POINTS WEST

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The Buffalo Bill Historical Center is a private, non-profit educational institution dedicated to preserving and interpreting the cultural history of the American West. Founded in 1917, the Historical Center is home to the Buffalo Bill Museum, Cody Firearms Museum, Plains Indian Museum, Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Draper Museum of Natural History and McCracken Research Library.

www.bbhc.org

Cover: The alpine majesty of the Beartooth mountains photographed from above Twin Lakes by C. R. Preston.

Calendar OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Illustration by
Barbara Harmon

APRIL 5–7 **20TH ANNUAL COWBOY SONGS AND RANGE BALLADS.**

11 ***MOUNTAIN-SPIRIT-FAMILY: THE ARTS AND CULTURE OF THE UTE INDIANS,*** Patrons Preview. 5-7 p.m.

12 ***MOUNTAIN-SPIRIT-FAMILY: THE ARTS AND CULTURE OF THE UTE INDIANS*** exhibition opens.

26 **Fourth Friday.** 5-7 p.m. (Free)

MAY 5 **SPRING OPEN HOUSE.** 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Free)

14 **NATURAL HISTORY LUNCHTIME EXPEDITIONS.** 12:15 p.m. (Free)

17–18 ***ONE WEST, TWO MYTHS: COMPARING CANADIAN AND AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES***

18 **BBHC MEMBERS TRAIL RIDE.** Dead Indian Trail.

24 ***THE FULL CIRCLE: PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE AMERICAN WEST*** by Gus Foster. Patrons Preview. 5-7 p.m.

JUNE 3–28 **LAROM SUMMER INSTITUTE IN WESTERN AMERICAN STUDIES,** ***EXPLORING THE WORLD OF LEWIS AND CLARK.***

3 **DRAPER MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY** Patrons Preview Reception. 4-7 p.m.

3 **RICHARD LEAKEY LECTURE.** Wynona Thompson Auditorium, 7-9 p.m. (Free)

4 **Draper Museum of Natural History PUBLIC OPENING CEREMONY.** 10-11 a.m.

4 **Draper Museum of Natural History OPENS TO PUBLIC.** 11a.m.-8 p.m. Day includes Natural History Fair.

5 **Draper Museum of Natural History KIDS' DAY, June 5, 12, 19, 26.**

6 **TWILIGHT TALKS, 7 p.m. June 6, 13, 20, 27.**

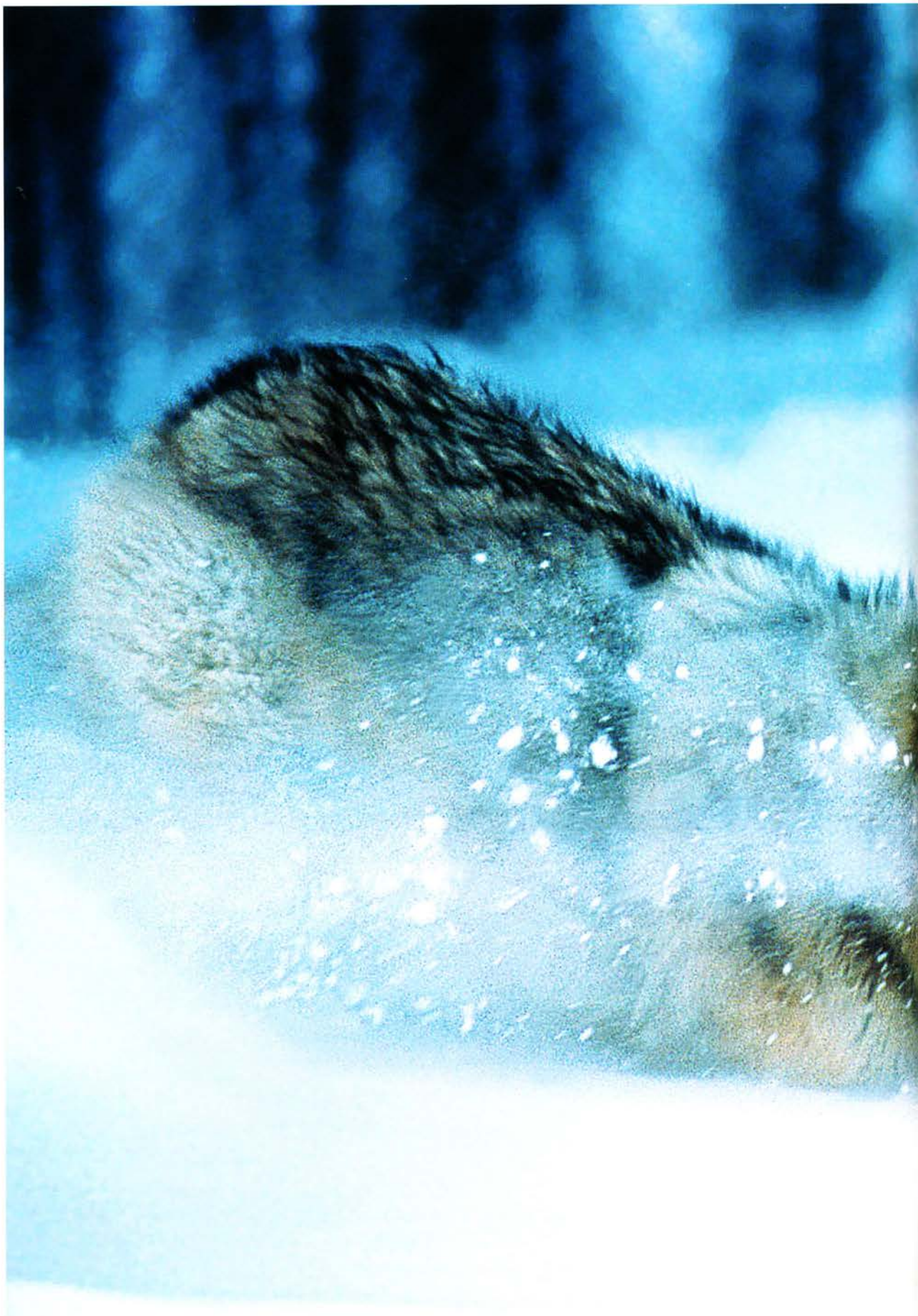
10–28 **SUMMER YOUTH ADVENTURES.**

14–16 **WINCHESTER ARMS SHOW,** Winchester Arms Collectors Association. Sweitzer Gymnasium, Cody, Wyoming.

15–16 **ANNUAL PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM POWWOW.**

15–16 **CORPORATE DAYS.** Employees and families of corporate members free.

21–23 **ANTIQUE ARMS SHOW,** Winchester Club of America. Sweitzer Gymnasium.



National Park Service Photo

Natural History?

Wally Reber
Associate Director

In their way, our collections have always catalogued the West, its character and its characters.

Through those collections, we could and often would, still can and do, weave stories of settlement and survival. With art and artifact we have added flesh to legend and fact to fiction. Each of those stories or statements was based deeply on spirited people drawn to, or already living in the West . . . and each one of those stories was influenced by the place.

Our western land has always and inevitably encouraged life and enabled death. It has allowed men to grow and crops to shrivel, animals to thrive and sunsets to speak. For many of us, the West escapes our understanding, but often helps us to better understand ourselves.

For many of us, the West escapes our understanding, but often helps us to better understand ourselves.

Can any story of the West be told in its entirety, without reference to and reverence for the land? Can we as an institution fulfill our role, our responsibility, without sharing with our constituency the story of this land and its natural history, with the same energy and intellect that we apply to the story of its men and their nature's histories?

Our institution, long before it became the Center, has always been intrigued with the possibilities and aware of the responsibilities of creating a natural history museum, a museum through which the story of the land could be eloquently told. Such a museum would also find a logical linkage within the mission that the institution had accepted for itself. To that end, in mid-century, artist Edward Grigware, presumably at the direction of the board of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association, drew up a building plan for how such a museum might look, at least on the outside.

Between then and now, much has happened to our world, our West and our institution. Some acknowledge that our world is shrinking and that the West is not what it was. We are not what we once were either. Bigger in size, with greater resources, we have assumed larger responsibilities. Our collections are better now than ever and we are focused in our concentrations. From our origins as the Buffalo Bill Museum, we have added the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Plains Indian Museum and the Cody Firearms Museum, each museum in its turn, contributing to the breadth of our collections, and immensely to our understanding of the West.

Natural Destiny!

The Bison, an icon of the American West, is a main attraction of the Greater Yellowstone Region. Photo by Sean Campbell.

The fact that we became involved in the [Seasons of the Buffalo] exhibition signaled our approach to the natural history stage.

Mountain bluebells add to the beauty of the Greater Yellowstone high country. Photo by W. J. Hartung.

As one small step in the direction of our destiny, in 1994 the Buffalo Bill Historical Center began the preliminary planning for an exhibition celebrating the buffalo. In preparation for the exhibition, the Center gathered together a team of known and renowned experts on the animal and its environment to review the themes and discuss the methodology for presentation. Those discussions involved numerous and divergent perspectives, sometimes focusing on undisputed fact, supportable science and, every now and then, wishful thinking. Most of all, the conversations became a dialogue on a subject that was near and dear to everyone in the room and everyone of the West. The result of those conversations became the raw frame of reference for the development of an exhibition on the buffalo presented in the summer of 1996.

The exhibition, titled *Seasons of the Buffalo* was a landmark installation for the Center and a benchmark for the possibilities of an interdisciplinary exhibit. As a landmark, it was recognized by the American Association of Museums in its annual exhibition awards competition. As a benchmark, it was the first time that the Center created a broad multidisciplinary exhibition, utilizing materials and ideas from each of the diverse collections of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, then supplementing them with borrowed natural history collections.

The fact that we became involved in the exhibition signaled our approach to the natural history stage. It also proved that it was possible to view natural history through the lens of the humanities. With the exhibition, we found that we could present new information about natural history, especially as we acknowledged that man and his influence was integral to our understanding of that history. It became apparent that by utilizing our collections and our special understanding of the West, then complementing them with loaned natural history materials, we could develop a natural history perspective that was not only unique in its presentation, but also unique to the Center.

In part because of that obvious success, the Historical Center began anew to examine the idea and the institutional impact of a natural history museum. The creation of a natural history presence, however it was conceived, hinged upon a fundamental understanding of the breadth of possibilities looming in front of us. Looking at natural history museums from a traditional perspective, the Center was behind the curve when it came to amassing natural history collections that would equal the diversity and significance of our existing collections.

Illustration by
Barbara Harmon

The stories embedded in the many environments of the Greater Yellowstone region are endless. Photo by C. R. Preston.

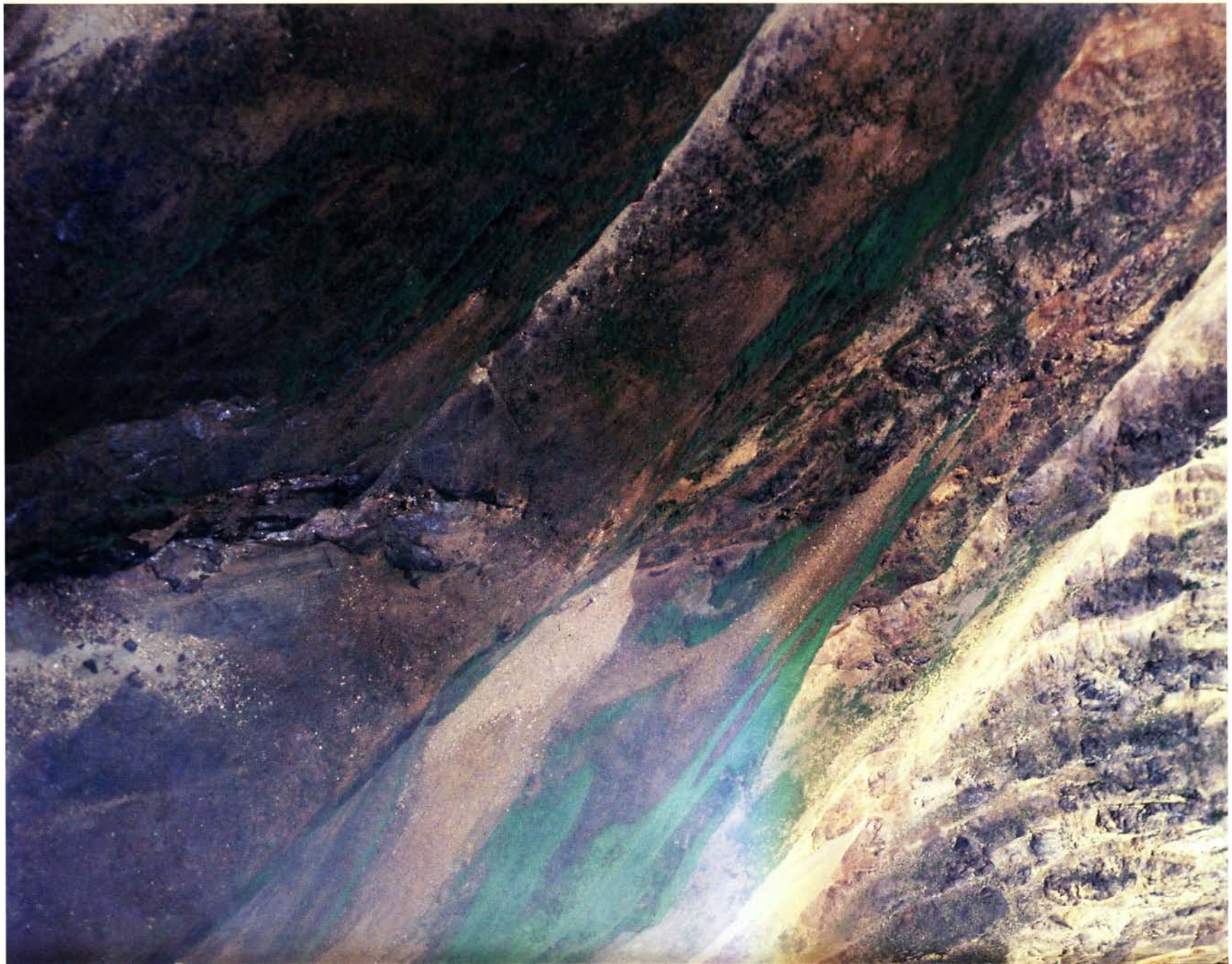
Consideration had to also be given the level of technical support that such a new and potentially different collection would demand. The added physical space, in and of itself, would present an operating and financial challenge. Finally, every support service would be expected to maintain the level of commitment and care equal to those afforded the other museums of the Center.

With the election of Senator Alan K. Simpson in 1997, as chairman of the board of the Memorial Association, and the hiring of B. Byron Price in 1996, as the new Executive Director, the Center had new leadership with new vision, and the quest for the creation of a natural history museum moved rapidly forward. With both men energized by the idea, committed to a plan, and with a significant portion of the funding guaranteed by Nancy-Carroll Draper, the project was given remarkable life. The process for developing the plans for the new museum and methods of funding the project were as uniquely different for us as the natural history idea once was.

As Byron left us last fall, he left in place the literal foundation for the Center's next great museum, by any available yardstick, a significant contribution to the community of Cody and to our broad community of museums. He left in place, also, the passion and the people to bring the museum and the ideas which it will represent to life, adding at once new relevance for the Center and remarkable, new resources for all of us so that we might achieve better understanding of ourselves and America's western land.

While *Seasons of the Buffalo* may have signaled our approach to the natural history stage, the commitment to the idea, the construction, and now the opening of the Draper Museum of Natural History confirms finally, our arrival. ■

The Greater Yellowstone region is the only place in the lower 48 United States where wild bison have existed since prehistoric times. Photo by C. R. Preston.



Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River. Photo by C. R. Preston.

Photos by C. R. Preston

The Draper Museum of Natural History:

Forging the Future with Lessons from the Past

Charles R. Preston, Ph.D., Curator
Draper Museum of Natural History

In 1998, I was handed the challenge and opportunity of a lifetime: several lifetimes really. I was invited to help design and develop a natural history museum for a new century. Now, I've been around the museum world for more than 25 years. I've worked in several different museums as an educator, interpretive writer, collections manager, curatorial assistant, research scientist, curator, administrator, and trustee. But neither I, nor any museum professional I know, has ever been presented with a more exciting challenge. The Trustees and staff of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center (BBHC) invited me to help them shape the future, and I enthusiastically accepted. In earlier articles (*Points West*, Summer 1999 and Fall 1999), I have described the evolving, multipurpose role of natural history museums and the genesis of The Draper Museum of Natural History (DMNH). Here I provide an overview of the DMNH inaugural exhibit galleries and place this new museum in the broader context of other museums past and present.

Today's museum audiences demand more than a passive, spectator experience and more than a titillating thrill ride.

The dawn of the 21st century is a period of profound transition in American museums. Not long ago, most museum exhibits were designed as shrines to objects hanging on walls or tucked behind glass. The visitor's role was to admire paintings, artifacts, or stuffed animals from afar. Audiences learned the names of objects, where the objects came from, and about the people who produced, collected, and donated them. The spaces designed to showcase objects were clean, sterile boxes that didn't distract visitors from the material on display. Museums came to be regarded by some as mausoleums, geared more to curators and an elite group of patrons and enthusiasts than to the public at large. Museum visitation began to decline.

During the last quarter of the 20th century, a new wave of museums was created to encourage visitors to participate with exhibits. The visitor experience was focused around hands-on displays and high-tech adventures designed to compete with entertainment theme parks and video arcades. These exhibit galleries enticed visitors, especially families, back through museum doors. They did not, however, always provide a satisfying learning experience. Some critics began to view these new age museums as little more than children's playpens.

Today's museum audiences demand more than a passive, spectator experience and more than a titillating thrill ride. Museums have enormous potential to improve people's lives through engaging, informative exhibits. The most successful (i.e., popular and informative) museum exhibitions I've seen provide both passive and active experiences, and season them with a healthy dose of relevance. Audiences are almost always interested in learning how what they're seeing and doing in a museum relates to their own lives.

Our challenge in designing and developing exhibits and other programming for the Draper Museum of Natural History was to incorporate the best ideas from the great museums of the past with an understanding of today's audiences. The first step was to establish a relevant, overarching theme for our exhibits. That part was easy! Staff, consultants, and DMNH advisory board members decided early on that our research, collections, educational programming, and exhibits would revolve around the relationships binding humans and nature in the Greater Yellowstone region. This was the most logical way to integrate natural science with humanities at the BBHC and focus on those areas where we could most easily achieve excellence.

National Park Service photo.

Yellowstone National Park and the mosaic of public and private lands surrounding it comprise one the earth's great treasures. At the core of this landscape is one of the last intact, temperate ecosystems in North America. With the controversial restoration of the gray wolf to Yellowstone, this region contains a full complement of native wildlife that was present in pre-Columbian times. But this region is not some pristine island frozen in time: it contains ranches, farms, bustling cities, and a growing human population. Humans have been a part of this landscape for at least ten thousand years, and have impacted it profoundly during the last two centuries. In turn, the climate, geology, plants, and animals of this region continue to profoundly affect human economies and cultures.

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks are set aside for the enjoyment of the people and to preserve the natural environment and processes within their boundaries. What happens on the lands surrounding the national parks, however, affects the environment and processes within park boundaries. Conversely, what happens inside the parks (e.g., restoration of wolves), affects the lives and livelihood of people in surrounding communities. For this reason, the Greater Yellowstone region is a lightning rod for environmental controversy and a proving ground for new ideas related to natural resources management. Indeed, the Greater Yellowstone region has come to represent the challenges presented by our paradoxical desire to embrace nature but keep it at bay. These same challenges echo throughout the American West, and in other parts of the world, such as East Africa and the Amazon Basin. The overarching theme of the DMNH thus holds relevance for a global, as well as regional, audience.

Our focus on the relationships binding humans and nature is not totally new for natural history museums, but it represents a more robust and contemporary interpretation of the topic. Most traditional natural history museums present natural history factoids in wildlife or

Federal agencies, such as the U. S. Forest Service, practice active management on public lands.

Our approach is quite different. We are presenting humans as an integral part of nature, rather than apart from nature.

Above: U. S. Forest Service employee plants seedlings — one aspect of the complex relationships between humans and nature. U. S. Forest Service photo.

Below: McCullough Peaks area near Cody. Photo by Chris Gimmeson.

geology halls, while presenting cultural history in separate vignettes. Our approach is quite different. We are presenting humans as an integral part of nature, rather than apart from nature. The conviction that both our approach and content hold national significance was confirmed when we were awarded a major grant from the National Science Foundation to help with exhibit development and production.

Our interpretive approach is content-based, rather than object-based. Instead of positioning stories around museum objects, we decided to use museum objects and other tools to help interpret compelling concepts and stories. Early in the planning process, we decided to organize our stories around the Yellowstone setting itself. We would weave natural and cultural history together on an expedition through time and space in the Greater Yellowstone region. Our Denver-based architects (Fentress, Bradburn and Associates) and New York-based exhibit designers (DMCD, Inc.) collaborated closely to create spaces and floor plans that would work together to convey the grandeur of our geographic region and the excitement and adventure of exploring it.

Pikas make hay while the sun shines during the short alpine summer. Photo by C. R. Preston.

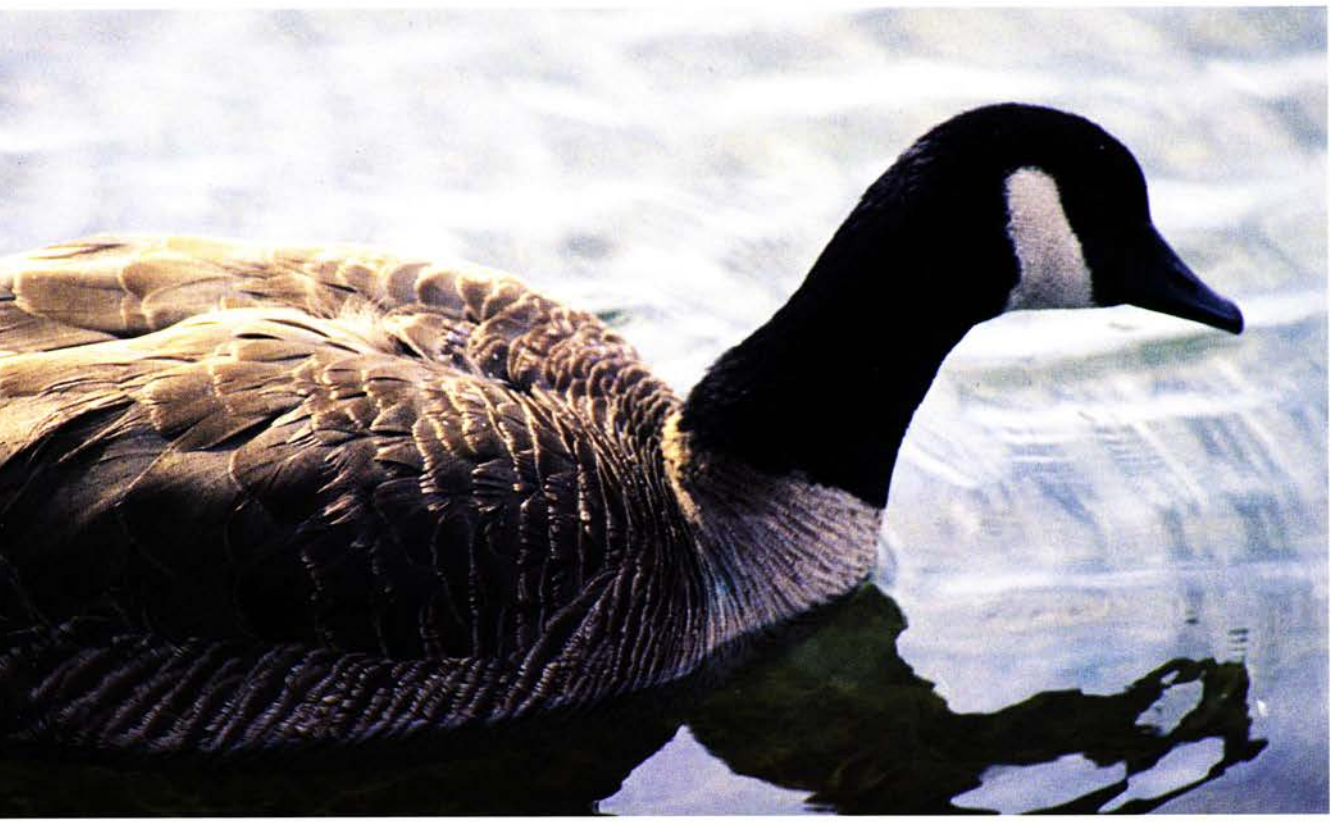
The Draper expedition transports visitor-explorers through three interconnected exhibit galleries including the *Expedition Trailhead*, *Mountains-to-Plains Trail*, and *Seasons of Discovery*. Our visitor-explorers embark on their expedition through the Draper Museum of Natural History from the *Expedition Trailhead*. The *Trailhead* provides a basic introduction to the mission and layout of the DMNH, but will also help visitors make the transition from spectators to explorers.

The *Trailhead* is occupied by two authentic, back-country, log cabins that you might encounter at a remote field station. One of these cabins is used as a naturalist's study. Our resident naturalist, B. A. Ware, may or may not be present, but our visitor-explorers are invited to look around and see how and why other people from various walks of life have explored the Greater Yellowstone region. The take-home lesson for our visitor-explorers is simple: everyone can be an explorer.

The second cabin in the *Expedition Trailhead* is a field station classroom. The class has just left for a field trip, but it is clear that the students have been learning about the dramatic geological processes that have shaped our region. Our visitor-explorers will discover a working seismograph and be able to use computer interactive stations to explore the handiwork of glaciers, volcanoes, and other forces. People will leave the cabin with the knowledge that these forces are still at work in the Greater Yellowstone region.

From the *Expedition Trailhead*, visitor-explorers will begin their journey along the *Mountains-to-Plains Trail*. The Trail winds through a grand rotunda, where visitor-explorers first encounter an alpine environment, and gradually work their way down a spiraling path through mountain forest, mountain meadow, and lowland environments. At the bottom of the grand rotunda, interpreted from an alpine overlook, is a colorful tile map of the Greater Yellowstone region. The map is thirty feet in diameter and provides a rare perspective of one of the most dramatic landscapes on Earth. The ceiling of the grand rotunda represents the magnificent embrace of the Wyoming sky.

Our visitor-explorers are immersed in each environment along the *Mountains-to-Plains Trail* with ambient sounds, theatrical lighting and scrims, varied carpet and wall color schemes, and scenic islands depicting slices of the Greater Yellowstone landscape. Each island features a recreation of a landscape (e.g., alpine boulder field, wolf den, grizzly feeding site, prairie dog colony, windmill and stock tank), boldly illustrated text rails and panels, and various other elements appropriate for the story. In contrast to traditional dioramas, visitors are not separated from scenic islands by a box of cold glass. Protective cases are used to house special sculptures and cultural artifacts, but they are designed to blend with the overall presentation.



Canada Goose. Photo by C. R. Preston

Exhibit elements include objects from the collections of each of the other museums of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, as well as material on loan from other museums. Audiences will also encounter audio and video stations, and computer interactive stations featuring extended, virtual, tours of the environment presented. It is this rich mixture of cultural and natural artifacts, together with hands-on activities, and audio-visual experiences that sets the DMNH apart from traditional natural history interpretations. Our objective is to provide both contemplative and interactive experiences that facilitate individual and social learning for diverse audiences.

Near the end of the *Mountains-to-Plains Trail*, our visitor-explorers will encounter a passageway into *Seasons of Discovery*. The visitor experience is a bit different here than in the *Expedition Trailhead* or *Mountains-to-Plains Trail*. Organized around the theme of the four seasons in Yellowstone country, *Seasons of Discovery* is filled with even more highly interactive experiences than are found in the other two galleries. Visitors can peer through microscopes and spotting scopes, try on a bison robe, or crawl into a black bear's den. This gallery includes an exploration station, where staff, teachers, docents, or naturalists-in-residence lead visitors on hands-on paths of discovery. There is also a campfire circle environment in *Seasons of Discovery*, where visitors might sometimes encounter a storyteller. If no storyteller is present, visitors can make themselves comfortable in cushioned seating areas and peruse the books, videos, and other resource materials available.

Although our approach to creating DMNH exhibits was guided by trustees, staff, and consultants, it was greatly informed by our audiences. We learned much about audience interest in natural history with earlier, temporary exhibits on bison, wild horses, and John James Audubon. We also learned

Young raccoon. Photo by C. R. Preston.

about the effectiveness of several cutting edge exhibit techniques by observing visitor response to the highly innovative and successful reinstallation of BBHC's Plains Indian Museum. In addition, we contracted an outside evaluation group, Randi Korn and Associates, to test some of our ideas and exhibit design elements with prospective regional and national audiences. We believe the modifications we made in response to this exercise have greatly improved our design.

After being examined and banded by a DMNH researcher, this western tanager is about to return to the mountain forests of the Greater Yellowstone region. Photo by C. R. Preston.

Some people view the grand opening of the Draper Museum of Natural History on June 4th, 2002, as the end of a long, challenging construction project. For me, it marks the beginning of an exciting new era. Modern museums are far more than exhibit galleries and collections, and the Draper Museum of Natural History will become an important center for original research and educational programming regarding the relationships between nature and humans. In our proposal to the National Science Foundation, we outlined our long-term plans to promote linkages between DMNH and formal education, bring natural science education programs and activities to our rural communities currently without informal science education opportunities, and improve scientific literacy among both children and adults to assist them in making informed decisions about natural science policies that have cultural implications. We will accomplish these goals through exhibit gallery presentations, on-site and outreach classroom programs, field-based tours and other programs, and a virtual explorer program through the BBHC web site. The National Science Foundation has provided funding for a 2-year natural history educator position to help us achieve these objectives.

Of course, no matter how exciting, informative, or relevant an exhibit or educational program is, it is a failure if it doesn't attract an audience. We believe that the BBHC has only begun to tap our potential regional and national audiences. In addition to increased BBHC promotional and marketing initiatives, the DMNH staff and advisory board is dedicated to aggressively promoting our new exhibits and programs through publications, public presentations, and special events.

To kick off the grand opening of the DMNH, the BBHC is planning a week-long program of events geared toward focusing attention not only on the DMNH, but on all of the museums and activities of the BBHC. Noted paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey will be on hand to help celebrate

the DMNH grand opening. The DMNH mission is to increase the appreciation and understanding of the relationships binding humans and nature in the Greater Yellowstone region. Richard Leakey has devoted much of his life to a similar mission in East Africa. Leakey's appearance here affirms the international importance of the DMNH mission, and underscores the parallel challenges and opportunities we face in understanding and conserving the inherent values of natural treasures across the globe.

Many people, including the DMNH advisory board, external content and interpretive consultants, architects, building contractors, exhibit designers and fabricators, BBHC trustees and staff have contributed to the design, development, and installation of our exhibits. The true soul of the Draper Museum of Natural History, however, is its namesake and principal benefactor, Nancy-Carroll Draper. It was her vision, her passion, and her commitment that made the Draper Museum of Natural History the first new major natural history museum of the 21st century. ■

The range of elevation in the Greater Yellowstone region supports diverse plant and animal communities and provides many challenges and opportunities for humans. Photo by C. R. Preston.

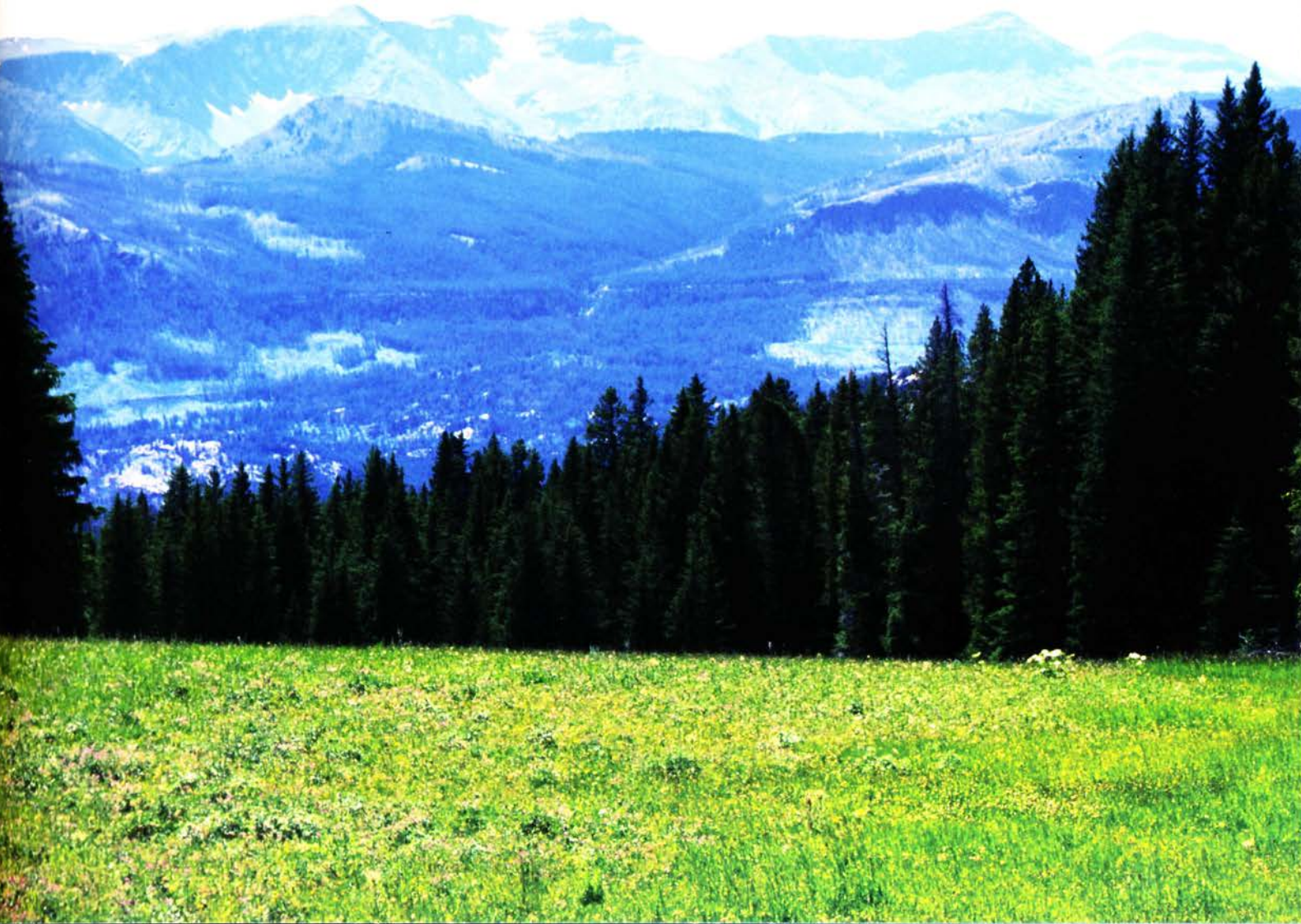


Illustration by
Barbara Harmon

Bearly Making It:

Can *Homo Sapiens* and *Ursus Arctos Horribilis* Make History and Coexist?

Valarie Hamm

"Maybe we should keep the engine running," says my friend Rick, "in case we have to make a quick getaway."

We peer through the foggy windshield half-hoping to see the outline of a grizzly bear prowling in the lingering shadows. But the only movement is that of a waking rooster in the pen beside our parked truck. He cocks his head to one side in the breaking daylight and begins to crow.

We have arrived early, even earlier than the game wardens, and we are hesitant to move deeper into the ranch. But soon the sun reveals a green government truck rolling down the lane, and we slowly follow it to an open field surrounded by cabins. In the middle of the grass sits a bear trap, and it is occupied...

Ursus arctos horribilis — the grizzly's Latin name sounds foreboding. And the sight of a grizzly bear standing on his hind legs at seven feet tall and 600 pounds appears "horribilis" indeed (although in truth, a standing grizzly is simply a curious grizzly.)

One of the largest land mammals in North America, grizzly (or brown) bears once lived as far south as Mexico and as far East as the mid-plains. But times have changed. The vast landscapes that so appealed to bears also appealed to settlers hungry for land and opportunity, and grizzlies now occupy only 2% of their original home range in the lower 48 states.

"The public lands' preeminent use must be for the native wildlife."

—Chuck Neal

"In the early part of the 20th century, there were well-organized, even government sponsored campaigns to eradicate the large predators that threatened the well-being of the livestock industries," said Mark Bruscino, a bear management officer for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. "A lot of bears died at the hands of man."

Bears can live in a variety of habitats, as long as there's enough space — female grizzlies typically need a home range of 50 to 300 square miles; males, 200 to 500. Today, grizzlies reside primarily in mountainous habitats in the lower 48, but historically they roamed riparian areas in the plains as well. And while such habitat was once in abundance, development throughout the last century caused a significant decline in available land.

Rural and recreational development, road building, energy and mineral exploration . . . all these activities moved into areas traditionally occupied by grizzlies.

By the 1970s, grizzly numbers and densities reached a critical low. Extinction appeared imminent, and biologists worried they might not only lose the grizzly but the information they derived from the bear as an "umbrella species." (Umbrella species, so named because their habitats encompass the habitats of many other species, help biologists assess the health of entire ecosystems.)

"[The grizzly bear] is a species whose habitat needs are so great that when you protect the viable populations, you are protecting the whole tapestry of the Rocky Mountains," said Chuck Neal, former Bureau of Land Management rangeland specialist. "We would all be poorer if the grizzly were to disappear."

In 1975, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) afforded grizzlies federal protection as a "threatened species" under the Endangered Species Act. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, which includes Yellowstone National Park and surrounding regions in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, was designated a target recovery zone. Twenty-five years later, the USFWS claims the grizzly population increased from a 1970s low of 200 to a current 400–600 and continues to grow 2–4% annually. Yet as both human and bear populations have increased, so too has conflict. Can man and grizzly share land and live side-by-side? The answer is still in the making.

Left: A grizzly relies on his long claws to dig up roots and berries — and to raid a cabin refrigerator.
Right: Wyoming Game and Fish Bear management officer Mark Bruscino stands over a sleeping grizzly trapped at the 7-D Ranch this fall. Photos by Valarie Hamm.

From a safe distance, Rick and I watch as the Game Wardens tranquilize the bear and remove him from the trap. Soon we join them on the grass and I am amazed at the bear's tranquility. His claws are long and sharp, but he snores softly, small bubbles blowing gently from his nose like a resting baby.

Two days earlier, this sleeping beauty (Number 153, according to his lip tattoo) broke into a Seven D Ranch cabin kitchen. He'd visited Wyoming's Sunlight Basin 15 years before and poked through the ranch's burn pit, but this time he took advantage of a quiet night to rummage through the refrigerator. As the ranch staff snacked on birthday cake in town, Number 153 dined on pork fat, strawberry jam, eggs, lunch meat, Hershey's syrup . . . then he took a package of bacon to go.

Most grizzlies can smell a human a mile away and approach unnoticed, but bears generally avoid human contact. Their primary goal is to eat, reproduce, and seek shelter and safety — not to attack hikers or campers.

"I think there's a fear of bears that's not very realistic," said Kerry Gunther, Yellowstone National Park's bear management biologist. "We've had more people murdered [in the park] than killed by bears."

"We've had more people murdered [in the park] than killed by bears."

— Kerry Gunther
YNP's bear biologist

Yellowstone National Park (YNP) has had a long-standing relationship with grizzly bears. Prior to the 1970s, grizzlies were allowed free access to park garbage dump sites; park officials even set up bleachers for spectators. When the dumps finally closed, officials spent the next three years relocating and removing more than 30 bears accustomed to eating a garbage diet. Now the park removes a bear infrequently, about once every three to five years.

"Yellowstone National Park is about a third of the recovery zone," said Gunther, "but we account for less than ten percent of the human-bear conflicts." Gunther credits the park's stringent sanitation programs for the success — backcountry camps have food storage poles, park garbage is picked up twice daily and all sewage treatment plants are fenced. But for those bear management officials working outside the park and among settled areas, coping with increasing numbers of bears is proving more difficult.

"Bear-proof dumpsters in rural subdivisions are a good thing, but it's still not addressing the entire issue — that bears and humans don't live well together," explained Bruscino. In 2001 alone, there were 175 reported human-grizzly conflicts in the Wyoming portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. (A human-grizzly conflict incident can range in definition from property damage to food rewards to cattle damage or human injury). Human-grizzly conflicts often result in the trapping, tagging and relocation of a nuisance bear. Those animals that injure humans, appear especially threatening or return repeatedly after relocation are sent to zoos or euthanized — "removed."

"I truly believe they don't really want to interact with people," said Bruscino. "I think they view humans as other bears—something they'd rather not contend with." Yet in increasingly cramped quarters, interaction is inevitable. And since bears are smart enough

to know that sheep and cows make a bigger meal than other lower-calorie sources, like berries or roots, interaction between grizzlies and livestock is becoming more common.

"The bear himself is trying to earn a living but at times his trying to earn a living conflicts with my trying to earn a living," said Albert Sommers, a rancher in Pinedale, Wyoming. As president of the Upper Green River Cattlemen Association, Sommers has noticed an increase in the number of bear attacks on his members' livestock. Association members have also seen more grizzlies on their Forest Service allotments, explained Sommers, when "five or six years ago, it was really uncommon."

Sommers' own dead or missing calf losses skyrocketed during the 90s, rising from an average 1990-94 of 1.6% to a high of 5.3% in 1999 before finally receding to a more manageable 2.2%. Ranchers receive compensation for grizzly depredation of livestock, but Sommers says it isn't enough if the mortality rate is too high. Still, Sommers believes bears and ranchers can co-exist "as long as you remove and relocate problem bears and as long as you're not relocating them somewhere where they'll become someone else's problem."

"The Game and Fish is absolutely committed to long term bear recovery. How we accomplish that is a topic of debate."

— Mark Bruscino
Wyoming Game and Fish
bear management officer

As bears spread beyond the recovery zone, and people move closer to the edges of YNP, the need for management actions increase. Unfortunately, bear management — from relocation, to removal, to killing to reparation for damages to livestock — is expensive and timely. And with an additional 23 incidents occurring each year in Western Wyoming, bear management officials are struggling to keep up.

"Right now we're stretched to the max. There has been an increase in conflicts, not because we're not doing a good job, but because there are more bears and more people," said Bruscino. "Management of nuisance bears can be very expensive, which is something the public has to support."

It is snowing, and my toes are chattering in my boots. We help the game wardens load the sleeping bear back into the trap. He is heavy — it takes four of us to get him loaded — and groans quietly when lifted. I am surprised he has not already awakened and thrashed about in fear and rage because he is captured, because his hunger overcame caution and the scent of a rotten deer leg lured him into a box with no exit.

I watch the truck and occupied trap rattle off down the lane. They don't know what they're going to do with him.

The growth of the grizzly population and an increasing need for management are now leading some to wonder if the time has come to remove the brown bear from the Endangered Species List.

Mark Bruscino searches for a lip tattoo identification number on a nuisance bear. Photo by Valarie Hamm.

"The grizzly bear isn't endangered," said Sommers. "There are lots of bears in Alaska, and the Yellowstone population has recovered."

The USFWS, along with Montana, Wyoming and Idaho, is about to release a revised regional conservation strategy to be employed upon the grizzly's possible delisting. Although still in draft form, the plan calls for limited hunting and would allow more state discretion in management decisions. Yet not everyone agrees that the bears are ready for delisting.

"If we are to achieve our goal of a self-sustaining, truly recovered grizzly bear population across the U.S. Northern Rockies, there must be a dramatic increase in occupied habitat," wrote Neal in a May 2001 letter to Wyoming Game and Fish Commission. According to Neal, a larger bear population would ensure that the species could cope with various genetic, demographic, environmental and catastrophic uncertainties. Reintroducing bears to certain areas — like the Bitterroot Ecosystem in Montana and Idaho and unoccupied habitat south of Yellowstone Country — would create a broader gene pool and help bears reach a necessary minimum of 2000.

But in order to create such a gene pool, Neal says the remaining public lands must remain roadless. And if it comes to a choice between maintaining domestic livestock or providing habitat for native wildlife, domestic use has got to go.

"The public lands preeminent use must be for the native wildlife," Neal said. But such an approach doesn't sit well with ranchers like Sommers. Sommers' family grazed cattle on public lands even before many of the current state and federal agencies were established.

"Surely the bear was here before we were, but as long as we take care of the land, we have a right to exist there," said Sommers. "And as far as I know, the National Forest is supposedly still managed under the multi-use concept."

Regardless, delisting isn't likely to happen too soon. The conservation plan must be completed and deemed adequate for continued grizzly survival. The plan's authors also expect litigation from groups and individuals not satisfied with the decision to delist, litigation that could prolong any changes to current grizzly policy.

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Yet despite all the controversy, a shared sense of appreciation and awe for the grizzlies remains untainted. Bears have intrigued explorers, tourists and scientists for hundreds of years, and there's no sign that our fascination is now dwindling. Millions of Yellowstone tourists continue to visit the national park each year, many with the hope of spying a grizzly. Researchers are also investigating why and how bears avoid bone loss during long periods of hibernation. If they find the answer, osteoporosis may become a thing of the past.

But what is perhaps more important than scientific discoveries or a grizzly sighting in the national park, is what the bears tell us about mankind, says Gunther — and "everyone's desire for their own five acres of paradise."

Bear Number 153 sleeps deeply after being trapped and tranquilized. Photo by Valarie Hamm.

I learned later that Number 153 was too skinny, too hungry . . . that he was so old and his teeth so ground down that he was struggling, unsuccessfully, to obtain the calories necessary for a long winter hibernation. Where there should have been six inches of fat there was less than one. He was starving and would have returned again and again to the ranch.

"Given the fact that he had nowhere to go but down, we decided to euthanize him," Bruscino told me. "It's the hardest part of my job, but it's also a necessary management action."

So the bear rests, I tell myself. At least his last supper was a good one. ■

Valarie Hamm is a freelance writer and photographer living in Cody, Wyoming. She is also an exhibits intern at the Draper Museum of Natural History.

The grizzly bear is the sheer essence of wildness — a condition that has ceased to exist in most of the American West. Photo by C. R. Preston.

A major part of the grizzly bear diet, the Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout is one of several subspecies found in western waters. Illustration by Brian Maebius.

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