

# **THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT**

## **May and June 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.

Once again, 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 both Jordan Mannix and Kelsey Bailey working the Ovando/Helmville area and the Lincoln area. 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.

Thanks again to all of the ranchers and landowners that make this program possible. Thanks to all of the partners that 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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 was captured, collared and relocated for management purposes. The bear was predating on free ranging chickens in the Kleinschmidt flats area. More details will follow in the next wolf and bear report.

Wolf:

In April and May Wildlife Services confirmed 9 calves that were killed by wolves and one calf that was injured by wolves in the Avon and Helmville area. Four wolves were removed in response to the depredations. There are no radio collars in the area and it is unknown which packs are responsible for the depredations.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, Wildlife Services trapped and radio collared a yearling male wolf out of the Union Peak pack near I-90.

On June 15, Wildlife Services trapped and radio collared a yearling female wolf out of the Stonewall Mountain pack North of Lincoln.

## **BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS**

### **ARRASTRA CREEK PACK**

Pack Structure: 5 Adults 6 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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

### **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: WS collared one wolf and euthanized five following a confirmed depredation.

### INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults #? Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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

### LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults

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: MFWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

### STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 4 Adults

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, and recreationists.

PLEASE remember to carry your bear spray and to keep a clean camp as to avoid attracting bears to prevent conflicts.

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.

A grizzly bear was shot by a black bear hunter northeast of Bonner on 5/16. The case is still under investigation but here is a link to an article that was written in the Missoulian.

[http://missoulian.com/news/local/grizzly-killing-near-missoula-leaves-neighbors-wondering/article\\_57060267-09fd-59be-a49a-ea1f14e26282.html](http://missoulian.com/news/local/grizzly-killing-near-missoula-leaves-neighbors-wondering/article_57060267-09fd-59be-a49a-ea1f14e26282.html)

MFWP has been research trapping for grizzly bears in the Blackfoot Valley. The last of 5 collars for Brittani Johnson's electric fence study was placed on a male grizzly bear on 5/24. The 586# male grizzly bear was named "Lucky" and was trapped east of Kleinschmidt Flat. The bear has since been located on a FWP flight survey southwest of Helmville.



"Lucky" in the culvert trap after the handling procedure. *Photo by Brittani Johnson.*

Below is a list of the sub-adult grizzly bear males that we have caught this season. These bears were not outfitted with collars because we only have collars left for female research grizzlies.

- “Rocky” a 297# male grizzly bear was caught in a remote location northeast of Lincoln on 6/11.



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- “Callaghan” a 280# male grizzly was caught in a remote location northeast of Lincoln on 6/17. *Trail camera photo by Mike Johnson.*



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- “Gabe” a 316# male grizzly bear was caught in a remote location northeast of Lincoln on 6/25. *Trail camera photo by Mike Johnson.*

- “Pat” a 336# male grizzly was also caught in a remote location northeast of Lincoln on 6/29.

Below is a quick update from some of the grizzlies that were captured and collared last season for the electric fence study.

- “Walking Bear” is a male grizzly bear that weighed 466 pounds when he was captured on 5/28/16. After the capture he had been located between Lincoln and the Highway 141 Blackfoot River bottom. The collar dropped off the bear and it was retrieved by FWP in May northeast of Lincoln. The folks that analyze the data said that he had traveled over to Arlee and St. Ignatius country.
- “Stone” a sub-adult male grizzly that weighed 253 pounds when he was captured on 6/19/16 has been located north of Ovando near Woodworth and south of Helmville/Nevada Lake. He has not been located in the Blackfoot during the last two FWP flight surveys.
- “Dan” an adult male grizzly, weighed 475 pounds when he was captured on 6/23/16. He ranges from east of Elevation Mountain, over to Monture Creek, over by the Highway 141 Blackfoot River bottom, on to the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA) and on the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA). This is the bear that had previously been captured on the Rocky Mountain Front and came down to the Blackfoot area on his own.
- “Marten” a male grizzly that weighed 336 pounds when he was captured on 7/12/16 dropped his collar in the Scapegoat Wilderness and it was retrieved by FWP in early July.
- The remaining collars for the electric fence study on “Dan, Stone and Lucky” are programmed to drop off on 8/9/17. The GPS collars store the location information and will need to be retrieved to download the data for analysis.
- Currently there is one research female grizzly bear in the Blackfoot watershed to support the ongoing 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 FWP 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>

Research trapping in the Blackfoot watershed will continue this season (weather dependent) until we hopefully capture and collar another female grizzly bear for the population trend monitoring study in the south end of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE).

Bears had been feeding on natural foods such as deer fawns, elk calves and digging biscuitroot and eating spring vegetation. They are now taking advantage of the excellent huckleberry and serviceberry crop.

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

Earlier this spring in the Blackfoot River bottom, a couple of antler hunters with dogs had a close encounter with a grizzly that charged.

Some other antler hunters reported a close encounter with female grizzly and 2 yearlings northwest of Woodworth.

Wildlife Services responded to a report of a calf depredation west of Helmville. The calf had been depredated and fed on by some bears but the carcass was too old to set traps.

Near Seeley Lake two sub adult grizzlies were naturally feeding on sedges and got too close to several backyards with attractants such as domestic turkeys, goats and pigs. Nothing happened but FWP and Defenders of Wildlife are working with the owners to contain the attractants with electric fence.

### **BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY**

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.

Black bear activity has been quiet around Lincoln.

Seeley Lake has had quite a bit of black bear activity. FWP set a trap to catch a bear that had got into a woodshed. The bear was not captured.

There have been several bears being attracted onto porches seeking out birdfeeders and garbage in the Double Arrow area. A black bear was shot by homeowners on the Double Arrow on 4/27 after repeatedly visiting their garbage. Read the full article here: <http://www.seeleylake.com/story/2017/05/11/news/dont-make-a-fed-bear-a-dead-bear/2132.html>

There have been some reports of black bears getting into garbage in the Placid Lake area.



Here is a photo of the big male black bear was reported as roadkill in the Greenough area. The bear had been reported as a grizzly bear. *Photo courtesy of FWP.*

There has been a lot of black bear activity in the Potomac area related to goats, pigs, sheep and chickens. Wildlife Services set traps for a black bear that killed a goat. Also a landowner shot a bear that was caught in the act of killing a sheep. This was the same bear and two different incidents.

In the Bonner area there has been a lot of black bear reports related to garbage and birdfeeders.

The bears have been feeding on deer fawns and elk calves and will now take advantage of the huckleberry and serviceberry crop.

If you have good natural foods for bears around your 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>

### **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 and Brittani is planning to hold a meeting in Ovando in August to discuss those results with residents. 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 (and some continue to collect) 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.