

March 26, 2020

To the Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council,

Grizzly bears are part of the fabric that makes Montana unique, and they play a vital role in our ecosystems as well as our economy. Millions of visitors come to Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks and surrounding areas to experience the incredible scenery and the iconic wildlife that exist only in these places. Visitor polling in Yellowstone consistently places wildlife viewing in the top three reasons people visit the park. From the most recent annual National Park reports, visitors to Grand Teton, Yellowstone, and Glacier spent over \$1.4 billion dollars in nearby communities, which had a cumulative benefit of approximately \$1.8 billion to local economies. Montana's grizzlies are foundational to our livelihoods. We have built our businesses around showing people Montana's iconic wildlife and photographing the unique wildlife of the state. Without a healthy grizzly population our businesses would suffer, and so would Montana's rapidly growing tourism/recreation economy.

A healthy grizzly population in and around the parks has a direct positive impact on our livelihoods as business owners, guides, wildlife watching tour operators, and wildlife photographers. There are over 50 wildlife tour operators in Greater Yellowstone alone. We employ local guides who take thousands of people on trips every year. Seeing a grizzly bear is often the trip highlight as one visitor put it, "I went to see wolves and found myself awestruck by the bears and that amazing coyote too. To see these animals in their home and thriving was such a joy." Even individual bears can have a positive impact on business as people travel and spend money to see specific animals. Additionally, grizzlies indirectly contribute to Montana's economy in the form of providing important ecosystem services. An example is grizzlies' appetite for huckleberries. An individual bear can eat thousands of huckleberries a day; in doing so they distribute the seeds across the landscape, creating new berry patches and reseeding the old. Huckleberries alone are responsible for an estimated one million dollars in revenue for Montana. Grizzlies play a vital role in the overall health of the environment which in turn fuels our recreation economy.

We recognize that living with grizzlies does have a cost; conflict mitigation and compensation for depredations takes time, money, and resources to address. However, grizzlies are essential to Montana's wildness and bring tremendous benefit to Montana's economy and our businesses. They are a critical part of how we make a living and we need thriving, healthy populations of bears to be part of our future.

We are deeply concerned by the increasing number of grizzly mortalities across the state. Without an increase in resources for conflict prevention these numbers will be exacerbated by

climate change and a growing human population. Grizzlies' presence on the landscape is not a guarantee and could easily reach a tipping point, sliding toward extinction.

This council has an opportunity to prioritize coexistence and connectivity management solutions, and in the process protect our way of life. We hope that this council recognizes the economic and intrinsic value of the grizzly bear. Four of the six federally-designated grizzly bear recovery areas are wholly or partially in Montana; as such, the state plays a huge role in their full recovery. A healthy grizzly population is genetically and demographically connected. It also requires strong investment in conflict prevention and coexistence strategies in cities, towns, and frontline communities. Montana's recreation economy is only projected to grow; this council has the opportunity and responsibility to make recommendations which protect the grizzly and recognize it as an important economic asset to the state.

Thank you for your consideration,

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Fitpacking

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Wild Things of Wyoming

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Jackson Hole, WY

Yellowstone Wild the Gallery

Thomas C. Hoff , Photographer/Owner
Beth Renick, Managing Director, Bozeman
yellowstonewild.com
Bozeman, MT & Gardiner, MT

Mangelsen, Images of Nature

Tom Mangelsen, Photographer/Owner
mangelsen.com
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Don Getty's Wildlife and Nature Gallery

Don Getty, Photographer
Dongettywildlifephotography.com
Wapiti, Wyoming

Jack Bayles Photography

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Grizzly Ridge Photography

Linda Skeen, Photographer
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Sandra Lee Photography

Sandy Zelasko, Photographer
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San Diego, CA
Operates in: Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

Bear Creek Council

northernplains.org/our-local-groups/bear-creek-council
facebook.com/BearCreekCouncil
Gardiner, MT

*Organization which represents numerous business owners in Gardiner, MT

Glacier - Two Medicine Alliance

glaciertwomedicine.org
East Glacier, MT

*Organization which works to protect the environment of the Badger Two-Medicine region