

2023 BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT

March 2024

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Region 2 (R2) and the Blackfoot Challenge (BC) produce this wolf and bear activity report. These reports are typically compiled at the end of field season and include information on wolf, lion and black bear activity in the Blackfoot Valley and grizzly bear activity and management throughout FWP R2.

During 2023, FWP R2 and the BC worked with ranches throughout the area and assisted with range riding and livestock carcass removal. The BC Range Rider Program was established in 2008 and is ongoing. Sigrid Olson and Vicki Pocha are the range riders for the Challenge. The BC Carcass Pick-up Program has been ongoing since 2004. We thank Dan Masseur and Barry Gordon who pick up most of the carcasses associated with the annual carcass pickup program. Thanks again to the ranchers, landowners, partners, and funders who make these programs possible. Outside of the Blackfoot Valley, carcass pick-up programs are also occurring now in the Deer Lodge and Drummond areas as well as in the Bitterroot Valley.

Most bear management, preventative management and grizzly bear research trapping are handled by the FWP R2 Grizzly Bear and Black Bear Management Team. In the Blackfoot Valley the agency works in conjunction with Eric Graham (BC) who focuses on preventative projects and works closely with communities, homeowners, and landowners in the Blackfoot and Clearwater drainages. Eli Hampson (FWP) based out of Missoula, works throughout R2 (Blackfoot Valley, Missoula Basin, Bitterroot Valley, and lower and upper Clark Fork Valleys) and assists where needed. Brad Balis (FWP) is stationed in the Deer Lodge, Butte, and the Big Hole Valleys, but assists where needed. Bruce Montgomery (FWP) is stationed in the Bitterroot Valley and assists where needed. And Jamie Jonkel (FWP) based out of Missoula, works throughout R2, and assists where needed, but mostly handles calls from the public and provides logistical support.

Wildlife Biologist Mike Ebinger (FWP) relocated to Alaska in January 2024 and a new biologist will be hired the spring of 2024. The wildlife biologist is the point person for all issues pertaining to elk, deer, and other aspects of wildlife management in the Blackfoot drainage. In the meantime, for any wildlife-related matters on issues needing the attention of a biologist or game warden, contact Lincoln Game Warden Ezra Schwalm. We also welcome and introduce Garrett Kocab, the new Seeley Lake FWP Game Warden, who will be starting work in the Seeley Area the spring of 2024.

Wolf, lion and bear depredations and livestock loss reimbursement are handled by Wildlife Services (WS). The main contact for Powell County, Granite County, Deer Lodge County and Ravalli County is Bart Smith (WS). The main contact for Missoula County, Flathead County and Mineral County is Ted North (WS). The main contact for Lewis and Clark and Cascade Counties is John Meidke (WS). And Kraig Glazier is the District Supervisor for Western Montana. When wolf depredations are not the issue, Tyler Parks (FWP) handles all other wolf-related

management, wolf research trapping and reporting. Eli Hampson (FWP) handles mountain lion-related management.

We would like to recognize all partners that provide funding and technical assistance – FWP, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), The Nature Conservancy, Heart of the Rockies, the Livestock Loss Board, Northern Rockies Conservation Co-op, Defenders of Wildlife, Vital Ground, the Cross Charitable Foundation, People and Carnivores, the Stranahan Foundation, the Western Bear Foundation, and numerous individuals.

A quick reminder that all attractants on the ranch or homesite should be unavailable to bears. For example, be sure to lock up all sheds and barns where garbage, grain and other attractants are stored and if you need additional electric fence materials or energizers for containing carcasses, other bear attractants (grain, sweet licks, garbage, etc.) or if you have any questions about the BC Wildlife Committee, community-based bear management in the valley, the range rider, or the carcass pick-up program, call the **BC Wildlife Program Coordinator Eric Graham (406) 240-3132**. For areas outside of the Blackfoot Valley contact one of the FWP personal below.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR REPORTING WOLF, BEAR AND LION ACTIVITY:

Jamie Jonkel – FWP Bear Management Specialist (406) 544-1447

Eli Hampson---FWP Bear/Lion Management Technician (406) 210-3213

Brad Balis—FWP Deer Lodge Bear Management Technician (406) 465-9343

Bruce Montgomery—FWP Bitterroot Valley Bear Management Technician (406) 422-6184

Tyler Parks – FWP Wolf Management Specialist (406) 531-4454

Again, if you have a suspected livestock predation, please notify USDA WS as soon as possible to determine the cause of death. Regarding reimbursement for losses through the **Livestock Loss Board**: If you suspect a livestock loss due to mountain lion/wolf/grizzly bear predation, you can request an investigation to see if the losses were due to a confirmed or probable depredation. The Livestock Loss Board can pay only for confirmed or probable losses as determined by USDA WS. For more information go to this link: [Livestock Loss Board \(mt.gov\)](http://Livestock Loss Board (mt.gov)).

WS Powell County - Bart Smith (406) 660-0368

WS Missoula County - Ted North (406) 274-4856

WS Lewis & Clark County - John Meidtke (406) 855-8429

Western Montana District Supervisor- Kraig Glazier (406) 458-0106

Department of Livestock - Livestock Loss Board (406) 444-5609

And for any other wildlife-related matters needing the attention of a game warden contact:

Ezra Schwalm– MFWP Lincoln Game Warden (406) 438-3666

Garrett Kocab – MFWP Seeley Lake Game Warden (406) 210-1299

IMPORTANT UPDATES REGARDING 2023 GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY IN THE BLACKFOOT VALLEY

2023 Grizzly Bear Conflicts and Depredations in the Blackfoot Watershed

In 2023, there were a handful of conflicts and multiple reports of grizzly bears. The first report of grizzly tracks, although unverified, were on February 3, south of Helmville. The first verified tracks were observed on February 17th and 22nd near Seeley Lake. In mid-March, tracks were verified near Lincoln and in the Prickly Pear drainage north of Helena. As the spring progressed, tracks and sightings became more common through March and April. The first reports of a female with offspring were north of Lincoln on April 12th. During the remainder of the year, grizzly activity in the central basin and the headwaters of the Blackfoot drainage was constant with abundant reports of grizzlies feeding in crops, traveling near homesites and towns, and feeding on natural foods on private lands. Grizzly activity was documented through December with most of the bears in the den by Christmas. Compared to years past, there was a reduction in the number of conflicts in the Blackfoot Basin:



Grizzly bear tracks along muddy roads and riparian areas provide the early signs that bears have emerged from their dens

- Between 4/7/23 and 4/20/23, a grizzly killed four calves at a ranch southwest of Helmville. WS set traps, but no bears were captured.
- Starting on 4/24/23, through the remainder of the month, a female grizzly with two sub adults accessed uncontained garbage, birdfeeders, and other attractants at multiple home sites on the west side of the Lincoln Valley. FWP worked with landowners in the area on attractant issues and removed a moose carcass that had lured in the bears.
- On 4/25/2023 and again on 5/18/23, two calves were killed on a ranch west of Helmville. WS set traps, but no bears were captured.
- On 5/1 and 5/2/23, an adult male grizzly killed three calves at a different ranch west of Helmville. The grizzly was shot and killed by a private party and the incident is under investigation by federal wardens with the USFWS.
- The last couple of years a family group of grizzlies and lone grizzlies were documented getting into uncontained garbage in the Potomac Valley. This year starting on 5/8/23 and through the summer and fall, at least three grizzlies, one of which was the radio-collared bear known as “Kolb,” began accessing garbage and uncontained attractants in the Potomac Valley and the lower Blackfoot River canyon upstream from the confluence with the Clark Fork River. “Kolb” was photographed on multiple occasions getting into dumpsters and residential garbage cans. A large adult male, which was later road-killed on Hwy 200, and a smaller sub-adult grizzly were also observed accessing garbage and investigating homesites. FWP set traps on several occasions and worked closely with the

community and garbage service companies on garbage and other bear attractant issues. Mid-summer, members of the Potomac community petitioned the Missoula County Commissioners to assist with issues involving garbage and bears. On 9/28/23 the Potomac Bear Mitigation Zone was created. At this same time the County Commissioners voted to expand the Missoula Bear Buffer Zone to cover a larger portion of county lands in the Missoula Basin.

[County approves wider bear-buffer zone, bear-resistant bins \(missoulacurrent.com\)](https://missoulacurrent.com)

[Bear Buffer Zone regulations finalized - Seeley Swan Pathfinder \(seeleylake.com\)](https://seeleylake.com)

https://missoulian.com/news/local/bear-resistant-trashcans-required-around-missoula-potomac/article_f6ec10b0-6ecf-11ee-a7c8-f7e0422b4e85.html

- Other than an incident on 5/12/23, where a grizzly accessed uncontained garbage at a Salmon Lake residence, the Clearwater drainage had no conflicts with grizzlies.
- On 5/28/23 a grizzly killed a calf on a ranch east of Ovando. Due to the length of time between the incident and the reporting WS did not set a trap.
- 9/11/23 a grizzly was reported feeding on fruit trees in Helmville. The BC worked with the community and set up temporary electric fences and organized fruit gleanings efforts.
- On 9/21/23 the radio-collared grizzly bear known as “Kolb” was able to access the Clearwater Junction MDOT composting site. FWP responded, opened the gates, turned off the electric fence and electrified cattle guard. Traps were set but during the night “Kolb” exited the compost site and left the area.
- On 10/2, 10/6 and 11/14/23, a grizzly accessed chicken feed and grain at several home sites in the Woodworth area. No traps were set and FWP and the BC worked with homeowners to reduce attractants and one residence opted to construct a permanent electric fence.

IMPORTANT UPDATES REGARDING 2023 GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY ELSEWHERE IN REGION 2

2023 Grizzly Bear Conflicts and Depredations Outside of the Blackfoot Watershed

There was an increase in grizzly activity in the Missoula and Bitterroot Valleys again in 2023.

- Throughout the spring, summer, and fall, grizzly tracks and observations of a grizzly were reported in the Missoula North Hills region between Lavalle Creek, the Rattlesnake Recreation Area and the Marshall Ski Area. Two encounters with a mountain biker and a hiker were reported. In both cases the bear moved off.
- In July and August, a lone grizzly was spotted on multiple occasions in the Ninemile Valley. The bear was observed feeding on service berries, huckleberries, and choke cherries on multiple occasions. At no time did this bear act aggressively toward humans or show interest in garbage. On August 4th, however, the bear did investigate several backyards and was photographed near a chicken coop. The homeowner put up electric fence as a precaution.

- Throughout June and early July, a lone grizzly was observed and photographed on multiple occasions in the Clinton area. This bear spent a great deal of time feeding on service berries in the river bottom area between Clinton and Bonner. On 7/21/23, the grizzly known as “Sakaam” was captured and radio collared southeast of Missoula in the Sapphire Range. “Sakaam” ranged widely through the summer and fall between the Clark Fork River bottom, the North Sapphire mountains, and the Bitterroot River bottom. There is a high probability that the sightings of the unmarked bear near Clinton earlier in the year were of “Sakaam.” At no time did this bear act aggressively toward humans or show interest in residential garbage or other attractants. In September, however, “Sakaam” was documented feeding on apples at a residence near Lolo.

<https://dailymontanan.com/briefs/fwp-recent-grizzly-bears-outside-of-missoula-are-reminder-to-be-bear-aware/>



The bear named “Kolb” traveled widely before dropping his radio collar (lower middle of photo) in the Potomac area in late 2023.

- On 8/1/23 the radio-collared grizzly bear known as “Kolb” crossed Interstate 90, his third time, and traveled south into the Sapphire Range. “Kolb” joined up with “Sakaam” and they spent several weeks feeding on service berries in the same vicinity. On 9/1/23 “Kolb” returned north and crossed I-90 a 4th time and was photographed 9/2/23 feeding on uncontained garbage in Turah. He may also have been involved with a garbage incident in Clinton around that same time. “Kolb” returned to the Potomac area but did make a foray east toward Drummond, and, on 9/18/23, in the headwaters of Mulkey Creek, “Kolb” was photographed investigating several remote home sites. On 10/23/23 “Kolb” crossed I-90 a fifth time near Turah, spent several days south of Clinton and crossed I-90 a sixth time on 10/25 and returned to the Potomac area. He dropped his collar later that fall.
- There were additional reports of a grizzly accessing uncontained garbage in the Wallace Creek area near Clinton that were not associated with either “Kolb” or “Sakaam.”
- In the upper Clark Fork Basin, Region 3’s Big Hole Valley, Boulder River Basin and the Prickly Pear Watershed, there were frequent sighting and reports of grizzly bears. The only conflict reported, however, was an unverified report of a goat being killed in Dunkelberg Creek in mid-July. In mid-September several suspect cattle depredations were investigated by WS in upper Snowshoe Creek near Elliston. And on 8/21/23, a grizzly got into livestock feed in the Big Hole Valley. FWP worked with the family and the site was secured with an electric fence.

COLLARED AND RELOCATED GRIZZLY BEARS 2023

Here is a quick summary of relocated and radio-collared grizzlies in R2:

- On June 10, 2021, the female grizzly bear “Ursa” and her two yearlings were in Alice Creek in the headwaters of the Blackfoot River near the Continental Divide. “Ursa” was captured in 2019 on August 26th northeast of Lincoln in the Landers Fork. She spent most of her time ranging the south end of the Scapegoat Wilderness between the Landers Fork and McDonald Pass and denned in the headwaters of Falls Creek Northeast of Lincoln. “Ursa” was located and observed with her two sub adults on 5/5/21 in the headwaters of the Landers Fork. In 2022 Ursa was observed with at least one cub. She wore her collar through 2022 and denned again in the headwaters of Falls Creek. “Ursa” dropped her collar the spring of 2023.
- On 9/1/2022 a calf was killed by a grizzly near Lincoln. WS set traps and an adult male grizzly, known as “Lucky Four” from a previous research capture, was captured the next day. A second grizzly was observed on camera at the trap site. Not knowing which bear was involved the male was relocated to the South Fork of the Flathead River East of Hungry Horse Reservoir. He spent the remainder of the 2022 and denned in the Flathead National Forest. He dropped his collar the spring of 2023.
- In the fall of 2022, the NCDE Grizzly Bear Research Team captured and collared a female grizzly along the Swan-Clearwater Divide. The bear known as “Alpine Glow” spent time in the Clearwater River but mostly in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. She denned in the headwaters of Shaw Creek. In 2023 she spent the entire summer in the wilderness and denned in the South Fork of the Flathead River Basin.
- In early October 2022, two sub-adult grizzlies, presumed to be siblings, were captured in the Bitterroot Valley near Florence, and were relocated to a less inhabited area place on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley in the Sapphire Range. On the 20th, the sub-adult male (“Kolb”) was captured, radio collared and relocated to the Welcome Creek Wilderness. On October 2nd, the sub-adult female (“Lichenstone”) was captured, radio collared and relocated to the same area. Separately, the bears proceeded to travel north, crossed Interstate 90 at different sites, and reunited on the Rocky Mountain Front. The two bears denned together and in the spring of 2023 the female dropped her collar. The male “Kolb” returned to the Blackfoot Valley and ranged widely through the summer. He spent a great deal of time in the Potomac area and made several forays over to the Drummond area and made two trips south of I-90 to spend time in the Sapphire Range on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley. His dropped collar was picked up on November 15 on the south side of the Potomac Valley.
- On 5/9/23, an adult male was captured and collared for research in the Kleinschmidt Flat area. The bear, known as “Ward,” dropped his collar shortly thereafter in the Scapegoat Wilderness on 6/29/23.
- On 5/19/23, a sub-adult male was captured, and ear tagged for research in the Landers Fork northeast of Lincoln. The bear, named “Silver Prince,” was released on site, and not collared.

- On 7/21/23, a sub-adult male grizzly was captured south of I-90 in the Sapphire Range southeast of Missoula. The MPG Ranch Black Bear Study captured the bear in a black bear trap. FWP responded and placed a collar on the bear and released it at site. The bear, known as “Sakaam,” was originally captured on the Flathead Indian Reservation as a yearling in December 2021 and at some point, ventured south of I-90 to the Sapphire Range. After his second capture, “Sakaam” spent most of August feeding on service berries on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley, a good portion of September in the Clinton area feeding on chokecherries and in October came back to the Bitterroot Valley to forage in the river bottoms between Lolo and Florence. In December 2023, “Sakaam” denned in the Welcome Creek Wilderness.
- On 9/9/2023, an adult male grizzly, known as “Butters,” was trapped outside of Choteau after several turkeys were killed. The bear was relocated near Rogers Pass. Butters spent most of his time along the Rocky Mountain Front but did make several forays into the Lincoln area. He denned in the Scapegoat Wilderness.

GRIZZLY BEAR MORTALITIES 2023

In 2023 there were three confirmed grizzly bear mortalities:

- On 5/2/23 an adult male grizzly was shot and killed by a private party near Helmville. The bear was involved with three calf depredations. WS and FWP responded to the incident and the case was taken over by USFWS for investigation.
- On 8/14/23 a cub grizzly was killed on Highway 200 east of Lincoln.
- On 10/19/23 an adult male grizzly was struck and killed by a vehicle just outside of Bonner on Hwy 200. The bear, known as “Dick,” had been captured, collared, and handled in 2009 for research purposes. He dropped his collar shortly after capture but was located on several occasions, via DNA samples, at a rubbing tree in the Rattlesnake Wilderness boundary in upper Twin Creek after his capture and again in 2022 at an elk-kill site in the Potomac Valley. During the summer and fall of 2023, a large grizzly matching “Dick’s” description was documented on several occasions accessing uncontained garbage in the Potomac Valley and lower Blackfoot River Canyon between Potomac and Bonner.



In October 2023, a research bear known as “Dick” was struck and killed on Highway 200 outside of Bonner.

GRIZZLY BEAR AND BLACK BEAR NATURAL FOODS SUMMARY 2023

In 2023, berry production was excellent in the Blackfoot Valley and elsewhere in the region. Huckleberries, service berry, choke cherry and hawthorn production were abundant and there

was an ample supply of other natural bear foods the entire fall. As a result, grizzly and black bear conflicts were minimal throughout Western Montana. The number of bear conflicts in and around the Potomac Valley and the lower Blackfoot drainage, however, were exceptionally high. This was most likely due to the phenomena of “training up” of the local bear populations. For years Potomac has had chronic issues with black bears because of the excessive amounts of uncontained garbage and other human food attractants (bird seed, livestock grain, chicken feed, small livestock and other unnatural foods) associated with residential areas. The Potomac area has always been a big draw for both black bears and mountain lions, but in recent years the local grizzly population has also keyed into these food sources.

2023 BLACK BEAR AND MOUNTAIN LION ACTIVITY

Black bear conflicts in the Blackfoot, Clearwater, Clark Fork, and Bitterroot drainages occurred on a regular basis. But compared to years past, other than the Potomac Valley, the number of conflicts were below average.

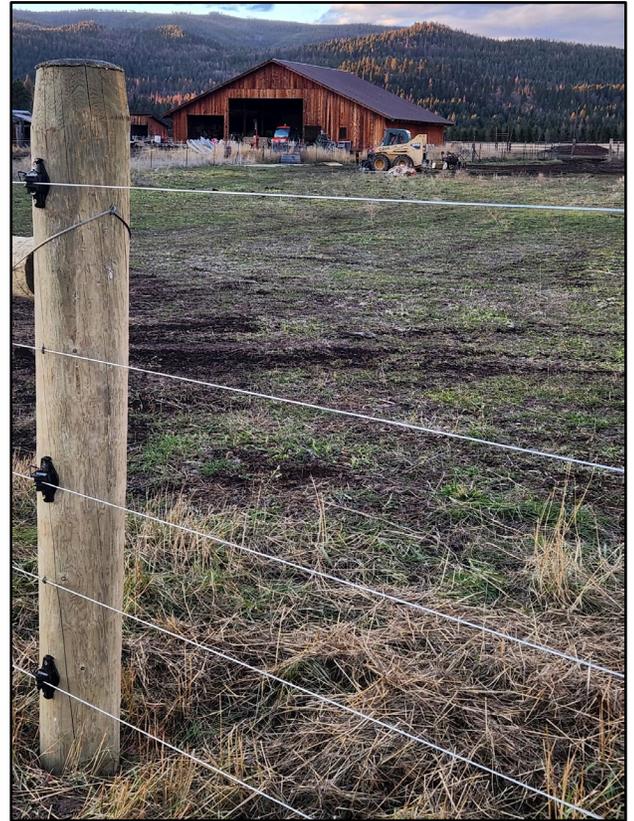
In January, February and March of 2023, FWP fielded reports of lion activity throughout the Blackfoot, Clearwater, Clark Fork, Bitterroot and Missoula Valleys. There were a handful of livestock depredations and incidents where lions were in proximity to home sites. FWP was called out on multiple occasions to assist trappers with freeing trapped mountain lions from wolf and furbearer traps. Please report black bear and mountain lion activity and incidents as quickly as possible and for detailed information on black bear and lion activity in and around R2 check out these two sites:

<http://missoulabears.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/missoulabears/>

BEAR SMART COMMUNITY EFFORTS IN THE BLACKFOOT AND ELSEWHERE IN REGION 2

The Blackfoot region is well known for a community-driven approach to managing and mitigating for bear conflicts, and the Blackfoot Valley has been recognized internationally for cooperative efforts and having some of the lowest numbers of grizzly conflicts in the state. But, as mentioned above, there are a few grizzlies in the Blackfoot watershed that have developed bad habits the last few years. Therefore, it is always best to lock up all sheds and barns where garbage, grain and other attractants are stored. If you need additional alarm devices, bear



This electric fence built in 2023 was designed to keep bears away from attractants like livestock feed that are typically stored in sheds and barns.

spray, electric fence materials or energizers for containing carcasses or other bear attractants (grain, sweet licks, garbage, etc.), call Eric Graham or James Jonkel.

Collaborative community-led approaches for mitigating bear conflicts can benefit both people and bears. For many years the BC has been practicing this approach effectively and recently other communities around R2 have been developing similar programs for addressing bear-human conflicts. For example, the City of Missoula, the town of Seeley Lake, the town of Alberton and the community of Potomac Valley have organized and are working diligently on addressing garbage and other attractant issues that are the driving force for bear-related conflicts. A similar endeavor is occurring in the Bitterroot Valley. For more information on these efforts check out these links:

[Bear Smart Missoula – Missoula Bears](#)

[Potomac Wildlife | Facebook](#)

[Looking for in Seeley Lake | Looking for wildlife photos or videos taken in the Seeley Lake area including all of the Clearwater watershed | Facebook](#)

Resources are available for any communities interested in pursuing similar efforts. For example, the Bear Smart Community Resource Fund, is available through the nonprofit group People and Carnivores: [Nonprofit offers money for communities to go Bear Smart \(missoulia.com\)](#). In addition, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee has a whole website devoted to assisting communities with bear smart community efforts. For more information, contact Eric Graham or any of the R2 Bear Management Team or visit this link: [Bear Smart Communities - Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee \(igbconline.org\)](#).

RANGE RIDER AND LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICKUP PROGRAMS

The Blackfoot Challenge is happy to report that a good portion of the livestock producers in the Blackfoot Valley are participating in both programs. Currently during the spring, summer and fall there is a range rider covering the central portion of the Blackfoot Valley and a range rider covering the Potomac Valley. If you are interested in the range rider program, contact Eric Graham for more information.

The Blackfoot Challenge's Livestock Carcass Pick-up and Removal Program runs during calving season from mid-February through mid-May. Thereafter, carcasses in the Blackfoot Valley are picked up by FWP or Blackfoot Challenge employees. In the last few years there have been incidents of grizzly bears venturing into ranch compounds to retrieve carcasses left out for the carcass pick-up program. Dead calves were either left on the ground or placed on hay bales within high activity areas on the ranch and bears were lured in to feed on the carcasses. As a result, the pick-up protocol was re-evaluated, and it is now recommended that after March all carcasses set aside for pick-up be stored away from ranch premises. **For carcass pick-up service**

in the Blackfoot Valley, call Dan Massey at 406-793-5639 (winter and spring) and Barry Gordon at 406-541-1078 (summer and fall). If you are unable to make contact at these numbers or need carcass pick-up service elsewhere in R2, call James Jonkel with FWP at 406-544-1447. The carcasses are either taken to the compost site at Clearwater Junction or the Missoula and Deer Lodge landfill sites. To learn more about this program, watch “Living with Carnivores: Boneyards, Bear & Wolves.” Click here: <https://vimeo.com/131528982>.

ELECTRIC FENCE AND ELECTRIFIED CATTLE GUARD COST-SHARE PROJECTS

Multiple fencing projects have occurred at various ranches and residential sites across the Blackfoot Valley. Over the last two summers, the BC has assisted multiple families with electrified residential containment fences, drive-over electric mats, and larger scale NRCS electric fence projects. NRCS EQIP funds have provided participants with financial assistance through the Grizzly Bear Mitigation Targeted Implementation Plan. This funding has allowed for installation of electric fences and electrified drive-over mats to deter grizzlies from entering ranch headquarters throughout the Blackfoot area. For more information on how to access NRCS EQIP funding in the Blackfoot or elsewhere, check out the link below. Electric fencing is an excellent way to protect livestock, fowl and contain residential attractants. Electric fence is a method of ensuring that bears or other predators that check out yard areas will not come back again. A good shock is the best way to teach bears to keep away. Contact Jamie Jonkel (544-1447) or Eric Graham (240-3132) if you would like to talk about cost-share programs to install electric fence around home sites, livestock holding pens, chickens, cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, bee yards, fruit orchards, gardens and other sites that might attract bears or other wildlife. For information on electric fence and another option for cost sharing on electric fence, check out these sites:

<https://defenders.org/got-grizzlies>

[USDA APHIS | Wildlife Services' Nonlethal Initiative](#)

[Grizzly Conflict Mitigation Targeted Implementation Plan \(usda.gov\)](#)

2023 WOLF ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Population trend: Montana FWP uses an Integrated Patch Occupancy Model (IPM) to estimate the state's wolf population. According to the IPM, the statewide and R2 wolf population declined slightly from 2020 to 2022 (Figure 1). The model estimates that roughly 47 packs and 300 wolves were present in R2 as of December 31, 2022. The Blackfoot Valley is home to roughly 15 or more of those packs (Figure 2) and likely 70 to 100 wolves.

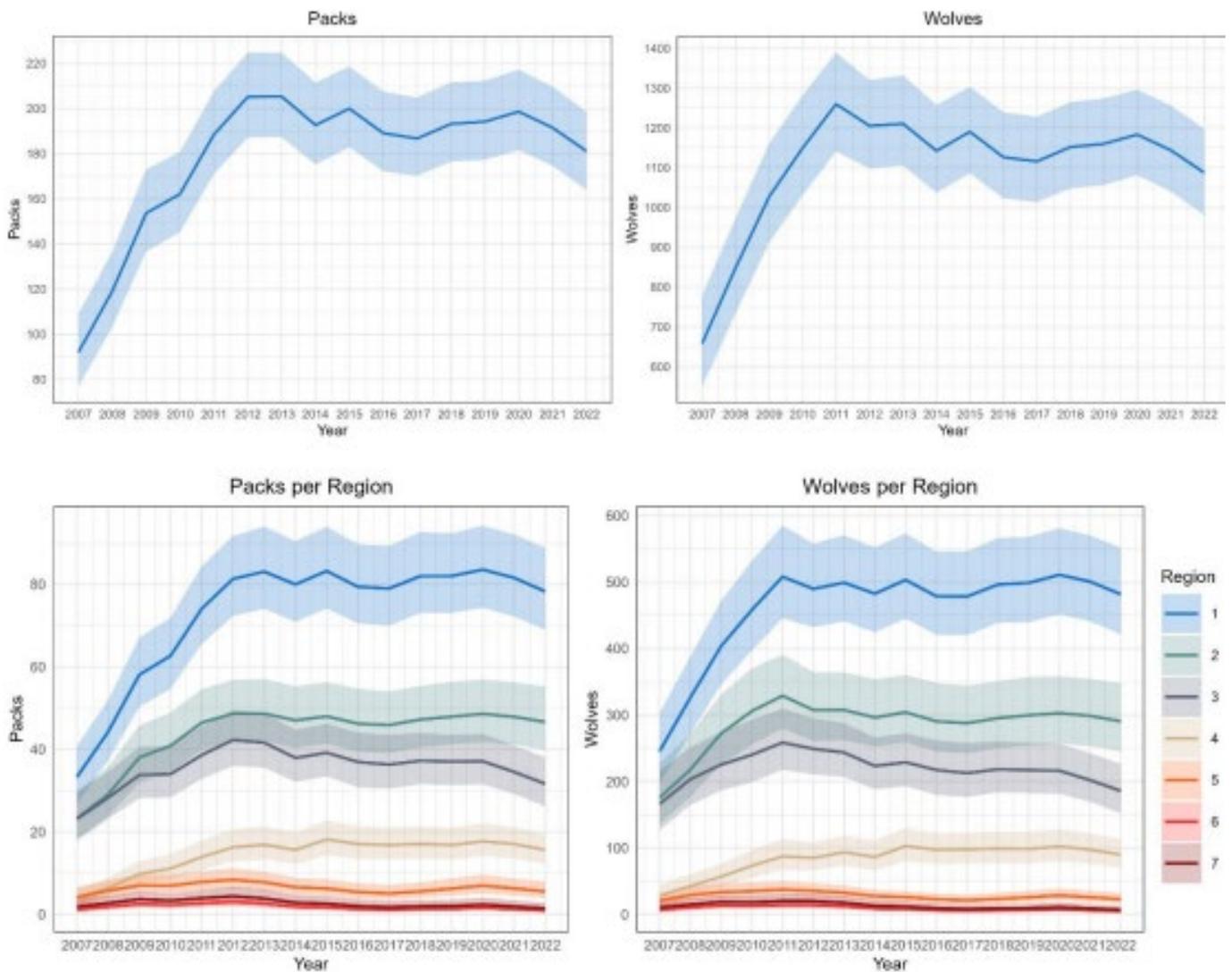


Figure 1. Estimated number of packs and wolves in Montana and by MT FWP Administrative Region, 2007-2022. Ribbons indicate 95% credible intervals (From FWP's 2022 Annual Wolf Report).

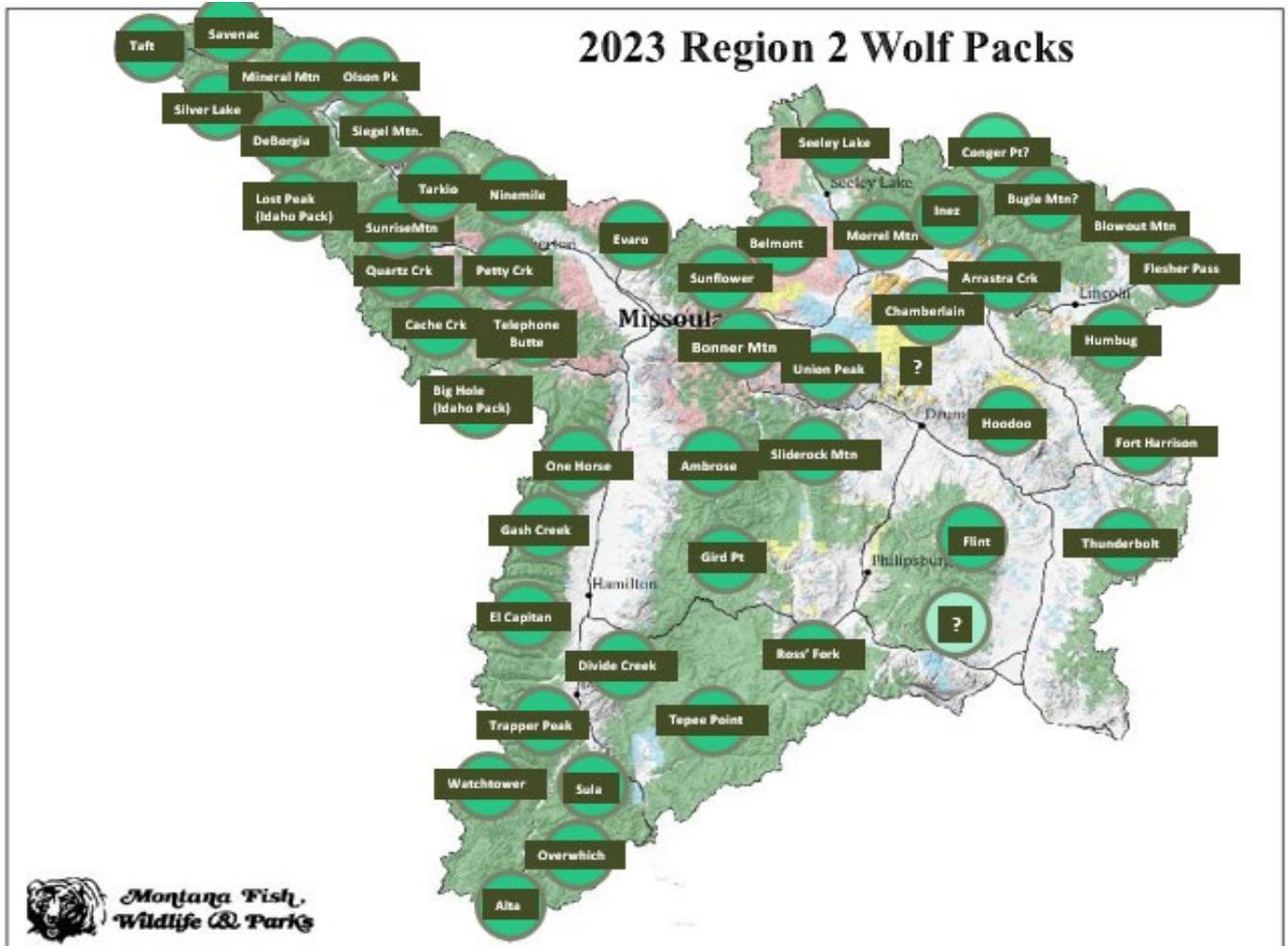


Figure 2. Wolf Packs in R2 during 2023.

Harvest: During the 2022-23 wolf hunting and trapping season, 91 wolves were harvested in R2 (Figure 3). Of those wolves, 33 were harvested in the Blackfoot Valley. As of Feb 15th, 2024, 79 wolves were harvested in R2 during the 2023-24 harvest season (Figure 3). And 35 of those wolves were harvested in the Blackfoot Valley. On average, 24 wolves are harvested in the valley every year (2012-2022 average=24).

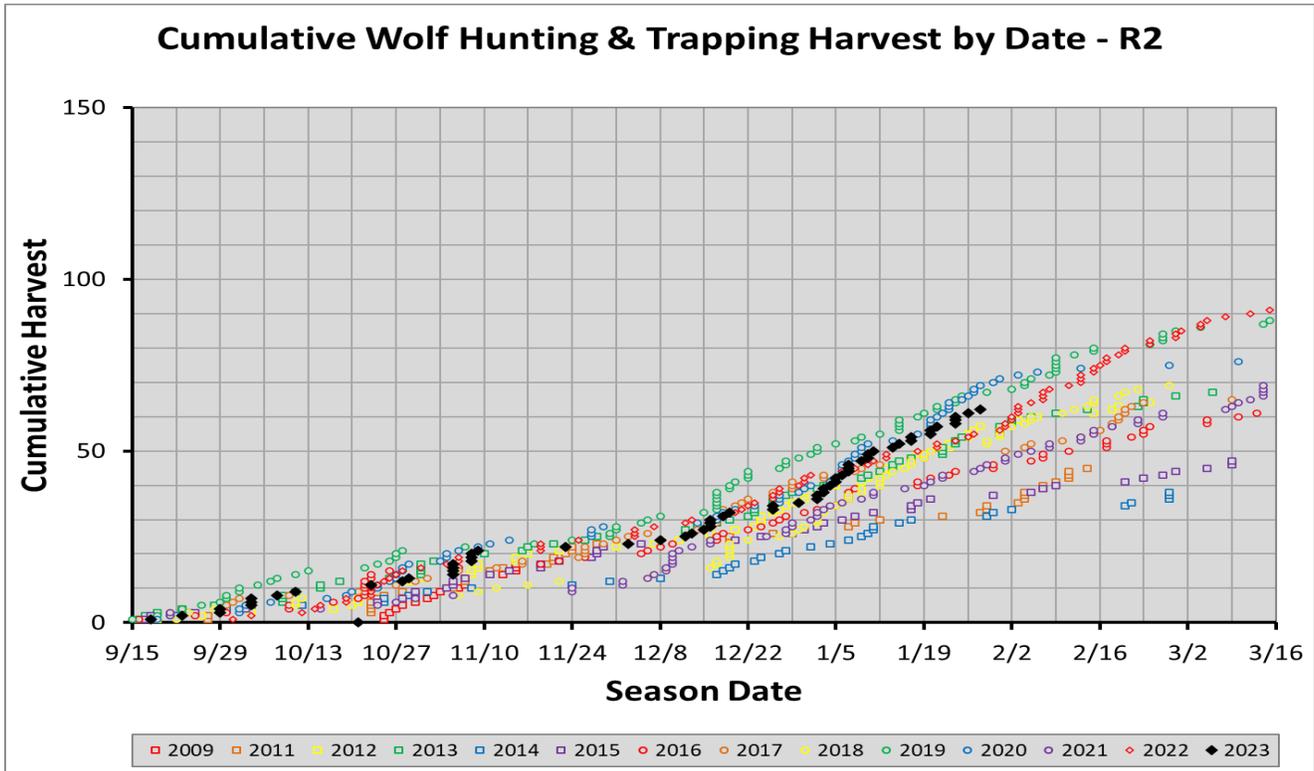


Figure 3. Region 2 cumulative wolf harvest by date for seasons 2009 & 2011-2023. The 2023 season was still open when this chart was produced.

Depredations: During 2023, Wildlife Services confirmed one calf and two lambs that were killed by wolves in the Blackfoot Valley. While control actions were attempted, no wolves were removed in response to the confirmed depredations. On average, there are 10 confirmed livestock depredations in the valley every year (2015-2022 average=10.25). It is important to note that there is likely additional livestock loss to wolves that is not discovered or confirmed each year.

Radio Collaring: Wildlife Services radio collared one wolf northeast of Avon to assist with wolf monitoring and depredation response. FWP captured and radio collared eight wolves in the Blackfoot Valley. These wolves were collared out of the Sunflower, Belmont, Seeley, Blowout, and Fort Harrison wolf packs. As of January 2024, six radio-collared wolves were still active in the valley.



Image 1. FWP R2 Wolf Technician Brandon Davis radio collaring two wolves in the Blackfoot.



Image 2. Wolf tracks approaching fladry.