

Agency rules that grizzlies are protected

Bears in Selway-Bitterroot are under ESA protection

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Grizzly bears that find their own way into the Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service confirmed that in a letter Tuesday to four national forests.

The Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem — which includes portions of the Bitterroot, Lolo, Nez Perce-Clearwater and Salmon-Challis forests — was one of six grizzly bear recovery areas established in a 1993 recovery plan. Until now, it was the only one that officially lacked bears.

In the 1990s, the federal government considered reintroducing grizzly bears in the area and issued a rule — called the 10(j) rule — that would create an “experimental nonessential population” of bears. That reintroduction never happened.

Last year, a collared grizzly bear from the Cabinet-Yaak recovery zone made its way into the Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem and spent a good part of the summer there.

In Tuesday’s letter, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that since the bear was neither released nor reintroduced into the area, it was not covered under the 10(j) rule and needed to be considered threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

While that bear has since returned to the Cabinet-Yaak, its well-documented journey will change the way that management occurs on the surrounding forests.

Federal and state land managers are required to complete a consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services on projects that occur within designated occupied grizzly bear habitat.

While the Service works to develop maps that show where grizzly bears may present in or near the Selway-Bitterroot

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BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Phil Burgess, a poet, presented his story ‘Evelyn’s Water: The Woman Who Sang with Ferlin Husky’ to a crowd of about 50 people at Travelers’ Rest State Park visitors center in Lolo on Saturday morning. Burgess’ presentation is one of many in a series titled ‘Winter Storytelling,’ which offers weekly presentations based on subjects like indigenous foods, the state’s railroads and roadside attractions.

Poet showcases one of Montana’s great matriarchs

Story of Evelyn Moore told by poet Phil Burgess at Travelers’ Rest State Park

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LOLO — More than 50 people gathered to hear the story of how a matriarch weathered through homesteading in eastern Montana, raising sugar beets and a family of 10, along with spearheading a campaign to bring water to farmland scorched by drought.

“Evelyn’s Water: The Woman Who Sang with Ferlin Husky” presented by poet Phil Burgess Saturday at Travelers’ Rest State Park, traced the story of Evelyn Moore. At 15, she was already a mother, wife and farmer in 1911. Burgess paid tribute to both Moore and an entire generation of women.

“If their kids were going to survive relatively intact, they just had to endure whatever the situation was,” said Burgess

to a packed room.

Moore’s story is part of a series hosted by Travelers’ Rest Preservation & Heritage Association. The “Winter Storytelling” series brings weekly presentations to the park’s center, with invited speakers covering subjects like indigenous foods, the state’s railroads and its roadside attractions.

“We tend to have a focus on history, but the floor’s open to any topic you can imagine,” said the association’s executive director Molly Stockdale.

Burgess, who grew up in eastern Montana and knows firsthand the labor and grief that go into ranch life, has been writing poetry for more than 30 years. When a storm kept a speaker from presenting in the winter of 2018, he gave the first rendition of his account of Evelyn’s life.

He’s been adding to that account ever since.

“It’s just like life itself, it’s a work in process,” he said.

After her arrival to the banks of the Missouri River in 1911, Burgess said Moore had her first child that same year. She would have 10 more children while also tending to a farm producing sugar beets. Four of those children were twins and one died due to a doctor’s error.

Her husband, Jim Moore, used his skills as a self-taught veterinarian to fill in for a doctor to deliver her first two twins in 1926.

Reading from letters written by Moore, Burgess let the woman who spent her first year in Montana killing 23 rattlesnakes speak for herself at length. A drought crippled eastern Montana farmland during the 1930s, and fur-

ther exacerbated a population under the yoke of the Great Depression. Moore launched a five-year campaign in 1934 to bring the crops back to life.

“We had no electricity and no modern conveniences on the farm until 1947. We had no crops for 14 years. So when I woke up one morning discouraged, and thinking about poverty, I said to my husband, ‘If we only had irrigation.’”

Five years of unanswered letters to local representatives drove Moore to send a letter addressed to the country’s First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. An addition to the Lower Yellowstone Irrigation Project to include the farmland surrounding Moore and her family followed Roosevelt’s response.

Please see **STORYTELLING**, Page B2

Amazon’s stake in rural Montana

How Montanans benefit from the online conglomerate

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BILLINGS — Comilla Taylor got started in the world of e-commerce and Amazon repackaging after moving to a town where jobs were scarce.

A prep-and-ship center in Roundup posted a job opening.

“I knew nothing about them. I just happened to get hired,” Taylor said.

As shopping habits continually gear more online, a new set of local shops are opening in Montana to support Amazon’s vast and complicated infrastructure.

Prep centers, which work with Amazon sellers to package their items for a cut, are providing remote work in rural Montana as well-paying job options dwindle in small towns.



CASEY PAGE, BILLINGS GAZETTE

Carts and boxes of products wait to be repackaged at Selltec Prep, a repackaging business for Amazon sellers, in Roundup on Friday, December 27, 2019.

What they are

The first in Montana started five years ago.

In 2015, Kristal Graham began selling her late brother’s books on Amazon. Then she began selling other items, things

she’d buy discounted, in bulk, as a self-proclaimed “extreme couponer.” Looking to expand, and needing help packaging her items, she tried to scope out a

Please see **AMAZON**, Page B2

U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan to keynote Mansfield-Metcalf

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U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan, a Democrat from New Hampshire, will be the keynote speaker at the Mansfield-Metcalf Dinner in Helena on Feb. 29.

The Mansfield-Metcalf dinner is a major fundraising event for the Montana Democratic Party. Hassan has been elected both governor and senator in New Hampshire, and is one of only two women to have done so in the nation.

Party executive director Sandi Luckey, who took over Jan. 1, said she was thrilled to have Hassan speak.

“Throughout her career as a state legislator, a governor, and a U.S. senator, Hassan has been a national leader in fighting for affordable healthcare, quality public education, and an economy that works for everyone,” Luckey

said in a press release. “Elected three times in a battleground state, Sen. Hassan knows what it takes to bring people together to get things done for her constituents — just like our own Sen. (Jon) Tester and Gov. (Steve) Bullock.”

The 42nd annual Mansfield-Metcalf dinner will be at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds. Tickets go on sale Jan. 28.

This year will see a major election in Montana, with all the elected statewide offices on the ballot. Montana’s lone seat in the U.S. House seat is also open and Republican U.S. Sen. Steve Daines is up for re-election.

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Hassan

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ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE

A grizzly bear roams near Beaver Lake in Yellowstone National Park.

Grizzlies

From B1

ecosystem, the Forest Service's Northern Region Public Affairs Director David Smith said the agency will work with FWS to determine what's required on proposed projects.

"We don't need to wait for the maps if we determine that something that we are proposing may affect bears," Smith said.

That's not something new for Bitterroot National Forest officials.

Consultations with federal wildlife managers have been required on projects on the Bitterroot National Forest east of U.S. Highway 93 since 2017.

Grizzly bears have been spotted in the valley on several occasions over the last decade. In 2002, a bear was seen on Sunset Bench southeast of Stevensville. In 2018 a young male grizzly was captured and relocated from the Whitetail Golf Course north of Stevensville.

The bear that made its way into the Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem wasn't the first.

In 2007, a Tennessee hunter killed a grizzly bear in the Kelly Creek area of the Bitterroot ecosystem that had traveled there from North Idaho's Selkirk Range. That was the first time a grizzly bear had found its way to the 5,700-square-mile Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem in central Idaho and western Montana since 1946.

Mike Bader of Missoula has been involved with grizzly bear conservation since the 1980s.

"I've been working on this for a long time," Bader said. "There have been a lot of critics over

the last 20 years who said the bears would never get there ... this recognition is a bit tardy. There have been grizzly bears here in the past."

The FWS notice this week does provide some clarity on the issue on how the landscape should be managed to protect grizzly bear habitat, he said. "The bear that came here last summer was part of a protected population," Bader said. "They are listed wherever they go. That protection travels with them like a briefcase. The foggiest of the 10(j) rule died on the vine."

With grizzly bear sightings occurring with more frequency both north and south of the Selway-Bitterroot ecosystem, Bader said the area is an important corridor.

The recent FWS decision could add urgency to a lawsuit filed to stop the practice of Idaho hunters using bait barrel to attract bears. Bader said four different grizzlies were photographed this year over bait barrels in central Idaho.

"I think the issue of attractants are something the Fish and Wildlife Service and Forest Service will have to address," Bader said. "They are really going to have to consider the whole ecosystem. Fish, Wildlife and Parks now tells people they can potentially expect to run into a grizzly anywhere in western Montana."

"I think the agencies have been dragging their feet and kicking the can down the road on this issue, and now the bears have gotten ahead of the agencies," he said. "I view this letter as a positive first step, but it still leaves a lot of questions unanswered."

Storytelling

From B1

Before moving to California to live out the rest of her life, Moore shared a duet with popular country singer Ferlin Husky as part of a ceremony honoring her as Montana's Mother of the Year in 1962.

Burgess said in an interview with the Missoulian that he first read Moore's

account in a collection of family histories. Her experience touched on his own, making him reflect on the woman who raised him.

"When I was a kid, I was kind of precocious because I was acutely aware of how difficult it was for my mother. We had no running water until I was 5 or 6. I could sense the suffering there, but it would be a while until I could actually realize it," he said.

He finished his presentation of Moore's life with a poem that emerged from the project.

"Evelyn gives birth in a one-room log cabin on the Missouri River. She sings the song to her first child her mother sang to her," he said at the start of his poem, "Evelyn Sings."

A schedule for the "Winter Storytelling" series can be found at travelersrest.org/winter-storytelling.html.

Hassan

From B1

That's in addition to the presidential race at the top of the ticket and 125 seats in the state Legislature, in addition to other races around the state.

Keeping the governor's office in Democratic hands after 16 years of control by the party is a key goal for Democrats in Montana in 2020. The three candidates in that primary include Lt. Gov. Mike Cooney, Missoula businesswoman Whitney Williams, who is the daughter of longtime state lawmaker Carol Williams and former U.S. Rep. Pat Williams; and state Rep. Casey Schreiner of Great Falls. For U.S. House, former state lawmaker Kathleen Williams is again running for the seat like she did in 2018, along with state Rep. Tom Winter, of Missoula.

Democrats are also trying to unseat Republican U.S. Sen. Daines, who is seeking his second term. Several Democrats have pushed Montana Gov. Bullock to run for that seat, seeing him as the party's best chance to defeat Daines. But Bullock, who ended his long-shot bid for president earlier this year, has said repeatedly he will not join the race. The candidates are Cora Neumann, a Bozeman resident who works on public lands and public health issues; Helena Mayor Wilmot Collins; Navy veteran and engineer John Mues; and Michael Knoles, of Bozeman.

Amazon

From B1

prep center in Montana.

She didn't find any. So she decided to start one herself.

She and her husband, John Kiem, set up in her garage, built a website, and Selltec Prep and Ship was born.

Five years and three locations later, Graham owns the largest prep center in the state. The large warehouse off a gravel road in Roundup is stuffed with boxes waiting to be shipped.

Since 2015 more than 12 centers have started.

Prep centers are an odd cog in the Amazon machine. They arose alongside Amazon Marketplace, a platform where third-party vendors can sell items through the online retailer.

The prep center receives vendors' deliveries, repackages them to fit Amazon's strict specifications, and ship them off to an Amazon center.

They began cropping up across the country, but have clustered in states that were exempt of sales taxes. Montana is one of five states without sales taxes.

As Amazon's labeling and packaging rules became increasingly stringent, the demand for prep centers grew.

Sellers wrack up savings by sending products to tax-free Montana by committing "online arbitrage."

Domestic and international sellers commit arbitrage by buying discounted items online, shipping them directly to a Montana prep center, and reselling the products on Amazon for a higher price.

For sellers buying in bulk, the savings quickly add-up.

"Vendors save thousands of dollars by sending products to us," Linda McAfee said. McAfee owns MT Ship 'n' Pro.

Some big-box chains have tried to fight back against sellers undercutting them by blacklisting Montana addresses connected to prep centers, according to Graham.

"Target is one of them," Graham said. "The address is restricted as a prep center."

But many of the prep centers have found ways around that by changing their shipping addresses, letting sellers ship to their home addresses or a friend's address.

The tax discount allows Montana's prep centers to charge more than prep centers in other states.

Most of Montana's centers start with prices at \$1 per item. Each item they prep and ship gets them a buck. Certain items can get a bit more, but typically the



CASEY PAGE, BILLINGS GAZETTE

Carts and boxes of products wait to be repackaged at Selltec Prep, a repackaging business for Amazon sellers, in Roundup on Friday, December 27, 2019.

amount they make is contingent on the number of shipments moved.

Typically workers at the prep centers are the first eyeballs on the product. Sellers ship them sight unseen, and rely on the preppers to weed out damaged products. The shipments could come from a retailer or from physical stores. Some sellers will buy another seller's products and then flip them on their stores.

Supporting locals

All of the 12 prep centers in Montana are owned by women. The prep centers are flexible, easy to start and allow women to work from home in areas that might not have flexible, or well-paying jobs.

"There are no jobs," Taylor said. "So, the women made their own jobs."

The prep centers are overwhelmingly based in small towns in Montana like Winnett, Edgar, Bridger and Roundup. One is based in Billings.

Taylor worked at Selltec Prep for about a year before deciding she could earn more with her own prep center. She started KC Prep and Ship in 2017, with the help of McAfee, and has stuck with it since then.

"Nice thing about prepping is a person can decide how much they want to make. They can turn it into a large business, or keep it small," McAfee said.

Marti Bering began looking for a remote job, as she didn't want to commute long distances.

"In Montana it's hard to find (jobs) that are close," the Bridger resident said.

She and her husband own Mountainview Tires, but needed to supplement income. She read about prep centers in an article, and in November reached out to McAfee for training.

She started Mountainview Prep N Ship in December working out of her home. She's one month old, and only has one client, but her goals for the prep center are lofty.

"My desire is to expand and help as many as I can," she said.

Bering wants to eventually expand to a warehouse

and hire multiple employees. She already knows friends in the Bridger area that would jump at the opportunity, she said.

She thinks embracing remote work and e-commerce is the future for rural areas that don't have vital independent economies.

"Those kinds of businesses really help support a community and keep it going," she said. "Once you're making money you're also spending it in that community. That helps with future growth."

The six centers in Roundup have become their own industry. Selltec alone employs 16 full-time staff in Roundup, and a few part-timers.

In its five years Graham has struggled to find equilibrium with her store. She's either had too many clients that she can't keep up, or she's scraping to make ends meet. She plans to stick with it.

"I refuse to be the person who had an idea and didn't follow through," she said.

Graham recognizes the jobs it has carved out in town.

"The main reason I still have it open and haven't given up is because of the employees," Graham said. "I'm glad I can help them as much as anything else ... I can't close. Where will they go, what will they do?"

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