

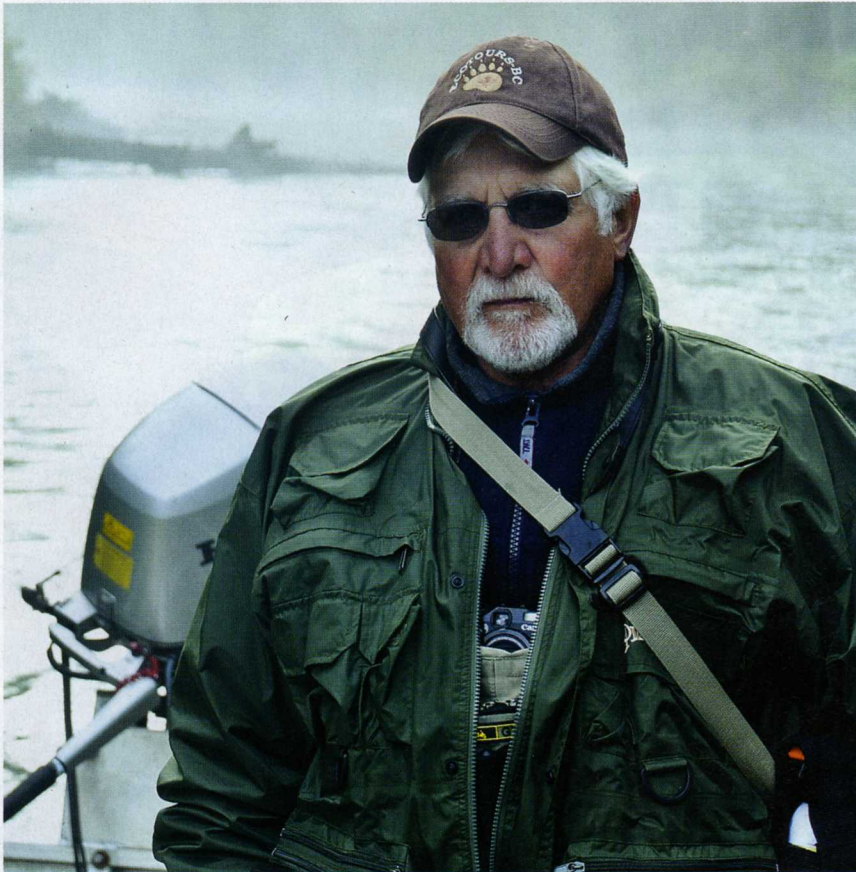


## Bear Soul

A reverent shout-out to  
B.C.'s bear whisperer

story and photography by

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**Cariboo Mountains Provincial Park, B.C.** Clad in hip waders and a rain jacket, Gary Zorn braces thigh-deep against the glacial current of the Mitchell River, hands the size of grizzly paws gripping the gunnel of our jet boat. "This river is a treasure," he confides in his gravelly whisper. "I bet you never knew places like this existed."

I open my mouth to respond from my seat in the prow, but Zorn raises a forefinger. Silence is key when edging toward a grizzly; to *Ursus arctos horribilis*, one of the continent's fiercest predators, the human voice is as obtrusive as a bullhorn at choir practice. So, I sit, listen and watch as Zorn guides the boat over a shallow riffle, then climbs back aboard.

Depending on whose science one believes, B.C.'s grizzlies number between 6,000 and 17,000, and are considered a species of "special concern" by government – highly vulnerable to fragmentation of their wide-ranging territory by roads and logging. But this is prime, pristine bear habitat. All



**GARY ZORN IS ONE OF THE FEW** B.C. wilderness guides who eschews bear-viewing platforms. Instead, he gets the curious out on the Cariboo's Mitchell River – which drains out of remote Cariboo Mountains Provincial Park, adjacent to the world-renowned Bowron Lakes canoe circuit – and up close to salmon-feeding grizzlies.

