

TETON STEWARDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION



THE LEGACY OF 399:

A GRIZZLY'S LIFE AND THE FUTURE OF BEAR CONSERVATION IN THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE

hat is it about grizzly bears that evokes human emotion, inspires our imagination, and beckons us in hopes of a fleeting glimpse?

Maybe it is the resiliency of a species in a world of change or the adaptability of an animal to overcome whatever obstacles lie within its environment. Maybe it is simply respect for an apex predator who reminds us that there is always something larger than ourselves.

While grizzly bears have roamed the region we now call the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for centuries, human activities associated with pioneer settlement haven't always

made it easy. By the early 1900s, grizzlies had been extirpated across most of their historic range in the western United States. One of these isolated populations persisted in the core of Yellowstone National Park. However, that's where the story makes a dramatic transition. In the decades since Yellowstone's grizzly bears were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975, an overwhelming conservation success

story has followed. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of biologists, public lands managers, local communities, private landowners, recreationists, and so many others, over 1,000 grizzly bears roam the Greater Yellowstone today.

While it is now common to see a grizzly bear anywhere within Grand Teton National Park, this wasn't true all that long ago. Grizzlies began recolonizing Grand Teton in the 1990s as individual bears dispersed from Yellowstone and

established home ranges farther south. Scientists with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team monitored the growing population by capturing a representative sample of bears and fitting them with radio collars. Like each of us, every bear has an incredible story—a collection of triumphs and losses, lessons learned, and places explored. For many bears with home ranges deep in the wilderness, these stories may never be known by us. Yet, for a myriad of reasons, the 399th grizzly bear captured and collared in the Greater

Yellowstone offered countless people from around the world a glimpse into the life of a wild ursid.

While much remains unknown about grizzly bear 399's early life, she is believed to have been born in 1996. Over the next twenty-eight years, she would give birth to at least eighteen cubs before she died in the fall of 2024. Grizzly 399 didn't become special just because she produced all of these cubs. She became renowned be-

cause she raised her offspring in areas visible from roadways in Grand Teton National Park, which inspired visitors who had the chance to observe her in her native habitat and learn her story. There were certainly high points during 399's time in the park: a cub swap with her daughter from a previous litter; emerging with a rare four-cub litter during the COVID pandemic; and becoming the oldest known grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone to successfully give birth to a cub. Grizzly 399 also gave us insight into the challenges a wild bear faces





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while making a living in a landscape shared with humans. Of the eighteen known cubs she produced, eleven are confirmed mortalities as of May 2025, with the leading cause of death being human-related (e.g. vehicle strikes or management removals after conflicts). In the later years of her life, grizzly 399 was documented traveling well south of park boundaries, illustrating the critical importance of ecosystem connectivity across boundaries. Even a national park like Grand Teton is not large enough to wholly encompass the home range of grizzly bears, who need vast and diverse habitats to access seasonal foods, raise cubs, find mates, and prepare winter dens. For wide-ranging species like grizzlies who don't recognize lines on a map, collaboration by land managers and landowners across jurisdictions is crucial.

This is the next chapter in the story. Partnerships like Bear Wise Jackson Hole, a collaboration between Wyoming Game and Fish, Grand Teton National Park, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Teton County, and the Town of Jackson, are essential to advancing bear conservation at an ecosystem level. But agencies can only do so much. We need everyone's help—whether you've lived in Jackson Hole for decades, visit Grand Teton for just a day, or simply care about wild bears and wild places. There is still more work we can do to protect bears by investing in bear-resistant infrastructure, working with our neighbors to



create bear-wise communities, providing bears the space they need to move across the landscape unimpeded, and recreating safely in bear habitat to avoid human-bear conflicts.

Community stewardship is necessary for coexistence with bears throughout the Greater Yellowstone—and in other ecosystems with robust bear populations—and this doesn't end with grizzly 399. We can all honor her legacy by ensuring generations of her progeny continue to thrive on this landscape and roam freely, just as she did. In this way, we encourage people to channel their interest, care, and enthusiasm for grizzly 399 into tangible actions to support bear populations so they can persist into the future. Each of us has a role in the continued success story of grizzly bear conservation. Working together, we can keep bears wild and people safe, so that future generations can marvel at these incredible animals, too.

This article was written by Grand Teton National Park Bear Biologist Justin Schwabedissen.

GRIZZLY 399 TIMELINE

1996: BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN BORN

2001: First collared for research monitoring by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team

2004: 1 cub-of-the-year, which was lost (likely natural causes)

2006: 3 cubs-of-the-year

2007: Involved in a surprise/defensive mauling near Jackson Lake Lodge

2008: Successfully weaned 3 offspring

2011: 3 cubs-of-the-year; one of which was adopted by grizzly 610

2012: Separated early from the 2 remaining yearlings

2013: 3 cubs-of-the-year; one of which was lost (likely natural causes)

2015: Successfully weaned 2 offspring

2016: 1 cub-of-the-year, which was lost (vehicle strike)

2017: 2 cubs-of-the-year

2019: Successfully weaned 2 offspring

2020: 4 cubs-of-the-year; documented traveling south of Highway 22 in Jackson, WY for the first time

2021: Traveled through the town of Jackson; interagency response to conflict behavior involving food rewards

2022: Successfully weaned 4 offspring

2023: 1 cub-of-the-year

October 22, 2024: Died from a vehicle strike; remaining yearling assumed to be alive



2006 Cubs



2016 Cul



2020 Cubs



2023 Cul



ADVANCING BEAR CONSERVATION IN GRAND TETON

Grizzly 399 captivated the world with her resilience and grace, becoming a symbol of wildness in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. To honor her legacy, Grand Teton National Park Foundation has established the 399 MEMORIAL FUND, a permanent fund that we aim to endow, dedicated to ensuring a future where bears and people can coexist. This initiative supports:

- Bear Conservation: Funding ongoing research and bear-resistant infrastructure throughout Grand Teton National Park, ensuring grizzlies continue to thrive.
- Wildlife Brigade: Supporting a team of staff and volunteers who
 manage wildlife viewing opportunities, educate visitors about bears,
 and respond to wildlife-related incidents, promoting ethical wildlife
 viewing and safety.
- Bear Wise Jackson Hole: Collaborating with local agencies and communities to provide resources and education aimed at preventing conflicts between humans and bears in the Jackson Hole region.

By contributing to the **399 MEMORIAL FUND**, you can help continue the work that conserves bears like 399 in Grand Teton and throughout the Greater Yellowstone. Together, we can ensure that her legacy inspires future generations to protect and cherish these magnificent creatures. Over time, our goal is to have this fund become an endowment to honor 399 in perpetuity. Scan the code to learn more and donate today.

THANK YOU!

Message from President LESLIE MATTSON



s summer unfolds in Grand Teton, I continue to reflect on our work to conserve the park's iconic landscape.

At the end of 2024, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, in partnership with the Department of the Interior, completed the purchase and permanent protection of the Kelly parcel—640 acres of irreplaceable wildlife habitat within park boundaries. This square mile serves as a vital corridor for migrating pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and other species that rely on Grand Teton's abundant habitat to raise their young and survive the seasons.

Without the commitment of our incredible partners and generous supporters, this parcel could have faced development, jeopardizing one of the park's most important migration routes. Instead, thanks to you, wildlife continues to roam freely in this key area—a lasting victory for conservation.

With the addition of the Kelly parcel, the Foundation has now helped add a total of 1,281 acres to Grand Teton National Park. This includes the 640-acre Antelope Flats parcel in 2016 and a one-acre inholding on Mormon Row in 2018. Together, these achievements reflect the same vision that inspired John D. Rockefeller, Jr. more than

a century ago—a determination to protect the Jackson Hole valley for wildlife and the enjoyment of future generations.

Today, that vision continues, and Grand Teton National Park Foundation remains focused on our mission and what we have always done—preserving and enhancing Grand Teton National Park to ensure it thrives well beyond our lifetime. Across the park, our programs and projects are making a visible impact: from Wildlife Brigade volunteers helping visitors view animals safely and youth crews maintaining trails, to ecologists restoring native sagebrush habitat and hydrologists studying the Snake River. This is your support in action.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to Grand Teton. With your help, we are ensuring this extraordinary place remains wild, now and into the future.

Leslie Mattson

President

GRATITUDE FOR OUR COLLEAGUES

This past spring, we said farewell to two esteemed colleagues—Wayne Turner and Mary Patno.

Wayne is the new CEO of Teton Science Schools, a role that aligns perfectly with his passion and experience. We look forward to continuing to work with him in our collaborative efforts to engage young people in Grand Teton. After nearly two decades at the Foundation, Mary retired from her position as our accounting director. We are grateful for her years of dedication to our mission and wish her all the best in this next chapter!



REIMAGINING TAGGART LAKE: A TRAILHEAD & BACKCOUNTRY EXPERIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

Each year, more than 300,000 visitors begin their Grand Teton adventure at the Taggart Lake Trailhead—drawn by its sweeping views, family-friendly terrain, and proximity to the Teton Range.

As one of the park's most popular destinations, it offers easy access to a vast network of backcountry trails. The popularity of the area has resulted in strain on infrastructure, from trail erosion and parking congestion to visitor experience challenges.

Grand Teton National Park Foundation and Grand Teton National Park are working together on a transformative effort: *Reimagining Taggart Lake*. This multi-year initiative is renewing the trailhead and trail system to create a more welcoming, accessible, and sustainable experience for all who visit.

DESIGNING FOR ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

At the heart of the project is a vision to preserve what makes Taggart Lake special while renewing how people interact with the landscape. Updates will include an expanded parking area, a redesigned trailhead plaza, enhanced wayfinding, and designated viewing areas along the trail and lakeshore to better protect sensitive habitats. These improvements aim to reduce congestion, guide visitors responsibly, and support the long-term health of the surrounding ecosystem.

Importantly, accessibility is a core priority. The trail to Taggart Lake is being evaluated and updated using universal accessible design standards to better serve people of all abilities. Dovetail Trail Consulting, a firm specializing in accessibility, has been working with the park since 2024 to identify areas where slight modifications can make the trail more navigable for those who use mobility devices.

"What makes Taggart unique is that the natural layout of the trail is relatively close to being adaptive-ready. With targeted improvements—such as modifications to obstacles like rocks, water bars, and narrow sections—a truly inclusive experience will be created," Joe Stone, Dovetail Trail Consulting coowner, said. "These adjustments would allow individuals with mobility disabilities to enjoy the trail and the surrounding beauty on equal footing as those without disabilities, ensuring people who have historically never had this opportunity can explore more of Grand Teton National Park." Joe, along with his Dovetail co-owner Quinn Brett, helped assess the trail first-hand using their mobility devices.













Photos: Existing conditions at Taggart Lake do not meet the needs of all park visitors. Sketch: The new Taggart Creek bridge will provide opportunities for people of all abilities to enjoy a rushing creek with stunning mountain views.

Dovetail's work is not only improving Taggart Lake, but also informing training for Grand Teton's trail crew and the Foundation's Youth Conservation Program, helping to shape the future of inclusive trail design across Grand Teton National Park.

NEW BRIDGE, ENHANCED VIEWS

Visitors to Taggart Lake this summer will likely notice the start of on-the-ground changes. Trail crews began construction on a new bridge across Taggart Creek last fall, replacing the previous structure less than a mile from the trailhead. This new bridge will be accessible for all users and include thoughtfully designed viewing and turnaround areas. With intentional rest spots and shade, it will offer a beautiful spot to pause and enjoy the sound of the creek and the iconic view of the Grand Teton.

Also happening this year, Lower Valley Energy will bury the overhead power lines that currently cross the trail just past the parking lot. This effort, planned to be minimally disruptive to visitors by occurring in early summer and fall, will improve the visual experience and restore a more natural feel to the area.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The final stages of planning for the trailhead area are under-

way. After collecting public input in 2024, the park is evaluating alternatives for the location of the new parking area. The goal is to reduce roadside parking, better accommodate demand, and minimize impact on the landscape. Once the site is selected, teams will finalize designs for the trailhead, pedestrian plaza, and trail alignment to the Taggart Creek bridge.

Work will continue in both the frontcountry and backcountry over the next several seasons, with each step moving the project closer to a trailhead and visitor experience that reflects the natural beauty, thoughtful design, and welcoming spirit of Grand Teton National Park.

WHY NOW?

The Foundation has raised more than \$7.1 million toward our goal, which will leverage up to \$4 million in federal funding. As visitation continues to grow, the time to invest in Taggart Lake is now. With your support, we can protect this iconic destination, welcome a broader community of visitors, and inspire a deeper connection to the natural world. Thank you for making this legacy project possible.

To learn more about Reimagining Taggart Lake, visit gtnpf.org or call 307-732-0629. Thank you!





ENDOWMENT ESTABLISHED TO SUPPORT TRIBAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

For Indigenous communities, the land is more than a physical place—it is a vital connection to culture, language, spirituality, and identity. In Grand Teton National Park, the importance of this connection is reflected in a continued commitment to deepening relationships with tribal nations and creating opportunities for Native youth to experience their ancestral homelands.

Since 2016, Grand Teton National Park Foundation has supported programs that engage Native youth with the park through outdoor experiences, cultural learning, and career development. These efforts are informed by the needs and interests of tribal communities and are grounded in collaboration with Grand Teton.

This work recently reached a meaningful milestone with the establishment of the *Original Stewards Endowment: The Fund to Support Tribal Youth Engagement in Grand Teton National Park.* This permanent fund was made possible by longtime Foundation friend and supporter, Bill Hudson.

The endowment will provide enduring support for tribal youth programming in the park and will help ensure that Indigenous young people have opportunities to connect with the land of their ancestors—land that continues to hold deep cultural and spiritual significance. In addition to sustaining existing programs, the fund will allow for growth, innovation, and long-term vision in this important area of youth engagement.

"My time spent in Grand Teton has been more important in giving me a sense of being at one with myself and the land than all of the time that I spent living and working elsewhere during my life," Bill said. "As I reflect on what this personal connection to the land has meant to me, I am overcome by a sense of responsibility to ensure the next generation, specifically those with less access to opportunities, has the same chance to experience this place."

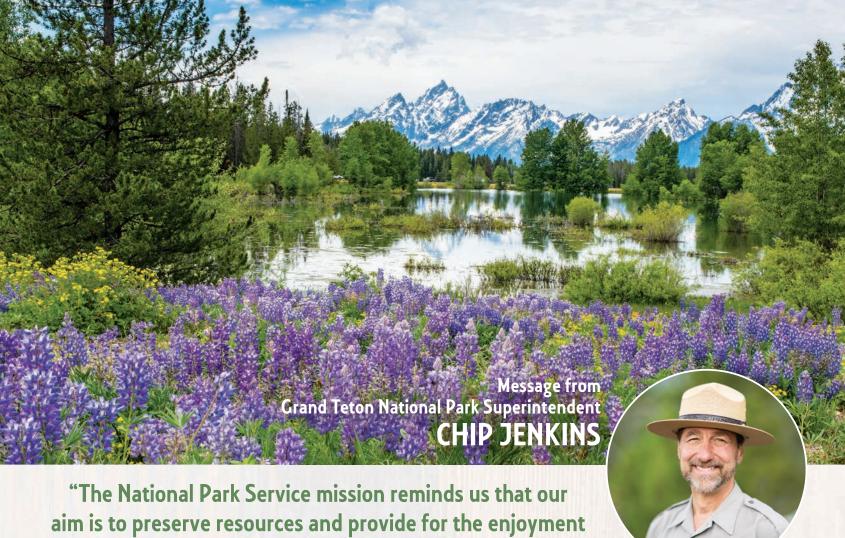
More than two dozen tribes have ancestral ties to the Teton land-scape. Yet, the majority of youth from these communities have never had the opportunity to visit the park. With philanthropic support, Grand Teton's tribal youth initiative is helping change that narrative—creating inclusive, educational, and memorable experiences for Native youth.

Current tribal youth efforts include Indigenous Ground Leaders, which brings Native teens to the park for immersive, week-long cultural and outdoor experiences; a tribal community engagement fellow, who builds relationships with Indigenous communities and supports programming across the region; and ongoing work to develop additional initiatives that reflect the priorities and values of affiliated tribes.

"We are only recently coming to truly understand and respect the example set by our Native American brethren in their stewardship of the land they so depended on and were connected to," Bill said. "In helping to start the *Original Stewards Endowment*, I hope that it will become a vehicle for providing Native youth an experience that will connect them with the land and their ancestral heritage, and provide a foundation and springboard for their future success and happiness as adults, proud of their Native heritage wherever their career paths may take them."

The Foundation is honored to receive this visionary gift. The *Original Stewards Endowment* will have a lasting impact on Indigenous youth and their connections to Grand Teton, ensuring that programs continue to grow and evolve for generations.

The Foundation welcomes additional contributions to the Original Stewards Endowment. Contact Dani Bahnsen at 307-732-0629 or dani@gtnpf.org to learn more. Thank you!



of these places now and for future generations."

Lupine, sticky geranium, and arrowleaf balsamroot are showing their colors across the valley floor while the snow is slowly melting up the Teton Range, giving way to fireweed, columbine, and alpine forget-menot in the higher elevation. Elk, pronghorn, and other ungulates have followed the great green wave to their summer homes along migration corridors. Routes that you have helped protect. Bears are active across the park, ospreys are hunting along the lakes and rivers, and American pikas have already started haystacking in preparation for the coming winter. Families and visitors of all ages have arrived and are greeted by seasonal park rangers, eager to present the kids with earned Junior Ranger badges.

Amidst all this activity, it's important to reflect on the core of why park staff are here and what calls us to continue to do this work. The National Park Service mission reminds us that our aim is to preserve resources and provide for the enjoyment of these places now and for future generations.

Partnerships have always been essential to this mission. It is as true today as it was ninety-five years ago, when the park was first envisioned by the community who loved it then as much as we all do now. We cannot do this work alone, and we are deeply grateful for everyone who cares for this place as much as we do.

In this time of change, the best way to help us protect this special landscape is by sharing your love for it with friends and family. Come visit. Take a hike up

Cascade Canyon, enjoy a picnic on the shores of Jackson Lake, or float along the Snake River. Slow down and marvel at the bison in Elk Ranch Flats and at the persistence of the people who call this place home. Maybe you will hear a wolf from one of the park's packs. Help your loved ones understand why this place holds special meaning to you and demonstrate what it takes to care for it. Model proper food storage, avoid leaving backpacks unattended, maintain a safe distance from wildlife, and help your friends and family appreciate this place responsibly.

We are excited to have you visit soon. The team of park staff will be here to welcome you back.



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