

THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT

September and October 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 have finished our range rider season working with several ranches throughout the Blackfoot watershed to help them keep an eye on predator activity and to increase herd supervision. The cattle are now home from their grazing leases and the calves have been shipped. We will adjust our efforts next season based on the information we have gathered this season. We will continue our range rider program next May through October 2018.

A BIG THANKS to our range riders this season - Sigrid Olson, Jordan Mannix and Kelsey Bailey. We appreciate their dedication and hard work that make this range rider program work in the Blackfoot. Thanks once 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

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. The collar in this pack is likely malfunctioning and may no longer be transmitting a radio signal.

BUGLE MOUNTAIN PACK

Backcountry

CHAMBERLAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 3 Adults

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: 10 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 3 Pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

SUNFLOWER PACK

Pack Structure: 4 Adults 6 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: MFWP will begin monitoring via radio telemetry.

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

There are still some grizzly bears out and about in the Blackfoot and Clearwater drainages. Several reports of tracks and sightings came in from hunters the last week of hunting season. Some of the track reports indicate the bears are headed to the high country toward the den while other reports indicate the bears are taking advantage of hunter's deer and elk gut piles. Expect to see some grizzlies out until mid-December and then out of their dens in late March and early April 2018.

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. (See ["Partnerships put Bear Spray in the Hands of More People"](#) for more on MFWP the Blackfoot Challenge's bear spray distribution program.)

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.

Currently “Icel” is the one research female grizzly bear in the Blackfoot watershed to support the ongoing Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) population trend monitoring study. She was 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> MFWP will continue grizzly bear research trapping next season in 2018. A collar is still needed on a female grizzly bear east of Lincoln for the grizzly bear trend monitoring studies.

“Baptiste” is a radio collared two year old male, research grizzly bear that came over from the Flathead Indian Reservation several weeks ago. The bear was suspected to have taken a hunters harvested deer out of a shed north of Seeley Lake and MFWP has been monitoring the bear. The bear has been traveling between the Reservation, Seeley Lake and Placid Lake country.

A fisherman had a close encounter with a family group of grizzlies feeding on a carcass up Monture Creek.

North of Ovando - A bow hunter had his elk carcass taken over and consumed by a family group of grizzlies. A horse that died of natural causes was consumed by grizzlies. There were multiple family groups and lone grizzlies observed in the agricultural fields.

In the Helmville and Aunt Molly WMA areas there were multiple reports of grizzly bears from bow hunters and ranchers during the first couple weeks of hunting season.

There was a report of a possible domestic calf depredation west of Clearwater Junction. The carcass was in a remote location and not investigated by Wildlife Services.

At the tail end of bow season a bow hunter had a close encounter with a female grizzly with one offspring east of Clearwater Junction.

There was an incident where a grizzly bear got into garbage and an uncontained chicken coop north of Seeley Lake and killed some chickens in mid-September.



Bow hunter's elk scavenged by a female grizzly with young north of Ovando. Photo by MFWP Warden Bill Koppen.

Several family groups of grizzly bears and some lone bears have been reported digging for caraway and feeding in the agricultural fields west of Helmville.

A domestic calf died west of Helmville and two family groups of grizzlies were feeding on it. Wildlife Services confirmed the calf had died from pneumonia.

At Russell Gates and Harpers Lake campgrounds a female grizzly and 2 yearlings tried to access garbage from bear resistant dumpsters.

Lincoln - In the Scapegoat Wilderness a hunter's elk was taken over and consumed by a grizzly bear. In September a grizzly was feeding along the river and FWP aversive conditioned the bear so it would move out of town.



Grizzlies on a ranch in the Helmville area. Photo by Georgiana Bignell.

One grizzly bear was reported getting into garbage at the tail end of the fire season near Seeley Lake.

During the last few weeks of hunting season there were multiple reports of hunters encountering grizzlies at close range and one report of a female grizzly with three yearling taking over a hunter's deer carcass.

BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY

The forest fires 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 black bears had gotten into garbage around the Seeley Lake area. Several black bears were trapped and relocated by MFWP during this time.

There were a lot of black bears getting into garbage in the Potomac and Bonner areas towards the tail end of the fire season.

A couple of black bear females were shot and their cubs were orphaned. One of the bears was shot over garbage and this incident is under investigation by MFWP. The other female was shot near Clearwater Junction while getting into apples. All of the orphaned cubs were taken to the Montana Wildlife Center in Helena. The bears have already been released back into MFWP R-2.

Up the Gold Creek drainage a hunter shot a female black bear and one cub. There was a second cub and MFWP is monitoring the situation.

There have been a couple verified grizzly bear reports from hunters in the Elliston/Avon country.

In Lincoln there were several reports of black bears getting into garbage.

Near Clearwater Junction a black bear was getting into chicken feed, livestock grain and apples. There is a good electric fence onsite but the bear was coming through the gate. FWP responded and hopefully the situation has been fixed.

There were a couple incidents with grizzly bears getting into apples close to homes. FWP provided electric fence energizers to help with both situations one north of Browns Lake and the other southwest of Helmville.

Apples are an attractant for bears and we encourage folks to pick your apples even if you don't use them. Some folks in the Blackfoot valley have actually cut down their apple trees that were not being used to remove the bear attractant. Other residents have put up electric fence around the apple trees to keep the bears out.

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

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. She is almost done writing up Phase 1 and will send that out to Blackfoot Challenge before Christmas. Phase 2 and Brittani's complete project will be done in April. Brittani is still planning on conducting a meeting for everyone in the Blackfoot but had to delay because she received a job offer from Idaho Fish and Game and will be starting in December. Brittani will be the senior wildlife technician for the Salmon Region and will be working on game damage, wolf and bear depredation, and bighorn sheep and elk research. She is sad to leave the Blackfoot but is

looking forward to the new adventure. She is still close by and if anyone has any questions they can give her a call at 406-214-5749 or at brit23@live.com. She thanks everyone who participated and for the massive support she received while working in the Blackfoot.

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.