

## Press Advisory

### Dr. David Mattson Provides an Alternative Perspective on the Past, Present and Future of Grizzly Bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem in “Heart of the Grizzly Bear Nation”

Video now publicly available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pfIBnZtjTw>

In a talk entitled “Heart of the Grizzly Bear Nation,” Dr. David Mattson offers both a critique of how government officials have managed and researched grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), and an alternative vision of robust recovery for this bear population.

Government spokespeople would have us believe that the NCDE grizzly bear population continues to grow at a rapid pace, fueling dramatic increases in distribution, and that they know with remarkable precision how many bears there are.

In fact, Dr. Mattson explains, we know very little about the current size and trajectory of this bear population. Moreover, episodes of rapid increase in distribution have more plausibly been driven by changes in habitat and diet than by increases in bear numbers.

Looking to the future, climate warming, increasing human populations, and loss of critical bear foods will represent major conservation challenges. Yet there is ample habitat not only capable of sustaining additional grizzlies, but also positioned to reconnect with Yellowstone and to allow colonization of central Idaho’s vast wildlands by NCDE grizzly bears.

With more tolerance and deployment of proven tools that foster coexistence, Dr. Mattson believes we could sustain ourselves and a regional inter-connected population of grizzly bears large enough to withstand the rigors and uncertainties of a rapidly changing world, and in which NCDE grizzlies are the figurative Heart of the Grizzly Bear Nation.

Dr. Mattson’s hour-long talk was presented in Missoula on December 6, 2018, to an audience of grizzly bear scientists and advocates. It was recorded by Missoula Community Access Television and can also be viewed on MCAT’s web site at: <http://69.144.69.99/CablecastPublicSite/show/9778?channel=1>

An annotated, timestamp index to highlights from Dr. Mattson’s talk is attached.

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## **Annotated Video Timestamp Index to “Heart of the Grizzly Bear Nation” Highlights**

- 00:00 Introductory remarks.
- 02:02 The government’s NCDE recovery narrative is overly simplistic.
- 04:56 A roadmap to the presentation and alternative explanation of NCDE dynamics.
- 06:23 Arrivals and Departures - historic grizzly bear distribution and genetics. Mid-latitude Canadian and Lower-48 grizzly bears are of the most ancient lineage and extinct almost everywhere else in the world. Historic grizzly distribution in Lower-48 and how it has been greatly reduced.
- 10:19 Grizzly bear diet - ancestral and current diets, losses of some food sources like salmon and bison, with bison being replaced by cattle. The gradient of grizzly bear consumption of meat v. vegetation in the NCDE.
- 14:25 Human-grizzly bear conflict regimes map quite closely onto dietary regimes. 89% of all deaths of radio-tracked grizzlies in the NCDE were caused by humans. West-side v. East-side NCDE diets compared to conflict and mortality regimes.
- 18:22 Ecological traps: where productive habitats draw bears into conflicts, mortality.
- 19:35 Blackfoot Challenge practices have reduced conflicts by over 90%, in an area important to bears dispersing south.
- 22:00 West-side NCDE human densities are three times those on East-side. Bear mortality due to highway vehicles, attractants at human residences, and activities in roaded industrial/timber lands - including poaching due to road access.
- 28:00 Demography of NCDE grizzly bear population and population trends.
- 30:20 Berry famines matter and affect population trend.
- 34:00 Rick Mace happened to monitor bears during a period of reduced bear mortality. His estimated population increase of 3.1% per year cannot be extrapolated into the future. Doing so, as was also done with Cecily Costello’s subsequent estimate of a 2.1% annual population increase, results in highly uncertain population estimates.
- 38:58 If the NCDE population was increasing by 3.1% annually from 2004 - 2009 per Mace and taking into account Costello’s lower growth rate of 2.1% including the same time period, Dr. Mattson estimates the population was growing only at 1.5% annually from 2009 - 2014. Projecting forward using those rates of change, he estimates the population decreased by 1.7% annually from 2014 - 2018.
- 40:00 We don’t really know how many grizzly bears are in the NCDE and the actual rate at which the population is changing. This makes it impossible to have a reliable basis upon which to manage grizzly bear mortality and harvest/hunting levels.

40:30 Source-sink population structure and dynamics - These include trophy-hunting effects that still persist years after such hunting was stopped.

42:08 Source areas subsidize the sink area populations with the exception of the Blackfoot Challenge area, which serves as an example of how bears need not die at a rate faster than they are being born in agricultural areas.

43:50 Anything that impedes the flow of bears from a source area to a sink area, such as highways and railroads, matters.

44:48 Distribution - During a time when the NCDE population increased by 10%, its distribution increased by 33%. The bear population could not have driven that large an increase in the distribution. The likely causes of the increase in outward distribution were the berry famine in the northwest and the rapid decline in whitebark pine, both foods that draw bears back inward to the mountains.

48:20 While wildfires are in the long term good for bear habitat, recent increases in acreage burned by wildfires results in increased acreage less useful to bears for the twenty years it takes for them to become productive again. A perhaps more reliable explanation for the increase in bear distribution eastward is fewer mule deer and more cattle resulting in a dietary switch in meat sources for bears.

53:38 The government consistently understates the importance of bear habitat and diet in explaining the dynamics of demography and distribution in this system.

54:20 The Future - Climate warming will increase temperatures, which will more than offset any increases in precipitation. This will increase berry famines, decrease cattle stocking levels, etc. - with extirpations of some berry species. Human densities and residences will increase, especially on the west side.

57:08 How many bears are enough? Dr. Mattson shows a graph of the historic decline in bear numbers compared to the scant recent increase being called "recovery." We need nearly 9,000 bears for a "minimum viable population." The estimated 900 bears currently in the NCDE is inadequate. We can have 9,000 bears if we connect the NCDE with Canada, Yellowstone, the Selway-Bitterroot, Cabinet-Yaak, and Selkirks.

1:00:20 If one wants to have vigorous arteries connecting these areas, we need a vigorous Heart of the Grizzly Bear Nation. Rather than at this point in time talking about removing ESA protections from grizzly bears and instituting trophy hunts to limit the number and distribution of bears, we need to be talking instead about replicating what is being done in the Blackfoot Challenge and the High Divide areas. We need more restoration, recovery and coexistence. We can do it.

1:01:20 We need to tell ourselves different stories. Rather than stories of death, domination, violence, intolerance, and fear, we need to tell ourselves stories of tolerance, compassion, accommodation, and relatedness to attain this vision.

1:02:02 End of talk, beginning of questions and answers, ending at 1:33:55.