladry set up kept wolves and cattle separated all spring despite losses in recent years.



Wolf tracks near the fladry line.

We are using tools on 10% of the ranch, leaving more than 5,000 acres as wildlife habitat. Earlier this summer, I visited the ranch to check on the guardian dogs. That afternoon I witnessed 30 elk and calves and a dozen pronghorn antelope with fawns sharing a field. Our cameras have also recorded black bears, coyotes, fox families, badgers, and a moose in the area.

Here's the most amazing thing: I checked a trail camera on the ranch in June, and it captured a grizzly bear – the first confirmed grizzly sighting this far south in decades. When I shared this with the ranchers, they were alarmed, but it has turned into a tremendous opportunity to talk about how we're going to manage this and keep everyone (people and carnivores) safe. This is just one of many ongoing P&C projects in southwestern Montana, but in rural communities like the Big Hole, one project becomes five projects becomes ten projects becomes... coexistence!



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

What a year this has been, with much of the story left to be written. I hope you and yours are healthy and working through any challenges. We have appreciated hearing from so many of you, asking how we're doing and sharing your experiences of this surreal time. Thank you for being in touch.

Through thick and thin, we share a passion: wildlife. As we adapt our lives to a changing world, so do wolves and bears. Not to a pandemic or social unrest, but to more people, more development, and more deadly attractants. With your help and an essential service designation from the state, this year we've been able to forge ahead with our field work to keep wild carnivores alive and going where they need to go. And we've had no losses on our projects. Grizzlies are expanding their range; the wolf population is growing. The big cats are keeping to themselves.

I hope you enjoy our project stories in this issue of Tracks. Let me know if you have any questions or would like to learn more. Thank you for your support and working with us to protect wild carnivores. Be well, and get outside as much as you can!

Lisa.

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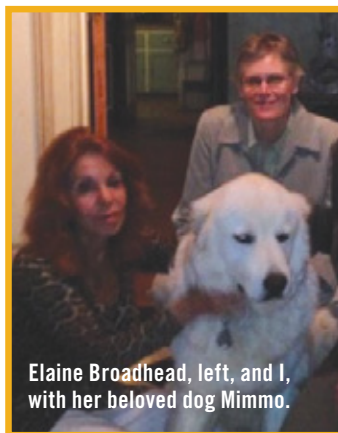
SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT: ELAINE BROADHEAD

LISA UPSON

Elaine Broadhead was a force of, and for, nature. A diminutive person physically, she stood tall and was plenty spirited. Elaine was an ardent activist for animals, human rights and peace – all things that are good in this world but that need lifting up – and she spent her life doing just that.

I first met Elaine outside Yellowstone during a wolf reintroduction anniversary. We drove to one of P&C's project sites to look for wolves. Elaine loved and fought for animals, especially if they were vulnerable. She rescued all kinds, from pigs to donkeys; she advocated for many wildlife species, including bonobos and elephants. But wolves were her "last great passion" her daughter Sabina recently told me. Fiercely independent, very social, and usually the alpha, Elaine probably felt a kinship with the top dog.

Yet, Elaine understood that conservation has to work for people too. When Elaine



Elaine Broadhead, left, and I, with her beloved dog Mimmo.

hosted a gathering of wildlife supporters on P&C's behalf at her famed Glen Ora estate in Middleburg, VA, she presented a cake with not just a wolf on it, but also a cow.

Elaine passed away at the end of last year. But her boundless energy for agitation, and her generosity, vested others to continue the fight.

In a tribute to Elaine, her daughter wrote: *Many of you shared a happy drink on the terrace of her house in Italy or Virginia. As the generous person she was, she shared her favorite Prosecco (and her house) with anyone who would care to join her. Even if you did not care to join her, she would pour you a glass. And then maybe drink it herself in the end, as she could not stand the waste. When we arrived at Glen Ora that afternoon in 2014, Elaine handed us glasses of Prosecco. Cheers, Elaine! We promise to continue fighting for wolves and other animals.*

BREAKING BAD HABITS: BEARS AND MELONS

BRYCE ANDREWS



Courtesy Western
Transportation Institute-
MSU

“Yoga Bear” seen here crawling under electric fence determined to get melons. Many bears tested the fence and very few got through.



This is a drive-over gate, one of four experimental gates going into the melon field, designed to allow vehicle but not bear entry.

Wild animals thrive in the thickets along the Jocko River. The cottonwoods and brush grow thick beside the river’s course, and the floodplain remains largely undeveloped, thanks to the conservation efforts of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). The river corridor is of particular importance to the region’s bears—both black and grizzly—which use it to travel between the Mission Valley and habitat located farther south and west.

The Jocko Valley is also essential ground for agricultural producers, who make use of the valley’s low elevation and relatively mild climate. In 2019, People and Carnivores began working with Dixon Melons, a family farm that specializes in growing cantaloupes and watermelon since 1987. The farm had long been losing tons of ripe melons to bears with conflict increasing in recent years, particularly in a twenty-acre field adjacent to the Jocko River. In 2019, Dixon Melons co-owners Cassie and Faus Silvernale estimated that bears consumed 5% of the crop – about 5,000 melons!

After confirming with CSKT biologists that collar data showed grizzlies as well as black bears moving through the area, we started working to build an electric fence around the melon field. Serendipity connected us to the Western Transportation Institute (WTI), which wanted to explore new gate systems to reduce bear-vehicle collisions. Working with WTI, we incorporated a series of electrified ‘drive-through’ and ‘drive-over’ gate designs around the melon field. If the prototypes showed promise, WTI intended to use similar designs to keep grizzlies and other large carnivores from straying onto highways.

As the melons ripened, we relied on trail camera data collected by WTI to determine the effectiveness of our

experimental barriers. Our data showed two things clearly: First, that the melons were drawing plenty of bears.

Second, that those bears were deeply food conditioned and determined to eat. The cameras recorded all manner of ursine attempts to get over, under and through the fence. Many were unsuccessful, but some dedicated bears made it into the field. Working from WTI’s camera data, we fine-tuned our designs to address problems wherever we found them.

At the time of this writing, two-thirds of the way through the melon harvest, the results look encouraging. According to the folks at Dixon Melons, crop loss has been reduced by 80% from the previous year. One of our electrified gates—the ‘drive-over’ design—is particularly promising. It stopped bears in 17 of 18 attempts, with the lone exception being the deviously committed yearling black bear, which managed to cross by carefully placing its paws in spaces between electrified wires. We subsequently narrowed our wire spacing. Your move, yearling.

In the fall of 2020, in partnership with WTI, we will build on what we’ve learned at Dixon Melons by installing two more prototype ‘drive-over’ gates along Montana Highway 93. We hope to see these structures reduce collision rates and keep wild carnivores moving safely across the landscape.

Update: Right before print, we learned that collar data shows a large grizzly near the melon patch, so we’re glad the black bears have helped us refine the fence and gate designs!



Bryce Andrews securing a bear pole to a tree.

FIELD ROUND-UP

BEN WICKHAM

At nearly 6,000 feet in elevation, **Virginia City**, Montana's first incorporated city, lies in prime black bear habitat and in a corridor between mountain ranges through which grizzly bears will soon expand their range. We have worked with the community to develop a Bear Smart initiative, with P&C cost-sharing bear proof storage for the community's homes and businesses, and organizing a fruit pick-up (with delivery to the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center to feed bears). **Georgetown Lake** is another community with a history of black bear issues and imminent grizzly bear presence. We organized funding for more than 60 canisters to keep bears out of garbage. We have also coordinated with campgrounds and RV parks in the **Madison River Valley** and contributed equipment to federal agencies to improve food storage practices and strengthen public loaner programs.

P&C's Kim Johnston, who manages our field work in the High Divide, developed coexistence toolkits which have become popular with other practitioners and organizations all over the state. In response to bear break-in calls and wolf and



Coexistence toolkit, including Critter Gitter, Foxlight, radio, bullhorn, bearspray, P&C manuals, LGD books, and more.

mountain lion sightings in the **Big Hole Valley** and elsewhere, Kim has loaned out several toolkits at a moment's notice until a more permanent conflict prevention plan can be developed and implemented. In the toolkits are: Foxlight, Critter Gitter (noise device), some fencing supplies, bear spray, bullhorn and radio, and two books on livestock guardian dogs, as well as our technical manuals (fladry and wolf conflict prevention).

Further north near Lolo in the **Bitterroot Valley**, Oxbow Cattle Company operates in dense mountain lion country. We cost-shared on two guardian dogs and a livestock herder at Oxbow.

WELCOME BEN AND STEPHANIE!

We are excited that Ben Wickham has joined the P&C team as Development and Communications Manager. Ben previously worked at Friends of the Inyo in the Eastern Sierra Nevada where he led the organization's communications and mobilized people to support public lands, from Death Valley to Yosemite. Growing up in Boise, Idaho, Ben was fortunate to experience the wild, open spaces of the gem state before it was discovered, later teaching outdoor education in McCall. He has also guided in Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks. Ben is a professional photographer and storyteller, which will help P&C share about our work in new, creative ways.

Before Ben joined P&C, we said goodbye to Martha Sellers. Martha, who came to P&C from Montana State University and who loved mentoring students, moved on to work with an outdoor education nonprofit. Martha was with P&C for four years and deftly helped build our fundraising and communication systems after the Keystone-P&C merger in 2015. We're grateful for Martha's contributions to P&C and wish her the best in her new position.

This summer, P&C also welcomed Stephanie Barron, of Missoula, as our first Field Assistant. Having worked in botany, forestry, fisheries, and wildlife in Virginia and California, Stephanie brings a diverse background to conservation field work. She is helping our Field Director Bryce Andrews implement tools, such as fences and bear poles, in the Crown of the Continent.

FIELD ROUND-UP, cont'd

In the **Mission Valley** we used fladry to deter a large wolf pack from interacting with livestock, and we installed an electric fence for a composting company in **Columbia Falls** and provided canisters so that they could collect compost from around the community without bear conflicts.

Among our other projects in the Crown of the Continent, P&C's Bryce Andrews and Stephanie Barron built a dozen



Oxbow herder feeding guard dogs near the goat herd.



Two big cats in one photo! Check out our YouTube channel for footage of this mountain lion family.

bear poles this summer, near **Phillipsburg** and for the Nature Conservancy near **Greenough**. As we write this, on the **Flathead Reservation** and in partnership with the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes and a Flathead cherry grower, we are installing a fence to keep bears out of a large cherry orchard, which may serve as the basis for a key policy modification that would make substantial federal funding available for coexistence efforts.

We're pleased to report that we have had no losses (carnivores or livestock/property) on any of our projects, and minimal—greatly reduced—crop loss in the melon patch (see page 3).

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