

Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek:

An Intimate Portrait of 399, The Most Famous Bear of Greater Yellowstone.

Todd Wilkinson. Photography by Thomas D. Mangelsen. Forward by Ted Turner. Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. New York, New York.

By Rick Smith

Unlike most of the reviews I have written for *Ranger*, this is not a straightforward book review. It is, instead, a review of a work of art. The photography in this coffee-table format is absolutely riveting. And the story of 399 and her offspring is spine-tingling. While the cost of this book may stretch a reader's budget, if you care about grizzlies and their future in the American West, this is a book you have to see.

Wilkinson's narrative traces the comings and goings of grizzly 399, who was first trapped in 1996. She has produced three sets of triplets, who have produced two sets of twins and a single cub. Like many grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone, not all of these cubs have survived. Those that made it to adulthood face the enormous prejudices that exist in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho against predators, and they also face dangers associated with the annual elk hunt just south of Grand Teton. Grizzlies flock to the Grand Teton area to feed on elk remains left by hunters, and there is always the chance of an encounter between a bear and an armed hunter. Most conservationists consider the elk hunt to be a clear and present danger to the grizzly population and consistently call for its end.

Perils ever present

What is striking about *Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek* is its message regarding the precarious level of the bear population and the grizzlies' position on the Endangered Species List. Unlike 399, most sow grizzlies are notoriously slow reproducers. Killing just a few sows can start a precipitous slide in population dynamics. The states of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana seem intent on opening hunting of grizzlies. This seems particularly foolish, considering that grizzlies are one of the major attractions in Yellowstone and Grand Teton and are one of the biggest dollar producers in the area.

The opportunity to see grizzlies is one of the top reasons that people travel to Yellowstone and Grand Teton. NPS employees and retirees, as well, understand the priceless and intrinsic value of wildlife under our charge. Yet, for doing nothing more than wandering across an invisible park boundary line, 399, the most famous bear in the world today, could be shot by hunters. And, as *Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek* notes, there are people who vow to target and slay 399 if federal protections are removed — because they despise the federal government, environmentalists, bears and the law that has been protecting bears since 1975.

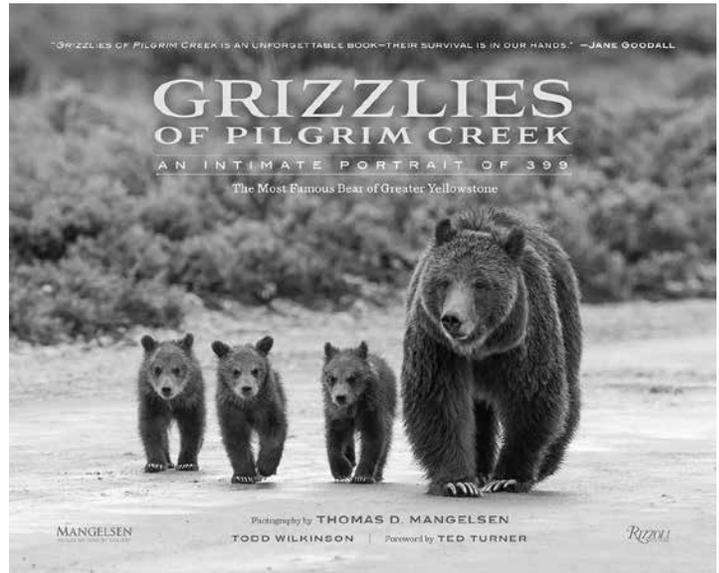
Just as the slaying of Cecil the lion in Africa brought global outrage when the charismatic cat wandered outside of Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe and was fatally wounded by a Minnesota dentist using a bow and arrow, a national park grizzly could become subject to a similar

needless tragedy — which would be sure to incite national controversy.

Food sources an issue

Although grizzlies have proved to be remarkably adaptive to food changes, two of the main staples in their diets are already disappearing. Lake trout, introduced surreptitiously to Yellowstone Lake, have drastically reduced the number of cutthroat trout upon which the bears used to feed when the cutthroat swam up the streams that feed into Yellowstone Lake to spawn. And the lake trout spawn at depths in Yellowstone Lake that are inaccessible to the bears. Yellowstone National Park's aggressive campaign to remove lake trout from the lake has caused a rebound in the cutthroat population and may promise a brighter future for the bears. In addition, beetle infestations caused by warmer winters have almost eliminated the whitebark pine as a food source for grizzlies in Yellowstone and Grand Teton.

These kinds of changes make grizzlies more dependent on meat, a fact that often puts them on a collision course with ranchers who raise cattle and sheep. The sad fact is that bears that prey on domestic livestock are trapped and euthanized. Wilkinson raises an interesting question: Why should non-native cattle, ultimately bound for the slaughterhouse, take precedence over native grizzlies that are acting as the natural predators they are? Wilkinson writes, "What rubs many the wrong way is that exotic cattle hold primacy on public land that would otherwise be exceptional



wildlife habitat. Ranchers graze their cattle at below-market rates and they receive protection from native predators.” The National Wildlife Federation holds that cattle grazing is a land mine for grizzlies and their fellow predators, wolves.

Breathtaking photography

I would like to turn my attention now to the photography in the book. In 11 seasons at Yellowstone, I saw at least 70 or 80 grizzlies, many of them close up. Even so, the photos of grizzlies in this book took my breath away. The images are sharp and engaging and in some photos the bears appear to be a lot closer than I would want them to be in real life. Particularly interesting are the photos in the “Family Album,” all of bear 399 or her offspring. These are thrilling photos of what has been called the most famous bear in the Greater Yellowstone area.

I guarantee that you won't tire of the photos or Wilkinson's narrative. You will come away from this book with a greater appreciation that we have thus far managed to save this magnificent animal. Its future, though, is far from assured.

Rick Smith, an ANPR life member and former president of ANPR and the International Ranger Federation, retired from the National Park Service after a 31-year career. His last NPS position was as associate regional director of resources management in the former Southwest Region. He and his wife, Kathy, live in Tucson, Arizona.

Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek: An Intimate Portrait of 399 is available at www.mangelsen.com/grizzly.

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