

A Conversation on the Morality Management of Grizzly 399: How people can start to address a human-human conflict

By Lauren Sadowski

If you haven't heard of the world's most famous grizzly bear, also known as Grizzly 399, and her four cubs you probably haven't visited Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I would say beware of the bears but in actuality, you should probably look out for the "bear jams." As many people flock to Jackson Hole to catch a glimpse of this highly revered celebrity bear and her cubs, they often create massive stand-still traffic jams known as bear jams. Grizzly 399's worshipped following has required the creation of a special task unit in Grand Teton National Park known as the Bear Brigade, which helps direct traffic and prevents people from getting too close to wildlife. What's ironic about this "following" is that it also takes place online where, Grizzly 399 has close to 40,000 followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This is no joking matter, as people pretend to be Grizzly 399 and post in her words and thoughts, all while the real identities of these human authors are secretly hidden to avoid the backlash of this contentious bear.



Why is Grizzly 399 such a contentious subject? Many people would say that it's because of the continued Endangered Species Act debate by different interest groups over whether grizzlies should be delisted or protected under the Act. These groups all see Grizzly 399 (and grizzlies in general) as different representations or symbols of something. For example, a wildlife photographer may think it's morally wrong to hunt grizzly bears as grizzlies represent whatever our social constructs of "wilderness," and "nature" may be. People often attribute "motherly," "good" and "very special" qualities to Grizzly 399 since many believe she has been an extraordinary grizzly bear mother. While

others see these qualities as problematic where she has led her cubs in and around more urban areas that pose a threat to bear and human safety - especially considering that the Town of Jackson has yet to provide bear-friendly infrastructure like bear-proof trash cans.

So what is the problem here? Is it the continued debate over whether grizzlies should be protected under the Endangered Species Act? It is the human food attractants that people continue to leave out making bears return to residential areas? Do we need more educational awareness, pamphlets, and signs? These issues of Endangered Species Act debates, bear traffic jams, and bear-proof trash cans are products of some larger, underlying systemic problems that technical fixes cannot address.



The first problem is that solutions (usually technical ones) are proposed before a problem is defined, which can often exacerbate the problem even more. The second problem is that the current wildlife management system cannot integrate people's values and expectations of wildlife. Why should wildlife management be value-oriented? Because science and what scientists believe as the objective truth is laden in values and moral outlooks. For example, who decides on what scientific standards measure the success of grizzly bear recovery in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem? Is it a certain population number and in what boundary area? Is it a connection from Yellowstone to Yukon? Natural genetic flow? Artificial genetic flow? These standards for recovery may be backed by scientific methods,

however, whoever decides who is in charge of making the decision on which measure of recovery to use is driven by politically and socially value demands.

What are value demands? Value demands can be found in every person's statement on how they make sense of the world. It's like looking for patterns. It's tricky at first, but then it becomes easier to recognize with time, sort of like learning a new language. A language that can help people communicate across different interests and moral boundaries. Let me show you.

When a photographer or animal advocate says that hunting grizzlies is morally wrong and people must protect them, this is a value statement based on *rectitude*. People believe they are doing the right thing. When a rancher says that the continued listing of the grizzlies on the Endangered Species Act is a broken covenant between the government and the American people, this is a value statement based on *respect*, especially when ranchers believe that they are faulted for bear-livestock conflict but not recognized for their livelihoods that help preserve the open lands of the West. When hundreds of native tribes signed the Tribal Heritage and Grizzly Bear Protection Act stating that tribal nations should have input in decisions that will determine the future survival of the grizzly bear, a sacred ancestor, such demands based on the *well-being* of grizzlies and cultural heritage, along with *respect* for wanting to be heard, and *power* to make decisions regarding their relations to human and non-human species. In total there are eight values: power, respect, well-being, wealth, enlightenment, skill, affection, and rectitude. People usually seek these 8 values through institutions or organizations using and affecting cultural and natural resources - this is a formula to help you find the patterns in the complexity of life.

This formula comes from a problem-oriented framework that was designed by very smart people to help sort through cultural and institutional complexities to find strategies for conflict. Such tools can help progress conversations about Grizzly 399 and grizzly management in the GYE, from defending moral narratives of who is right and wrong to addressing fundamental questions like what are people really asking for and for whom is wildlife managed?

To improve wildlife management capabilities to address the management of human expectations, we need to start asking ethical questions like, "are roadside bears good for the longevity and health of the human and non-human species?", "what are the moral, ecological, and social considerations of celebritizing animals?", and many more real questions. With these questions in mind, hopefully, we can have integrative conversations about how we interact with wildlife and humans, and what is required for the management of people's expectations. This is the pragmatic starting point to improving our relations between human-human interactions as well as human and non-human coexistence that we all say we want. Let's start before it's too late.