Bagazine Summer 2012

From Yellowstone to the Yukon

Can ecology and economics work together to preserve this special corridor?

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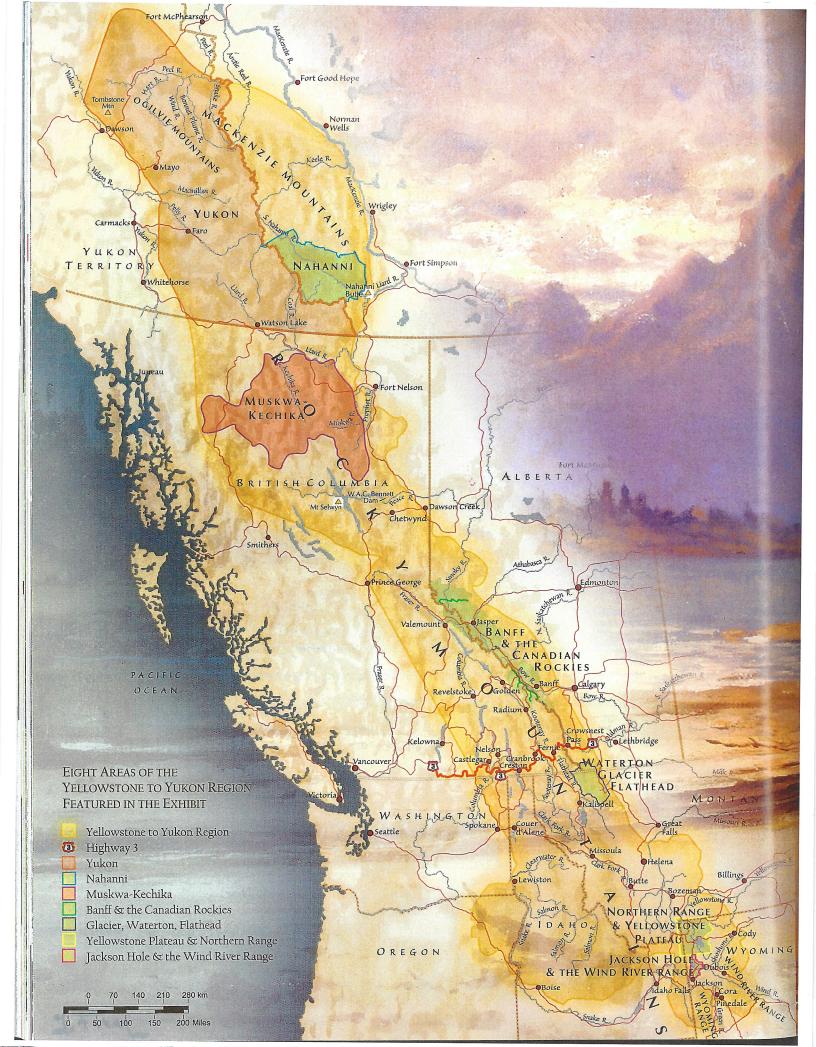


LOOKING BACK
The 'Coach
Bar & Band

OUTDOORS
JH's Growing
Trail System

DINING Cooking Cowboys

DESIGN Contemporary Western



The Dividends of Thinking

The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative is transforming the way the world thinks about ecology and commerce

BY TODD WILKINSON

Jackson Lake and the Tetons by John Fery is included in the critically acclaimed art exhibit Yellowstone to Yukon: The Journey of Wildlife and Art.

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BACK IN 1993, Locke and a host of noted conservation biologists began assembling the conceptual map of Y2Y. The group saw that "pinch points" between habitats had developed and were constricting and/or eliminating traditional wildlife migration routes. Lynx, wolverine, and woodland caribou were relegated to tiny pocket populations and in danger of localized extinction. The future of grizzlies was still uncertain. Wolves were already extinct in most of the Lower 48.

Locke also drew inspiration from two figures that many, at first, might consider unlikely: artists Charles M. Russell and Carl Rungius. A German immigrant, Rungius came West at the end of the nineteenth century. He lived on a ranch at the foot of the Wind River Range in Sublette County, Wyoming, and made numerous painting excursions north to Jackson Hole. Later, he moved to Banff, where he gained renown as a painter of animals in the Canadian Rockies.

"If you look at Rungius' portfolio, his choice of subject matter reads like a field guide for Y2Y," Locke says. "Equally as important, his backdrops provide us with an opportunity for visual comparison between then and now." Locke notes the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson holds the largest collection of major Rungius oil paintings in the United States and, this summer (2012), is showcasing a selection of Rungius' drawings. "Russell, too, was

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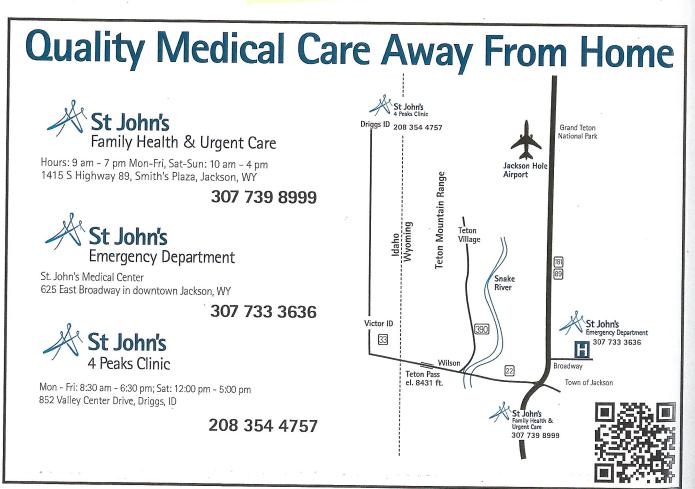
drawn to wildness on both sides of the border," Locke says.

"What captured my attention about Y2Y?" asks Steve Duerr, former director of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, leader of The Murie Center, a Moose-based nonprofit that engages people to understand and commit to

the enduring value of conserving wildlife and wild places, and a Y2Y supporter. "I remember the first presentation Harvey [Locke] gave when I was invited to speak in Banff, and he featured a satellite photograph from space. The Y2Y [corridor] at night was a black space surrounded by a sea of bright lights. It made sense. Y2Y isn't being crammed down anyone's throat. It's a one-hundred-year vision, and slowly, communities are waking up to its value."

Duerr sees Y2Y evolving over time. It won't be quick fixes that ensure corridors remain viable, but citizens becoming more aware and educated about what it takes to keep large landscapes healthy and working with elected officials on regulations that accommodate growth, but not at the expense of natural processes.

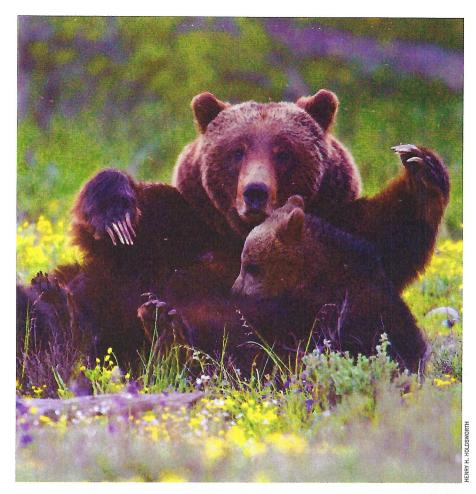
THE UPSHOT OF the hair-raising tales mentioned at the outset of our story is this: Far from igniting a paroxysm of fear and antipredator sentiment, the unfortunate deaths in Banff-Canmore had the opposite effect. Citizens and policy makers in those communities redoubled their efforts to devise better ways of

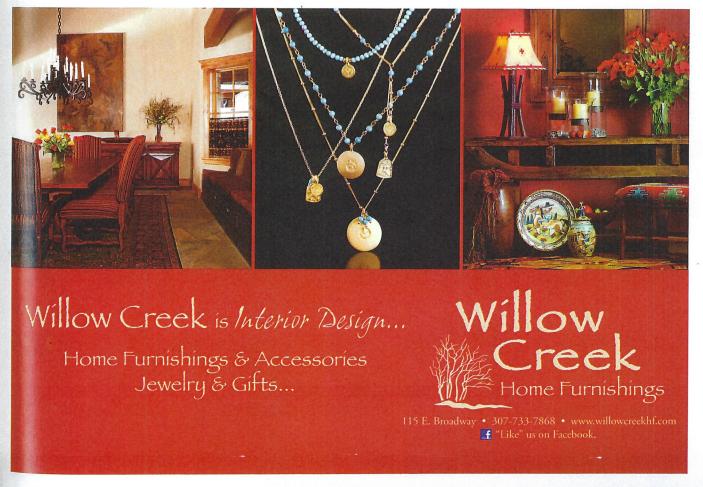


The bear sow known locally as Grizzly 399 romps with her cubs in Grand Teton National Park. Grizzly bears have been expanding their territory in recent years as their population increases in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

achieving human-wildlife coexistence. Today, with grizzlies, lobos, and cougars roaming Jackson's back doorstep in greater numbers, Jim Pissot, a Canadian-American conservationist who formerly oversaw Y2Y, says there's a lot that each community—and country—can learn from one another in their shared custodial stewardship of the Y2Y corridor.

People in Banff-Canmore have been willing to accept some restrictions on their lives in order to have wildlife: residents are under strict orders with how they manage trash, there's a ban on outdoor bird feeders, and a push for all hikers to carry bear spray. At the same time, Jackson Hole is a model to Banff-Canmore for using nature tourism as a sustainable engine for commerce. And Canadian conservationists envy the U.S.'s stronger federal laws protecting species and habitat on federal land and the greater public scrutiny of major natural





1999, when a mother cougar denned and gave birth to kittens in a cave close to a road on the National Elk Refuge, more than 15,000 visitors—professionals as well as the merely curious showed up with cameras.

"AT FIRST BLUSH, Y2Y is a conservation initiative, but from the perspective of our tourist economy, I view it as an opportunity," says Tim O'Donoghue, Duerr's successor at the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, which is a Y2Y supporter. "[The chamber is] very much a triple bottom line organization. Sustainability is built on a three-legged stool: economics, environment, and human-social capital."

A recent economic study showed that in 2010 alone, Grand Teton National Park contributed \$424 million

Yellowstone another \$334 million. Nearly one of every three of the 22,350 jobs in all of Teton County has a direct tourism component. Factor in the services these visitors avail themselves of-and the money they spend elsewhere in the state as they travel to these parks-and the economic engine that runs on the mystique of wildness generates more gross commerce than the annual net worth of commodity agricultural products statewide. The chamber, O'Donoghue says, is

to the greater Jackson economy and

working on the idea of a novel collaboration with the National Geographic Society. The goal is to have a Society geotourism program highlighting Y2Y and distinctive towns in the corridor. "So far, the Society is really interested in it," O'Donoghue says. "We'll see how it develops." It would not only give smaller towns in the corridor greater visibility, but also an added shot of commerce. "Responsible tourism is additive to community values and the value of the land, not destructive to them," O'Donoghue says.

Today, Y2Y boasts relationships with more than 120 different government, tribal, business, conservation, hunting/ fishing, and outdoor recreation entities. President Obama has mentioned Y2Y when talking about his America's Great



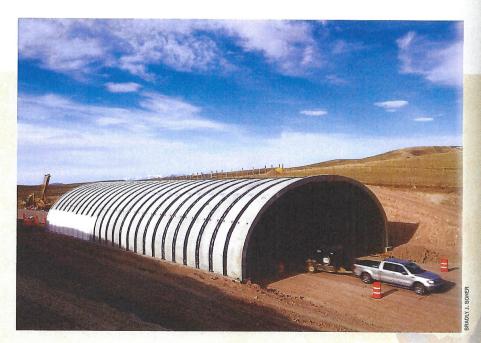
Jackson Lake, the Teton Range, and the rest of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem sit near the southern end of the Yellowstone to Yukon corridor.

Outdoors Initiative and the economic value of nature. Y2Y and Path of the Pronghorn have gained attention around the world.

"Like Yellowstone once was, we're the new vanguard," Locke says. "It isn't just a theory. We're actually implementing strategies for protecting connectivity." Berger adds, "Y2Y brings to the world all sorts of great visions about big landscapes and what's necessary to keep things working. No matter where I go, Y2Y is the holy grail for a new generation of thinking by conservation biologists."

How'd the **Pronghorn Cross** the Road?

CANADA HAS BEEN building a series of wildlife overpasses to afford peripatetic species safe passage across four-lane roads and railroad tracks. They work. Road kills have decreased in the areas around the structures. Wyoming has taken notice. As the result of a pronghorn monitoring study by the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Wyoming Department of Transportation is spending \$9.7 million to install a total of eight overpasses and underpasses. These are along U.S. Highway 191 at a Path of the Pronghorn bottleneck north of Pinedale. Loss of habitat has forced the pronghorn to move through a narrower funnel of habitat, leaving them more vulnerable to being struck by cars. There aren't official statistics, but ecologist Joel Berger says that over the years, "hundreds" of pronghorn have died here. The new structures will go a long way in preventing further collisions with motorists.



A wildlife overpass under construction on Highway 191 near Pinedale, Wyoming. Following the example of similar overpasses in Canada's Highway 1, the sides and top of the structure will be filled in, giving pronghorn and other wildlife safe passage over the busy highway during their fall and spring migrations.