



## The Wild Tapestry

The great brown bear, *Ursus Arctos Horribilis*, better known as the grizzly, exudes a power and majesty that captures our attention. The graceful motion of this 500 pound animal running through Yellowstone is awe inspiring. The devotion of the mother sow to her cubs, ranging through the gray-green sagebrush searching for roots, speaks of invisible bonds at the indestructible core of life.

Observers stand outside in the early morning hours, shivering in the cold as flakes of snow begin to fall, when suddenly a grizzly appears far across the wild expanse of the grand Lamar Valley. The cold is forgotten as concentration on the grizzly through spotting scopes intensifies, and the level of absorption does not waiver until the bear wanders out of view, disappearing into a copse of cottonwood trees. Perhaps part of the thrill of following the movements of the bear, wolves, pronghorn antelope, elk, moose and bison in their natural environment originates from a deep connection between all of life.

Gary Ferguson described this eloquently in *Walking Down the Wild: A Journey Through the Yellowstone Rockies*: “It dawns on me that for people living full-time with the land – dedicated nomads, if you will – the world must take on a profoundly different cast, a seamless flow of relationships in which it would be impossible to imagine any single component unhinged from the whole. There are many who have mastered the names and the habits of nature. But who among us is left with the sagacity to feel the rhythm of it all...?”

A growing perception of the inter-dependence of life goes hand in hand with a

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commitment to protect wildlife and preserve habitats. The National Parks are like islands that need to be connected by a corridor in which bears and other animals can freely roam in order to maintain a healthy environment and prevent their extinction. Bear biologists such as the legendary path breaking researchers John and Frank Craighead have shown that grizzlies in Yellowstone wander home ranges as large as several hundred to a thousand square miles. The separate reserves need to be part of a larger working ecosystem. It is estimated that 2,000 large mammals are needed to maintain genetic variation and the potential to come back after a natural disaster. That number of grizzlies translates into 50,000 square miles.

Lance Craighead is carrying on his father and uncle's research by mapping the areas where wildlife can travel northward from Yellowstone through British Columbia and into the Yukon. This vision is called Yellowstone to Yukon, or Y2Y. It is a bio-geographic area, and the Y2Y Conservation Initiative is a movement to promote the beauty, environmental health and natural diversity of the region. Over 120 conservation-minded organizations col-laborate in a network to figure out how human activities can take place while protecting the landscapes, wildlife and natural resources of the area.

Questions are raised about responsibility for animals and their welfare. The grizzly bear has been reduced to one percent of its original range in the lower 48 states. One of the biggest problems is development: it seems that man likes all the same places that bears do, such as the bottomlands between mountains. Louisa Willcox of the Natural Resources Defense Council observed that this country is becoming in some ways increasingly conservative and more concerned about private property rights and less concerned about sharing. She said that we need to take responsibility for our impact on others and cultivate a sense of altruism. She said that we should be willing to make sacrifices because the grizzly bear has nowhere left to go.

According to Doug Peacock, author of *Grizzly Years: In Search of the American Wilderness*, "The Blackfeet used the mountains for vision quests; their medicine people sought their patron animal, Real Bear, as a spirit guide, because the grizzly was more than the animal wearing the fur coat, he was the Medicine Grizzly" (130). Northern regions share in common Native American myths and legends about the bear, such as the genesis tale of the Bear Mother. These stories suggest the cyclic regeneration of nature, the hibernation of bears providing a graphic symbol of renewal, immortality and rebirth.

Peacock relates his own story of renewal from returning from two years as a soldier in Vietnam. Finding himself unable to communicate even with his family, he set out to make sense of his experience and get in touch with a deeper side of himself by camping and hiking in un-inhabited regions in Colorado, the Wind

River area and Yellowstone. By coming directly face to face with a grizzly on a trail, he came to a point where he knew his shooting days were over. He followed the grizzlies from a distance for weeks, and increasingly felt his vitality return. The bears saved his life, he felt, and he became totally committed to grizzly recovery.

In his book authored with his wife, Andrea, *In the Presence of Grizzlies*, Peacock wrote, "In the intimate presence of this animal you may experience the ancient alchemy of fear concocted with awe and respect, which is a window to the connectedness of all life ... opening your mind to the bear's world is imbued with the invitation to transform your personal life. On occasion, something is exchanged, like an adventure that crosses a mythic boundary" (219).

The opportunity of observing wildlife and the beauty of nature is a freedom that we must keep intact. Gary Ferguson highlights the value of experiences in these wild places: "The flash of that cardinal, those soft green leaves of the maple and the dogwood, are small, precious hints of the wild tapestry that once circled the earth, the patterns and paradigms that first breathed meaning into human existence. For many people those hints are what help transcend the tumult of daily living, they are that slim measure of miracle that brings wholeness to a severed world. Looking back, I realize that I too was hunting for such inklings, such assurances, from the nooks and crannies of the Yellowstone. And what is perhaps most remarkable of all is that I never once failed to find them" (203).

Gerry Lewin, Member, Institute of World Culture

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