

Bear Necessities: Northwest Toyota Dealers Support Documentarian's Quest to Track Grizzly Migration in Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

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More than 40 years ago, grizzly bears were on the U.S. endangered species list, with just 200 of these majestic animals roaming the country's western wilds. Today, due to federal protection measures and conservation, the grizzly population has eclipsed 1,000 bears in the Greater Yellowstone region.

With increasing numbers, the odds of grizzly-human interaction have grown exponentially, especially at Yellowstone National Park which attracts nearly 5 million visitors annually.

This statistical probability fascinated Emmy-nominated, outdoor journalist Kris Millgate, as she prepared for her next documentary subject.

“With all the challenges facing our natural resources these days, it's important to celebrate nature's wild successes too,” said Millgate, an Idaho resident and owner of Tight Line Media. “Greater Yellowstone grizzlies have figured out how to live among us. Now, we need to figure out how to live, work and play with a growing number of grizzlies on the landscape.”

Following her journalistic instincts, Millgate spent six months of 2022 following and filming grizzlies through parts of the 22-million-acre, Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE).

The GYE includes Yellowstone National Park and Greater Teton National Park, plus portions of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. With such an expansive territory, these federally protected grizzlies can travel more than 1,000 miles each summer, looking for food sources and potential mates.



After principal filming was complete, Millgate spent another six months reviewing and editing 17 hours of footage. As a result, she just completed her 30-minute documentary entitled “*On Grizzly Ground*.” The film features several grizzlies in their natural habitat, albeit from a safe distance.

“Following grizzlies is risky, but warranted,” Millgate said. “I made sure to stay a very safe distance from the bears, always putting a natural barrier, like a river or a hill, between me and my subjects.”

On a rare occasion, Millgate did get up close and personal with an adult grizzly after field specialists had tranquilized the bear for the purpose of fitting it with a tracking collar. She said the moment was a special one, until the bear's eyelids fluttered open.

"We were taking some photos of me and the grizzly for size comparison purposes, when its eyes slowly opened," she said, "The bear was groggy but the specialist quickly administered more of the tranquilizer to put it back to sleep. It definitely got my heart racing!"

Besides bear footage, *On Grizzly Ground* also showcases interviews with tourists, scientists, environmental activists and native tribes as they all consider the future of these creatures.

According to Millgate, the native American viewpoint is thought provoking, as more than 50 tribes consider the GYE their ancestral home.

"For these tribes, bears are spiritual beings – so much so, they consider them their brothers," she said.

On Grizzly Ground marks Millgate's second major documentary in the past three years. Her first film, *Ocean to Idaho*, chronicles the journey of Chinook salmon and their round-trip migration from Idaho nesting tributaries to the Pacific Ocean and back.

With a life expectancy of five years, the featured salmon traveled four rivers and three states to get to the Pacific, where they live for two to three years, before returning home.

Ocean to Idaho won an array of awards from several outdoor media associations and environment-focused film festivals. This 30-minute film also earned Millgate a pair of local Emmy nominations.



The two documentaries were supported by Northwest Toyota Dealers, including Teton Toyota of Idaho Falls, both financially and through usage of an off-road capable, Toyota Tundra pickup truck.

“I’m extremely excited about the opportunity to support Kris Millgate’s latest major production. What Kris endured while following grizzlies for this new film is inspirational,” said Travis Zmak, Teton Toyota managing partner. “We are committed to the long-term goal of maintaining access to wild places and preserving habitats for wildlife. I hope this film allows us to gain some educational perspective around the changing landscape where we live and use that education to have meaningful conversations about these challenging topics.”

On Grizzly Ground debuts online on November 1, 2023. To order tickets and gain access to the documentary, see the link below.

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