



THE GOOD NEWS BEARS

BY DAVID K. WILLS

THIS IS A STORY about the rescue of two orphaned grizzly cubs from Alaska's Kenai Peninsula and an HSUS project to return the cubs to the wild two years hence. If the project is successful, it may dramatically alter the way orphaned cubs and so-called problem bears are currently treated under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) policy.

Bears are the world's largest carnivores, yet their diet is primarily vegetarian. They are incredibly strong and have an intellect to match. Bears play a huge role in the myths and drama of humankind's relationship with our world. From Smokey the Bear to Winnie-the-Pooh, bears have been and remain an icon of our fascination with and love for nature.

North America has three closely related species of bear, the American black bear, the brown bear (also known as the grizzly), and the polar bear. All have been victims of humans' ruthless attempts to exterminate them. Bears have been poisoned, trapped, confined, exhibited, baited, hounded, and hunted throughout time and in all parts of the world.

In the United States, black bears are managed and hunted as a "game" species. Hounders, the modern-day equivalent of bear baiters, electronically track bears, tree them, and turn their dogs loose to tear them apart.

In Alaska, grizzlies and polar bears are regarded as trophies; their heads and skins are prized public displays of a hunter's prowess over "dangerous game." In Montana, where about 650 grizzlies make up the only significant population of this threatened species south of the Canadian border, there are strong and recurrent efforts to remove protection afforded by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) so that bears can be trapped, hounded, and killed once more.

In many Eastern cultures, bear gallbladders are highly valued for their supposed medicinal and aphrodisiacal properties. As a result bear poaching is epidemic in the United States and Canada.

Perhaps most disheartening has been the FWS's attitude toward so-called problem grizzlies and orphaned grizzly cubs. Until recently a problem grizzly (a bear who becomes acclimated to humans) has

Bear cubs (*opposite*) flourish at the Wildlife Images center. *Top to bottom:* David K. Wills cleans a cub prior to leaving Alaska; Mr. Wills and Dave Siddon unload the cubs in Oregon; the men observe the cubs in the center's holding area; and an FWS official, assisted by Mr. Wills, draws blood from a cub as Mr. Siddon looks on.



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been sent either to a research facility or zoo or has been killed. Orphaned grizzly cubs, considered poor candidates for rehabilitation and release, have been dealt with in the same manner.

In September The HSUS received a call from Dave Siddon of Wildlife Images Rehabilitation Center in Grants Pass, Oregon. He had been contacted by the Alaska fish and game department, which had two orphaned grizzly cubs and was interested in a rehabilitation effort.

A former wildlife cinematographer, Dave Siddon has a world-class reputation as a wildlife rehabilitator and in the past decade has successfully released to the wild more than fifty black bears. (We hope to move Bear #134 to his facility upon her release from a laboratory at Washington State University [see the Fall 1992 *HSUS News*].)

Dave told us that an Alaskan bush pilot had spotted two grizzly cubs alone on a sandy spit near Soldotna, Alaska. It was obvious their mother was dead. Rangers from Alaska's fish and game department speculated that a male grizzly killed the mother bear as she attempted to defend her cubs, since males often prey on grizzly cubs, perhaps perceiving them as future rivals. Two orphaned cubs didn't have a

chance on their own: Would The HSUS help coordinate and facilitate their rescue/rehabilitation?

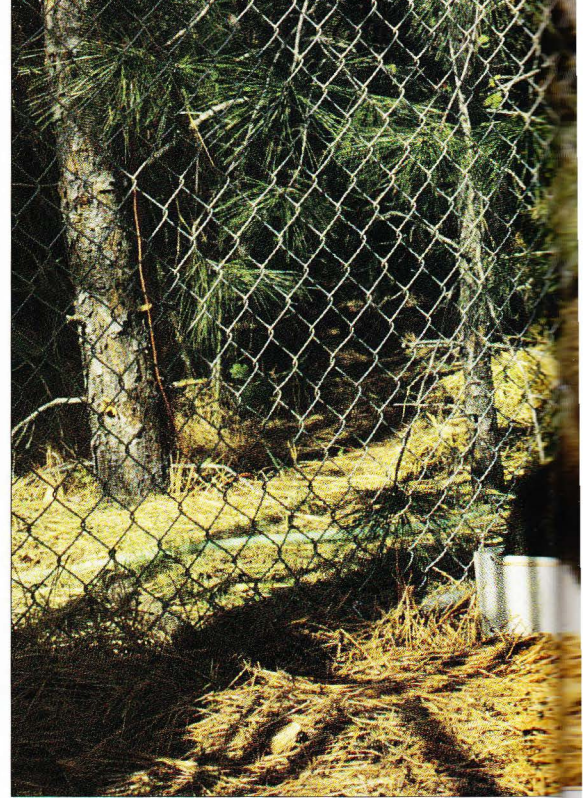
Alarmed bear cubs seek refuge in the water dish in their holding pen. The cubs will be kept safely at Wildlife Images until their precedent-setting return to the wild—two years from now, if all goes well.

chance on their own: Would The HSUS help coordinate and facilitate their rescue/rehabilitation?

Proving that orphaned cubs could be raised and successfully reintroduced to the wild would establish a precedent that could save countless cubs in the future and perhaps open the door for rehabilitation of problem bears such as Bear #134.

I called Dave and said we had gotten fast approval of the project in light of HSUS President Paul G. Irwin's pressing of an HSUS emphasis on enabling wildlife-rehabilitation-and-release efforts. Over the next few days, we arranged travel itineraries for us and the bears and obtained a permit from the FWS authorizing The HSUS to receive and transport the cubs to Wildlife Images.

On September 14, just five days after hearing of the cubs' plight, Dave Siddon and I joined Ted Spraker, biologist for the Alaska fish and game department, in his truck, heading to the cubs' holding site.



The two babies were disheveled, scared, and extremely vocal about their captivity.

The logistics of the trip were relatively simple: First we would drive the bears by van 145 miles back to Anchorage, where all would spend the night. After being fed,

A BIG BEAR TRIUMPH

IN A REMARKABLE SHOW OF UNITY AMONG a variety of animal-protection groups and individual activists, Coloradans United For Bears (or CUB) succeeded in November in banning completely spring bear hunts and banning the use of bait or dogs in the small percentage of hunts that remain legal. Passage of Amendment Ten represents a stunning electoral victory in a fiercely pro-hunting and pro-gun state.

Amendment Ten was approved by 70 percent of the almost 1.5 million Colorado voters. Its passage validated the strategy of targeting the most revolting and prevalent forms of bear hunting for elimination rather than attempting to ban all bear hunting. To ensure victory it was essential to get the votes of those Coloradans who favored keeping some bear hunting while eliminating the most offensive kinds. They represented the majority of Coloradans, and without their support the amendment would have surely gone down to a huge defeat.

Spring bear hunts were addressed specifically because of their toll on cubs (see the Spring 1992 *HSUS News*). In the spring female bears with young offspring

emerge from hibernation, often alone, and search for food for the cubs. A number are killed, since even the most experienced hunters have difficulty distinguishing a lactating female. Motherless cubs are almost certain to die, as they normally need two years of maternal education to learn to survive on their own.

Baiting—habituating animals to the use of a feeding station, then shooting them once hunting season opens—turned out to be equally offensive to the majority of Coloradans. Calling for a ban on the use of dogs to chase and tree bears proved crucial to the effort's success because such cruelty disgusts even the casual hunter. No one could remain indifferent after viewing films of dogs chasing a terrified bear, encircling her as she frantically climbed a tree, then attacking her as she fell, blasted by hunters' bullets.

While the amendment language was being prepared in 1991 by Coloradans, The HSUS, and The Fund for Animals, polling and extensive analysis in Colorado revealed that an outright ban on all bear hunting would have been overwhelmingly defeated. However, by craft-

ing language to ban approximately 90 percent of the hunts and thus attracting the support of Colorado residents who strongly agreed with this approach, we achieved a stunning landslide victory against strong and well-funded opposition. The National Rifle Association, the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, the Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association, the Colorado Woolgrowers Association, the Colorado Farm Bureau, Safari Club International, and the Izaak Walton League were part of the opposing camp.

More than 1,000 hard-working activists throughout Colorado share this victory with us. Katherine Bragdon of Boulder organized 940 volunteers to spread out across the state to collect the signatures of those in favor of placing the measure on the ballot and educate voters on the bill's merits. Campaign director Michael Smith of Boulder County Audubon oversaw other aspects of the fight, including media relations, which proved crucial. Our sincere congratulations go to the Coloradans who achieved this landmark victory.—Michael Winikoff, *HSUS legal investigator*



KATHY MILANI

BEAR ALERT

FIREHOLE LAND CORPORATION, A DEVELOPMENT company based in Montana, is on the verge of building an eighty-seven-acre commercial complex directly on the western boundary of Yellowstone National Park, in West Yellowstone, Montana. "Grizzly Park" would include a 100-room luxury hotel, stores, a theater, restaurants, a gas station, and a park for recreational vehicles. It would be located within the known home ranges of at least five wild grizzly bears. More than half a million visitors are projected to visit Grizzly Park each year. Grizzly Park is more than just a large commercial development. Sandwiched between the retail complex on one side and Yellowstone National Park on the other would be a "Grizzly Discovery Center." This grandly named facility turns out to be a zoo for black and grizzly bears.

How could grizzly bears, who are protected by the ESA, be used in what is primarily a money-making tourist attraction? There's a loophole in the act: Grizzly bears and members of other threatened or endangered species can be obtained by private interests if the animals are to be used for scientific purposes or to promote the recovery of the species. Firehole has argued that Grizzly Park will be an important vehicle for research and for conservation education and will therefore promote the recovery of threatened grizzly bears.

The HSUS disagrees with this rationale and finds it, at best, self-serving.

Grizzly-bear habitat surrounding Yellowstone is being threatened with plans for more logging, strip mining, livestock grazing, and other developments. The intensive human activity associated with Grizzly Park would add to the frenzy of destruction around the park, spilling onto national park land already undergoing a major ecological transformation because

of the extensive fires in 1988.

Tourists might not be the only visitors to Grizzly Park. Also ambling in might be some of Yellowstone's wild bears, lured by the scents of strange bears and their food. Black bears living free and grizzly bears critical to the recovery of the species could find themselves confronted with swarms of people in unexpected places. Through no fault of their own, animals could become so-called problem bears and risk being placed in a zoo or "research" facility.

In the view of The HSUS, the "educational" message related by Grizzly Park would do nothing to offset the development's damaging effect on Yellowstone and its wildlife. What natural processes would be showcased by a display of captive bears engulfed in a maze of glitzy souvenir shops and fast-food restaurants? The HSUS believes that visitors to Grizzly Park would learn not of conservation, care, and respect for nature, but that animals can be exploited for profit and amusement.

Grizzly Park would blight the Yellowstone ecosystem. It would damage habitat, turn wild bears into captive bears, and exploit those animals to attract tourists.

Ground clearing has already begun for Grizzly Park. However, the FWS has not yet given Firehole permission to hold grizzly bears there. HSUS members may be able to persuade the FWS to reject Firehole's application to hold captive grizzlies. Please write to: Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Washington, DC 20240); The Hon. Max Baucus (United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510); and The Hon. Pat Williams (United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515).—Allen T. Rutberg, Ph.D., HSUS senior scientist, *Wildlife and Habitat Protection*

cleaned, and rested, the cubs would be loaded onto an Alaska Airlines flight to Medford, Oregon. From Medford Dave's drivers would transport the cubs to a temporary holding facility at Wildlife Images while HSUS and Wildlife Images volunteers built a large, isolated, relatively natural enclosure. Soon the cubs would be transferred to the enclosure and begin to be prepared for their return to the wild.

The entire process went like clockwork. Crowds of airline personnel watched as we loaded the cubs in the plane's climate-controlled cargo hold. As we unloaded the cubs almost six hours later in Medford, they were bright-eyed and curious about all the fuss. Fifteen reporters and television cameras greeted the new arrivals. A quick interview, some photographs, and we were off to Wildlife Images.

Bear cubs can usually fend for themselves after two seasons with their mother. Dave Siddon thinks the chances are excellent that these cubs will be able to be released two years from now. "Bears are scent animals; that is, they live by their nose. They are also wonderful opportunists when it comes to food. There is no reason to suspect, with a careful raising remote from human smells, that they couldn't go into a protected area, remote from people, say Glacier Bay National Forest, and quickly take up the life of a wild grizzly," he says.

We believe Dave Siddon is correct. That is why The HSUS, with the cooperation of the Alaska fish and game department and the FWS, supports this project financially, through professional expertise,

and with our spirit.

People may ask, "Why so much trouble to take care of a couple of bears? Why preserve bears at all?" I think Dave Siddon answered that when posed a similar question:

I have been asked by reporters how I can justify spending \$8,000 on a baby bear when children are starving. My answer has always been to point out that we as humans are the only organisms capable of caring for other animals. It's the main thing that makes us human. If you can't

spend \$8,000 on a baby bear, why bother to spend hundreds of thousands keeping a human alive? The fact is, if we look on Homo sapiens as the only life form worth saving, it probably isn't.

There is a less complicated reason for why we came to the rescue of two orphaned cubs: We care. For all of us at The HSUS and all of you who support our efforts, that is enough. ■

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