Ethics and ecology | An environmental history of bear hunting in western Montana

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ETHICS AND ECOLOGY: AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF BEAR HUNTING IN WESTERN MONTANA

by
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Bear hunting in Western Montana has followed many traditions since the first peoples arrived here in the Pleistocene Era. Each of these hunting cultures has had distinct effects on the bears of the region, and has justified those impacts with evolving ethics. This paper traces the history of bear hunting in western Montana as a part of the larger Yellowstone to Yukon bioregion. The sources for this history are diverse, including: paleological works, anthropological accounts of historic tribes and their bear hunting cultures, written accounts from white settlement, biological and ecological studies of the effects of bear hunting; interviews with regional historians, hunters, wildlife managers, and tribal representatives; tracts concerning hunting ethics; and personal experiences with bear hunters. Throughout, the paper explores the ethical and ecological aspects of bear hunting, with a view toward creating a positive, connected bear hunting culture for the future. Ultimately, bear hunting must exist within a society that places a high value on bears. Based on the historical sources and current concerns about bear hunting, I make some suggestions for ways to increase the ethical and ecological integrity of bear hunting.
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I went on a bear hunt in the spring of 2002 with Mission Creek Outfitters in the Swan Valley north of Missoula, Montana. Driving out of town at 5AM I yawned through the Blackfoot Valley, watching the road with as much attention as I could muster while the black-green hills flashed past. As it turned out my hurry was unnecessary; I was early for the day. When I pulled in at 6, muddy four-wheel drive trucks were parked all over Mission Creek’s compound, and no light showed from any of the buildings or trailers. On the back of one truck there was a dead black bear strapped to a four-wheeled ATV. Getting up close, the only indication of fatal injury that I could see in the bear was a trail of bloody spittle hanging from its lips. I took some photos, wondering alternately if the dozing hunters would object to my photography, and how the bear spirits might regard my intentions.

This hunt was an experiential aspect of my ecological and social research into bear hunting in Western Montana: a chance to explore what a bear hunt is about, what happens during this controversial activity, and why people do it. I wanted to find out if bear hunting was more than a macho ritual conducted at the expense of a wild animal. I wondered if these bear hunters would prove to be meaningfully connected to their prey, connected in ways foreign to people, like me, who would never dream of killing a bear. Some parts of the hunt could be anticipated, but I knew that there was much more that I could not foresee. I was anxious and excited, and not entirely sure that I wanted to be there—probably a normal start to a bear-hunting day.

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1 Names of guide, outfitter, and client changed to preserve their privacy.
A quiet, studious-looking man in khaki emerged from the largest building and made his way to a small rental car. After rummaging for a minute, he walked over and, hands on hips, admired the dead bear through his thick glasses. Taking me for an expert, he asked me what I thought the bear weighed. I guessed 275 pounds, which to my surprise turned out to be pretty close. This man, Jim, was a first-time bear hunter from Nevada, and he had been tramping around the back roads with Mission Creek's guides for the last four days. Late last evening another hunter had killed the bear that we were examining. It was the first one taken killed by Mission Creek’s clients that year.

The slow start on the hunting season was probably due to deep spring snows that had limited vehicle access and kept the bears drowsy in their dens. The slow start on the day was due to the late night the guides had worked while finding and hauling this bear out of the woods, and the subsequent celebration. Everyone except the so-far-unsuccessful Jim was still sleeping it off. We passed some time drinking coffee in the kitchen and talking with the cook. Before long, breakfast got fired up and Mark Robbins, the head guide and owner of the lodge, shambled into the dining room. He looked as if he had gotten up on the wrong side of a frat party. Mark apologized for his oversleeping and quickly got down to business. Before I knew it, he, Jim and I were out the door and bumping along a winding logging road in Mission Creek’s old Blazer.

Mark has been hunting and guiding in Western Montana for 29 years, concentrating on the mountains around his home in the Swan. Work is often scarce, and the spring bear season is an opportunity for him to guide in an otherwise slow period. Besides animals with year-round open seasons, like coyotes and prairie dogs, there is no other spring hunting in Montana. Mark says that over the years the spring bear seasons
set by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks have gotten shorter and earlier, limiting the success of his hunters and making it harder to sustain his small business. He wishes aloud that the environmentalists and other groups, like the Missoula-based Great Bear Foundation, would get out of the way and let the local wildlife managers set the seasons based on science, not public emotion. Jim sat in quietly for this discussion, soaking up information that you don’t commonly find in hunting lodge brochures.

Up a long grade we pulled over and got out to hunt along a promising closed road. There were patches of snow around, but the grass planted along the roadcuts was greening up. If Mark was right, hungry bears were likely to be grazing nearby. We walked along the road as quietly as we could. Mark was up front in his old camo jacket and with a big pistol on his hip, Jim just behind carrying a long rifle, and me in the rear armed with a camera—and weaving left and right to stay out of the path that a bullet would take if Jim’s rifle went off accidentally. Mark padded to the outside of each curve in the road, trying to see as far ahead down the next stretch as possible. The land was raw in late spring, caught between an old winter wind and a delayed spring green-up. The weather was undecided about which way it was pulling. Heavy clouds hung over the valley, and it looked like it might be snowing in the Swan Range to the east—but now and then a warm blast of sunlight slipped between those rough-edged clouds.

The excitement and anxiety of the hunt slowly faded as we walked longer and farther, and saw no sign. At last we found one: some bear scat, full of grass. Mark guessed it was three days old, and kicked it off the road so that the next time he passed this way he would know if there was anything new. It somehow became clear to me that we would not be seeing any bears out here.
At an old log deck at the end of the road, Mark proposed that we sit for a while and wait. He propped himself against a stump and was soon snoring. Jim and I sat and talked quietly. He wondered what I had discovered in my research into bear hunting history. Picking what I considered an interesting part of my studies, I told him about the nearly universal Indian beliefs that animals chose to give themselves to worthy hunters. Blinking, Jim packed away this information without comment.

When we returned to the truck, Mark proposed that Jim and I hike a closed road while he drove around to another access point where he could pick us up—and where he could snag another nap while we hunted. As Jim and I headed off on our five-mile jaunt, Mark told me not to let Jim shoot any small bears. “Sure,” I replied, a bit surprised at my assignment.

Set in the role of novice guide, I headed off for another long, pleasant forest walk with Jim. I had to remind myself that if we saw a bear, we were not going to sit and watch it through binoculars or try to “give it space.” Jim was going to do all he could to kill it. What I would do at the moment of this potential killing, I did not know for sure. I imagined that I would feel a strong impulse to scare the bear off, or to bump Jim’s arm so that he would miss. This sort of impromptu activism would no doubt derail this important part of my bear hunting research, and might even interfere with my safe exit from the Swan Valley. On a conflicting mental track, I had a desire to spot a bear first, and, as the one with more bear experience, to lead Jim to it. Part of me truly wanted to see what would happen then. In those moments I felt that I was actually bear hunting. The long walk passed with my mind alternately consumed by the hunt, and then drawn to more
abstract thoughts about ethics and action. Whatever my dilemmas, the occasion for action
did not arise; our walk was completely bear-free.

* * *

Back at the compound, the hunters rested during the midday lull in bear activity,
and I watched two employees skinning the bear that had been shot the night before. It
was lying on its back in the bed of a pickup, its legs strung through with thin steel cables
to facilitate the skinning. The men worked quickly along the body from the belly
outward, using small knives that they sharpened every few minutes. There was a thick
layer of creamy white fat on the trunk of the animal, which everyone remarked on as
unusual for a bear just out of the winter den. Old-time Indians said this fat tasted like
mother’s milk, and prized it for cooking and ceremonies. One of the workers, a young
man from Texas A&M University here for a summer job, was skinning just the second
bear he had ever seen. He got down to the paw, and his older co-worker showed him how
to score the lower leg bones with the knife and snap them off, leaving the paw attached to
the hide.

The two of them quickly finished the job, with occasional help from the proud
hunter, a bullish young man from Oklahoma. They all wondered why I was so intent on
photographing this operation, and mentioned in passing that if I were writing an anti-
hunting tract that they would be obliged to remove the film from my camera. I told them
honestly that I was not against hunting overall, but stayed quiet on the matter of my
critical questions about bear hunting ethics and policies.

My stomach churned at the sight of the now skinless bear. It did appear semi-
human without its fur, as I had heard, and its blank lidless eyes were disturbing. I
reminded myself that this has been happening to bears in many contexts for thousands of years, and that there was nothing unusual or inherently wrong about this scene. Despite that reassurance, it was shocking to see a bear so quickly and irrevocably reduced to its physical parts. It does not surprise me that Indians were so circumspect about this act, and made elaborate apologies to the bear. There was just a hint of that attitude apparent in the bear-skinners that day in the Swan.

The men removed some of the prime cuts of meat from the bear’s body, dropped the heart and liver into clean garbage bags, and then the college boy was given the unenviable job of disposing of the carcass. “Load it on the 4-wheeler and take it out far enough that the dogs won’t get it,” Mark told him. And that was it for that bear.

Writing this, I imagine the concentric waves of bear energy that radiated from those events. The skin became a rug for the Oklahoman and his pretty wife. The bear steaks might still be waiting in their freezer. The guts were mostly left where the bear was shot, gobbled by ravens and mice. The bones ended up somewhere in the woods, picked clean and gradually blending back into soil. A tooth went to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks for a dental-cementum age analysis using a technique that Chuck Jonkel, a local bear biologist and director of the Great Bear Foundation, helped to invent. Money for the bear flowed from Oklahoma to the Swan Valley—and maybe back again via the Cenex gas station down the road. The Oklahoman had a good time here, and he may send friends this way. But up in British Columbia the week before he saw fifty bears and killed two, and so any return business will probably be flowing further north.

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2 Rockwell, 60.
3 Stoneburg and Jonkel.
Jim was quietly impatient to get going and kill his own bear. I sensed the competition in the air, and Mark seemed to notice it as well. He gave Jim a playful punch in the shoulder and said, “Let’s get your bear tonight!” Jim, half-joking, wondered aloud if he had somehow offended the bear spirits.

* * *

I quizzed Mark about his bear hunting career on the way out to the evening’s hunting grounds. He told me that the last bear he shot was an old boar in the Bitterroot Mountains many years ago. The bear would not get out of the trail for his pack string on the way up Trapper Canyon. No matter how Mark yelled and then threw things at the bear, it just ignored him and kept grazing on the huckleberry bushes above the noisy creek. Mark decided that the bear was acting strangely, and would be trouble for the horses one way or another. Reluctantly, he killed the bear with one rifle shot. On inspection, the bear turned out to be blind in the eye that had been toward Mark on the trail, and so old that it was probably deaf as well. Apparently, the bear never knew Mark was there, despite his attempts to warn him off. Tooth cementum analysis later showed that the bear was 27 years old, a real patriarch. That day was in 1991, and Mark felt so bad about killing that old bear that he has never shot another.

Next, I asked Jim what he had learned about bears during this trip. He seemed to have gained some knowledge about black bear foods, their habits, and their various fur colors, called color-phases. Importantly, he had learned some good ways to distinguish between black bears and grizzlies in the field. All this seemed to be incidentally interesting to him, but beside the main point of killing a bear. He came bear hunting because he was bored with elk and deer, wanted a new challenge in a new area. He said
that he would not return for another hunt if this one were successful. He was living in and
for Nevada, not the Swan Valley of Montana. His learning seemed to me like the
information we gain from cramming for tests—quickly gained and just as quickly
forgotten. In this case the exam was killing a bear, and with any luck it was coming right
up.

Mark mentioned that many of his clients hunt bears only once or twice ever—it is
a kind of “novelty hunt,” at least for most guided hunters. Montana Fish Wildlife and
Parks echoes this sentiment when they justify the spring hunt on the grounds that it adds
to the variety of hunting experiences offered in the state. But there are other hunters who
specialize in predator hunting and are often dedicated to killing bears—“they just like it,”
Mark said with a shrug. And then there are the obsessive collecting-oriented hunters who
attempt to complete the various “grand slams” of the trophy-hunting world. These people
try to kill examples all the big game species they can, in all their varieties, using various
weapons and hunting techniques. Among bears they try for all the color-phases of black
bears, and then perhaps for all of those with a bow. Bear hunting outfitters often advertise
the ratio of rare color-phase bears in their area. In another life these people might have
been champion stamp collectors.

We pulled over at a gated logging road on the Swan Range side of the valley. We
could look out of this clear-cut drainage to where we had hunted in the morning. I began
to realize that hunters are out for the simple experience. While getting the bear is on
everyone’s mind, just being out in the mountains is a part of why they do it. A hiker
looking for scenery might not choose this logged-off and roaded place for a walk, but for

\[4\] Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) 1994, 29.
hunters needing to cover large areas in a short time, the easy access is essential and the unimpeded views are helpful too.

We thrashed through some thick woods to the banks of a fat spring creek. Here Mark found a deer head stuffed into a camouflaged barrel lying on its side. Closer inspection revealed a wire loop just in front of the barrel, and we realized that this was a bear trap—probably set by a state biologist, according to Mark. The trap made me wonder about the persistent rumors I had heard about bear poachers in the Swan. In either case, the trap helped confirm Mark’s suspicion that bears frequented this area.

Encouraged, we walked on through the late afternoon light. Somehow I was again sure that we would not find a bear.

Above a shadowy meadow we stopped and waited for a bear to emerge from the woods to graze on the green shoots poking up through last summer’s straw. The light faded, and I wondered if Jim would be able to make the long downhill shot into the dark glen. Jim and Mark were focused and alert, pointing and whispering urgently. I lay back on the ground, stared up past the pines to a pearl sky, and traced a nighthawk’s spiral. No bear offered itself to us.
Introduction: Why study bear hunting in Montana?

Despite that account of an unsuccessful hunt, people do kill significant numbers of bears in Montana every year. Many are killed by our cars, a few by hunters acting in perceived self-defense, and more and more by state and federal agents controlling “troubled” and troubling bears. Most importantly, hunters kill hundreds each year during regulated seasons for sport. Most fall to one of these direct causes brought to a head by our alterations of bear habitat—that is to say the roading, logging, mining and the overall “developing” of Montana’s mountains, valleys, and plains. There is nothing unusual about this. People have been killing bears here for quite some time, and the same sort of thing is happening all over the northern Rocky Mountains from Yellowstone to the Yukon and beyond. Where we will go from here with our bear killing is another question entirely.

The actual practice of killing bears has changed radically as hunting technologies have advanced and hunting ethics have changed over the decades. But in its essence bear hunting remains the same—a confrontation between the two dominant species on the continent. As such, it holds a mythic power that draws people to this challenge, whether it is to fulfill a sacred rite that will assure the continuation of the world, or to protect vulnerable livestock; whether the bear dies in order to fill a pot with grease during a lean winter, or to complete one’s color-phase collection of bear trophies. Spirituality, security, ego, and basic material needs have sent people into the woods after bears throughout our history. Now, as the best remaining bear habitat fades into our various “developments,”
our decisions about killing bears take on more import. We need to carefully consider our actions if we hope to have bears around in the long-term to enliven our woods and our dreams. And, in my opinion, useful thoughts about our future with bears should begin by excavating our past.

Bears and humans have been tightly connected for thousands of years. Many who write about bear-human relations note the strong similarities between our two species. Human cultures living with bears have almost universally felt a visceral kinship with these beasts, despite the sometimes-threatening ursine disposition. Laying out the physical and behavioral reasons for this semi-conscious feeling of relatedness with bears can help us perceive it more clearly. And understanding this connection can help us see why hunting these animals gives rise to such powerful emotions and debates.

So, what qualities do we share with bears? Like all large omnivores, both humans and bears are resourceful, adaptable, and intelligent. We eat much the same variety of foods, from elk to huckleberries to salmon. Bears ably compete with us for wild foods, and have earned our admiration as worthy opponents in what was, and in some cases still is, a high-stakes game. Bears can stand erect like we do, and use their paws much as we use our hands. Some tribes regarded bear as “unfortunate men,” and many have noted that a skin-less bear looks very much like a person. Bears sleep through the long, cold Montana winters, as many humans might prefer to do. Some believe that the ursine

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5 See Appendix 1.
6 Shepard, 1-2.
7 Ibid., 1.
winter "death" and spring "rebirth" is the original model for the belief in a human afterlife, and may have been a template for the story of Christ's resurrection.\(^8\)

We share many other behaviors as well. Bear-mothers take excellent care of their cubs, just as human mothers do. This summer in Alaska I watched two bear cubs faithfully imitating their mother by eating the brains and bellies of spawning salmon, and thereby absorbing the local bear-culture—I could not help but think of human children learning about the world from their parents. In many aboriginal societies there are persistent story-myths of lost children raised by bears, or cared for by bears. These children often went on to play significant roles in their cultures by transmitting knowledge between bears and humans.\(^9\) People of many societies have taken bear cubs into their families; among the Kootenai Indians women would sometimes suckle orphaned cubs.\(^10\) Smokey the Bear is only the most well known modern example of people taking extraordinary care to raise a needy cub. This is perhaps not terribly surprising, since our training in caring for bears begins so early. Nearly every North American has a toy bear at some point in their childhood. And, on a more adult theme, we are so close to bears that stories of fertile bear-human couplings are the subject of some of the most widespread myths of the aboriginal Northern Hemisphere.\(^11\)

All the foregoing supports a rather surprising assertion: for we who dwell in the primate species-poor North, bears have often been our closest living link to the animal world. For many Northerners, bears connect them to their evolutionary and mythic origins more completely than any other extant animal. Now, as living bridges between

\(^8\) Ibid., 134-5.
\(^9\) Ibid., xi.
\(^10\) Schaeffer.
\(^11\) Ibid., 58.
modern cultures and earlier eras, bears have also become proxies for wildness. Our changing attitudes toward bears have reflected, and sometimes led, our thoughts about the whole wild world.

Despite this closeness, or perhaps in part because of it, this is also an animal that we commonly hunt and kill. Of course, bears are quite well-equipped to kill us as well. With the Pleistocene extinction of saber-toothed cats and dire wolves, bears are nearly alone in this ability. However rarely bears kill humans these days, the potentially reciprocal mortal relationship between our species lends bear hunting deeper meanings, and makes for an uncomfortable comparison: hunting a bear is about as close as we can legally get to hunting a person. The prey is smart, tough, and dangerous when aroused. This is clearly not something to enter lightly, and the martial analogies are clear. Many Indians went to hunt grizzly bears much as they went to war—expecting to be bathed in glory if successful, and to be summarily maimed or killed if not. Even with today’s vastly superior weapons, bear hunting retains some element of real danger—from the prey, not just from myopic or trigger-happy fellow hunters—that is missing from most other kinds of hunting. That explains in part why we still do it: bear hunting is a visceral, risky recreation that taps into ancient drives that are otherwise difficult to access. In this way, bear hunting has at least the potential to connect people with the natural world on powerful evolutionary and ethical levels.

There are more reasons for bear hunting, and more history behind those reasons. It is worth investigating our history of hunting bears to find the range of relationships we have had with these creatures. We may then see where our current attitudes have come

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12 Mountain lions fit this description as well, and many of the ethical issues surrounding bear hunting also apply to killing lions, i.e. use of hounds and orphaned young.
from and, with the cultural pieces we have inherited, to imagine what our future with bears could be.

Some may take exception to my use of “we” in referring to bear hunting, noting that they personally would never do such a thing. But as a society we do allow bear hunting to continue. That decision may be based more on habit and social inertia than on real thought about the consequences and goals of bear hunting. There is a wide and widening gap between hunters and society in general about how, when and why it is acceptable to hunt bears. A more ecologically and historically informed culture might make different and better decisions about bear hunting.

This inquiry into bear hunting is grounded in Montana, the place where I live, and where bears and hunting are an important part of our sense of place and our economies. As we will see, Montana has been in some ways unique in its treatment of bears, but in many other ways the state is an exemplar of the cultures and attitudes of a much larger region. This study focuses on the mountains and valleys of western Montana, but when possible and useful, I will place Montana’s situation in the larger context of the Yellowstone to Yukon region, known as “Y2Y.” The Y2Y idea bears explanation here, as it has some important implications for bear hunting in Montana.

Y2Y is to some extent a human imagining—you could not draw a hard line around this huge area stretching from Dawson to Idaho Falls and reasonably say that it all has more to do with itself than with the continental vastness surrounding it. But as an interconnected mountain eco-region, and one of the best-preserved and largest remaining

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13 Beck et al., 121-2.
14 See appended maps.
in the world, Y2Y does cohere. Indeed, this idea can literally make sense of a huge and diverse region—allowing us to think in natural wholes that cross fractious, artificial boundaries. People working on the Y2Y Conservation Initiative are trying to improve ecological interconnections across those boundaries, and to encourage an economy and ecology—call it an integrated culture—that works for all the region’s species. It is an evolving long-term project with ecological and cultural sustainability as its goal.

Why examine the history of bear hunting in Y2Y? The simple, personal reason is that I live in the middle of it, and I know the people and ecology here better than anywhere else. More substantially, bears are implicated in many contentious issues here. On the U.S. side we are wrangling over bringing grizzlies back to the tremendous Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness complex, and contesting the possible removal of Endangered Species Act protections for grizzlies in Yellowstone. In Canada they are heatedly debating hunting regulations and habitat alterations, trying to keep their bears and their development plans intact. All over this region people are trying to see how modern people and their local bears can get along.

Obviously, Montana occupies a prominent position within the Y2Y region, especially with respect to bears. The state has the longest section of the U.S. - Canada border in the Y2Y study area, and with it some of the best habitat connections between U.S and Canadian bears. As well, if the grizzly bear populations in the Greater Yellowstone region are to be connected with those on the Northern Continental Divide, they will have to go through Montana for significant parts of the journey. Montana’s management of bears has important regional implications. Conversely, it is clear that how

15 http://www.rockies.ca/y2y/.
our regional neighbors treat their bears matters for us as well. Their bears and our bears are sometimes the very same bears.

Another reason: Ecologists sometimes compare bears to umbrellas, and because of this rather odd analogy, bears have a lot to do with the origins of Y2Y. “Umbrella” species require a large amount of habitat in order to survive, and the theory goes that if you preserve enough land for them, you will have preserved enough for most other species as well. In a more sophisticated version of this approach, conservation biologists are now examining models that map the combined habitat needs of several such species with varying habitat requirements. The goal of this is to identify and protect the critical wild areas needed to preserve regional biodiversity. Black and grizzly bears are two of the most important species in these investigations.16 Another Y2Y goal is to preserve landscape connections between these core habitats, so that a bear could range from the far north of this region where it verges on the arctic tundra, all the way down to the southern edge where it meets Great Basin deserts. Or rather, since individual bears are unlikely to complete such an arduous journey, that a Yukon bear’s genes could get to Idaho over several generations.17 Those fresh genetic alleles could then rescue the no-longer-isolated southern bear population from a stunted and inbred demise.

Any bear biologist will tell you that intact, secure habitat is the most crucial link in this chain leading to recovered and interconnected bear populations. But bear habitat quality is largely determined by human access, since 80 to 90 percent of bear mortality is due to direct action by people.18 Hunting is a significant piece of this equation. With bear

16 Noss et al.
17 Merrill and Mattson, 103-107.
18 McLellan et al.
reproductive rates among the slowest of North American animals, the loss of a few critical females can topple a population that is on the brink.\textsuperscript{19}

Grizzly bears are in significant danger throughout the Y2Y region, black bears are not.\textsuperscript{20} I consider bear hunting in general here because there is a significant connection between legal black bear hunting and grizzly mortality. To whit; it is difficult even for professionals to distinguish between the two species at rifle-shot distances. Many grizzly bear mortalities result from black bear hunters taking a hurried or uncertain shot.\textsuperscript{21} Montana has attempted to remedy this with an internet-based training program and identification test for black bear hunters.\textsuperscript{22} This is a laudable program that deserves a chance to work and to spread to other states and provinces. But bear hunters will always make mistakes, however trained and tested. As a society we have to consider how important it is to continue the traditional practice of bear hunting as it is, versus the threat it represents to endangered grizzly bear populations in the Y2Y region. This is controversial, as so many bear issues are, since there are widely varying views on the status and probable future of grizzly bears. Some contend that there are enough for removing endangered species protections now, while others insist that the long-term future for grizzlies is dim.\textsuperscript{23} On another side of the hunting question, we could also consider how important the constituency for bears composed of hunters and outfitters has been in the past, and what role those groups might continue to play in terms of advocating bear conservation. This question is especially salient given the potential of recovered, and thus huntable, numbers of grizzlies on the U.S. side of the border.

\textsuperscript{19} MTFWP 2002, 17.
\textsuperscript{20} Merrill and Mattson, 103-107. Williamson.
\textsuperscript{21} McLellan, Thier.
\textsuperscript{22} http://www.fwp.state.mt.us/bearid/default.htm.
Those human borders have achieved near-magical powers—bears crossing them may unknowingly transform from mere wild animals into big game, symbols of wilderness, hazards to public safety, potential livestock-killers, or “watchable wildlife.” Expanding efforts to manage this region more as an ecological whole than as a disconnected jumble of geographic puzzle-pieces will promote vital ecological interconnections and tremendously aid the well being of our sometimes-prey, the bears.

In sum, Montana is a digestible and fairly representative piece of the Y2Y region, and presents a workable case study of bear hunting history. Bears are central to the Y2Y project, and in turn that long-term conservation vision offers the best hope for bears to survive the coming centuries. The U.S. and Canadian publics have made it generally known that they greatly value wild bears on the landscape. How, when, and why we choose to kill bears matters ecologically and ethically in this region. History can be of some help here, putting our past ethics and understandings before us so that we can judge which of our pasts, and parts of pasts, we will choose to lead our future.

Here is a map of where we are going:

Start at the beginning—we will look at how people and bears got along in post-ice age North America, with speculation about the role each species played for the other beginning around 12,000 years ago. Moving to slightly better known ground, we will survey the tribal beliefs surrounding bear hunting through stories, ceremonies and anthropological accounts. Next, we will examine the entrance of European-Americans into the territory that became Montana, and how they dramatically altered the relations between people and bears with their intense hunting and generalized remaking of the

23 AP Wire.
landscapes of the West. The changes in these bear hunting cultures from subsistence to sport to management will comprise the rest of the chronological history in this text.

Throughout this work we will examine the changing ecological and ethical dimensions of bear hunting—how bear hunting has affected the land and wildlife of Montana, and how we have decided upon ethically acceptable ways to kill bears. The final chapters will explore both these dimensions of recent bear hunting in Western Montana. There is a purpose to examining this history: the future of bears and bear hunting in Montana and in much of the Y2Y region is in flux, and there are opportunities for the people of the state to alter our bear hunting policies for the better. We will finish with some historically informed observations and policy suggestions for ways that we may want to continue our long relationship with bears.
Native American Bear Hunting in Montana

This slaying of the bear was never an everyday event, rare enough not to become a harvest of ordinary food, yet frequent enough to be experienced by everyone. It was as though men were summoned by such a hunt, invited to intrude in the middle of the bear's cycle of deathlike sleep, to receive a gift of nourishing food and astonishing spiritual awareness by participating in its reincarnation. From feast to festival, from stomach to sacrament, the idea congealed across the millennia as a rite. —Paul Shepard²⁴

Bear hunting at the start of human history on this continent may have involved more hunting by bears than of bears. Some evidence suggests that the fearsome Pleistocene short-faced bear may have kept humans substantially off the continent until that bear's mysterious extinction, along with most other Pleistocene fauna, around 12,000 years ago.²⁵ The extreme reverence that Indian tribes gave bears may have its deepest roots in this ancient reversed hunter-prey relationship. Before long, though, humans became quite skilled at killing bears. More lethal stone points may have turned the tide in bear-human dominance and allowed tribes access to the Americas. Much of this history is shrouded in mystery. Did these early hunters cause the extinction of the gate-keeping short-faced bears, and then in deadly succession kill off so many other Pleistocene animals in a "Pleistocene overkill?"²⁶ Or were these extinctions due to a combination of climate change and human hunting pressure, and the cascading ecological consequences

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²⁴ Shepard, 57.
²⁵ Geist.
²⁶ P. Martin.
of these forces? The debates about the causes of the massive ecological changes between 10,000 and 14,000 years ago still rage in the surprisingly contentious worlds of paleobiologists and archaeologists.

Whatever the answers to these archaic mysteries, the first human experiences in North America were significantly shaped by bears. The Asian tribes crossing the Bering land bridge were entering an utterly new landscape, and in doing so became dependent upon many unfamiliar plants and animals. Like any hunting and gathering people, they had to be exceedingly inquisitive about their surroundings. The powerful and omnivorous bears must have drawn a lot of attention. One way the immigrants learned about plant foods and medicines was to watch what animals ate. The predominantly vegetarian bears became known as master herbalists and gardeners.

We see here the beginnings of the many complex roles that bears have played for people on this continent. At the same time as the tribes were learning plant lore from the bears, they were also vigilant for aggressive bears, looking for ways they might be able to kill them for food, as well as hoping to gain some of the bear's apparent spiritual power.

Proponents of the Pleistocene overkill hypothesis theorize that the many animal species that were extinguished around the time of human arrival in North America lacked experience with people and their hunting ways, and did not learn quickly enough to avoid their destruction by this unexpected new danger. A similar lack of experience among grizzly and black bears might have led them to assume that they could dominate humans just as they had other mammalian species. This assumption was probably wrong, since

27 Krech.
28 Rockwell, 76-77.
29 P. Martin, Krech.
Asiatic tribes were probably well acquainted with bears and bear hunting.\textsuperscript{30}

Archaeological sites in Montana and the Y2Y region have significant numbers of bear bones, indicating that early “Montanans” killed bears with some frequency.\textsuperscript{31}

Despite the obvious dangers involved in hunting a bear, the rich meat and fat, along with the variously useful fur, sinews, bones, claws and teeth made bears an exceptionally valuable prey animal.\textsuperscript{32} Knowing where bears denned allowed a starving people to easily kill a drowsy and fat bear.\textsuperscript{33} In fact, many tribes used bears as a kind of emergency winter food source. I suspect that, via behavioral selection, this winter bear hunting has helped lead grizzly bears toward their current preference for remote denning sites on high elevation, north-facing slopes.\textsuperscript{34}

Tribes regulated their interactions with bears through bear-honoring ceremonies and special hunting rites. Bear hunting became highly ritualized; following a conception of hunting that is radically different from industrial-age ideas and practices. It is of course impossible to make universally valid generalizations about the varied beliefs that Indians held and that they now hold. Indian societies were often less internally consistent in their beliefs than systematic anthropologists might hope would be the case. While there are strong similarities among the bear hunting practices among members of one tribe, there are also significant differences between bands and thus many variations on their cultural themes. This shows the very local and place-specific nature of Indian cultures, especially among the decentralized semi-nomadic tribes common to Montana’s western mountains and the Y2Y region.

\textsuperscript{30} Black.
\textsuperscript{31} C. Jonkel interview.
\textsuperscript{32} Rockwell, 60-61.
\textsuperscript{33} Schaeffer. Shepard, 57.
Therefore, I am interested in the broad range and scope of aboriginal beliefs about bears and bear hunting in this region. If we hope that bear hunting will help connect people to this place, then it is important to look well to what our extremely well-connected regional ancestors thought and did here.

For early Native Americans, hunting was an integrated spiritual and practical activity. A nineteenth-century anthropologist described an attitude commonly found in hunting and gathering cultures: "Not a single plant, animal or fish...is looked upon as something he has secured by his own wit and skill...or as mere food and nothing more.... He regards it as something which has been voluntarily and compassionately placed in his hands by the good will and consent of the spirit."\textsuperscript{35} Aboriginal hunters were extremely skilled at tracking and killing game, since they knew their prey based on an enveloping cultural experience and a bodily dependence that is nearly impossible to duplicate today.

Despite these excellent skills, in the aboriginal view success in hunting originated with paying proper respect to the prey animal, performing the correct rituals before and after the hunt, and in living a complete spiritual life. For tribal peoples in many parts of the world, animals were not defeated by a successful hunt. Rather, omniscient animal spirits sat in judgment of individual hunters and tribes; the controlling animal spirits gave individual animals to people who hunted well and with proper respect. A successful hunt was a sacred gift from animals to humans so that the people could continue to live. People were profoundly grateful for these gifts, and went to great lengths to honor their prey. There was always the implied threat that if there were any disrespect for physical

\textsuperscript{34} MTFWP 2002, 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Charles Hill-Tout In Shepard, 91.
animals that the animal spirits would send no more game to be killed and the offending
people would starve.36

Bears, as the most physically and spiritually powerful creatures about, were
considered by many tribes to be the chiefs of all animals. With their similarities to both
humans and other animals, bears were the intermediary between the human and animal
worlds. As well, for many tribes, bear spirits not only directed extant physical bears, but
influenced many other animals as well. In this way, disrespecting a bear could easily lead
to an overall lack of willing game, and thus result in starvation for a whole tribe. And so,
for many Native Americans, bear hunting was the most sacred and consequential hunt of
all.37

Among the tribes who hunted bears in the circumpolar North from the Yukon to
Greenland and all across sub-arctic Europe, there was considerable symmetry in their
practices. Shepard summarizes these common bear-hunting rituals in fourteen steps:

1. Locating the bear’s den.
2. Performing rituals of purification and preparation.
3. Reciting tabooed words and euphemisms.
4. Calling out the bear and apologetic speeches.
5. Killing the bear in a prescribed way.
6. Welcoming the killed bear into the village.
7. Skinning and flaying, leaving the bones intact, separating of head and paws
   from the body.
8. Decorating the head and fur.
9. Socially structured, sacramental cooking and feasting.
10. Telling the story of the hunt and other myths of the bear as kinsman.

36 Rockwell, 26.
Montana’s tribes of the Y2Y region, such as the Cree and the Assiniboine, shared some of these circumpolar beliefs, but were also distinctive in many ways. To demonstrate both the diversity and the underlying similarities of Indian beliefs, I focus here on two tribes who differ from the circumpolar norm Shepard outlines: the Kootenai and the Blackfeet.

Kootenai beliefs are well-described in Claude Schaeffer’s 1966 *Bear Ceremonialism of the Kutenai Indians*, which is based on his review of the literature of the time and his own interviews with the Kootenai in the 1940’s and 50’s. The Kootenai believed that black bears were markedly less spiritually powerful than grizzly bears, or at least that they were less willing to share that power. According to traditional stories “…the black bear, before assuming his animal guise, promised that while he would always be available as a food animal, he would never bestow supernatural power upon people.” Kootenai hunters killed black bears opportunistically throughout the year, but sought them intensively only during the fall when the bears were fat and in prime condition. Some hunted along rivers by canoe, and others killed bears while commuting to and from their bison hunting trips on the plains. If the bear was taken while traveling,

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37 Rockwell, 43. Shepard, 56-65.
38 Shepard, 90.
39 Schaeffer, 4.
it was “cut up in small portions, sliced and roasted over a fire.” Closer to home, however, black bears were often roasted and steamed in a pit. Black bears were sometimes killed with deadfall traps, but grizzlies were considered too powerful to be taken in this way.

A Kootenai hunter held a large feast when a black bear was killed. “News of the event quickly went around and everyone in the vicinity came to take part. . . . Any hunter who refused to share his kill with people of the camp became the butt of ridicule.” Sharing food was central to the ethics of many tribes as a way to cement social bonds and demonstrate that one was not being greedy with the gifts from the animals. The hunter who killed the bear was, however, entitled to keep its hide. Great care was taken to ensure that none of the bear was wasted. The Kootenai attempted to eat all of the bear during the feast, “even the flesh from the head was scraped off, leaving nothing but the skull.” After the feast, the Kootenai placed the dead bear’s tongue sinew in a slit cut into the bark of a tree, and its skull was set among the branches of a tree. Dogs, who held the rather unappealing Kootenai name “küqul,” or “feces eaters,” were not allowed to chew the bones of any bear. Hunters would, however, use dogs to track and corner bears.

In contrast to the fairly subservient food-animal role of the black bear, the Kootenai considered the powerful grizzly bears to be the chief of “all clawed creatures,” and accorded them great respect. Stories told that the grizzly bear spirits resented their mythic-time displacement by humans, and that before taking animal form they had this to say about the matter:

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40 Ibid., 20.
41 Ibid., 21.
42 Ibid., 22.
43 Ibid., 14-15.
The Supreme being has ordained this change and hence it must come to pass. It is difficult for me to accept. After mankind takes over the earth, people will boast of their deeds. If I hear them speak slightly of me, however, they will regret it. No child or adult should say what they will do, if they meet me. I'm going away into the mountains to make my home. I never want to live near people.\(^4^5\)

Given that rather belligerent introduction, it is not surprising that Kootenai bands were deferential to these bears. Grizzlies were known to attack people in the Kootenai territory, and many rituals were performed to placate these notoriously touchy bears. Only those who had acquired spiritual power directly from the grizzly could even speak of grizzlies without fear of attack. If anyone were disrespectful toward bears in word or deed, the Kootenai believed that he would be likely to encounter a grizzly, and that he would be unable to kill the angered bear. If a hunter was unable to kill a grizzly under otherwise favorable conditions, it was taken as evidence that he did not truly hold spiritual power from the bear.\(^4^6\)

The Kootenai believed that it was essential “never to set out deliberately to hunt bear, not even to announce one’s intention of doing so.” Bears allowed their sign to be found, and in doing so invited the hunter to come kill them. Since black bear dens are found in “deer country,” at low elevations, hunters could plausibly stumble upon one of their dens and ethically kill a sleeping black bear.

\(^4^4\) Ibid., 7.  
\(^4^5\) Ibid., 5.  
\(^4^6\) Ibid., 6.
Only if driven by extreme hunger, however, would the Kootenai kill a hibernating grizzly. Few among the tribe ever ate grizzly meat, and so this appears to have been truly a practice of last resort. If a grizzly den was found, the hunters were required to call the bear out into the open to kill it. If the bear *voluntarily* emerged from its hole, the Kootenai hunters took that as acquiescence, and felt justified in killing the animal.\(^{47}\) Because of the danger involved, grizzly hunting was usually a large group endeavor. The cluster of Kootenai grizzly hunters attempted to direct the bear toward strategically preferable rough ground by means of a magical substance, chiefly composed of powdered tortoise heart. To kill a grizzly, the hunters used special long-fletched war arrows, normally reserved for human foes. They did not use hand-held weapons like clubs or spears, as the northern circumpolar tribes did.\(^{48}\)

Outside the hunting context, the Kootenai believed that a grizzly that entered a camp had been sent by a shaman against one of his enemies in that camp. Again, people who lacked special power over bears were reluctant to attack this sort of bear, because it was believed that they would not be able to successfully dispatch the animal.\(^{49}\)

The Kootenai performed an elaborate bear-honoring ritual called the “klu!kinam klaula,” or the “Grizzly Bear Ceremonial.” Schaeffer writes that:

> The observance itself was characterized by petitions, propitiatory songs and mimetic dances, tobacco offerings, food sacrifices and other gifts made to the bear, with prayers by women that they not be molested during the root- and berry-gathering season, and by men that the spirit be not angry if one of its ‘children’ was killed, since the flesh was to be used as food.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{47}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 14.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 17.
For this study, it is important to note that bear spirits were mollified if bear bodies were truly needed to continue human life, and were not in any sense wasted. The last performance of this rite on the Flathead reservation was in the autumn of 1890, after which the influence of Christianity militated against it. In more recent times the ritual has come to have broader significance, roughly equivalent to the Sun Dance ceremony among Plains tribes—a ritual petitioning for continued health, wealth and food among the Kootenai.  

The collective weight of these rites and ceremonies indicate that the grizzly bear was of central importance to the Kootenai, and that hunting the bear was a very significant action for their bands to undertake. It is also clear that a strong personal and spiritual connection to bears was necessary in order to successfully kill them—a connection that was characterized by give and take between the people and bears.

I talked with Art Soukkala, a tribal biologist on the Flathead Reservation, about how bear hunting has changed among the Kootenai and their partner tribe on the Flathead, the Salish. Black bear hunting is open year-round, but there are few bears taken. Some tribal members use bear parts for ceremonies, but there is virtually no trophy hunting on the reservation. Anyone killing a bear on the reservation is required to use the meat. The tribes reserved the right to kill grizzlies for ceremonial purposes, but that right has not so far been used. I also talked with Flathead resident David Rockwell, author of *Giving Voice to Bear*, an excellent source on Indian cultural beliefs about bears. Rockwell noted that the tribes stopped grizzly bear hunting well before the state of Montana did, and that they were the first to close an area specifically to protect
grizzlies. Rockwell has noticed a change in attitudes over the last two decades, possibly indicating a return of traditional respect for bears—now if someone on the reservation kills a grizzly, their neighbors are likely to report them to tribal authorities.

The formidable Blackfeet nations of the eastern Rocky Mountains and adjacent plains generally did not hunt grizzlies, perhaps to save their fighting men for the relative safety of warring with other tribes for horses and bison-hunting territory. Nor did the Blackfeet hunt black bears intensively. Like many tribes with access to large buffalo herds, the Blackfeet did not need bear meat as much as those groups who lived in the game-poor mountains. Even when given the chance to eat bear meat, some Blackfeet reportedly would have preferred to starve. Schaeffer writes, “Bear flesh was eaten by only a few Blackfeet, an avoidance taboo still largely observed.” That was written in 1966, and that dislike for bear meat continues now according to tribal bear biologist Dan Carney.

Nonetheless, bears were very important animals for the Blackfeet. It was forbidden to use the true names for bears, and instead euphemisms like “sticky mouth,” “takes large left-overs home,” or “that big hairy one” were used. Some Blackfeet warrior societies were based upon the grizzly bear spirits, and the grizzly medicine pipe was an important ritual item. Even handling a hide was considered dangerous, and women were

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51 Ibid., 17.  
52 Large parts of the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness are closed to human use in the fall to protect grizzlies that are foraging on insect larvae.  
53 Schultz, 146.  
54 Schaeffer, 35.  
55 Dan Carney interview.  
56 “Kyaio,” which means simply “bear;” was used for black bear, or “nitakyaio,” which means “true bear” for grizzlies.
forbidden to touch them for many years after the bear’s death due to the tremendous spiritual power held in each hair.57

Killing a grizzly was considered a great feat among the Blackfeet, and laid some responsibilities on the hunter. Those who killed grizzlies “were forbidden to use knife awl or needle [on the hide], lest they cut or pierce the flesh; should they do so, it was thought that they would be clawed by a bear.” The Blackfeet were also forbidden to kill a hibernating grizzly.58 Like many other groups, the Blackfeet did kill aggressive bears who threatened their people. These “crazy” bears were seen as acting outside the normal sanctified role of bears. In modern parlance, these were “problem bears” in need of “aggressive management.” As with the Kootenai, hunters who had strong spiritual connections to bears via visions and dreams sought and killed these troublemaking grizzlies.

Respect, spiritual connection, and strong local cultures characterized Native American bear hunting ethics. The people of a place worked hard on their relations with bears, and keenly felt their dependence on the whole animal world. These ideas are perhaps not as remote from current concepts as it might appear.

Despite the obvious differences between traditional Indian and modern white cultures, I find some striking similarities between the Indian concepts of controlling animal spirits and the biological idea of species. Traditional Indian and modern European-Americans concerned with bears have labored mightily in the service of these parallel abstractions. Indians, however, did not place themselves in a managerial role

57 Schaeffer, 33-6.
58 Ibid., 36.
above bears, as is normally done today. On the contrary, Indians felt that bears were among their equals, and even that their lives continued at the pleasure of the bear spirits. They knew that they still had a great deal to learn from animals. Hunting was a central part of this relationship with bears as a physical confirmation of the bond between our two species. The idea of eliminating bears from their lands was unthinkable, akin to attempting the genocide of a loved and respected neighbor nation.

What were the effects of Indian bear hunting in terms of populations and ecology? The answers to many questions about pre-historic ecological interactions are complex and clouded by the lack of records and studies from that time. Still, scientists and historians have speculated about probable conditions in North American pre-history, and we will follow in their intrepid footsteps. Our first well-documented view of these ecological dynamics comes from the early European explorers.

Lewis and Clark found a culture among bears and Indians that was characterized by an uneasy and uneven state of avoidance and deference. It seems likely that it took a long period of hunting and mutual killing for humans and bears to arrive at that condition. Some have suggested that a long-term cultural co-evolution has selected against the most aggressive behaviors among both bears and humans, and rewarded respectful attitudes toward the other species. In this way bears and humans have probably significantly shaped each other through the passing ages.

There are many possible scenarios to explain the ecological history of bears and people in the Y2Y region. By the accounts of the first Europeans to enter the region,

59 Shepard.
bears were sometimes distressingly common. On June 28, 1805, near present-day Great Falls, Montana, Lewis wrote:

The White bear [grizzlies] have become so troublesome to us that I do not think it prudent to send one man alone on an errand of any kind, particularly where he has to pass through the brush. we have seen two of them on the large Island opposite to us today but are so much engaged that we could not spare the time to hunt them, but will make a frolick of it when the party return and drive them from these islands. they come close arround our camp every night but have never yet ventured to attack us and our dog gives us timely notice of their visits, he keeps constantly padroling all night. I have made the men sleep with their arms by them as usual for fear of accedents.  

But perhaps Mackenzie, Clark and Lewis saw the Rockies with an unusually high number of bears compared with truly pre-contact times, due to the decimation of many bear hunting tribes by the European diseases which fanned out ahead of the explorers. Perhaps not. Populations may well have been quite volatile, depending on the movements and dynamics between neighboring tribes, and the ecologies upon which they depended. There may be intra-population dynamics that affect bear populations as well, such as adult male bears killing cubs when many bears are packed into limited habitats. The point of all this is that our snapshot view of the Rockies through those explorers’ eyes around the turn of the 19th Century may or may not present an accurate picture of longer-term dynamics between native peoples and bears. We just can’t be sure.

Bear and human populations in the Northern Rockies were both probably quite healthy in pre-contact (and pre-disease) times, hovering around the limits imposed by habitat and competition for resources. Historian Dan Flores concludes from his survey of
pre-historic population studies that there were probably, "no more than 10-12 million people north of Mexico at the time of contact." Pre-Columbian grizzly populations, however, were much larger than today; the generally accepted estimate is that there were probably around 100,000 in the Rockies and Great Plains. In comparison with today, the pre-contact population of grizzly bears was perhaps twenty times greater, and the human population only about three percent of current numbers. While this human population appears to be very low, we should remember that these tribes were wholly dependent on wild animals and plants for their sustenance. With this total dependence on generally unmanageable food sources, famine and starvation were not uncommon among Indians.

Why then didn't Indians consistently try to wipe out an animal that represented significant competition for wild foods, and that fairly often threatened people directly? If, as some propose, they caused the extinction of short-faced bears, then why not the other bears too? The food value of black bears, and their relatively placid behavior would have protected them, but the grizzly is another story entirely. It seems that no tribes ate grizzlies consistently, and they were considerably more dangerous overall.

It may be that hunting such a valuable and potent animal was so culturally regulated that the Indians had little effect on the overall populations of bears. The true origins of these taboos and rituals are lost to time, but it seems possible that instances of overhunting in the past, and the subsequent starvation of the hunting tribes, could have led to strong prohibitions on killing too much game. The fears that animals would forsake

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60 Moulton, Vol. 4, 338.
61 Flores, 192.
63 Flores, 192.
peoples who disrespected their prey were so concrete and so widespread that they were probably sustained by repeated instances of overhunting and starvation. The overhunting that may have contributed to the Pleistocene extinctions could be a prominent example of this cycle. We will probably never know if Indians considered these ecological connections and adjusted their hunting practices accordingly, or if cultural-ecological evolution simply favored groups who held spiritual beliefs that resulted in moderate hunting, since those groups might have had a more reliable base of food animals to kill.

There may have been contributing ecological reasons for limiting bear hunting which molded Indian cultures over many generations. Perhaps the cultural evolution of Indian tribes selected against those who removed the ecological keystone of healthy bear populations. Through their widely varied ecological roles, bears may help an area become productive for many other species. For example, Montana naturalist and guide Tom Parker notes that berry bushes in the Swan Valley seem to sprout only from heaps of bear scat. Like modern planners trying to leave universal messages to future generations about nuclear waste sites, it could be that the survivors of bear-impoverished tribes might have built myth and ritual taboos around hunting to assure the continued vitality of their bears.

We see here again the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship that aboriginal peoples had with bears—as food animals, as powerful enemies, as spiritual guides, as practical life-skill teachers. It was inevitable that such an animal would take a prominent place in their cultures. These analytical thoughts about the practical and cultural-evolutionary reasons for aboriginal bear hunting practices should not be

64 Parker interview.
interpreted as an attempt to diminish their philosophical and spiritual importance. In fact, I believe that the reverence and respect that traditional Indians held for bears is often an important missing part of current bear hunting cultures. We should carefully consider what we might learn from these peoples about wise ways to live with bears—they did it more intensively and for a longer time than we can imagine.

From here we move on to an examination of the beginnings of European-American bear hunting, and a wholly different set of hunting methods and ethics that have forever altered North American bear and human cultures. The ecological and ethical changes set in motion by this invasion echo down to today. These next humans to enter North America did not share the Indian sense of ultimate, long-term dependence on wildlife. This attitude showed prominently in their bear hunting ethics.
European-American Bear Hunting: Explorers, Trappers and Indians

William Wright, a prominent bear hunter and guide in the northern Rockies, is in many ways an exemplar of the European-American bear hunting cultures of the region, and the trajectory of his career illustrates many of the changes in those cultures. In his twenty-five years of active hunting, Wright moved through the turning point between the earlier exploitations of the fur trade, and into the origins of managed bear hunting for sport.

Wright was a superb grizzly bear hunter. Following in the tracks of his childhood bear hunting and bear taming hero James “Grizzly” Adams, Wright moved west to Spokane, Washington in 1883. After several years there he finally settled in Missoula, Montana. His first bear hunts were rather comical affairs, with both he and the bears generally scared out of their wits but unharmed. In Wright’s excellent 1909 book, *The Grizzly Bear*, he describes those early adventures; “Looking back on it now, I think my idea must have been that hunting grizzly bears was something like chumming for fish; that all that was necessary was to go into the hills, let one’s scent blow down breeze, and then shoot the ferocious animals that worked their way up wind with the intention of eating you.” 65 This passage illustrates the fairly outrageous beliefs many North Americans had about grizzlies in the century after Lewis and Clark.

After many unsuccessful attempts, Wright shot his first bear in the Clearwater country of Idaho, just over the state line from Montana. The wounded grizzly charged, and Wright hid from the enraged bear in an icy creek for an hour or more. Weighing his
choices, he finally decided that he “would as soon be clawed by a bear as frozen to
death.” Creeping back to his abandoned rifle he discovered that the bear had in fact
expired a few paces from where he had last seen it. This close call only whetted Wright’s
appetite for hunting grizzlies, and he pursued them for many years in the U.S. and
Canadian Rockies. As he grew in experience, Wright became deadly—he once killed five
grizzlies in five minutes with five rounds from a single-shot rifle. Over the whole course
of Wright’s hunting career he killed several hundred grizzlies. He became an expert in
the bear’s habits and haunts through long years of tracking and watching them, and
eventually this close relationship with grizzlies led him to regret the killing. Later in life
Wright began setting out with a camera instead of a rifle, and became more interested in
conserving grizzlies than shooting them. His last opinion of grizzlies was that they are
intelligent, sensitive animals, much more interested in avoiding humans than eating them.

Wright ascribes his early misconceptions of the grizzly’s homicidal nature to the
journals of Lewis and Clark and the sensational secondary opinions that followed in their
wake. When the Corps of Discovery encountered grizzlies they invariably shot at them
with their relatively feeble muzzle-loading rifles. These weapons rarely stopped a grizzly
in its tracks, and the bears often put up a good fight before dying. Although he found that
grizzlies were not as formidable as some contemporary rumors asserted, Lewis also wrote
this:

I must confess that I do not like the gentlemen and had rather fight two Indians than one
bear. There is no chance of conquer them by a single shot but by shooting them through
the brains, and this becomes difficult on account of two large muscles which cover the

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65 Wright 1909, 9.
sides of the forehead and the sharp projection of the center of the frontal bone, which is also of a pretty good thickness.\textsuperscript{66}

The behavioral cause Wright cites for the grizzly's ferocious reputation is that they will often reflexively turn toward a surprise attack and charge. This fits well with the evolutionist's idea that grizzlies were originally an open-ground species accustomed to having no cover for retreat. Often, a grizzly's best defense has been a good offense. Eastern naturalists, unencumbered by personal experience, leapt in to amplify the bear's bloodthirsty reputation. Wright quotes an 1814 speech by New York Governor DeWitt Clinton: "[the grizzly bear] exists, the terror of the savages, the tyrant of all the other animals, devouring alike man and beast and defying the attack of whole tribes of Indians."\textsuperscript{67} Naturalist George Ord took Lewis and Clark's word "grizzly" to mean fear-inspiring and horrible, rather than grayish in color, and formally named the bear \textit{Ursus arctos horribilis}\textsuperscript{68} It was with these sorts of sentiments that Americans like Wright set out West, looking for their fortunes. They were quite literally loaded for bear.

While Wright was an avid grizzly hunter in his early years in the Rockies, he was emphatically not a black bear hunter. In a companion to his treatise on grizzlies, Wright published \textit{The Black Bear} in 1910. The opening story is a captivating account of his five years living with a black bear he named Ben. While on a grizzly hunt on the Montana-Idaho border in the Bitterroot Mountains, one of Wright's companions shot a female black bear with three cubs. The hunting party captured the cubs, and attempted to raise them on their summer-long hunting campaign. Ben, named after Grizzly Adams' companion, was the only cub to survive the season, and became a great friend to Wright.

\textsuperscript{66} Moulton, Vol. 4, 141.
\textsuperscript{67} Wright 1909, 29.
The chinks in Wright’s tough bear hunter armor quickly became evident as he worked tirelessly to train and protect the cub. Wright took the greatest pleasure observing Ben’s antic intelligence and amazing athletic abilities.

Wright describes the black bear hunters of his day as “self-appointed vigilantes” who break into bear homes to kill them, and on this basis claim to know the animal intimately. Wright counters this misapprehension with his observation that bears act very differently when hunted than when sought out with innocent intentions. In his opinion, a hunter will see a much fiercer and more guarded animal than a person who comes simply to watch and learn about the everyday lives of bears. He writes, “If you kill your bear just as soon as it starts to act natural, you may get to be an authority on hides, but there will be a lot of things you don’t know.” And, “if you want to find out how an animal lives, you must watch it live and not watch it die.”

Wright also impugns the supposed bravery of black bear hunters. “Goodness knows, there is little enough glory—since there is little or no risk—in killing a black bear,” he writes, “To chase a timorous and inoffensive animal up a tree and then to stand underneath and shoot it is no very great achievement. The sport is altogether in the mind of the sportsman.”

Wright’s last appraisal of American bears was this:

The grandest wild animal of the United States is the grizzly bear. But the most amusing and the most ludicrous, the most human and understandable of our wild animals, is our friend Ursus americanus [the black bear]. … He is neither evil-intentioned nor bad-
mannered. Yet he has probably terrified more innocent wayfarers than any other denizen of our forests.\(^72\)

By the time Wright came along, bears in Montana had borne the brunt of a generally unorganized, but nonetheless fairly successful, campaign to wipe them out. Wright’s final views represent a considerable evolution of personal and societal ethics when compared with the attitudes of those who first encountered the bears of Montana. The ethics that allowed Wright to hunt bears so profligately early in his career came from a culture that seemed to believe that wildlife was inexhaustible, and that there would always be more pristine woods and mountains in which to pursue bears. And in any case, getting rid of bears, or at least getting them down to the point where they were never seen—making them essentially mythic animals absent from the humanized landscape—seemed like a pretty good idea to people whose lives were based on civilizing and settling this wild country. There was no sense that people were in any important way dependent on wildlife or bears, or that our species were in any sense equals, as Indians believed. Bear hunting in this era was a “spree,” to use Barry Lopez’s word describing the Spanish conquest of the New World; a free-for-all game for the brave and entrepreneurial.\(^73\)

That exploitative attitude had its origins in the just-ended era of the fur trade. While bears were not the most sought-after furs, trappers had killed as many as they could easily encounter, and sent the skins back east for muffs, tippets and rugs. Bear skins were not as highly valued as beaver and martin, and their weight and size sometimes made transporting them prohibitively expensive. Bearskins were often used as

\(^72\) Ibid., 127.
\(^73\) Lopez, 9.
protective packaging for more valuable furs on the long trip to eastern markets.\textsuperscript{74} During favorable markets, however, bear skins were ranked third in value of the species brought in by the Hudson’s Bay Co., and one bear pelt could be traded for one beaver skin. A fine grizzly hide could fetch the kingly sum of twenty to fifty dollars in 1819.\textsuperscript{75}

The geographical reach of the trade changed with the succeeding waves of exploration and technology. Early in this era, trading posts were the centers of commerce. David Thompson established the Saleesh House near what is now Thompson Falls, Montana in 1809. Later on the railroads distributed commerce along their lines. To support his extended bear hunting ventures, William Wright often shipped his grizzly pelts by rail.\textsuperscript{76}

Indians were the main source of furs for the trading companies who vied for control of the lands and animals of Montana throughout the 1800’s. The tribes were thus key players in the strategic moves among companies and countries, especially while they retained the military power to banish traders and trappers from their lands. Complicating matters somewhat, the hunting ethics of the whites were dramatically different than those of traditional Indians. For the whites, the trade was an intense strategic battle among well-funded capitalists bent on gaining exclusive access to the best lands and key tribal allies in order to dominate the lucrative market.\textsuperscript{77} Consideration for the animals they exploited was the last things on the minds of the ambitious men who pursued their fortune in the fur trade. As one example, the Hudson’s Bay Company tried to create a “fur desert” along the west side of the Rockies by killing all the fur-bearing animals in

\textsuperscript{74} Hudson’s Bay Co., 69; Innis, 96.
\textsuperscript{75} Warden quoted in Wright 1909, 30.
\textsuperscript{76} Wright 1910, 35.
\textsuperscript{77} Malone and Roeder, 42-47; Ray, 228.
that region, and thereby discourage competing companies from entering their rich Columbia Basin territories.\textsuperscript{78}

In a case of the tragedy of the unregulated “common-pool resource” there was no benefit in leaving animals behind to reproduce, unless you firmly controlled that area and could count on reaping the eventual fruits of conservation. All the benefit went to the exploiter, and the terrible costs to wildlife and traditional cultures were not much considered. When they could, the British and American governments supported their respective commercial interests in the region, since domination of the fur trade in an area constituted \textit{de facto} annexation of that land. These imperial imperatives shaped governmental policies toward Indians, policies that focused on using them and their knowledge to fuel the larger economies of the continent.

How did the Indians adapt their deeply ingrained hunting practices and beliefs to aid the cause of these invaders who were not only wiping out the wildlife, but the Indians themselves? Several factors play into this equation, and like so many questions about this era, there are not universally agreed upon and well-documented answers. Here are some plausible ideas:

Many tribes believed that, as long as the animal spirits were respected while trapping, there would always be enough game—raw numbers did not matter in this conception of animal abundance.\textsuperscript{79} Illustrating this issue, when the Hudson’s Bay Company did try to set up conservation measures on its Canadian lands, it had a difficult time gaining Indian compliance. The bands were not accustomed to non-spiritual rules that would limit their take of available and profitable resources. This was no doubt

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{79} C. Martin., 82.
exacerbated by the fact that bison and other large game were becoming scarce, and the Indians badly needed food and trade goods. It was also necessary for the Company to gain acceptance of conservation rules among all the Indians of a certain region, since there were no rigid boundaries between Indian lands. An area left “fallow” by a conservation-minded band could easily be stripped of animals by a hungrier nearby group. The Company tried to resolve this by settling the formerly nomadic tribes on defined geographical territories, and introducing regional quotas for the number and type of furs that the Company would buy from a region. Demonstrating the profit-driven and strategic nature of these quotas, they were relaxed in the regions bordering on the U.S. because the Indians there were acquiring many of their furs by raiding and trapping across the border in Northwestern Montana.  

As their world changed dramatically under the technological, economic, epidemiological, and cultural forces brought by the invading whites, Indians made their choices about which path to follow under extreme duress. The incentives for Indians to join in with the fur trade were quite powerful given their situation and their alternatives. The trade provided the Indians with valuable goods such as cooking pots, steel arrowheads, food, alcohol, and most importantly, guns. The Blackfeet owed their supremacy on the plains of Montana in part to the guns they acquired in the fur trade with the British. When Lewis and Clark encountered the Salish they were near starvation, and waiting for a chance to furtively venture into Blackfeet territory on the plains to hunt buffalo.  

The Crows, Kootenai, Salish and Nez Perce were all scrambling to keep up

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80 Especially the Piegan (Canadian Blackfeet). Ray, 203-204.
81 Ambrose, 284.
with the Blackfeet, and demanded access to trade and rifles so that they could regain access to the rich hunting grounds in Eastern Montana.

In these circumstances, joining in with the fur trade was the overwhelmingly rational course for Indians. If the animal spirits could still be respected in the course of feeding this lucrative trade, then there was no spiritual or ethical harm in it. As time went on and native cultures further eroded under the reservation system of displacement and coercive government schools, those traditions of respect and consideration for animals tended to fade as well.

As more highly prized furs such as beaver and marten became scarce in Montana and surrounding territories, bear pelts became more desirable. Traders had some difficulty getting good bear skins from the Cree trappers working in western Canada and Montana, because skinning a bear ruined the meat for the traditional methods of cooking. These Indians apparently calculated that eating bear meat was more important than trading bearskins. Similarly, The Kootenai practice of pit-roasting bears interfered with producing salable bearskins. Fur traders put pressure on the desperately poor Indians to change their practices with regard to bears and thus more fully assimilate into the white economy and culture.

And so, a great change in hunting ethics among Indians moved forward, and the bears of the region felt the blow heavily. For example, in the winter of 1871 group of Hudson’s Bay Company hunters entered the Cypress Hills just north of the Montana border. They hunted and trapped intensively, despite the presence of aggressive Blackfeet bands who killed many of the Assiniboine hunters. Lending support to Paul Martin’s

82 Ray, 223.
83 Schaeffer, 15.
"war zones and game sinks" theory of animal abundance, the area was extremely rich in game because it had recently been a battlefield between the Blackfeet and the Assiniboine bands. The group killed 750 grizzlies that winter.

The fur trade slowed dramatically in the mid-1800’s, due to a combination of factors. Animals became scarce due to overhunting—but since this had happened at several points during the long centuries of the fur trade in North America, this was probably not decisive. Perhaps as important was the lack of surviving Indians who could provide the furs and maintain the whole system. The final blow was the change of fashions in Europe to silk from beaver and other furs—an early indication of the effects global markets can have on remote local economies.

The end of the fur trade was probably beneficial for the landscapes of Montana. Some regional historians conclude that, “The real historical significance of the fur frontier lies...in its broad economic, social and aspects.... Perhaps most strikingly, the fur trade began Montana’s long and sad history of pillaging the environment. The fur men...stripped the surface wealth they were seeking and left little more than geographic knowledge behind them. While bears were not the primary targets of this enterprise, the fur trade powerfully affected them. The commoditization of wildlife, the destruction of native peoples and knowledge, and the mapping of the wild corners of Montana and the rest of the region; all these contributed to the bear hunting world that Wright entered in 1883. The trappers and traders also cleared the path for the next wave of European-Americans; people who meant to live a settled life in bear country.

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84 P. Martin.
86 Malone and Roeder, 33.
Miners followed the trappers into Montana, and the more successful mining camps became the first permanent white settlements in the territory. In a reversed pattern of development, these mining communities emerged before substantial agriculture was established. Thus, at the outset these frontier towns were dependent on trade and wild game for their sustenance. Deer and elk were the most common prey for market hunters who supplied the growing settlements, and they quickly decimated the ungulate populations of Montana and the region. This profligate slaughter made life hard for bears and other predators. Chuck Jonkel cites lack of wild prey as one of the early factors that drove bears toward livestock and trouble with settlers.

These market hunters probably took many bears as well. Immigrants from the East were well acquainted with bear meat. At times it was considered the second-best meat available to Virginians, placing just after raccoon. The trade in bear grease was well established in the southeastern U.S., and it was shipped out in barrels and deerskin bags until those bear populations utterly collapsed. Farmers and ranchers from these bear hunting regions soon arrived in Montana and settled down on homestead lands.

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87 Malone and Roeder, 65.
88 C. Jonkel interview.
89 D. Martin.
90 Sutton.
An agriculturist has much more quarrel with bears than a semi-nomadic trapper, or a placer miner. A bear is a threat to his way of life because the bear can and sometimes will eat the crops, the livestock, and at least potentially, the family. Given the hysterical fear of bears common when settlers headed out West, it is not surprising that killing off the local bears was often job number one in establishing a ranch. The generally poor range conditions made it necessary to graze cattle and sheep over large areas. Ranchers had to send the livestock up into the mountains for forage in the summer. The remaining mountain bears set upon the exotic and unsophisticated livestock as replacements for wild game.

With few hands, many animals, and big areas to cover, livestock producers did a very American thing: they declared a preemptive war on predators. Sheepherders commonly employed a dedicated predator-killer for the summers in the mountains. The cattlemen who soon elbowed out the sheepherders continued what historian Dan Flores calls “the white jihad against predators.” In this vein, Montana historian Bud Moore recalls an early homestead wife telling him that if a bear was seen anywhere near the ranch, men dropped everything and hunted it down.

As soon as a territorial government was established, ranchers appealed for and received help with predator control. For a concentrated collection of lively bear killing stories from this era of Montana history, Jeanette Prodgers’ The Only Good Bear is a Dead Bear is unexcelled. That title succinctly expresses an attitude common among the hard-pressed ranchers and farmers in early Montana. While there was, of course,

91 C. Jonkel interview.
92 Flores, 74.
93 Moore interview.
94 Malone and Roeder, 122.
considerable diversity of opinion, it seems that many Montanans in the period felt that Montana would be better off with no bears at all.

Late Nineteenth Century grizzlies were under extreme selective pressure to change their habitat use, their behavior under attack, and the timing of their activities. In a more stringent version of prior Indian selection for human-averse bears, settlement era bears that preferred open areas, those who were particularly aggressive, and those who were more active during the day, were much more likely to be killed. The effects of this heavy selective pressure were profound. Recent evolutionary studies have shown how quickly strong selective pressure can change physical traits in animals. Birds on the Galapagos Islands have been shown to significantly change the shape of their beaks in one generation in response to changes in available foods. Behavioral changes in exceptionally intelligent and adaptable animals such as bears are probably even easier to effect.

Bears reproduce slowly in large part because their mothers carefully teach their cubs how to survive in the particular place they live. Thus, bears have a finely-tuned set of adaptive habits and preferences that is passed down through generations: a local culture. In this view, the sudden holocaust of white hunting and trapping in the nineteenth century caused a drastic “cultural revolution” among bears. They were forced to rapidly adjust to a world vastly more dangerous and limited than that which their ancestors had known. Recent satellite-collar studies of grizzly bear movements in the Swan Valley have shown how well bears have absorbed these lessons in avoiding people and their works.

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95 Weiner.
96 Thompson.
Grizzly bears were soon absent from the plains and valleys in the settled areas of the Rockies. Wright had to go out into the mountains to find his bears in 1883, and he saw further profound changes in grizzly behavior in his hunting years. By 1906 Wright noted that Rocky Mountain grizzlies were more nocturnal, more wary, and apparently much more rare than twenty years before. He had to become something of a pioneer in flash photography in order to catch images of the night-roaming grizzlies.

There are no scientific population or range studies of bears from the turn of the 20th century, but it was becoming clear to some people that at the rate things were going, grizzly bears were fast headed toward extinction. Hunting was probably the direct cause of the decline in bear populations that Wright witnessed in the early 1900's, while the ongoing habitat alteration was a force behind the scenes, moving bears to places where hunters could kill them.

According to some historians, Wright lived during a unique period in bear hunting history. The hundred years from 1820 to 1920 was the “Bear Hunter’s Century,” according to Paul Schullery in his book of that title. The combination of numerous bears, expansive wildlands, government encouragement of predator eradication, and steadily improving arms made that period a golden age for killing bears in North America. This era began with the first substantial movements of frontiersmen and settlers into the American west, and ended with the spread of game conservation laws that protected bears. Schullery tells the stories of several of the most prominent bear hunters of the period, including William Wright and Theodore Roosevelt. The book is mainly composed of accounts of bear hunts, but the irrepressible Schullery also engages in some

97 Wright 1909, 65.
informed speculation about their motivations—and here introduces the idea of sport as a motivation for killing bears. He writes of his hunters:

They killed bears for bounties, they killed bears to rid the forest of ‘vermin,’ they killed bears because killing bears upheld family tradition, they killed bears in what amounted to manhood rites, they killed bears as practice for war. They killed bears because they were hired by men with reasons of their own. But most of all, and at the same time as they held all the other reasons, they killed bears for sport.98

Sport is a concept that Schullery asserts is more complex than mere fun; it partakes of deeper meanings, bordering on art. It remains as ill defined and as powerful today as it was during his Bear Hunter’s Century. Schullery writes, “Sport is a difficult notion, one involving self-imposed trial, tightly defined codes, competitions both subtle and direct, and a host of subjective, emotion-based judgments that few good sportsmen have even tried to articulate.”99 While all these attributes could apply as well to golf or mountaineering, hunting is a seminal activity upon which the attitudes and ethics of many other human endeavors are based. As Schullery notes, over time the reasons for bear hunting have steadily shifted away from the practical and toward the sporting.

The rules of bear hunting in the ethical universe of sport partake not so much from respect for the animal as for the quest for recognition among hunting peers. Having shot a bear after a “fair chase,” or using a bow and arrow, or passing up shots at small or female bears in order to get a big male trophy; all these increase the hunter’s prestige and the perceived value of the experience in the same way that fly fishermen rate their catches as more meaningful than those of anglers using bait. The chance of success in

98 Schullery, xvii.
99 Ibid.
such a self-restrained sport is lower, and the chance of diverting adventure is proportionately higher. A sporting hunt may require a more complete knowledge of the area and the prey animal than the leisure hunter may possess—leading to the large number of hunters who rely upon local guides to secure their game.

We should here note another fairly obvious fact: that sport is essentially a luxury. Traditional Indians did not regard hunting as a sport; it was simply essential for their continued existence. Sport hunting with its elaborate social and legal codes in some ways resembles the ceremonial aspects of Indian bear hunting. But bear hunting for sport has the hunter’s subjective experience and enjoyment at its core, not need or respect for the bear. Indians did not use anything like “sporting” methods—usually rousing a sleeping bear from its den to kill it. This practice would outrage any proponent of “fair chase.” Similarly, early settlers were quite utilitarian in their bear killing, using whatever method came to hand, including dynamited baits and drugs. Sport is apparently what happens when a previously difficult and essential activity becomes basically unnecessary and relatively easy. As participants in a “sporting” activity such as this become more marginal to a culture, and more insular, they can easily lose sight of the surrounding codes of ethics held by society at large. As we will see, this has sometimes been the case with bear hunting.

Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, along with George Bird Grinnell and other prominent hunter-conservationists, were instrumental in organizing and popularizing the phenomenon of sport hunting in America. The Boone and Crockett Club, which they established in 1887, and named after two noted bear hunters from the previous century, served as arbiter of game records for the continent. This helped put an
end to specious claims by hunters about the fantastic size of their kills, and formalized the ground rules for the sport of hunting. The doctrine of "fair chase" emerged early in the Club’s history, codifying the ethics of hunting as a "some holds barred" contest between hunter and prey, and as a contest among hunters for the largest, rarest, and wariest animals. Those ethics gradually spread, as did the prestige of having killed a certified "Boone and Crockett" record elk or bear.

The Club’s founders noted that, under the combined assault of settlement and heavy hunting pressure, wildlife was quickly disappearing from American landscapes. Paradoxically, they aimed to stem this destruction by advocating the killing of those animals in tightly prescribed ways. Hunting for sport, as a gentleman’s activity, was popularized through magazine articles and books. The Club frowned on subsistence "pot" and market hunters who went for meat and hides alone, and would shoot any animal. The Club was in part an attempt to wrest control of hunting from those profligate and indiscriminate hunters who had dominated the American hunting scene to that point. The hunter-sportsmen agitated for strict game laws, for taxes on rifles and ammunition to pay for conservation, and for their own definitions of hunting ethics.

Sport and trophy hunting, as activities pursued by affluent individuals concerned with appearances and propriety, are more easily regulated and controlled than subsistence hunting done by those desperate for food, or unregulated predator-control hunting done by those who believe that they must protect their livestock. This new kind of hunting fit with the emerging doctrines of scientific wildlife management advanced by Aldo Leopold and his supporters.

100 Prodgers, 183, 187.
Leopold made the move from his early work in forestry to game management around 1915. This was about the low point for wildlife in America: after the uncontrolled hunting of the settlement era, and before hunting laws were effectively enforced in much of the West. “Why is the big game of the West disappearing?” Leopold rhetorically demanded—and answered himself, “Principally for the reason that the game laws are not enforced. And why are they not enforced? Politics.”

Leopold worked tirelessly to appoint effective game wardens and to strengthen the sporting ethics of hunters through education and effective regulations. At first his efforts focused on ungulate hunting, but before long the troubling issues of predator control, and thus bears, came to occupy his mind.

In 1916 Leopold wrote, “We think that every true and keen sportsman will subscribe to our confession of a weakness for big bear, and a secret temptation to wish him a long life and a merry one.” But in Leopold’s early view, management of individual bears was often necessary. “[a particularly aggressive grizzly]...was a cow-killer from way back. He was a bad egg. ...The destructiveness of cow-killers is intolerable, and it is highly desirable that they be destroyed on sight.”

We see here a bit of the complex attitudes about predators common at the time, and the idea that some bears are good, and some are bad—and the implication that the species can be improved by removing the “criminal” bears from the population. In this climate, management of predators, rather than simple unrestrained eradication, was coming to the fore.

After advocating thoughtful management of predator populations for fifteen years, Leopold’s restless and incisive mind led him toward another revolution in thinking about

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101 Leopold In Meine, 153.
102 Ibid., 155.
animals and people. In the early 1930’s, his faith in pure scientific management was wavering. Leopold wrote, “...predator-control campaigns are usually indiscriminate, and are resorted to before anything else has been tried.” And as far as bears were concerned, politics and economics seemed to have altered rational management. In 1932 he wrote, “...I strongly lean to the belief that where commercial interests conflict with bear conservation, the former have been given undue priority.” Leopold also fought against the old pioneer feeling that the question of predator control was finally one of personal or societal bravery: “There is only one completely futile attitude on predators: that the issue is merely one of courage to protect one’s own interests and that all doubters and protestants [of predator control] are merely chicken-hearted.” In these passages Leopold demonstrates his growing understanding that “predator management” could become merely a cover for predator eradication for commercial interests, and that social attitudes often play a decisive role in game management.

As his ecological awareness increased through experience and experiments, Leopold began to doubt even the possibility of rational human management of wild systems. He wrote that wildlife management had “admitted its inability to replace natural equilibria with artificial ones, and its unwillingness to do so even if it could.” Foreshadowing his famous land ethic, Leopold looked to the ultimate solutions to game management problems in social and moral terms. In this wider context, game management “...become a slower, harder, but vastly more important job than it was. It will succeed or fail not by itself, but as a part of the whole problem of land and

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103 Ibid., 299.
104 Ibid., 287.
105 Ibid., 288.
106 Ibid., 366.
people." At this point, Leopold was thinking well ahead of his society's hunting ethics, and into territory we are continuing to negotiate.

If the golden age of bear hunting had passed by 1920, no one told the hunters. Efforts continued to keep the remaining bears at bay in their mountain haunts, and any problem bears were quickly dispatched. Sport hunting continued to rise in popularity with the growing urban populations of the region. Increasing regulation of bear hunting by states and provinces acknowledged several trends: the severe declines in bear populations, the relatively minor threat the remaining bears posed to agriculture and public safety, the bear's value as a game animal, and a general movement toward science-based conservation policy.

British Columbia appears to be the first area in the Y2Y region with closed seasons for bears: in 1910 it was illegal to hunt bears in the province between September 1 and July 15th. In 1912 the Tahltan Indians of the Cassiar area of B.C. requested a bag limit of three grizzlies to protect declining populations there. Their request appears to have been denied, but the trapping of any bear was prohibited in 1918, and a $25 trophy fee for non-residents was introduced for grizzly hunting. By 1921 there was a province-wide limit of two grizzlies, or three bears total per hunter per year; by 1929 the limit was one. Provincial regulations since then have fluctuated considerably with a long-term trend toward more restrictions. These changes can be seen as reflecting the general

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107 Ibid., 366.
108 C. and J. Jonkel interviews.
110 Avare, appended table.
111 British Columbia Ministry of Environment.
confidence in hunting regulations as tools to protect bear populations, and as indications of the much harder to manage downward trend in bear habitat quality. With many variations on these themes, other provinces and states in the Y2Y region have followed the same pattern in regulating bear hunting.

Bears in Montana first gained statutory protection in 1923 with their classification as game animals. This established open and closed hunting seasons and a limit of one bear per hunter per season. Perhaps as an acknowledgement of the difficulties in distinguishing black bears from grizzlies in the field, the state regulations did not distinguish between the two species. Two years before those restrictions were enacted bears had been granted protection from hunters using dogs. Montana was precocious in providing these protections for bears; other Western states and provinces (Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Alaska, British Columbia) have not banned hunting with dogs even now. It was not, however, until 1941 that the Montana hired its first wildlife biologist and embarked on “a program to obtain scientific data as a basis for wildlife management.”

Arnie Dood, currently a wildlife biologist for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, cites this early concern as the reason that Montana still has grizzlies to manage. He maintains that Montana was the first jurisdiction to have effective protections for bears, whatever the original dates of B.C.’s legislation. The respect Montanans showed for bears early on has paid off—at least for those who value bears as part of our lands.

113 See appendix 1.
114 MTFWP 2001, 30.
Montana now has at least portions of nearly all the remaining grizzly populations in the lower 48 states.\textsuperscript{115}

Montana’s bears thus survived their lowest point in post-glacial history, and learned to adjust their habits and habitat use in response to human incursions. The ethics of hunters also underwent cultural revolutions, from eradication to expert-managed sport, and set patterns that still dominate bear-human relations today.

\textsuperscript{115} Dood interview.
To get an informed opinion on Montana bear hunting in the mid-twentieth century, I went up to the Swan Valley to talk with Bud Moore at his woods cabin. He lives with a floppy but tough little dog that keeps him company in his small sawmill and shop. Bud does some selective logging on his land as a tool for restoration, and uses his operation to demonstrate sustainable land uses to the people of the Swan. Although he is now fully involved with his current home in the Swan Valley, Moore grew up and spent most of his working life in the nearby Bitterroot Mountains of Western Montana. In the 1920’s his family subsisted on income from trapping, raising a few cows, and doing odd jobs around the small town of Hamilton. As a teen, Bud saved $15 from his potato crop to buy a used Winchester Model-94 .30-30 rifle. He stashed the gun in a hollow tree along the way to school, and he would hunt on his commute. One day he shot a black bear—it was the first large animal he ever killed. Since his father was in jail at the time, Bud dressed out the bear himself and had a friend help carry it home. Today he tells the story with a smile, remembering the pride he felt at having provided some needed food and income for his family.

Grizzlies were gone from the valleys by then, and even the black bears were scarce. Bitterrooters killed bears when they saw them, but rarely went out specifically to hunt a bear. There were exceptions, of course. Bud recounted another bear hunt a few years after his first: there was a bear hanging around the periphery of their property, and
Bud's father wanted to kill it. They killed an old horse and set it out as bait, and the next morning they shot the bear while it fed on the carcass. Bud decries the use of bait for hunting bears these days, but ethics were different back then. When times were lean he and his family embraced any way to get by.

Mountain trappers were among the few people in those years exploring the Bitterroot Range specifically to kill bears. In the 1930's there were still some furs out in the vast wild country behind those mountains, and Moore went there with his father to apprentice in trapping. He was one of the last full-time trappers in the area. These men spent the winters out in the mountains running their trap lines for marten, fox, and wolverine. In the spring, loaded with bundles of furs, the trappers would try to catch a few groggy bears before the animals shed their luxurious winter fur. Bud's bear traps were baited in with an incredibly smelly substance made with rotten fish, and hungry spring bears were hard pressed to resist this odor. A trapper checking his line would look for a swath of destruction made by a snared bear as it dragged the log "toggle" through the forest. After he found the angry, wounded bear, the rifle did the rest. Bear pelts were not worth much; the limited trade was mostly in whole skins that were made into novelty rugs. Local uses were more immediately practical—Bud describes bear meat as tasty, and whites agreed with the Salish Indians that bear grease was the very best for cooking and baking.

Moore estimates that in the early 1900's the ten active trappers were killing 25 to 40 grizzlies per year in the Bitterroot. When he was trapping in the 1930's, there were considerably fewer bears being taken. Besides the trappers and opportunistic hunting, there were two events that decimated bear populations in the Bitterroot. First, the massive
fires of 1910, which launched the young U.S. Forest Service on decades of intensive fire suppression, also propelled an army of sheepherders out into the newly deforested hills. The fresh growth of grasses and forbs drew the herders into the higher elevations where bears had taken refuge. Another round of predator-eradication commenced, this time well above the fertile valleys. Second, dam building on the Snake River at Lewiston in 1927 suddenly cut off the supply of Pacific salmon, many of which had spawned in the west-side Bitterroot streams. The mountain bears had been counting on those fish for crucial fat and protein. With that food source gone, the desperately hungry grizzlies headed for the populated valleys in search of food. Lifelong Bitterrooters who had never seen a grizzly suddenly found them in their back yards. These displaced bears did not last long among the well-armed ranchers and farmers.117

As the fur trade petered out to nothing, Bud moved on to the start of a long career with the Forest Service, documented in his 1996 book *The Lochsa Story*. From his post on Lolo Pass he watched the rise of sport hunting. Mill workers from Lewiston and Missoula bounced up the rugged roads into the Bitterroot to get much-needed outdoor time and some fresh, wild meat. They were mainly after ungulates, but would shoot a bear if they saw one. In this period, well after Wright’s hunting days, killing any bear was considered a badge of courage. Killing a grizzly was the ultimate for the trophy hunters who followed Theodore Roosevelt’s belief that no greater “victory” was to be had in North American hunting.118

But from Bud Moore’s seat atop Lolo Pass in the 40’s and 50’s, he saw most locals dismiss trophy hunters as effete fools who would pass up fine deer, elk, and even

116 Moore, 266.
117 Moore interview.
bear in order to get a truly gigantic specimen for the books. Bears in Montana got a little relief in 1947: females with cubs, and the cubs themselves, were placed off limits for bear hunters, and a year later bear hunting with bait was prohibited.\textsuperscript{119} Despite the new protections, the last Bitterroot grizzly was killed in 1959.\textsuperscript{120}

It rubbed Moore the wrong way, coming from his hardscrabble background, to see killing animals become a form of competitive recreation rather than something done for economic and physical survival. Sport hunting, he says, "degrades the activity and the animals."\textsuperscript{121} However, the politics of the bear hunting situation do not escape him. Moore is quick to add, "If you want to keep the things you love, you have to have a constituency. That's where conservationists come from." As has often been the case, the most prominent constituents for bear conservation were hunters.

In my view, Bud has in many ways become a new native to his homeland. He is approaching practical and ethical issues from the larger perspective of his land and its animals. For Bud, work on the land must serve animal and human communities into the future, and not merely advance the short-term interests of a few. To him, ego and passing enjoyment are not reason enough to kill a bear. I find Bud's radical localism hopeful, because he is leading us toward some more positive futures.

Constituencies, such as those Bud envisioned for bears, must be informed and motivated for their causes. In this line, bear biologist Chuck Jonkel has done a great deal to promote and popularize bear hunting with the ultimate goal of increasing public

\textsuperscript{118} Roosevelt. \textsuperscript{119} MTFWP 1994, 27. \textsuperscript{120} Moore interview. \textsuperscript{121} Moore interview.
support for bears. Chuck is one of the grand old men of bear biology, and we are lucky to have him here in Missoula as a reference for the history and ecology of bears. My talks with him have been invaluable to this study.

Chuck came out to Missoula to study wildlife biology and did a Master’s project on pine martens in the 1950’s. After graduation he got a job with the Montana Fish and Game Department and began to study bears for the state. At first he thought that studying bears would be a great way to get to know their habits and locations and become a spectacularly successful bear hunter. But many busy years later, when he did eventually put that knowledge to use and had a beautiful black bear in his rifle sights, he could not pull the trigger. Bears by that point had become almost like human family to him—a sentiment many Indians from an earlier era would recognize.

Clearly, Chuck had nothing against hunting. He had grown up in Wisconsin during the Depression, hunting deer, squirrels, and rabbits for the family table. He still hunts deer and elk every year, and is unstintingly generous with the resulting food. In the late 1950’s as one of the few biologists working for the state, he set about the work of creating a constituency for bears among the state’s hunters. It appeared to Chuck and his supervisor Fletcher Newbie that the changeover from subsistence hunters to sport and trophy hunters, had reduced the connection that the average bear hunter felt with the animals. They hoped that a more committed and informed bear hunting community would actively support habitat protections for bears, and would understand the need for more effective management for bears.

No one knew much about bear populations at that time, since the field study methods for bears were not yet well developed. Bear hunting was haphazard, and despite
the classification of grizzlies as game animals in 1923, and the succeeding protections for bears, there were still no strictly enforced season or limits for any kind of bear hunting.

Chuck set about developing better methods for studying bears in the field, and publicized the results. He put the newly developed tranquilizer dart guns and radio collars to use, and helped invent methods for determining the age of bears by studying the layers of cementum in their teeth. Chuck and his colleagues were laying the technical foundations for the scientific field study of bears.

When they got wind of it, many deer and elk hunters were not pleased that some of their hunting fees were being used to study bears, which they considered vermin riding on the coattails of “paying” game animals. Fletcher Newbie felt considerable political heat for his support of Chuck’s work, but he continued to nurture it. Meanwhile, Chuck found that there was a group of people in the state who cared deeply about bears, whether conservation or eradication was their goal. He was shocked to see how popular and controversial he had become as the state’s bear biologist—and he realized that there was the potential for real social support for bear management in Montana.

Chuck felt that for bears to prosper in the long term, hunters needed to become excited about bear hunting and educated about bear biology. As a committed and informed constituency they could help move the state and federal agencies to study and conserve bears. Many of Chuck’s first and strongest converts were found among the soldiers and airmen stationed in Great Falls. These men often came from states where bear hunting was more common and regulated than it was at that time in Montana. They were looking for information and guidance on bear hunting in their new home, and
Chuck was happy to provide it. From this core group, Chuck was able to build a stronger constituency for bears and acceptance for his management programs.

The first step was getting a specific tag and season set for bears. For many years anyone with a deer-hunting license could kill a bear anytime between April 1st and the end of fall ungulate hunting. Montana issued the first specific tags and fees for bear hunting in 1959. This made bears more of a priority within the Fish and Game Department, since there was then some revenue coming in from bears. Chuck also noted that there was still no distinction made between grizzlies and black bears on the hunting tags—anyone with a bear license could shoot a “brown bear,” which might be of either species. In part due to Chuck’s work, Montana issued the first “grizzly bear license and grizzly bear trophy licenses” in 1967.

During this period Chuck was active on a number of other fronts, all aimed at increasing the interest and success of the new “rank and file” bear hunter. He encouraged the Forest Service to plant palatable grasses along their roads, so that bears would be drawn to these hunter-accessible areas in the spring. He published bear meat recipes in magazines and newspapers. He also tried to keep bear baiting legal in order to increase hunter success. Now, forty years later, Chuck has reversed his position on many of these issues in the wake of the great changes that have occurred in Montana’s bear habitat and populations. But at the time these measures seemed to be needed to secure a future for Montana’s bears.

Based on his solid reputation as an innovative researcher and effective advocate for bears, Chuck was named director of the Border Grizzly Project in 1974. The aim of

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122 Henderson interview.
the project was to study the grizzlies in and around Glacier National Park and Waterton Provincial Park, and to develop responsible management plans for those bear populations. This was an early effort at the kind of trans-boundary management that the Y2Y Initiative is now hoping to continue and expand.

Grizzly bears were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975. Chuck created a quota system to regulate the grizzly bear hunt in Montana, and suggested that it be reviewed every year to be sure that the killing of grizzly bears did not compromise the bears’ ability to sustain their populations. The Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks policymakers would not accede to this request, and reviewed the quota system only once every ten years. This did not prove to be adequate management of the grizzlies in Montana. As populations dropped, a federal court stopped all grizzly bear hunting in Montana in 1991, ruling on a suit brought by the Fund for Animals.

Today Chuck heads the Great Bear Foundation in Missoula, and has made it a hub of international bear activism and education. His constituency for bears now is almost exclusively composed of people who would not dream of killing one. But Chuck’s goals have not changed—advocating for bears in land use, and for responsible bear hunting policies.

A few weeks before the hunt with Mark and Jim, I spent an afternoon talking with Tom Parker at his place a few miles south of Mission Creek Outfitters. Tom has lived in the Swan Valley since the 1970’s, and during the last 25 years has spent as much time outdoors exploring the Valley as anyone. A lot of that time has been spent looking for

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124 Ibid., 2001, 32.
bears. The amazing abundance of bears is what initially drew Tom to the Swan. By his estimate there were two to three times as many bears back then than there are now. He had been an occasional bear hunter back East, but when he settled in the Swan he found that his interest in hunting bears had completely faded. The only bear he ever killed in Montana was a human-habituated black bear that had become too aggressive around his house. Tom earned money by guiding hunters, including bear hunters, in the days before meeting his wife Melanie. Together they have started an educational institute dedicated to conservation fieldwork and community studies in the Swan, Northwest Connections.¹²⁶

These days they conduct tracking surveys and other wildlife monitoring work for the Forest Service, and as part of their educational program for adventurous college students. Much of this work is focused on several grizzly bear habitat linkage zones that traverse the valley between the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex to the east, and the tribal and federal wildernesses in the Mission Mountains to the west.¹²⁷ Tom and Melanie’s projects are precisely the sort of thing that the Y2Y Conservation Initiative is hoping will spread throughout the region—locally based conservation work that is mindful of regional-scale ecosystems and community sustainability. And like the Y2Y Initiative, Tom and Melanie’s work found a large part of its inspiration in bears.

Guiding bear hunts magnified Tom’s knowledge of bears because it made him focus on them more intently than he would have done otherwise. Tom cites this intense focus and on-the-ground bear knowledge as a positive side of bear hunting. Under the right circumstances, he believes, hunting can deeply connect people with nature and animals. However, the hunters he guided often did not meet this ideal, and their

disrespect for the bears was distressing to him. Eventually, he started choosing his bear
hunting clients more carefully. He looked for hunters with some respect for the animals,
and whom he felt would gain something more than a pelt and some meat from the hunt.
To blunt the macho attitudes common among predator hunters, Tom sometimes brought
his clients out to a place where they could secretly watch a mother and cubs. Seeing bears
grazing, playing, and nursing in a non-hunting context was calculated to show his clients
that bears are sensitive beings, who deserve care and very deliberate decisions about their
deaths. It is striking that this is just what William Wright recommended to bear hunters
almost one hundred years ago.

Tom brings a wealth of experience and field study to the discussion of bears in the
Swan, and a whole-landscape perspective that is often missing from these discussions.
While he is solidly based in the Swan Valley, many of his observations have wider
application to bear hunting throughout the Y2Y and beyond. Even in his relatively short
tenure in the Swan, he has witnessed some historic changes, mainly the dramatic decline
of the bears in the Swan that was caused by the direct and cascading effects of the large-
scale logging that began in the 1980’s.

Before that time, logging was fairly small-scale in the Swan, and not catastrophic
to bear habitat values. Decades of effective fire suppression had closed the mosaic of
meadows and open forests that had been prevalent when low-intensity burns commonly
wandered across the valley. The generally sustainable logging practices of that time may
have actually improved bear habitat by creating more structural diversity in the otherwise
monotonously thick forests. However, the brutal logging that followed under the Reagan-

127 Servheen and Sandstrom.
era Forest Service and the “liquidations” of timber on corporate land radically altered bear habitat and bear habits in the valley. When applied across large areas, the logging began to destroy habitat diversity rather than increase it. Loggers cut roads across the valley and the hills to remote timber stands. These roads provided access for hunters, too.

According to Tom, interest in bear hunting was very high in this period. Chuck Jonkel’s idea of planting palatable grasses along the roads to increase hunter success worked quite well. Hunters began spending more time in their vehicles cruising the extensive road system where bears were commonly found in the spring. Hunting this way, rather than tracking and stalking on foot, led to more hurried shots by hunters who had only a moment to decide whether or not to shoot a bear that was likely to vanish into the forest at the edge of the clearcut. Determining the species, sex, and size of a bear is extremely difficult under those conditions. Tom believes that many grizzlies and female black bears with cubs were, and are still, lost this way. Studies in Northwestern Montana support Tom’s observations.

As their habitat quality faded under extreme logging in the ‘80’s, bears headed into populated areas looking for food—reminiscent of the movement of grizzlies into the Bitterroot valley after dams depleted their salmon supply. Another cultural revolution was underway as the traditional food sources for bears dried up, and previously safe areas became dangerous. Simultaneously, Tom believes that the increasing numbers of trophy hunters in the 1980’s were killing off the larger, more experienced females who could teach the next generation of bears about ephemeral wild foods. Tom claims that through

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128 Manning.
129 Thier, McLellan et al.
the combination of habitat alteration and trophy hunting that “we have gutted the memory of bears.”

Alongside the loss of bear-memory, Tom has seen the human community lose important elements of their local memory of bears. People in the Swan, especially the many newcomers, do not expect to find the great numbers of bears that he remembers from the 1970’s. That expectation has been replaced with an ahistorical and generalized approach to understanding and managing bears based on conservation biology. A recent study in the Swan found a density of one black bear per square mile, and deemed that a healthy population by the standards of conservation genetics and population ecology. But based on his experience in the field, Tom knows that the bears in the Swan are a mere shadow of their former populations. Tom cites this as evidence that the generalized models that wildlife professionals rely upon can miss important differences among landscapes: a statistically healthy population of bears may not be a healthy population in a particular place. He says that it is “crazy to start a study of bear populations when bears have been decimated and their habitat destroyed,” because that sort of study will tell you little about the longer-term”bear-potential” in that area.

It has been a struggle for Tom to win acceptance of his experience and local knowledge as relevant data for managing bears and other wildlife in the valley. State and federal officials are bound to strict academic standards of proof, and those rules often do not allow local, undocumented experience to be considered. It is no secret why governmental decisions are vetted so intensely—all sides of bear issues scrutinize game departments’ every move these days, and defending against appeals and litigation is

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130 Ongoing unpublished study by MTFWP biologist Rick Mace, via personal communication from Tom Parker.
expensive in time and money. While understanding the political and institutional reasons for these biases, Tom finds that the exclusive reliance on academic science often does not serve bears well. If managers only know what is proven by the few rigorous scientific studies performed in an area, they are missing a great deal of the story that can be told by alert and concerned local observers who care deeply about their land and animals. Tom is attempting to remedy this situation by standardizing and fully documenting his organization's current observations.

Adding to this ferment, scientific data can be misleading, even when well intentioned and accurate in its own terms. Given limited funding for intensive scientific studies of bear populations, wildlife managers usually rely on hunter surveys. This is the heart of the information used to set bear “harvest” quotas for hunting districts and to adjust the timing of bear hunting seasons. Tom believes that watching only the numbers of bears killed annually by hunters does not give an adequate picture of the bears in the Swan, and could easily lead to overhunting. Many factors that increase hunters’ overall success in killing bears—such as habitat alterations, increased hunter access via logging roads, longer seasons, more guided hunts, improved hunting technologies, and more hunters hunting more intensively—could all lead to a constant rate of black bears killed each year, even if the bear population has been declining. If people are “seeing bears where they never have before,” it might not be because there has been a tremendous increase in populations, but rather because the relatively few bears left cannot find enough to eat in the places they used to inhabit.

There are many cases, however, where scientific research supports ideas long held by alert locals. Tom’s thoughts on bear hunting management are backed by radio collar
research done by Tim Thier in Northwest Montana. Thier found that the number of black
bears being killed per hunter day was declining in the late 1980’s, although the overall
number killed remained fairly constant. His studies of bear population structure in that
area indicated that there was heavy hunting pressure on black bears, although some other
measures would have led managers to believe that this was a relatively unexploited
population.\(^{131}\)

Thier’s study supports other points Tom makes about bear hunting: Hunters often
have limited time and opportunities to kill bears and so there is a strong impetus to kill
\textit{any} bear you can. A hunter can decide whether to keep and report it later when he knows
what he has. Managers try for a 2:1 ratio of male to female bears killed by hunters, and
spring seasons have been steadily moved to earlier dates to target the early-emerging
male bears and preserve the later-emerging females. The radio collared female black
bears in Thier’s study were significantly less likely to be reported killed by hunters than
males. That would sound like great news to game managers who are attempting to create
just such a distribution. But Thier’s demographic data leads him to believe that it is more
likely that hunters are simply not reporting kills of female bears, especially the prohibited
killing of females with cubs. Tom and Thier agree that it is nearly impossible for hunters
to determine the sex of a bear at rifle-shot distance, and that female bears are very likely
to leave their cubs under cover while they graze in the openings where hunters are most
likely to spot them. Over many years this has the effect of reducing cub survival in the
population, and skewing the age structure of the killed population toward older bears.\(^{132}\)

\(^{131}\) Thier writes that the “high proportion of median-aged bears killed in NW Montana seems to
indicate an unexploited population, but the high numbers of collared bears killed indicates heavy
hunting pressure, especially when combined with the decreasing kill per hunter-day.” 62.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 63-64.
I believe that the relatively high ages of bears killed may also result from hunters discarding small bears that they have killed. Most hunters would prefer to fill their bear tag with an old, trophy-class bear. When they are successful in this, hunters do report the kill to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, and maybe the Boone and Crockett Club as well. While I was hunting with Mark Robbins, he made a point of disparaging hunters who shoot “toilet seat covers,”—bears whose pelts are so small that they would only serve that purpose. He added that once a client of his accidentally killed a small bear, but that he was able to mount the head in an acceptable fashion, and so the bear was not “wasted.”

Clearly, the pressure to discard a mistakenly killed grizzly bear is even greater, given that the Endangered Species Act assigns strong penalties for killing protected species. Tom believes that black bear hunters have done great damage to grizzly bear populations in the Swan. He has several times seen hunters take long shots from roads before they could know the species, let alone the sex, of the bear they had in their sights. A few black bear hunters he has met in the Swan professed ignorance of any grizzly bears in the area despite obvious nearby grizzly tracks and sign. These hunters were either truly ignorant of the differences between grizzlies and black bears, or did not want to admit that they were hunting in an area where killing a grizzly by mistake was likely.

Tom also believes that self-defense killings of grizzly bears by black bear and ungulate hunters are far more common than they should be. “Just because these guys have a weapon in their hands, they think with it instead of their using their brains.” Mark Robbins said that no bear hunters he knows carry pepper spray, a popular and effective deterrent to bear attacks. Smelly hunting camps in bear and ungulate seasons amount to baiting bears in to be shot, and Tom believes that this may be as significant for grizzly
bear deaths as mistaken identification kills. In Tom’s view, the combined effects of these many avenues to grizzly bear death by hunters have been devastating, and have remained largely unknown. McLellan’s study of grizzly bear mortality in the Northern Continental Divide region supports these contentions with its finding that only about half of the deaths of grizzlies would have been known without radio collar telemetry.\textsuperscript{133}

Thier’s study also supports Tom’s thoughts about the effects of roads on bear hunting. Thirty-nine percent of the bears killed in Northwest Montana were shot from an open road, and many more were killed on or near closed roads—like the roads I walked with Mark Robbins and Jim. Thier also found that the grass and clover planted along forest roads effectively served as bait for bears, and did in fact lead to easy kills for bear hunters. Many of these roads may soon be seeing increased traffic. With the timber largely gone from the corporate railroad grant lands that checkerboard with the federal Forest Service sections through much of western Montana, these lands may well become housing projects. Land values in the Swan have skyrocketed in the last decade and Plum Creek timber, which now owns most of this real estate, is now looking to sell off their stripped land. Tom, and many bear biologists, know that this added development and traffic in bear habitat will further disrupt bear movements and reduce the number of places where bears will be able to take refuge from hunters.

Tom maintains good relationships with several of the hunting guides and outfitters in the Swan. He is not opposed to bear hunting in general, just uninformed and egregiously damaging bear hunting practices. In parallel with Bud Moore, Chuck Jonkel and many others concerned with the region’s bears, Tom sees the value of a committed

\textsuperscript{133} 46-51% of grizzly deaths would have been undetected without radio-collaring, according to McLellan et al.
constituency of bear hunters who will advocate for the interests of bears in terms of habitat and high-quality bear research. The question becomes one of how to foster responsible bear hunting, and through that to encourage land-use that considers the needs of bears. At the same time, through his educational work, Tom is also helping to create a non-hunting constituency and a non-consumptive economic value for bears.

Tom and Melanie are further examples of people who are becoming native to their land. They are attempting to bridge the gaps between grounded local knowledge and scientific understandings, with the goal of creating responsible policies for the land and its bears. And so the native past of bear hunting begins to blend into the present and future. In the final chapter we will look more closely at the ethical and ecological situations we have inherited, and look to some ways we might make that future better for both hunters and bears.
Ethical and Ecological Conclusions

Bear hunting in Montana and the Y2Y region has been shaped by a series of dramatic revolutions and some gradual accommodations to bears and their role in these landscapes: Early hunters may have reversed an ancient supremacy of bears with technological and strategic innovations. Subsequent overhunting may have led to local and continental extinctions that impaired the hunters’ chances for survival, and led to the creation of rich cultural accommodations for bears and other animals. The hunting ethics internal to these early regional cultures were suddenly replaced with an exploitative commercial regime during the fur trade era, followed by the war of eradication ranchers and farmers launched on bears and other predators. As this war was being won, people in the region again stepped back from eliminating bears forever, and made a cultural space for bears—finding that as a society they did value bears, despite the challenges they presented to our aggressively expanding culture. Just as the concept of species has come to take the cultural place of controlling animal spirits, our scientific management programs and the highly codified rules of sport hunting have taken the place of the rituals and taboos that surrounded bear hunting in earlier eras. The final goal of these “accommodated” bear hunting cultures is the same: sustaining bear populations at a socially acceptable level. We may be, via a circuitous and difficult route, circling back toward an approximation of earlier native bear hunting cultures.

This inquiry into bear hunting began when I read an arresting book by Ted Kerasote titled Blood Ties: Nature, Culture and the Hunt. Kerasote is a writer and hunter
who lives in the Tetons of Wyoming—the southern end of the Y2Y region. His book is an exploration of hunting ethics woven through accounts of his experiences with subsistence Inuit hunters in Greenland and his travels with globetrotting trophy hunters. Kerasote also debates with animal rights activists who oppose all hunting on humanitarian principle, and documents his own struggles to find a “right livelihood” and a durable connection to the place he lives through hunting. Kerasote argues that respectful and responsible hunting for food is ethically correct because ultimately our bodies require the taking of other lives in order to continue. For him, the questions are ones of necessity and choice. Kerasote asks,

Does a free-ranging adult steer qualify as a candidate for “necessary food,” whereas the calf, chained in its stall so that its flesh can become tender veal, fails the test, being as it is no more than a fillip for the jaded palate? How about geese who are force-fed to produce pate de foie gras, or, a more down to earth example, the countless penal-colony chickens crammed in their boxes so that Colonel Sanders can keep America licking its fingers? Is the elk shot by me any more or less a necessary death than these or that of the thousands of rabbits and mice inadvertently destroyed in the process of growing and harvesting my organic, all-natural, oat bran breakfast cereal? I would argue that making clearer and more compassionate choices from such a multitude of daily options is the most important task of our lives.\textsuperscript{134}

And concludes:

The elk in the forest, the tuna in the sea, the myriad of small creatures lost as the combines turn the fields, even the Douglas fir hidden in the walls of our homes—every day we foreclose one life over another, a never-ending triage, a constant choice of who

\textsuperscript{134} Kerasote, 239-40.
will suffer so that we may live, bending a blue note into the neatness of morality. It is this tender pain between species that is the plasma bearing us all along.\textsuperscript{135}

Kerasote's morality is unflinchingly aware and interested in full connections to land and animals. He went back to hunting after a long hiatus, "because it attaches me to this place and the animals I love, asking me to own what each of us ought to own in some personal way—the pain that runs the world, …and because eating [elk] does nothing to increase the aggregate pain of the world. In fact, by attaching me lovingly here, the relationship between elk and me decreases it.\textsuperscript{136}

This is a haunting restatement of an old idea—that hunting and eating animals from our land draws us to love our part of the world. If we truly love the land and its animals, then we are bound to do the things associated with love: taking care of the beloved, planning for future generations, dissolving our separate identities into a union. It is also easy to see how in the absence of this relationship that the "aggregate pain" of the land and its people is increased through a destructive pattern of thoughtless and selfish acts. Such a pattern does seem to have gripped our culture, and escaping that grasp is at the center of our struggles for sustainability.

I was thinking about bears quite a bit while I read \textit{Blood Ties}, and I wondered where the moral reasoning Kerasote used for elk hunting would lead when applied to bear hunting. Traditional Indian bear hunting seems to fit Kerasote's definition of necessary killing, but what about modern bear hunting? What is necessary about bear hunting today? Does bear hunting necessarily create deep connections to land? How do the ecological and population biology aspects of bear hunting affect its ethical qualities, or,

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 240.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
put another way, how do individual animal rights mesh with the needs of the species? With a historical background of bear hunting in Montana in place, we can head into these questions well provisioned with ideas and examples.

Few question the moral rightness of aboriginal hunting for survival. It is such a basic part of the history of our race that is nearly beyond reproach. It is questionable whether Native Americans were conservationists in the modern sense, a quality which some argue has been projected upon their societies by Euro-American culture.\textsuperscript{137} But given the indisputable need for food which motivated Indian hunting and the rigorous ethics which accompanied that hunting, aboriginal practices appear to be accepted for the time in which they existed; so much so that they are often held up as models of responsible relationships to animals and the land.\textsuperscript{138} Similarly, early European settlers were struggling for survival, and while we may debate the wisdom of their anti-predator campaigns, it is easier to forgive our often-desperate ancestors some of their excesses.

It is \textit{unnecessary} killing that draws the most moral condemnation, especially if the animal is materially wasted. This prohibition on waste has deep cultural roots that are surfacing again. The example of traditional Kootenai practice of eating all of a bear as a sign of respect for the animal's sacrifice comes to mind. And witness Mark Robbins' relief that he was able to find a taxidermic "use" for the small bear his client had killed. Which leads to a question: is there any way that a bear killed today is \textit{not} wasted? Since obesity is now the main problem associated with nutrition in the U.S, it can be argued that \textit{no} hunting for food is truly necessary. All the nation's hunters could probably grow

\textsuperscript{137} Kretch.  
\textsuperscript{138} Flores, Mander, Shepard.
fat on just the food that is landfilled by the nation’s restaurants and grocery stores. In this era, even hunting for food requires a moral justification that will stand up to hard scrutiny.

Even in the face of these facts, I find Kerasote’s arguments for a respectful food-hunting ethic convincing because so many animals and habitats are inadvertently “wasted” in the processes of industrial agriculture, and the lives of animals who are raised for human consumption are most often hellish. Hunting in this sense can be a radical act in support of local sustainability and against total commercial domination of our food supply, and even for animal rights. I was so persuaded by these ideas that I went deer hunting for the first time last fall. Others might confront these same ideas and conclude for themselves that hunting for food is not morally justified. Even so, it would be hard to argue that it is ethically the worst form of hunting.

Hunting solely for sport and trophies, for example, is generally not morally acceptable. Ungulates are usually hunted for both food and for sport, and so they escape a portion of the disapproval that follows pure trophy hunting. After my survey of popular bear hunting literature and internet sites and conversations with hunters and wildlife officials, I can say with confidence that bear hunters are primarily killing bears for sport and trophies, not for food. This undermines their moral standing with many observers.

Underscoring these points, Matt Cartmill’s exhaustive study of hunting ethics titled A View to a Death in the Morning, argues that the love that many sport and trophy hunters have for their prey has a darkly pathological side, since it is so tightly bound to violence. He writes: “Some of the feelings that many hunters express—the murderous

\[139\] No deer offered itself to me.

love and other incoherent emotions, ... the relish for doing delicious evil, the false and contemptuous affection for the victim, the refusal to think of the victim as an individual—are common feelings among rapists."¹⁴¹ This may be an extreme statement of the point, but I find the analogy difficult to escape. In his last analysis, Cartmill concludes that hunting for sport is morally wrong. "If we accept any sort of laws against cruelty to animals... it is hard to see how we can justify sportive hunting, since it inflicts grave suffering for the sake of mere amusement. If killing animals is wrong as a spectator sport, it ought to be equally wrong as a participatory sport."¹⁴² While few people formulate the point so clearly, the sense that hunting purely for sport is morally wrong is widespread and growing. We can appreciate the good work that sport hunters and their organizations have done to secure habitat and rescue wildlife populations from excessive unregulated hunting, and at the same time realize that as a society we may have outgrown hunting purely for sport.

Bear hunters had better pay some attention to these ethical issues because however long the tradition of bear hunting is in Montana and the Y2Y region, there are significant social forces aimed at restricting or ending it. As Tom Beck, a bear biologist for the state of Colorado writes: "If hunting is to persist in America, it must operate within two sets of rules, one biological, and the other sociological. While the biological rules set the outer limits for what we kill, the sociological rules dictate how we kill."¹⁴³ Several sociological factors make this a troubling prospect for hunters used to a cozy relationship with the state wildlife departments who set the ground rules for hunting. First, the hunting population of the U.S. is not growing. Judging by the number of

¹⁴¹ Cartmil, 240.
¹⁴² Ibid., 240-41.
licenses issued, the peak of hunting popularity was in 1982 (16.7 million licenses), and it has declined by over a million since then. Second, as a percentage of the whole population, hunting has been declining for longer than that.⁴⁴ And, while the ranks of hunters shrink, opposition to hunting of all kinds has blossomed with the rise of aggressive animal rights groups like the Committee to Abolish Sport Hunting and the Coalition for Non-Violent Food.

These people are outraged at many aspects of bear hunting, and often for excellent reasons. Bear baiting, which even some “hook and bullet” journalists call “garbaging for bears,”¹⁴⁵ creates problem bears by habituating them to human foods. Baiting also does not, as is often claimed as a justification, allow hunters to reliably select for bear sex or size.¹⁴⁶ Another controversial and regionally common practice is running bears with dogs. Houndsmen commonly train their dogs by chasing bears outside of hunting seasons, exhausting bears who are trying to put on weight for denning, and often breaking up family groups. Bear cubs caught on the ground “are usually killed by the dogs.”¹⁴⁷ The climax of a successful hound hunt is shooting a bear out of a tree. Research indicates that, contrary to popular belief, hunters are generally unable to determine the sex of a bear while it is treed, or even reliably assess its size.¹⁴⁸ Hunters sometimes use radio collars on the dogs to track down a treed bear, not exactly a “fair chase.” Worse, some guides will keep a bear treed for days while a “hunter” is flown in to shoot it, a practice dubbed

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¹⁴³ Beck.
¹⁴⁴ Ring.
¹⁴⁵ Williams.
¹⁴⁶ Beck et al., 125.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 130.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 128.
"will-call hunting." While these practices are banned in Montana, they are allowed to one degree or another in many surrounding areas. The moral condemnation spills over to all bear hunters, whatever their ethics. Wayne Pacelle, director of The Fund for Animals which successfully sued to stop grizzly bear hunting in Montana, told Kerasote, "If the rest of the hunting community was like you, I probably wouldn't be campaigning [against hunting]. It's largely the egregious things that draw me out of the woodwork."

Apart from the political and legislative impact of these animal rights groups, and possibly even more troubling for defensive hunters, is that the mass of the constituencies for animals and habitat preservation seems to have shifted away from the well-heeled hunter-sportsmen of the Boone and Crockett Club and toward environmental groups who hold conservation of native biodiversity as their ultimate goal. The old saw that hunters do the most to conserve animal habitat through the taxes they pay on hunting gear is not ringing as true as it once did. These environmental groups include more and more urbanites who generally have little interest in hunting, and may oppose it outright. The larger movement to preserve biodiversity and animal populations may tolerate hunting as a way to extend their coalitions in rural areas, or they may appease their animal rights-oriented members by jettisoning hunting from their agendas. In this socio-political climate it is hard for hunters and game departments to resist demands for changes in hunting regulations. Increasingly, these changes are based on ethics rather than biology.

Several ethical issues concerning bear hunting have recently risen to the level of general public awareness. In the last decade, state ballot issues on bear baiting, use of dogs, and spring hunting seasons have become surprisingly common. A 1992 public

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149 Boone and Crockett interview.
150 See Appendix 1.
initiative that banned all these practices in Colorado passed by a margin of 70% to 30%, winning approval over the objections of the state Fish and Game Department and hunting groups. In 1996 there were six state ballot measures to restrict bear hunting, all along lines similar to the Colorado initiative. In famously conservative Idaho, voters proposed to eliminate the use of hounds and baiting. Polls showed that the measure was supported by 45% of that state’s black bear hunters, but it ultimately failed to pass because of organized opposition from guiding and outfitting organizations.

To the north, British Columbia has been mired in controversy about its grizzly bear hunting policies for at least the last five years. Grizzly hunting regulations and quotas in the province have swung wildly as the parties in control of the government have swapped places. The methods and motives behind government bear population estimates have been strongly questioned, and the issue has made international headlines.

In Montana it appears that straight trophy hunting is not acceptable any more. The state enacted a 1994 law prohibiting the waste of bear meat, requiring that it be taken from the field and consumed. Until that law passed, bears were the only big game animals that hunters were not required to eat. This law confirms and codifies a trend in the last decade away from public acceptance of trophy hunting for bears which has been noticed by many observers. If a hunter must eat a bear’s flesh, then, as with ungulate hunting, it is at least not a pure trophy hunt. I was not able to confirm any prosecutions under this prohibition on wasting bear meat. Despite the difficulties in enforcement, the moral intent behind the law is clear.

\[151\] Kerasote, 270. 
\[152\] Beck et al., 122-3. 
\[153\] Begley and Glick. 
\[154\] Koberstein.
Faced with initiatives limiting hunting seasons and practices, the attitude of many hunting organizations and publications has been to circle the wagons and defend against any curtailment of hunting “rights.” A hysterical fear of anti-hunting groups, and a kind of hunting regulation “domino theory” has led many hunting organizations to oppose any restriction of hunting, however well-based in wildlife biology or general public ethics it might be. They seem to fear that any chink in hunting’s armor will eventually lead to rapidly progressing bans on all hunting. This all-or-nothing stance has not always served their interests well. In the case of the Colorado black bear hunting initiative, a preoccupation with the strongly anti-hunting minority who proposed the changes led the hunting community to oppose limited concessions that would have satisfied most of the critics. The result of the bear hunting community’s inflexibility was a dramatic reduction in their access.

There is the hope that hunters and hunting organizations will see that they must respect the ethics of the other public “owners” of wildlife, and will be amenable to incremental changes in hunting practices and ethics. Philosopher and hunter Ann Causey asks, “Is it morally enriching to use animals as mere objects, as game pieces in macho contests where the only goal is to outcompete other hunters?” and asserts, “We [hunters] must attack and abolish the unacceptable acts, policies and attitudes within our ranks.” The 45% of Idaho bear hunters who supported the initiative that would have restricted bear hunting practices in that state may have had the same thought. If the worst ethical offenses were removed or reduced, the public might be able to perceive the more positive sides of hunting in general, and bear hunting specifically.

155 Williams.
156 Beck et al., 121.
There are after all, many positive aspects of bear hunting which could aid hunters in these debates. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks emphasizes the positive aspects of a possible future grizzly bear hunt on the bases of increased management effectiveness, modifying bear behavior, socio-political needs, and economic necessity, and provides a good summary of the reasons to continue hunting bears.

First, the state argues that it is scientifically well equipped to manage grizzly bear populations responsibly, “so as to have a minimal impact on the population as a whole.” Some critics will doubt this claim, citing the political, economic, and scientific controversies associated with a similarly well-equipped agency in British Columbia has had in regulating a grizzly bear hunt. And, if Tom Parker is correct about the hidden declines in bear populations, there may be some big bumps along the road to sustainable scientific management. Nevertheless, it is probably true that, absent political distortions of biological studies, Montana can sustainably manage a grizzly hunt. The dramatic advances in wildlife biology since Leopold’s days have made a difference in our ability to understand and manipulate animal populations. Citizens generally believe that state agencies are able to do their jobs well. As Beck (et al.) writes, “In general the public trusts state agencies to protect the bears from overexploitation.”

On the socio-political front, the state posits that hunting is of central importance to the rural Montanans who are most likely to encounter grizzlies in their backyards: “Hunting promotes better acceptance of this large and potentially life-threatening animal by the local public who are asked to live with grizzlies, and this acceptance is a key to

\[157\] Causey, quoted in Ring.
\[158\] Note that these points apply in most respects to black bear hunting as well.
\[159\] 2002.
\[160\] Ibid., 52.
long-term survival of the bear.\textsuperscript{162} Essentially, if rural people are at least potentially able to kill grizzlies during a hunting season, they may be less likely to do so illegally or in borderline self-defense cases.

Hunting also “allows the grizzly to be a social asset instead of being considered by some groups as a liability” in economic terms.\textsuperscript{163} Hunting fees for grizzlies will help defray some of the management costs associated with grizzlies, though Arnie Dood maintains that overall the grizzly hunt will not be a money-maker for the Department.\textsuperscript{164} The hunt may also reduce other management costs through its selective influence on bear behavior and character. Here we have a more formal statement of the program of selective breeding for mild-mannered and evasive bears, similar to that practiced by Indians and early settlers. It is an article of faith among the bear experts I contacted that a hunted bear population is a wary one, and one that causes less trouble for bear managers. On the rural-community economic front, Mark Robbins and his fellow guides are quite excited about the prospect of potential “good paying jobs” guiding grizzly bear hunts.

Overall, in the language of natural resource theorists, bears and bear hunting have become “non-timber forest products.” With these arguments, the state ultimately asserts that through being hunted, bears gain the critical support of rural people and hunters, who with their elk rifles, hold practical power of life and death over grizzlies. And, following Chuck Jonkel’s tradition, the state argues that bear hunters form a political constituency for the management and habitat needs associated with the bears.

\textsuperscript{161} Beck et al. 121.
\textsuperscript{162} MTFWP 2002.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{164} Dood interview.
While we may quibble with the fine points of some of these arguments, they are generally valid points in support of continued bear hunting in Montana and the Y2Y region. We also have the examples of bear hunters gaining stronger connections to the land and bears through hunting; William Wright, Bud Moore, and Tom Parker are only a few of those who have come to advocacy for bears and their habitat through having hunted and killed bears. If bear hunting were abolished and management agencies became the only ones to legally kill bears, we might lose many future strong and credible voices for bear conservation. Traditional Indians have sometimes said that when anyone slows down long enough and begins to pay attention, the land begins to speak to them. Sometimes it takes a powerful activity like bear hunting to force people from our hyperactive culture to stop and really listen.

Beyond all this talk of ethics and sociology, it is a practical certainty that bear hunting in many forms will continue in Montana and the Y2Y for the foreseeable future. Arnie Dood, the MTFWP manager who prepared the grizzly bear plan cited above, believes that a grizzly bear season in Montana is inevitable. As another member of the hunting press titled a recent article in the *High Country News*, "Hunting: get used to it.”

Well, in Montana and the rest of the Y2Y, we are quite accustomed to hunting, but we are also sick of some aspects of it. We don’t need to have our bears killed to provide “novelty hunts” for jet setters who are uninterested in our land and traditions. We

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165 McGaa.
166 Dood interview.
167 Fergus.
can choose how we want to continue our hunting traditions, and reform them according to the ecological and ethical goals that we want to advance. As Leopold argued in support of his land ethic, at bottom what we need to create sustainable relationships to our land is changes in our shared sense of right and wrong. These kinds of ethical changes can be made through concerted social and political efforts toward those goals.

It is worth envisioning and debating an ideal future for bear hunting so that we can know where to steer our policies and incentives toward the future we want. Here is a positive and quite possible future scenario for bear hunting in Montana: Hopefully, there will some day be diverse and interconnected populations of bears in Montana and throughout the Y2Y. Respectful and ethical bear hunters would be able to pursue these bears for food and hides, gaining along the way a visceral outdoor experience that is increasingly rare even in this relatively wild region. These hunters would advocate for bear habitat and locally-informed studies of bear populations. The whole experience of bear hunting would draw them into a closer relationship with this place; one in which they would be encouraged to give to, as well as take from, the land. The bears themselves would benefit from the respect and care that the hunters would give them, and their populations would continue to expand toward the limits of their expanding habitat. These bears would also retain a proper respect for people and their works through the lessons passed down from their long-lived mothers. This is the sort of idealistic vision that is quite possible within the long time frame of the Y2Y Conservation Initiative, given the application of wise policies now.

How might bear hunting in Montana move even closer to the respectful traditions of Indian hunting, and to the ecologically informed localism of the “new native” bear
hunters I have discussed? After several months of reading bear hunting literature and
taking with many people concerned with these issues, I have some suggested policies that
would help lead us further toward that vision of a respectful give and take hunting
relationship with bears:

• In order to increase the knowledge that bear hunters have about their prey, they
could be required to attend an interactive class with a bear biologist. These
experiences could be modeled on the hunting ethics seminars conducted by the
Orion Institute.168 The life history of bears, their ecological roles, and the
interactions between black and grizzly bears should be covered, along with
discussions of local Native American beliefs about hunting and bears. A hunting
manager could discuss the role hunting plays in bear biology, how seasons are set,
and air the specific concerns managers have about bears in the area that the
hunters will visit. A basic comprehension test could be administered at the end of
the class as an extension of the current internet-based identification exam. A
video might be substituted for portions of the interactive experience, if
accompanied by a briefing from a wildlife manager.

• Currently, bear hunters do not need to renew their bear-identification test if they
have passed it once. Hunters should be required to recertify each year. If the test
itself is updated and changed each year, it will continue to challenge and educate
experienced bear hunters.

168 Orion—The Hunter’s Institute mission states, in part, “...the institute works to assure ethical
and responsible hunting. This effort begins with individual hunters, extends to agencies
responsible for the environments in which hunting occurs, and includes those responsible for the
• Montana’s laws require only people between the ages of 12 and 17 to attend hunting safety classes. This should be expanded to all ages, and include information about responsible hunting in bear country.169

• Preference in bear hunting licenses, especially for potential grizzly bear hunts, should be given to those hunters who volunteer time to help with bear habitat management, educating new bear hunters, or working directly with injured or orphaned bears. This would encourage bear hunters to make the connections between the land, its animals, and their hunting. Eventually this service component could be required in order to receive a bear hunting license.

• There is currently a law in Montana prohibiting anyone from killing more than one grizzly bear in a lifetime. If there were another law prohibiting the possession of more than one black or grizzly bear pelt, it would further limit the socially unacceptable trophy collecting aspect of bear hunting. If hunters were not allowed to “trade up” as they killed bigger black bears, then they would be in the position of truly hunting for the connecting experience and the food. The bear skins not kept by the hunters could be used for educational purposes—a sharing that would honor another local aboriginal tradition. A regulation like this would be difficult to enforce, just like the ban on wasting bear meat is, but the moral force of such a law would further communicate social standards to bear hunters.

• Spring hunting seasons should be severely limited or eliminated. Many people associated with bear hunting believe that it will be ended at some point.170 The

169 As proposed in MTFWP 2002, 57. For regional comparison: in Idaho all hunters born after 1975 must attend hunter education, in Wyoming it is required of those born after 1965. The Yukon, Alberta, and British Columbia all require all hunters to pass written tests based on hunter education classes.
environmental damage, orphaned cubs, and the noted difficulties associated with sex and species selectivity all make the spring hunt not worth the ethical and ecological costs. As Bud Moore says, “It’s just not the right time to be killing animals.”

- Hunters of all kinds should be required to carry pepper spray as a deterrent to bear attacks. MTFWP is evaluating this regulation, but so far has not taken a firm stance. To reduce unnecessary “self-defense” killings of bears, this is a common sense measure.

- Historical bear abundance and confirmed local observations should be used where available as another consideration in bear population management.

- Further investigation of both bear species’ movements with satellite collar studies would provide valuable information for wildlife managers, especially in revealing bears’ responses to hunting seasons and human developments.

While hunters and game departments are generally opposed to new restrictions and requirements, if they understand that their future bear hunting opportunities will be bounded by societal ethics then they may be receptive to proactive actions on ideas like these. Still, it is likely that the growing non-hunting constituencies for bears will need to be the ones to advance this kind of agenda.

Historically, Montana has been a leader in progressive bear hunting policies for the Y2Y region. That consistent concern has allowed black and grizzly bears to continue to live in the state, however tenuous the situation continues to be for grizzlies. To continue this leadership, Montana has the responsibility to continue to innovate and

Parker interview, C. Jonkel interview.
advocate for the region’s bears. We can continue the ancient tradition of respect for bears through ecologically informed and ethically upright management of bears and bear hunters.

We are entwined with bears in this place. As they have for thousands of years, bears will continue to present us with complex and difficult issues concerning our role in ecological systems and our ethical responsibilities to animals. Bear hunting often brings these issues to a fine point, and forces us to consider how we modern, hyper-rational humans should relate to what remains of wild nature. Bears are too simply too powerful as physical beings and as psychic symbols to be blandly ignored or neatly managed. If we can relearn how to learn from bears, as people in this place once did, and if we can embrace the thorny paradoxes bears represent for us, then we may get closer to an equal relationship with them again. Given the proper care and respect to ensure their vitality, bears can help us stay deeply connected with this land.
Interviews Conducted

Chuck Jonkel. Bear researcher, Director of The Great Bear Foundation, Missoula, MT.
Tom Parker. Former bear hunting guide and Co-founder of Northwest Connections, Condon, MT.
Bud Moore. Local Historian and Author, Condon, MT.
Larry Handicart. State Director, Wildlife Services, Helena, MT. (by phone)
John Firebaugh. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Hunting Manager. Missoula, MT.
Heidi Godwin. Sierra Club Grizzly Bear Project, Bozeman, MT. (by phone)
Boone and Crockett Club representative (anonymous, by phone)
Arnie Dood, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Regional Manager (by phone)
David Rockwell, Author. (by phone)
Mark Robbins, Swan Valley outfitter and guide.
Jamie Jonkel, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks bear manager.
Art Soukkala, Salish-Kootenai Wildlife Department. (by phone)
Dan Carney, Blackfeet Tribal Bear Manager. (by phone)
Bob Henderson, MTFWP Wildlife Biologist. (by phone)

Bibliography


Prodgers, Jeannette. The Only Good Bear is a Dead Bear. Two Dot, MT: Falcon Publishing, 1997.


Appendix 1. Regional Bear Hunting Regulations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Province</th>
<th>Spring Season</th>
<th>Hounds legal</th>
<th>Baiting legal</th>
<th>Fall Season</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Apr. 1-June 15</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sept.-Nov. 30</td>
</tr>
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<td>Apr. 1-May 31</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Aug. 15-Dec. 10</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Apr. 15-June 15</td>
<td>No</td>
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Map 1. Yellowstone to Yukon Study Area.

Map created on the Internet at: http://www.y2y.net/landuse/default.asp, using the Land Use Mapping and Analysis (LUMA) in the Yellowstone to Yukon Ecoregion software.
Illustrations


Black Bear killed in the Swan Valley, 2002 By author.


Skinning a Black Bear, Swan Valley, Montana. By author

Engraving from a painting by Karl Bodmer of a grizzly bear.

Savage Arms. 1950’s Poster (corrugated paper on cardboard), 54" x 19", "It's Hunting Time"