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Brothers at Arms



During 12 years of research in Yellowstone, the Craighead twins, Frank and John, pioneered modern radio-collaring techniques for wildlife research. "When releasing grizzlies," Frank once advised, "point them away from you." | Photo by the Craighead Institute

The most enduring footage of Frank and John Craighead comes from a 1967 National Geographic documentary, a scene in which a tranquilized grizzly regains consciousness just as the brothers are taking his measurements. They dive into their station wagon and slam the doors just before the bear—itsself the size of a small hatchback—flops onto the hood, howling in fury. It's a classic sequence in adventure filmmaking, and the chiseled, rugged, and good-humored Craighead twins make the perfect protagonists.

Between 1959 and '71, the Maryland-born Ph.D.s trapped and examined dozens of Yellowstone bears each summer, sometimes tracking them for days, even following a handful into their dens. The Craigheads were the first to hypothesize that snowfall plays a role in the onset of hibernation, the first to thoroughly document the grizzly bear's home range and diet, the first to provide solid population estimates, and the first to determine that the grizzly's chief cause of death was human contact.

When National Park Service officials called for the closure of Yellowstone's open garbage pits in the late 1960s, the Craigheads cautioned that the dumps should be shut down gradually, over a period of a decade. More than half of the park's bears fed at the dumps, they warned, and bears accustomed to human food would seek it out in the park's populated areas. Park managers countered that delaying closures might habituate a new generation of bears to feeding at the dumps. After the brothers went public with their argument, park officials added a clause to the Craigheads' annual research agreement, mandating that any published work first get NPS approval. Rather than bow to the pressure, the

Craigheads decided to sever ties with the Park Service.

Frank Craighead died in Jackson, Wyoming, in 2001, following four decades as a professor, author, and wildlife advocate. John also continued publishing scholarly work and now lives in Missoula, where the University of Montana sponsors a wildlife biology chair in his name. Frank's son, Lance, runs the Bozeman-based [Craighead Institute](#), sponsoring research and conservation projects for bears and other species across the West. —**Brian Kevin**

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