

Dear Everybody:

Spring 2012



**MARK and GRIZZLIES:** Spring has returned to the Pacific Northwest and high elevation snowmelt has swollen the springs, creeks and rivers with sparkling fresh water. Hungry grizzlies and black bears have left their dens with their cubs and headed down the mountains to feed on the lush greenery flushing the lower slopes, and in the creeks and river bottoms. Spring breezes will soon caress the mountain's face, and clouds of yellow pollen will winnow along its crags and crannies, a veil for the flocks of ducks and geese nesting in the marsh below.

This time of year I help my Fish and Game partners launch their boats into the waters of Priest and Pend O'reille Lakes, and the Kootenai River; and researchers begin collecting hair from bears for DNA analysis. Sadly, several years of analysis has told us that the grizzly populations that we have been trying to recover for more than two decades have barely grown. The good news is that they haven't declined, and we know why they are not growing:

Greg, my Fish and Game partner and I arrived at the Agency's cabin on Bismark Meadows near Priest Lake. Over the past decade 600 acres of these meadows have been secured with permanent easements for grizzlies with the efforts of organizations, including the Owens Foundation, but with the lion's share of the credit going to Vital Ground, one of our stellar partners. Greg had asked me to help de-winterize the Agency's 3 patrol boats and test them before the Memorial Day fishing activities. And we were to meet some bear trappers who would help catch and radio-collar more grizzlies to collect DNA and blood samples. At the cabin after a long day, Greg, Wayne, Ed and Rob surprised me with a birthday party complete with barbequed chicken, a little whiskey and a lot of bush tales, capped off with a birthday cake that Wayne made in a black pot with coals from the fire. We needed a boost after research results showing the region's glacially slow growth of the grizzly populations.

*Photo Courtesy of David Chudnow, [www.freelargephotos.com](http://www.freelargephotos.com)*

On the lake the next morning, Greg took a call on his cell and I watched his face sag, heard his voice sharpen: A mother grizzly and her cub had been found shot dead at the edge of a timbered clear-cut on Hall Mountain along the Kootenai River Valley. It is the spring bear hunt, you see, and yet another hunter has either mistakenly or intentionally shot yet another grizzly female, fresh out of her den and headed down into the valley to find fresh forage with her new cub. Grizzlies are endangered and it is illegal to shoot them, but these bears are dead



because Fish and Game, pressured by its lay Commissioners, opened a spring bear hunting season; they are dead because hunting Unit 1 in the Northern Panhandle of Idaho has more than 900 miles of timber roads and tracks – most of them on *public* land -- that give hunters too much access to grizzly bear areas; because the State has refused to make bear identification classes mandatory before would-be bear hunters can get licenses to hunt; because Fish and Game gets almost all its revenues from hunting and fishing license fees, so that extremist hunters and fishermen can demand – and get – overly liberal hunting a fishing seasons and policies – like a spring bear hunt, at the expense of bears. These bears died because too often people who shoot them for whatever reason get off with a slap on the wrist by state and federal prosecutors and judges; because the governor appoints lay Fish and Game commissioners exclusively from the hunting/fishing and agriculture communities, who dictate policies that are often anti-predator and harmful to the wildlife they are supposed to be conserving. And - they died because there is only one dedicated game warden to cover an area the size of smaller states, so poachers don't worry that they will get caught.

No one can tell you how many adult grizzlies are killed each year and how many grizzly and black bear orphans are left to die in the forests as a result of the spring hunt. But I can tell you that it is way too many because we do know

that human-caused mortality accounts for the vast majority of grizzly bear deaths that we know of year to year. Almost all of these shootings occur during the spring and fall hunting seasons and are by hunters who claim they mistook grizzlies for black bears, and too many of these grizzly bears are females with cubs.

On our way to investigate this incident, Greg and I fretted over what could be done: We knew that we could not immediately change the politics behind the spring bear hunt. They are the same politics that drive the extermination of wolves and other predators and bias the entire management of wildlife, especially in the West. Then it hit me: If we can't change the politics, maybe we can insulate the bears from unethical hunters with people who care. Our communities are full of a 'silent majority' as frustrated as we are by 'the system' and by our inability to do anything to protect bears, wolves and other wild animals: Why not get these folks into bear-critical areas to establish a presence during the hunting seasons when bears are especially vulnerable?



As soon as I got home that night I began calling friends, many of them retired and with time on their hands, all of whom care about bears and who like to hike, hunt and camp. In no time several couples had pledged to spend time in specific areas where grizzlies had already been sighted this spring. While camping and hiking in these areas they would keep their eyes and ears open, hoping to see grizzlies – while noticing, and recording, the comings and goings of those who might pose a threat to the bears. Having people in the forest to help protect bears might deter someone from killing them illegally and encourage hunters to double check if it is grizzly rather than a black bear. Volunteers could also find and report bear cubs, lynx and other animals caught in wire wolf snares, report illegal baiting stations, and other illegal activities. Could this be a start of a new program? We hope so. At the very least it will help those of us participating feel more like we are doing something to actively protect grizzlies.

#### **WHAT THE OWENS FOUNDATION HAS DONE AND IS DOING TO HELP PROTECT GRIZZLIES:**

1. Provided trail cameras; horses, a horse trailer and other equipment to help patrol bear areas during hunting seasons.
2. Funded a 'Bear Aware' program and subsidized the salary of a F&G officer who visits schools and community venues with a stuffed grizzly in a trailer to teach people about the natural history of grizzlies and how to behave around them.
3. Organizing a local 'wildlife watch' program.
4. Publicizing the abuse of wildlife resources and lobbying against these practices.
5. Helping to identify, protect, and restore critical grizzly habitat, especially spring and summer range.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

1. Contact your local game warden/conservation officer, especially if you live in areas that contain threatened and endangered species, and offer to help organize an auxiliary 'wildlife watch' group.
2. Write President Obama (Copy Secretary of The Interior, Governor of Alaska, your state congressional representatives) asking him to issue an executive order outlawing the use of hounds, aerial gunning, poisons and toxic gas, snares, and bear baiting stations to kill bears on public land in all states. Point out that where elk, caribou, musk oxen and other prey populations have declined the problem is LOSS OF HABITAT, NOT predation. It is cheaper and politically expedient to blame and kill predators but PREDATORS ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR DECLINING PREY POPULATIONS - MISMANAGEMENT OF HABITAT IS! Refuse to visit Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming until they stop persecuting wolves and bears.
3. Consider using a federal programs to protect and restore bear habitat on your property:
  - a. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), The Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) and many others.
  - b. Contact your local NRCS agent, or local state Conservation Officer. Many programs are cost/share, some remunerate land-owners for placing conservation easements on their land, and cover some or all of the habitat restoration costs.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

- **US President**, The White House - Washington, DC 20500 Email: [www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact)
- **Sec Salazar, Dept of the Interior**, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington DC 20240, Phone: (202) 208-3100, E-Mail: [feedback@ios.doi.gov](mailto:feedback@ios.doi.gov)
- **For Address Info:** Write - *The Office of the Clerk of the US House of Representatives/US Capitol* -- Room H154 - Washington, DC 20515 -- PH: 202-225-7000, or email for info [www.clerkweb.houses.gov](http://www.clerkweb.houses.gov) - or email your representatives directly through the following link: [www.house.gov/writerep](http://www.house.gov/writerep)
- **Gov Sean Parnell, Alaska:** 550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1700, Anchorage, AK 99501, 907-465-3500 or email at [governor@alaska.gov](mailto:governor@alaska.gov).

## DELIA - NEWS FROM AFRICA

As we told you last year, elephant poaching is once again increasing throughout Africa. North Luangwa is still one of the most secure sanctuaries for elephants, but even there some elephants are being shot. We continue to believe that the best hope for the survival of elephants and other endangered species in Africa is to improve the living standards of the people who inhabit areas near the wildlife.

*Photo by John Antonelli*

As you know, two years ago with amazing support from Owens Foundation members we purchased a Mobile Clinic that could travel the rough bush tracks and provide health care to the same villages where we introduced medical assistance years ago. We are pleased to tell you that Hammer Simwinga has secured a grant from US AID that will contribute to the operational funding of the clinic. This is great news because it is very difficult and expensive to pay for fuel, maintenance, a medical team, medical supplies and a driver for the clinic.

Hammer will partner with the Zambian Ministry of Health (as we did with the first Traditional Birth Attendant program), and the program will include anti-malarial, pre and post-natal care, AIDS testing and vaccinations. The clinic will visit nine chiefdoms, including twelve rural health centers. In most cases, this is the only health care available in these remote areas. Before we began the health care program more than twenty years ago, villagers had to walk up to three days to the clinic in Mpika. This is an incredible next step in supporting both the people and the wildlife of North Zambia.

There is more good news to report from the African work. *National Geographic* is sponsoring a 'Learning Linkage' program for children in the area, and Hammer is introducing this to his Junior Rangers, who work for wildlife conservation. Some of the programs will be conducted in the facilities built by the OFWC in the 1980s, and recently upgraded with newer equipment. Our wildlife education programs have reached thousands of Zambian children for decades, and because of this, as adults, fewer people will be inclined to poach wildlife.

As always, we desperately need funds to support the programs in Zambia. Most specifically funds are needed for the health care, jobs and education programs. Thanks for anything you can do. Your generosity is magnified many times over in stable human and wildlife populations in a challenged world.

*Photo courtesy of EJ Peiker, [www.ejphoto.com](http://www.ejphoto.com)*



## NORTH IDAHO:

Mark and I walked together across the snowy meadow to our barn. This was his first outing after recovering from another serious spinal surgery in February. As we approached the barn, we spotted some large tracks near the door, and squatted down to identify them. Our neighbor, who had fed our horses while we were away for the surgery, had reported large dog tracks around the barn.

"This is no large dog," Mark said.

"I'd say it's a large cat," we both said at once. "A very large cat."

Mark continued into the dimness of the early-morning barn, while I went to the tack room for the horse halters. As he

approached the haystack, his eyes adjusted to the light, and he saw a mountain lion standing 15 feet from him. She was inside the south door, poised by the four-foot snow bank, which had slid from the roof. She stared back at him with the patience and confidence of a sure-footed cat, then leapt over the snow and ran to the woods.

I was extremely envious that I had missed her.



The next morning, Mark's back was too sore to walk to the barn. I'd have to go on my own.

"You better take the two-way radio and the bear spray with you in case she's still there," he said.

I wondered what good a radio would do. There is hardly time to make a call when a cougar has your throat. I forgot the bear spray.

As I stepped slowly into the dark barn, I realized I had never noticed how many hundreds of places a mountain lion could hide: under the tractor, in the loft, and in the back of the stalls. I could hear the horses milling about outside in the corral, two feet from the barn wall.

I clicked the radio, "All clear. Looks like she's not here."

Precisely at that second, a form unwound itself on top of the haystack, and I looked up at the lioness standing above me, no more than twenty feet away.

"Uh. No. She's right here. She's on top of the haystack."

In one fluid motion, the lioness jumped from the top of the hay, to a lower stack, bounded over the stall wall into the corral (with the horses!), then jumped over the water tank and the six-foot fence, and ran to the woods. I had a very good look at her. She was lithe and thin, probably a sub-adult out on her own for the first time.

Mark's voice crackled over the radio, "You okay?"

"Yeah. Fine. She's already in the trees."

I ran into the corral. The horses had fled to the other end, their eyes rimmed in white. They huffed and blew, and ran in tight circles, then stood looking into the trees. I brought some hay out for them and that's all it took. They settled down and ate.

Later I said to Mark. "I think we should sleep in the barn tonight. She'll probably be back, and might go for the horses."

"Naw. Cougars rarely attack horses. Anyway, she's too small to bring down a horse."

He was right: she never bothered the horses or the barn cats. Just slept on our hay now and then, and chewed up a harness. But I never go into the barn without having a good look around. And neither do the horses.

Spring came late again to the habitat we have conserved for wildlife, but now it is in full swing. We watched a female black bear with her two cubs – round balls of reddish fur – feeding and tumbling in the new grass. Two wolves passed within feet of us as they eyed a small herd of elk. White-tailed and mule deer romped and played. Moose grazed in the marsh ponds that soared with geese, ducks, herons, eagles, ospreys, and hawks.

Then one morning my eye caught something different. At first I could not believe what it was. A caribou -- which has probably not been seen here for a hundred years -- walked along the creek. She wore a radio collar and two ear tags. It turns out that Canadian biologists had immobilized her in British Columbia, 70 miles to the north. She does not belong in this type of ecosystem, and we hope she finds her way back home. But it was an honor, a privilege, and a joy to see a rare animal surrounded by lush habitat in relative safety.

There is, unfortunately, always some bad news to bring to you: wolves being trapped and shot, grizzlies being illegally shot, elephant poaching on the rise in Africa. But we all must celebrate the successes, while working to conserve the threatened. Winter and spring were seasons of cougars and caribou; wolves and bear cubs. And that's good enough to keep us going.

We cannot protect these creatures without your help, and know we can depend on you.

Thank you for all your support.

Cheers,

*Mark and Dee*

