

THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT

July and August 2017

Hello everyone, this is Eric Graham working as the Wildlife Technician for the Blackfoot Challenge. In coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) we produce this Wolf and Bear Activity Report.

We are working with several ranches throughout the Blackfoot watershed to help them keep an eye on predator activity and to increase herd supervision until the cows come home from their grazing leases in October 2017. For our range rider program this season we have Sigrid Olson working out of the Potomac area and Jordan Mannix working the Ovando/Helmville area and toward Lincoln. I have also been monitoring collared grizzly bears and wolves in the watershed, assisting MFWP with grizzly bear research trapping efforts, attending tours/meetings and giving educational talks in the Blackfoot watershed. Kelsey Bailey went back to her full time schedule at the Missoula stockyards. Thanks for your help this season Kelsey we really appreciate it!

Thanks again to all of the ranchers and landowners that make this program possible. Thanks to all of the partners who provide funding and technical assistance - MFWP, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Livestock Loss Board, Northern Rockies Conservation Co-op, Defenders of Wildlife, Vital Ground, the Cross Charitable Foundation, the Stranahan Foundation, and numerous individuals.

If you have any questions about the wildlife program please call the Blackfoot Challenge **Wildlife Committee Chair - Randy Gazda (406) 793-7402.**

Contact Info for reporting wolf and/or bear activity:

Eric Graham – Blackfoot Challenge Wildlife Technician (406) 240-3132

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

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

Scott Eggeman – MFWP Blackfoot Area Wildlife Biologist (406) 542-5542

If you have a suspected depredation please notify USDA **Wildlife Services (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 wolf/grizzly bear predation, you can request an investigation to see if the losses were due to a confirmed or probable wolf/grizzly bear depredation. Confirmed or probable mountain lion depredations will be covered starting October 1st, 2017. The Livestock Loss Board can pay only for confirmed or probable losses as determined by USDA-Wildlife Services (WS).

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

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

IMPORTANT UPDATES

BEAR -

In early July a young male grizzly bear was captured, collared and relocated for management purposes. The bear was predated on free ranging chickens in the Kleinschmidt Flats area. After being relocated on the south end of the Mission Mountains the bear named "Kleinschmidt" spent some time in the mountains feeding on huckleberries and natural foods. He eventually ended up hanging around Holland Lake and got into a chicken coop and was shot and killed by the landowner. The case is under investigation by the USFWS.

WOLF –

On August 4th, MFWP trapped and radio collared an adult wolf out of the Sunflower Pack. This is a newly named pack for 2017. The Sunflower Pack is named after Sunflower Mountain which is located near Gold Creek. This pack frequents Gold Creek and the Rattlesnake Wilderness. In 2016, we identified 4 adults in this pack thanks to solid winter reports from our Potomac Range Rider Sigrid Olson.

In early August Wildlife Services confirmed that two calves were injured by wolves on private land West of Helmville. WS radio collared a yearling wolf in response and will attempt to remove the offending wolves. Multiple other depredations occurred in this area earlier this year.

In mid-August a black wolf was killed by a vehicle on Highway 200 near the Highway 279 junction.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK

Pack Structure: 5 Adults 5 Pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: The wolf collar deployed in 2016 malfunctioned and is no longer transmitting. The collared wolf is still active in the pack.

BELMONT PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: This pack is thought to spend time on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe reservation.

BUGLE MOUNTAIN PACK

Backcountry

CHAMBERLAIN PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: 2-3 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: MFWP continues to monitor this pack via radio telemetry.



A photo of a black wolf that is suspected to be a part of the Inez pack. Photo by Jordan Mannix.

LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: MFWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

SEELEY LAKE PACK

Pack Structure: 3 Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

SUNFLOWER PACK

Pack Structure: 4 Adults 7 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: MFWP will begin monitoring via radio telemetry.



The Sunflower Pack adult male wolf that was collared by FWP. Photo by Molly Parks.

STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 4 Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

Pack Report: MFWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: 3+ Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: MFWP will begin monitoring via radio telemetry.

GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY

Grizzly bears have been widely dispersed throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater Valleys this season and have been reported by landowners, ranchers, local residents, hunters and recreationists.

PLEASE remember to carry your bear spray and know how to use it.



Photos of a grizzly bear family group taking advantage of agricultural crops in the Blackfoot.

We appreciate you taking the time to call in all of your grizzly bear observations including tracks and sightings. If possible take photos and a measurement of the width of the front foot of grizzly bear tracks.

MFWP had been research trapping for grizzly bears in the Blackfoot Valley. With the hot/dry conditions and forest fires the trap line was shut down and MFWP will continue research trapping next season. A collar is still needed on a female grizzly bear east of Lincoln for the grizzly bear trend monitoring studies.

All of the research grizzly bear collars for Brittani Johnson's electric fence study have dropped off, as they were supposed to. "Walking Bear" dropped his collar east of Lincoln towards Alice Creek country. "Stone" dropped his collar upstream from River Junction and the North Fork of the Blackfoot confluence. "Marten" dropped his collar back in the Scapegoat Wilderness near Meadow Creek country. Both "Dan" and "Lucky" dropped their collars on the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA).



Brittani Johnson locating "Dan's" dropped collar on the BCCA using radio telemetry. Photo by Bob Wiesner.



Jordan Mannix after he found "Lucky's" dropped collar using radio telemetry. Photo by Eric Graham

Currently there is one research female grizzly bear in the Blackfoot watershed to support the ongoing Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) population trend monitoring study. "Icel" continues to be localized around Woodworth, Monture Creek, the Blackfoot River above Clearwater Junction and Cottonwood Creek. She has been spotted during MFWP flight surveys this season with one cub of the year. More information related to the grizzly bear population monitoring study is available on the MFWP website:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/monitoring.html>

Bears had been feeding on biscuitroot and the excellent huckleberry and serviceberry crop. They shifted into lower country towards the hawthorn and chokecherry crop and are finishing up the last of them. There is still an assortment of berries available including dogwood, snowberry, kinnikinnick, rosehip and other riparian foods. Some grizzlies have recently been spotted feeding on the last of the hay, barley, alfalfa, oats and peas in the agricultural fields.

MFWP set up a residential containment electric fence at a residence north of Helmville to prevent bears from accessing apple trees. The site had historically had bears coming in for the apples and the landowners wanted to prevent this from happening in the future.

There have been several reports of river floaters seeing grizzly bears. Below Harry Morgan fishing access site a floater spotted a family group of grizzlies down river and pulled over and waited a couple of hours for the bears to move on before continuing the float.

Conflicts with grizzly bears have been fairly quiet so far this season in the Blackfoot and Clearwater Valleys.

Wildlife Services responded to a report of a dead calf west of Helmville. WS determined the calf had died of unknown causes but a family group of grizzlies had been scavenging on the carcass.

We would like to remind bow hunters to be bear aware when hunting in grizzly bear country. Please carry bear spray and know how to use it, keep a clean camp and remove carcasses as quickly as possible. Be especially careful when going into kill sites.

At Russell Gates campground two grizzly bears tipped over a bear resistant dumpster to access garbage. The lid was not properly latched and the bears got a food reward. FWP responded and properly closed the lid and removed the uncontained garbage and moved the dumpster.

A female grizzly with 2 yearlings has been spotted a couple times near Harpers Lake.

There were grizzly tracks and scat at the compost site near Clearwater Junction. The bear was not able to access the site due to the electric fence.

The bones of a dead calf were found by a rancher north of Helmville. There was both wolf and grizzly bear sign in the area but it had been too long since the time of death for WS to respond to determine the cause of death.

BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY

The forest fires have made it difficult for many people to manage their garbage especially for the folks that were evacuated. There were several reports from fire fighters that bears had gotten into garbage around the Seeley Lake area. Now that many of those folks are back in their homes and garbage pickup has started again we hope that things will get back to normal.

At a residence south of Ovando, a young male black bear was immobilized by MFWP and then relocated to Lolo Creek area.

There have been a handful of reports from the Potomac area of bears getting into garbage.

Around Lincoln there have been reports of people seeing grizzly bears and two grizzly bears were spotted on the edge of town feeding on berry bushes near home sites.

Near Johnsrud a young black bear had become habituated and approached several people. The bear had gotten into a freezer and garbage and had become food conditioned. Since the bear became a threat to human safety, MFWP decided to euthanize the bear.

If you have natural foods for bears around you home site please take extra precautions to keep your attractants contained.

For more information on how to avoid either directly or indirectly feeding wildlife in Montana, visit: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/feeding/default.html>

Please take down your birdfeeders, contain your garbage and pick your fruit trees. Please contain your attractants such as pet food, salt licks and livestock feed as to reduce human-bear conflicts. Thanks.

ELECTRIC FENCE STUDY

Grizzly Bear Study Update

Brittani Johnson's electric fence study is in Phase 2. Phase 1 lasted from 2015-2016. The 20 electric fence enclosures that were up last summer 2016 and in the summer of 2015 are not up this year. The field experiments and analyses of that portion of the study are done. Brittani did not get a chance to set up a meeting with residents to discuss the result but is hoping to accomplish that sometime this fall. Phase 2 is now underway and Brittani is developing a map of all permanent three-wire electric fences in the Blackfoot Valley. Five GPS collars were placed on grizzly bears in the Blackfoot valley that collected data every 35 minutes. Brittani will be analyzing the collared grizzly bears movement patterns related to the permanent three-wire electric fence come fall after the collars have fallen off those bears in August. The study will be completely finished in December and Brittani will hold another meeting to discuss final results.

LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICK-UP PROGRAM

The Blackfoot Challenge's Livestock Carcass Pick Up and Removal Program ran from mid-February through mid-May. If you currently have a carcass for pickup please call 544-1447 to reach Jamie Jonkel with Montana FWP. The carcass will be taken to the compost site near Clearwater Junction to help prevent conflicts with bears and wolves. To learn more about this program, click here: ["Living with Carnivores: Boneyards, Bear & Wolves"](#)

ELECTRIC FENCE COST SHARE PROGRAM

Contact Jamie Jonkel 544-1447 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. More information is available at <http://www.missoulabears.org> along with more detailed reports on grizzly bear, black bear and mountain lion activity.