



# THE RANCHER A

PEOPLE, LIVESTOCK, AND A THREATENED PREDATOR



A LOVE

BY BRUCE BARCOTT PHOTOGRAPHS BY VERN EVANS

# AND THE GRIZZLY

ARE LEARNING TO GET ALONG IN THE NEW WEST



STORY

Cattleman Todd Graham says the grizzly, *Ursus arctos*, is "part of the landscape, and one of the reasons we love working and living in this valley."

**A**S AN AFTERNOON RAINSTORM SWEEPS down Montana's Madison Valley, a verdant grassland 40 miles northwest of Yellowstone National Park, rancher Todd Graham stands inside a dusty barn and asks his neighbors for help. Dressed in workaday Wranglers and a Stihl Chain Saws cap, the lanky cattleman looks as if he spent the morning pounding fence posts.

"If we're going to survive running livestock out here," he says, "we've got to rely on each other." Graham addresses a veritable cross section of the new West: sheep ranchers, cattlemen, conservation biologists, government officials, retirees, and second-home owners. Seated in folding chairs, they've gathered for a Living With Predators workshop jointly organized by the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group (which defends livestock) and Keystone Conservation (which defends animals that want to kill the livestock).

Graham offers a plea for the conservation of the biggest predator in the valley, one known to dine on the cattle he keeps. "We can live with grizzlies," Graham says, "if we as humans do our jobs."

Once a sleepy cattleman's paradise, the Madison Valley today is the crash point of two demographic trends: a hot western housing market and rebounding populations of predators. A wide, gentle basin in southwestern Montana's cattle country, the valley in mid-summer is a sea of tall, swaying grass, punctuated here and there by the quaking leaves of an aspen tree. Penned in by parallel Rocky Mountain ranges, the valley runs north from the border of Yellowstone National Park to the headwaters of the Missouri River. Its snowmelt feeds the meandering Madison River, a pebbly waterway renowned for its "50-mile riffle" and the fat brown trout that rise easily to a fly. Pronghorn antelope graze on the grasslands. Thousands of elk overwinter on the valley floor.

About 7,000 people live in the valley, and cattle still outnumber them ten to one. But that's changing. Retirees and second-home owners, eager to claim their slice of Montana heaven, are snapping up 20-acre ranchettes carved out of 1,000-acre working ranches. Across Montana and Wyoming, the big spreads that aren't platted into "twenties," as locals call the ranchettes, are often bought by wealthy outsiders who don't depend on cattle for income.

Humans aren't the only creatures attracted to the valley. Yellowstone's grizzlies, once threatened with extinction, have made a strong recovery: Some 500 to 600 bears live in and around the park, up from fewer than 200 in the 1970s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers the population sufficiently robust that it has proposed, rather controversially, removing the Yellowstone bears from the endangered species list (see "Yellowstone Grizzlies: Threatened or Not?" page 22). Having reached their population limit within Yellowstone—these bears need plenty of territory to roam, forage, and mate—they are fanning out beyond the park's boundaries.

"Everybody wants to live next to the national forest so they'll have big backyards," says Charles Schwartz, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey who leads a federal-state grizzly research team. "But some of that happens to be grizzly bear habitat."

There is a long, sad history to this interspecies encounter. During the late nineteenth century, cattlemen and farmers helped extinguish the grizzly across most of North America. Farms, ranches, and growing towns deprived the bears of their habitat. Grizzlies, like wolves, were considered a mortal threat to humans and livestock and were often shot on sight. The threats grizzlies face now are more complex. "Most ranchers have been living with grizzlies for a long

"WE CAN LIVE WITH GRIZZLIES," SAYS CATTLEMAN TODD GRAHAM, "IF WE AS HUMANS DO OUR JOBS"



Bear researchers Seth Wilson, left, and Steve Primm help ranchers like Becky Weed protect their livestock from predators.



time; they've figured out how to protect their stock," says Louisa Willcox, who directs the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) wild bears project in Livingston, Montana. The biggest problems today, Willcox says, are people and their houses.

In addition to encroaching on grizzly habitat, rural development is attracting newcomers whose birdseed, dog food, barbecue grills, and garbage lure hungry grizzlies onto their porches. Bears that become a nuisance frequently end up dead—usually shot by government game managers. As their numbers grow, Yellowstone grizzlies face a crucial test: Can they survive on land owned by ranchers, farmers, and the new wave of retirees, telecommuters, and vacation-home owners?

"We used to manage the bears," says Kerry Gunther, Yellowstone's chief bear biologist. "Now we manage the people."

Todd Graham, a new-school rancher with old-school roots, is part of this evolution in grizzly conservation. Graham grew up working on a neighbor's cattle ranch in Big Piney, Wyoming, and now manages the Sun Ranch, a 25,000-acre spread about 40 miles northwest of Yellowstone. Software millionaires Roger and Cynthia Lang bought the ranch eight years ago, motivated more by an interest in conservation than by a desire to raise livestock. Such nontraditional owners are becoming common in this part of the West. Between 1990 and 2001, 38 ranches were sold in the Madison Valley; all but one were bought by investors, developers, and other wealthy newcomers like the Langs. (The mother of all "conservation ranches," Ted Turner's 113,000-acre Flying D Ranch, sits at the foot of the valley.)

All were drawn to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, an 18-million-acre landscape of grassy plains and rugged mountains encompassing portions of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. About the size of West Virginia, the region includes Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, five national forests, twelve federally designated wilderness areas, and three national wildlife refuges. One of the largest relatively intact temperate ecosystems on earth, the Yellowstone region hosts perhaps the greatest concentration of large mammals in the contiguous United States, including the nation's biggest populations of grizzlies outside Alaska. It's a region marked by concentric circles of wildlife protection. At its core are the national parks, which forbid hunting and allow only limited development. National forests, which permit limited logging, mining, and hunting, ring the parks. An outer fringe of private land, about one-quarter of the ecosystem, constitutes the final circle.

Private land in particular has become increasingly important for conservation, as bears nurtured in Yellowstone and the national forests expand outward. Biologists worry that these bears will die in increasing numbers as they push deeper into private land. That would effectively strand the bears within a circumscribed habitat and limit the population to its current level, which many researchers believe isn't big enough or diverse enough to ensure the grizzlies' survival.

"A population of 500 bears can persist for a long time, but you're putting all your genetic eggs in one basket," says Lance Craighead, a longtime bear researcher and executive director of the Montana-based Craighead Environmental Research Institute. "Prior to the last 200 years, bears were successful because they had big, genetically diverse populations. They could adapt to disease, the loss of food sources, and worse. If you cap the population and its gene pool, you run the risk of a single disease running through every last bear."

Development is happening fast, though. "If all those private lands are developed, Yellowstone could become an island in a sea of

Yellowstone National Park is home to populations of bison—an occasional source of protein for the grizzlies that share the land.



houses,” says Alex Diekmann, a project manager for the Trust for Public Land. For the grizzlies that are marooned there, the future would once more look pretty bleak.

**G**RIZZLY BEARS ARE EXTRAORDINARY creatures. An adult male Rocky Mountain grizzly may tip the scales at 600 pounds and measure 8 feet standing on its hind legs. (Alaskan coastal grizzlies, also called brown bears, grow to as much as 1,400 pounds, due to their higher-protein salmon diet.) Their sharp, curved claws, long and thick as a man’s finger, allow them to peel back a car door as if it were a lid on a can of beans. Grizzlies possess an unusually strong sense of smell. A bear can sniff out an elk carcass half a mile away. A few years ago a grizzly ripped open a Subaru in southern Montana to get at a bag of horse feed inside. Park rangers have reported grizzlies digging through three feet of dirt and ash to get at bacon drippings buried in campfires.

North America once abounded in grizzlies. Until the early 1700s, 50,000 to 100,000 grizzlies roamed from the northern tip of Alaska to central Mexico, from the Mississippi to the Pacific. As the second-largest animal on the continent (only the polar bear is bigger), the grizzly had no true predator. A few American Indian tribes hunted the bear. To the Northern Cree, for example, the grizzly provided a crucial source

of winter meat. Other tribes, such as the Blackfoot and Kootenai, considered the grizzly so sacred they wouldn’t utter its name. By and large the bears did as they pleased. “They ran the show on this continent for a long time,” says Charles Jonkel, co-founder of the Great Bear Foundation, a research organization in Missoula, Montana.

Westward expansion and the mass-production rifle ended the grizzly’s reign. From 1840 to 1900, settlers poured into the West, fenced off the range, and built towns, roads, and railways. When humans encountered grizzlies they took dead aim and fired. The bears were driven from the West Coast in the 1870s. Ten years later they were extirpated from the river valleys of the Plains. Grizzlies retreated to ever-higher ground, surviving into the 1920s in pockets in the Rockies and Cascades, a few as far south as New Mexico. Human predation and development continued, and eventually those pockets disappeared. By the 1960s the grizzly population of the continental United States had contracted to isolated groups of bears near the Canadian border and about 300 bears subsisting on rotting garbage at Yellowstone’s open dumps. Park officials encouraged dump-feeding as a tourist attraction, setting up bleacher seats for visitors to watch the show. Like most animals, bears are natural economists. They’d rather fatten up on an open buffet than spend precious calories hunting and foraging. As years passed, the Yellowstone bears grew habituated to human food.

In the late 1960s, park officials closed the dumps in an effort to return the bears to a more natural existence. Unaccustomed to foraging in the wild, hungry grizzlies overturned trash cans, raided campgrounds, and preyed upon livestock. Grizzly deaths spiked, as officials, hunters, poachers, and ranchers killed problem bears. Between 1969 and 1972, an estimated 158 grizzlies were killed in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. At the height of the carnage, in 1970, 57 bears—one-sixth of the estimated population—were eliminated.

By 1975, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the grizzly as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the greater Yellowstone population had plummeted to about 200 bears. “The situation was dire,” recalls Chris Servheen, the service’s grizzly-recovery coordinator. “I thought we were going to lose the entire population.”

**T**HE ROAD TO RECOVERY HAS BEEN LONG, slow, and deliberate. Early on, wildlife biologists realized that problem bears were trained, not born—and they were trained by people leaving food around. “Grizzlies are ingenious and incredibly persistent at getting fed,” explains Steve Primm, a wildlife researcher with Keystone Conservation in Bozeman, Montana. Primm works on grizzly conservation programs in the Madison Valley. “Once they find food from a human source it’s almost impossible to dissuade them from returning.” Grizzlies hooked on such food must be trapped and relocated. The worst recidivists were, and still are, killed.

The first step in the grizzly’s recovery was a process of eliminating, one by one, these sources of food. In the early 1970s, Yellowstone officials developed the first bear-proof garbage cans—metal bins with locking devices—and decreed that every bin would be emptied daily,

to reduce the smell and eliminate garbage overflow. Backcountry campers were required to string their food on high ropes between trees, out of a grizzly’s reach. Those simple steps produced dramatic results. As the bears returned to more natural foraging, human-grizzly conflicts plummeted.

The Yellowstone grizzly population began increasing by the early 1990s and soon became more frequent visitors to the five national forests surrounding the park. There is considerably more human activity in national forests than there is in national parks. Small towns exist there; ranchers graze cattle and sheep on long-term leases. The bears found tasty new trouble: town dumps, straggling sheep, honey in commercial beehives. “Solving the problems in Yellowstone was like picking the low-hanging fruit,” says NRDC’s Willcox. “Working on the secondary challenges in more outlying areas has been more difficult. Grizzlies always find the weakest link in the system, so we’ve had to learn to think like a bear—identify what a bear would find attractive and eliminate it.”

Across southern Montana and northern Wyoming, those weak links were strengthened ranch by ranch, valley by valley. In Cody, Wyoming, state game officials worked with commercial beekeepers to safeguard apiaries with electric fencing. In Cooke City, Montana, near the northeastern boundary of Yellowstone, grizzlies hit the local dump as if it were a smorgasbord. “We tried all sorts of

fences but they’d climb them all,” said Steve Liebl, manager of the Cooke City dump. “They’d tip over the Dumpsters and cause a real mess.” (Liebl was killed in a car accident in late 2006.) With the help of federal money, the town bought an odor-tight trash compactor and encouraged local restaurants to empty their bins once or twice a day. Today you won’t find a public trash can on any street corner in Cooke City. They’re all indoors.

When the smell went away, so did the bears. “Once in a while a grizzly will wander into town and try to get at a bundle of pizza boxes,” said Liebl, “but it’ll get frustrated and confused and eventually leave.”

**GRIZZLIES’ SHARP, CURVED CLAWS ALLOW THEM TO PEEL BACK A CAR DOOR AS IF IT WERE A LID ON A CAN OF BEANS**

**O**NE OF THE IRONIES OF THE GRIZZLY’S FATE is that the bear’s great size makes it more vulnerable to extinction. While America’s grizzly population remains in the hundreds (that figure excludes Alaska, where there are an estimated 30,000), approximately 300,000 black bears currently roam the continental United States. Size makes a difference. Grizzlies can be twice as big as black bears, so they require more food and a bigger range. “The same area of land that will support a few hundred grizzlies is capable of supporting five times as many black bears,” explains Servheen. Black bears reproduce more often—every two years, to the grizzly’s every three.

And then there’s the human element. “Because they’re smaller, black bears are more acceptable to humans,” says Jonkel. “We’re not so threatened by them, so we allow them to live around us. People don’t feel as comfortable around grizzlies. We let black bears adapt to our presence. Grizzlies never had that chance.”

Our fear of the grizzly stems from the bear’s ability to maul and kill humans, but the chances of that happening are extremely small. Of the 47 million people who visited Yellowstone National Park



MAP BY MIKE REAGAN



between 1980 and 1997, only two were killed by grizzlies. Still, such attacks strike some primal nerve in us. We're horrified and fascinated—witness the worldwide attention paid to Timothy Treadwell, whose gruesome death-by-bear was chronicled by Werner Herzog in his film *Grizzly Man*. (Treadwell has few fans among grizzly experts in the greater Yellowstone area, many of whom believe his unorthodox methods and horrible death have undone years of public education about grizzlies. “People are going to be killing grizzlies for the next 50 years because of that guy,” Jonkel says.)

Despite their reputation as fearsome carnivores, grizzlies are actually omnivores. They'll eat whatever is at hand. That includes grasses, clover, parsnip, wild berries, whitebark pine seeds, bulbs, roots, ants, spawning trout, sheep, cattle, elk, and moose. Grizzlies eat some strange things. If you climb in the Absaroka Range north of Yellowstone, you may spot grizzlies at 10,000 feet or higher, far above the tree line, digging in the talus fields to uncover army cutworm moths, which the bears consider a tasty, high-fat meal. Grizzlies have been known to lap up spilled motor oil and gnaw on the foam in ATV seats. When they find something they like, they'll stuff themselves. “I've come across grizzly scat in the springtime colored yellow with dandelions,” says Steve Primm.

Humans aren't high on a grizzly's list of preferred meats—but sheep and cattle are. And therein lay the problem when the Yellowstone population started expanding into the national forests around the park. In those forests ranchers hold longstanding grazing leases,

Take this exit off Highway 90 near Livingston and you'll arrive at Montana Grizzly Encounter, where you can see captive bears up close. The bear-proof receptacles, right, an hour southwest, hint at bears roaming freely nearby.

some of which date back to the early 1900s. If grizzlies find plenty of wild vegetation, they'll usually leave cattle and sheep alone. But researchers have found that when food grows scarce, grizzlies are three times more likely to go after livestock. “During a drought year,” says Primm, “all bets are off.”

Efforts to cancel those grazing leases in the 1990s failed. “It was a classic environmental clash,” recalls Hank Fischer, a special projects coordinator with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). “Conservationists lobbied the Forest Service to take away a grazing permit. The rancher lobbied his congressman to keep it. Few were ever pulled.”

Fischer eventually hit upon a solution. In the mid-1990s, he had helped establish the Defenders of Wildlife's predator compensation fund, which paid ranchers fair market value for livestock killed by Yellowstone wolves. The program went a long way toward easing the ranching community's bitterness over the reintroduction of the gray wolf, and the fund was later expanded to include grizzly predation. To date, the fund has paid out more than \$700,000 in wolf claims and \$138,000 in grizzly claims. In 2002, Fischer left Defenders to join the NWF, and one of the first things he did there was ask whether the principle that drove the compensation program could also solve the problem of grazing leases.



“We’d been asking these livestock producers to give up their allotments without being compensated, but those leases were worth upward of \$200,000,” Fischer says. “You’d be pulling some real change out of that rancher’s pocket.”

In 2003, backed by funds from NWF and other groups, Fischer contacted leaseholders with the highest incidence of predator-livestock conflict and negotiated deals to retire their allotments. Many ranchers used the money—about \$2.50 an acre—to secure new grazing leases in national forests far removed from the greater Yellowstone region. “The ranchers were motivated because they were losing stock, and the Forest Service was under pressure to defend the grizzlies,” says Fischer. “The money made it happen because it acknowledged the ranchers’ real economic concerns.”

Economics aren’t the only obstacle to retiring grazing leases. Fischer is working on several more conflict-heavy allotments, and in some of them tradition plays just as powerful a role as money. For Elaine Allestad, a sheep rancher who in 2006 agreed to retire her 74,000-acre grazing lease in the Gallatin National Forest, an allotment adjacent to Yellowstone, it was a tough decision. “The losses were mounting; we couldn’t afford them anymore. Last year we had a flock of 1,200 ewes and we lost 60 to wolves and grizzlies,” she says. The agreement enabled Allestad to secure new grazing land in northern Montana, away from the grizzlies. Still, it was hard to leave her lease land. “I mean, we miss the land we were on,” she says. “It was going on the fourth generation for our fam-



## HUMANS AREN'T HIGH ON A GRIZZLY'S LIST OF PREFERRED MEATS—BUT SHEEP AND CATTLE ARE. AND THEREIN LAY THE PROBLEM

ily. My husband’s father first went on that land in 1921.”

In three years, Fischer’s program has retired more than 300,000 acres of former grazing allotments in the greater Yellowstone area. Hundreds of cattle and sheep were killed or injured on those allotments. The number of conflicts on that land has been reduced to zero.

What’s happening in the region represents a new paradigm in what might be called conservation psychology. In this part of the West, the words *local* and *federal* come loaded with heavy baggage. (One of the most famous antigovernment movements of the 1990s, the Montana Freeman, found some of its supporters among the rural ranching communities of central and eastern Montana.) Edicts from Washington, D.C., are often resented and resisted. Grizzly conservationists have learned that long-term solutions in these remote Rocky Mountain valleys are most likely when local people solve local problems. By working close to the ground, ignoring greater ideological differences, and focusing on specific issues, ranchers, conservationists, and land managers have enabled the grizzly population to grow. As Todd Graham put it to his Madison Valley neighbors, “If we can manage this ourselves, we can avoid having the governor or Congress telling us what to do.” Much of the rancor that traditionally characterized the conversation between ranchers and conservationists has given way to hard-earned trust and respect.

A little cultural understanding can go a long way. Seth Wilson, a postdoctoral researcher with the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, works on grizzly conservation projects in Mon-

tana's Blackfoot Valley, east of Missoula. Like their Yellowstone cousins to the south, a population of bears centered in Glacier National Park in northwest Montana is moving onto rangeland in the Blackfoot. Wilson and Blackfoot Challenge, a local environmental group, worked with ranchers to establish a procedure to haul away livestock carcasses—mostly stillborns and the females that die giving birth during spring calving season, a prime grizzly attractant. "When we first started, we'd hold our meetings around a conference table in the middle of a weekday," says Wilson. "Well, ranchers can't give up their work-

day to sit around with a bunch of bureaucrats and environmentalists from Missoula. So we started meeting in smaller groups over dinner. That's when we really started engaging people." Those face-to-face meetings yielded crucial insights. During the early days of the carcass pickup program, Wilson couldn't understand why more ranchers didn't use the free service. Over dinner they told him: Nobody wanted their neighbors to know how many livestock they were losing. Wilson and his partners introduced anonymous pickup locations, and participation skyrocketed.



## YELLOWSTONE GRIZZLIES: THREATENED OR NOT?

**O**N NOVEMBER 15, 2005, INTERIOR SECRETARY Gale Norton announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was taking steps to remove the Yellowstone grizzly population from protection under the Endangered Species Act. "More than 600 grizzlies now inhabit the Yellowstone ecosystem and the population is no longer threatened," Norton said. "We are confident that the future of the grizzly bear in Yellowstone is bright."

Chris Servheen, the Montana-based coordinator of grizzly recovery efforts for the service, agrees. "This is one of the greatest success stories in the history of the Endangered Species Act," he says.

While Norton and Servheen herald the proposed delisting as a milestone on the Yellowstone grizzly's road to recovery—the bear has been listed as threatened since 1975—others aren't so sure. A number of scientists and environmental leaders say the Yellowstone population isn't ready to sustain itself without federal protection.

"The delisting plan won't ensure grizzly recovery, and there's a good chance it will reduce the population we already have," says Lance Craighead, executive director of the Craighead Environmental Research Institute. In early 2006, Craighead and more than 100 other scientists signed an open letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service opposing the delisting. They argued that an isolated population of 500 to 600 bears wasn't enough to survive potential shocks such as the loss of a key food

source. The bear population should be at least 2,000 before delisting, they said.

A final decision is expected from the Fish and Wildlife Service in early 2007. If the Yellowstone grizzly loses its threatened status, protection of the bear will be turned over to state wildlife agencies. Some grizzly advocates say that could prove disastrous. Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming plan to manage the grizzly as a game animal, which includes hunting. "That would be like taking patients in an emergency room and stabbing them a few more times," says Doug Honnold, an attorney for Earthjustice who has worked on grizzly issues for 20 years.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is now evaluating the states' management plans and considering thousands of public comments as it shapes its decision. The wild card in all this is Wyoming, which has a history of animosity toward predators like the grizzly and the gray wolf. The state's gray wolf management plan, which some critics characterized as "aim and shoot," was rejected by federal officials in early 2004. Court battles over that rejection continue to delay the delisting of the wolf. Wyoming's grizzly management plan would

cap the population at its current level, relying largely on hunting to keep those numbers in check. "The bear originally went on the list because states like Wyoming overhunted them," says Craighead. "And things haven't changed all that much since then." —B.B.

For more on the grizzly's status, see "NRDC Says..." page 44.

It's a subtle but crucial component of environmental work out here. During the Madison Valley barn seminar, for instance, researcher Steve Primm told the ranchers in the audience, "You folks are professionals. You know what you're doing." It was a sign of respect, one that spoke volumes about the years Primm has put in working side by side with local cattlemen. His words also sent a message: I'm not here to run you out of business. I want to make grizzly recovery work for you.

**Y**ELLOWSTONE GRIZZLY RECOVERY COULD BE entering its most challenging phase yet as bears continue to push past national forest boundaries, onto private land increasingly being converted into housing developments.

Ray Rasker lives in Bozeman and is the executive director of Headwaters Economics, a research firm that focuses on socioeconomic trends in the American West. Rasker's hometown is one of the centers of the booming ranchette economy. "I was in a coffee shop on Main Street yesterday," he says, "and practically everyone around me was a builder or land developer from out of town."

Groups like the Trust for Public Land and the Nature Conservancy are scrambling to negotiate conservation easements, which provide cash payments to ranchers in exchange for agreements to limit development of their land. "It's an epic struggle to keep these big ranches from being developed into twentys," says Alex Diekmann of the Trust for Public Land. In 2006 Diekmann completed a \$2 million deal for an easement on a 1,500-acre Madison Valley ranch adjacent to a national forest and a wilderness area. "A lot of ranchers can't make it just running cattle," he adds. "Their land is worth millions, so they end up doing what a lot of people would do—selling."

Despite all these efforts, conflicts are expected to increase, and not only because of new housing, settlers, and the ongoing loss of bear habitat. There is another emerging problem: A region-wide pine beetle infestation, exacerbated by global warming, is killing stands of whitebark pine trees. Whitebark pine nuts are among the Yellowstone grizzlies' primary foods, and they allow the bears to eat and roam at higher elevations. If those trees die, the bears may be forced to look for food closer to ranches and houses on the valley floor.

That's where meetings like the Living With Predators workshop come into play. In years past, grizzly conservationists could walk up to a neighbor's door and talk about the issue. But second-home owners often show up only during the summer, and many have unlisted cell phone numbers.

"It's tough with this churning population," says Primm. "They're coming in with zero knowledge about local predators, and it's hard to find them."

Development of private land in the greater Yellowstone region threatens migration corridors crucial for robust grizzly populations.



**"I WAS IN A COFFEE SHOP ON MAIN STREET, AND PRACTICALLY EVERYONE AROUND ME WAS A BUILDER OR DEVELOPER"**

"I've got a new neighbor, real nice guy from Texas," says NRDC's Willcox. "Soon after he moved in, he started building up his private pheasant population. It wasn't long before he had a bear on his property eating pheasant food. He came to Montana for the same reasons the rest of us did—the open space, the wildlife—but that connection between pheasant food and dead bears hadn't been made."

With new homeowners, there's no compensation fund or allotment to be bought out. There's only good, old-fashioned education and social pressure. It's a lot like recycling. Bear-proofing works only if it becomes common practice, if those who don't particularly care about grizzlies lock down their garbage and clean their grills simply because that's what everyone else does. During the Living With Predators workshop, Tricia Stabler, who owns a summer house in the Madison Valley, asks Primm about a black bear that recently wandered into her neighbor's kitchen.

"What I'd like you to think about is how that bear knew there was food in that house, or any house," Primm answers. "Some people like bears coming into their yard—they enjoy sitting back with a gin and tonic and watching a grizzly wander through. But that's a good way to kill that bear." Eventually, he explains, a nuisance bear will be eliminated by state wildlife officers. "We need you to put some peer pressure on those folks," he says.

Graham describes to the group how he scares curious critters away with air horns and cracker shells, nonlethal shotgun shells that deliver a frightening bang. "What you've got to do is haze these animals to keep them out of trouble," he says.

Graham wraps up his pitch with a call to community. "When you scare that bear off your porch, you're not only helping that animal, you're

helping me and my cattle and everybody else up and down the valley. This is a community responsibility. If you see a predator sniffing around your property, get on the phone and let your neighbor know.

"When I see a grizzly, I call up Scott and make sure his cows are okay," Graham says, pointing to a rancher sitting in the back. "It's just the neighborly thing to do. We all want to make a living out here. And for me, part of the reason I'm here is to live among these predators. This valley wouldn't be the same without them."

A few days after the workshop, Graham's livestock handlers spotted a full-grown grizzly near a cluster of houses on the ranch. A century ago those cowboys would have loaded their rifles and brought the bear down. Instead, they hollered at the animal and shooed it away toward the hills. The grizzly lumbered up valley, idly grazing, and continued on its way, moving north, away from the safety of Yellowstone and into a still uncertain future. 🐾



HEAR MORE ABOUT YELLOWSTONE GRIZZLIES AT [www.onearth.org/podcasts](http://www.onearth.org/podcasts).