

THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT SUMMER 2019

In coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the Blackfoot Challenge (BC) we produce this wolf and bear activity report. These reports are typically compiled during our range rider season from spring through the fall. We have been short-handed again this spring and summer as Jamie Jonkel has been out most of the summer recovering from surgery. Therefore, most of the bear management and grizzly bear research issues have been handled by Eli Hampson (FWP) and Eric Graham (BC). Thanks to the Blackfoot Challenge Range Riders - Sigrid Olson, Jordan Mannix, Vicki Pocha and Lindsey Mulcare who have assisted this summer with monitoring for predator activity. We would also like to thank Dan Masee and Barry Gordon who have been picking up most of the carcasses related to the carcass pickup program.

Here is some history on the Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider Program: It was back in 2008 that the Blackfoot Challenge started a pilot season that began to explore the idea of hiring on seasonal range riders and here we are in our 12th season of range rider efforts in the watershed. We will continue to work with ranches throughout the Blackfoot watershed to help them keep an eye on predator activity and to increase herd supervision and communication until the cows come home from their grazing leases this fall.

Thanks again to the ranchers and landowners that make this program possible. We would like to recognize all of the partners that provide funding and technical assistance - FWP, 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, the Western Bear Foundation and numerous individuals.

If you have any questions about the wildlife committee or this range rider program call the Blackfoot Challenge **Wildlife Committee Chair - Randy Gazda (406) 406-880-4386**

Contact Info for reporting wolf and/or bear activity:

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

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

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

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

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

If you have a suspected livestock-predation, 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 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-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

BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF PACKS

The pack structure for most of these packs is unknown. The rough numbers below are based on reports and wolf activity that is seen throughout the summer and are likely not very accurate. The most accurate pack counts are collected during the winter when tracks are easily seen and the young of the year are traveling with the pack.

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report:

The yearling female wolf that was radio collared in 2018 has not been located this summer. The collared female may have dispersed.

AVON PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

BELMONT PACK

Pack Structure: ~5 Adults, ? Pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: This pack has pups, but the number of pups is unknown. This pack is thought to spend time on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe reservation.

BUGLE MOUNTAIN PACK

Backcountry

CHAMBERLAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 4 or more Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

Pack Report: In May two yearling gray male wolves were radio collared by Wildlife Services. During the summer Wildlife Services removed 4 adult wolves from this pack in response to livestock depredations.

CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: At least 3 adults, likely more

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: In June, Wildlife Services radio collared a yearling wolf in this pack.

INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: ~5 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Very little activity this summer.

LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: In June, FWP trapped and radio collared a yearling wolf. This collared wolf may be part of a new pack that borders the Landers Fork pack to the East. Time will tell whether or not this wolf is part of the Landers Fork Pack.

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: ~5 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (3)

Pack Report: On June 10th, a radio collared adult and a yearling were shot and poached on the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA).

SEELEY LAKE PACK

Pack Structure: ~4 or more Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: ~4 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

SUNFLOWER PACK

Pack Structure: ~4 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

Pack Report: On June 20th, FWP trapped and radio collared a yearling male wolf.

UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: ~4 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: On June 30th, FWP trapped and radio collared a yearling male wolf. FWP and range riders will begin monitoring these wolves.



Yearling male that was captured and collared from the Union Peak pack. Photo by Tyler Parks.

WOLF ACTIVITY

There have been a handful of confirmed wolf depredations in the Blackfoot this summer and wolf activity around livestock appears to be picking up this fall. So far, Wildlife Services has confirmed at least one calf injured by wolves and three calves killed by wolves. WS radio collared three wolves and removed five adult wolves in response to reported wolf activity and confirmed depredations.

- On May 17th, Wildlife Services trapped and radio collared a yearling male wolf out of the Chamberlain Pack.

- On May 20th, Wildlife Services trapped and radio collared a yearling male wolf out of the Chamberlain pack.
- On June 6th, FWP trapped and radio collared a yearling male wolf out of the Landers Fork pack.
- On June 9th, Wildlife Services trapped and radio collared a yearling wolf out of the Humbug pack.
- On June 10th, the breeding female and a yearling wolf were poached on the BCWMA.
- On June 20th, FWP trapped and radio collared a yearling wolf out of the Sunflower pack.
- On June 30th, FWP trapped and radio collared a yearling wolf out of the Union Peak pack.

IMPORTANT UPDATES REGARDING GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY IN THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED

As we mentioned in the 2019 spring report, last year turned out to be the worst grizzly conflict season on record in the Blackfoot Watershed. Most years, we average four to five livestock depredations and 15 or so residential conflicts----mostly involving uncontained garbage, bird feeders, fruit trees, freezers and grain. But last year (2018), in the Blackfoot and Clearwater Drainages, we had approximately 80 grizzly-related conflicts, six of which were verified livestock depredations and one depredation attempt. The remaining incidents mostly involved uncontained residential and agricultural attractants.

Thus far in 2019, there have been fewer grizzly bear conflicts, but, three grizzlies have been euthanized for management reasons and one grizzly was struck and killed by a vehicle. During July and August, due to bountiful huckleberry, choke cherry and hawthorn production, conflict occurrences were low. But, historically the highest conflict period in the Blackfoot occurs in September and October, therefore, FWP and the Blackfoot Challenge are urging everyone to be diligent about containing attractants so that no additional bears get “trained up.”

ROAD-KILLED GRIZZLY BEAR:

On June 6th a 500-pound adult male grizzly was killed by a vehicle on Highway 200 near Patterson Prairie. This is the 12th grizzly killed by vehicles in the Blackfoot Watershed since 2004. Eight of these grizzlies have been killed along Highway 200 in the Lincoln Canyon between Ovando and Lincoln, MT.

RADIO COLLARED GRIZZLY BEARS:

Spring 2019 started out with a bang. The first grizzly tracks were observed in the foothills and higher ridge lines as early as March 19th and by the end of March we were getting reports of grizzlies on ranch lands in the Blackfoot Valley and from snowmobilers throughout the Clearwater Valley. Here is a quick summary of our radio collared grizzlies that emerged from their dens this spring:

- We were able to verify when two of our radio collared grizzlies emerged from their dens. “Walking Bear”, a 535- pound adult male, recaptured last July, denned in Arrastra

Creek. He poked his head out of his den on March 22nd. He continues to wear his radio collar and spends most of his time ranging the river bottoms around the Aunt Molly Wildlife Management Area, the Blackfoot Canyon and the mountains north and south of Lincoln, MT. In years past “Walking Bear” has made two tremendous/fast paced trips from the Blackfoot Valley over the top of the Mission Mountains to visit the corn fields around Ronan, MT. It will be interesting to see if he makes a similar journey this fall. In a recent flight, he was not located, and his collar may not be functioning.

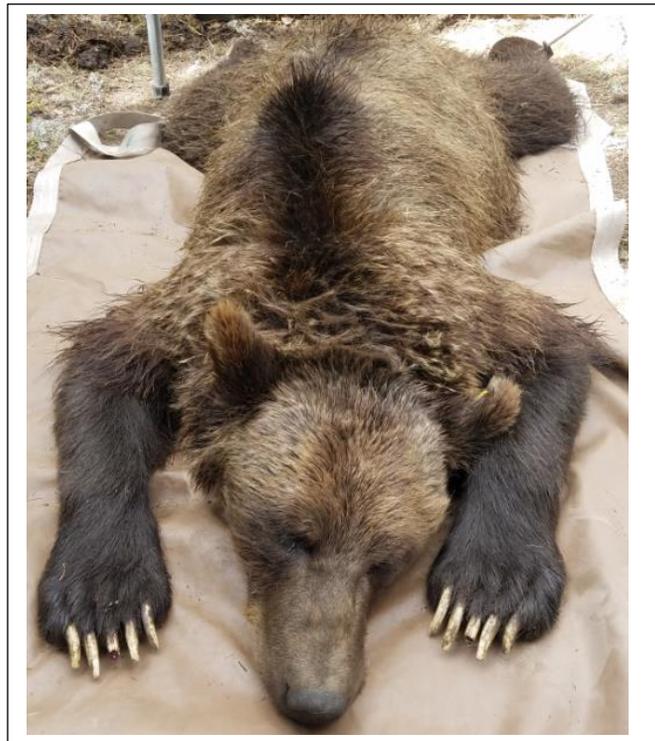
- “Stevi,” a sub adult male, captured last fall after digging up worms in the Stevensville Golf Course, denned in the southern Mission Range after he was relocated to the eastern edge of the Rattlesnake Wilderness. He came out of his den on March 17th. In mid-April he stumbled onto a residence north of Seeley Lake with a large accumulation of winter-garbage. FWP assisted the family with the removal of the trash. But, after that episode “Stevi” continued to seek out garbage, dog food, chicken feed and bird feeders. He was suspected to have damaged a house trailer on the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range and entered several open sheds and buildings for garbage and grain. He was documented at multiple residences in the Seeley Lake area, Clearwater Junction area, Ovando area and Woodworth area. On July 18th he was captured and euthanized after entering a building and accessing dog food on a porch at a ranch near Woodworth, MT.
- We were not able to determine when our research female “Silver Queen” came out of her den, but she was spotted this spring and again this August with her yearling in the headwaters of the Landers Fork of the Blackfoot. She was captured last July northeast of Lincoln. She has spent most of the summer ranging the south end of the Scapegoat Wilderness. “Silver Queen” is an older 245-pound adult female.
- The sub-adult male grizzly “Blackfoot”, who was relocated to the Flathead Valley last fall after accessing a ranch’s burn barrels and garbage near Helmville, MT, emerged from his Sun River Game Range den site on March 16th. He dropped his collar on May 13th while traveling north through the Blackfoot Indian Reservation.
- A female grizzly, known as “Sabine” and who was captured on the Flathead Indian Reservation for research purposes last summer, denned in the Missions Mountains. This spring she came over to the Seeley Lake area and ended up dropping her collar west of Placid Lake on May 2nd.
- On July 9, 2019 a new research grizzly was captured northeast of Lincoln, MT in the Landers Fork area. The 225-pound sub adult male was named “Landers”. He dropped his collar on July 29th. During the time he was collared he ranged widely between Lincoln and the Rocky Mountain Front.

- On August 26, 2019 a new research female grizzly, with cub/s, was captured northeast of Lincoln, MT. The female was named “Ursa”. In the last several weeks she has spent most of her time north of the Highway 200 in and around the Continental Divide.

RESEARCH TRAPPING

As mentioned above one new sub adult male “Landers” was captured in July. In late August a new adult female grizzly “Ursa” was captured in the upper reaches of the Blackfoot. For more information related to the grizzly bear population monitoring go to:

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



Adult female grizzly “Ursa” captured and radio collared for research. Photo by Eric Graham.

LIVESTOCK DEPREDATIONS/ONE GRIZZLY EUTHENIZED

Between April and the end of July, the Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services and FWP Region 2 responded to four verified livestock depredation incidents and a handful of additional calls about livestock (where cause of death or injury was natural, or not determined). Below is a synopsis of each of the incidents and management actions that occurred in the Blackfoot Valley:

- On April 19th, Wildlife Services investigated wounds on a newborn calf at a ranch east of Ovando, MT, and determined that the injury was grizzly-related. Due to the amount of

time that had passed and the fact that the calf was recovering, trapping was not an option.

- On April 20th, Wildlife Services responded to a calf killed near Helmville, MT. During the investigation it was discovered that a second calf had gone missing. Culvert traps and snares were set at site. On the 23rd one of two grizzlies were captured. Even though this was the sub-adult male's first offense, after close consultation with the USFWS, it was decided that due to chronic depredations occurring in the area, the 225-pound sub-adult male grizzly bear would be put down. The second bear was not captured. Adjacent to this ranch, in 2018, there were multiple calf depredations by grizzlies. Traps were set at this site last year on three occasions, but no bears were captured. For more information check out this link:

<https://www.blackfootvalleydispatch.com/story/2019/05/01/news/grizzly-euthanized-after-cattle-depredations-in-helmville-valley/1001.html>

- On May 23rd two calves were killed by a grizzly at a second ranch near Helmville, MT. Wildlife Services set traps on site, but the bears had consumed the calves and did not return. Traps were closed after several days.
- On June 15th another calf depredation was discovered near Helmville, MT. Wildlife Services determined the death to be grizzly-related. But, due to the amount of time that had passed trapping was not an option.
- Since April, Wildlife Services has investigated seven additional calf carcasses where it was determined the calves had died of natural causes and were scavenged by grizzlies. Two of these incidents occurred in the Avon area. In addition, Wildlife Services documented one calf killed by coyotes that had been scavenged by grizzlies. Wildlife Services also investigated a calf with a neck wound, near Avon, MT, that was determined to be related to an infection and not a bite wound.
- Since June 15th, there have been no additional grizzly bear depredation reports in the Blackfoot Valley.

LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICKUP PROGRAM

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 have been picked up by FWP or Blackfoot Challenge employees. In the spring of 2018, there were 5 incidents of grizzly bears venturing into ranch compounds to retrieve carcasses left out for the carcass pickup 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, we are re-evaluating pickup protocol and now recommend that after March all carcasses

set aside for pickup be stored away from ranch premises. If you currently have a carcass for picking up, please call 544-1447 to reach Jamie Jonkel with Montana FWP. **If you are unable to reach Jonkel call Barry Gordon at 406-541-1078.** Or call Eric Graham with the Blackfoot Challenge at 240-3132 or Eli Hampson with FWP at 210-3213. 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, watch “Living with Carnivores: Boneyards, Bear & Wolves.” Click here: <https://vimeo.com/131528982>.

TWO GRIZZLIES EUTHENIZED DUE TO FOOD-CONDITIONED BEHAVIOR

Compared to last year conflicts have been minimal in the Blackfoot Valley. But, two grizzlies have had to be destroyed this summer as a result of their extreme food-conditioned behavior.

- The first of these bears has already been discussed in the radio-collared bear section. This is “Stevi,” the grizzly that was trapped last fall in the Bitterroot Valley and relocated to the headwaters of Belmont Creek near Missoula, MT. For more information check out this link:

https://missoulain.com/news/local/grizzly-that-prowled-stevi-golf-course-euthanized-after-seeley-lake/article_6d24e8a2-2d9d-5565-bc1e-72cb9db35b6b.html

- The second grizzly, euthanized on May 12th, southeast of Seeley Lake in the Woodworth area, did not have a known history. But, because of this bear’s extreme food-conditioned behavior, after consultation with the USFWS, it was decided to put this bear down. This young 250-pound sub adult male grizzly broke open a locked door of a secured barn in order to access grain. He had been observed damaging the barn on video the night before and he was at adjacent home sites accessing unsecured grain, garbage, pet food, chickens and other attractants. It can be assumed that this bear is one of several grizzlies that learned “bad behavior” last year, as a result of some folks not having grain, garbage and other attractants secured. For more information check out this link:

<https://www.seeleylake.com/story/2019/05/30/news/fwp-euthanizes-two-bears-in-the-area-in-the-past-month/4868.html>

RESIDENTIAL AND AGRICULTURAL CONFLICTS (2019):

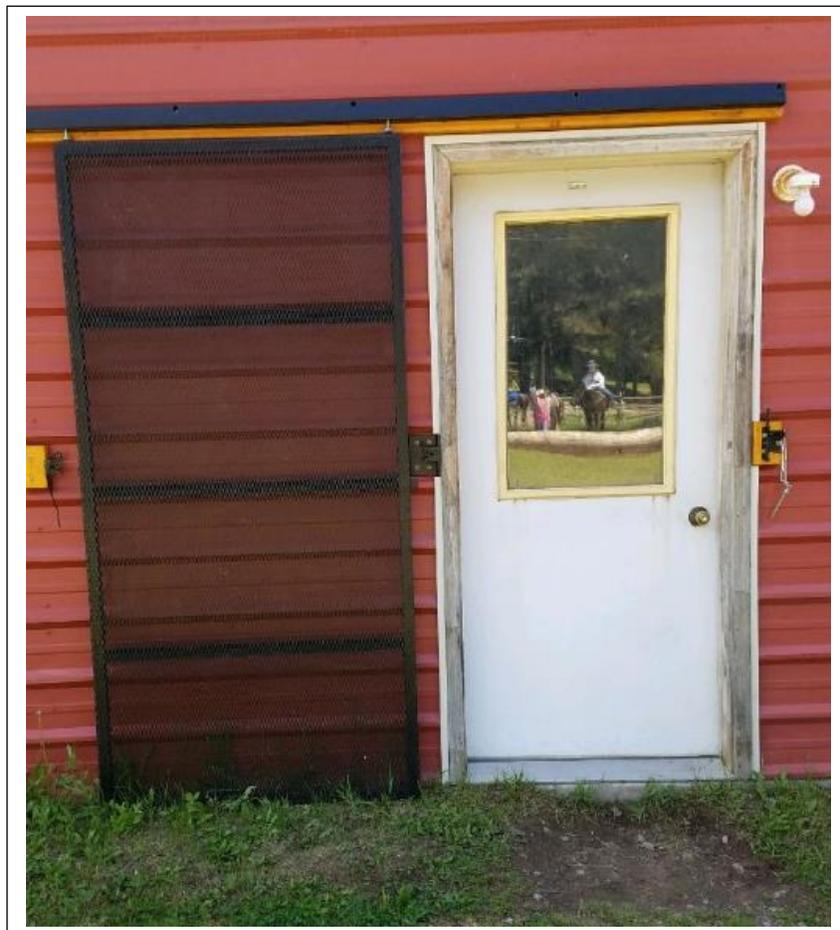
The Blackfoot Region is well known for a community-driven approach to managing and mitigating for bear conflicts, and the Blackfoot Valley has been recognized internationally for having some of the lowest numbers of grizzly conflicts in the state.

But, as mentioned earlier, multiple grizzlies in the Blackfoot watershed developed bad habits last year. In 2018, a handful of bears learned that homesites and ranches are good places to

find unsecured food. It is always best to lock up all sheds and barns where garbage, grain and other attractants are stored. If you need additional electric fence materials or energizers for containing carcasses or other bear attractants (grain, sweet licks, garbage, etc.) call Eric Graham or James Jonkel.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY:

There have been numerous reports of grizzlies observed crossing cow pastures, feeding in agricultural fields, skirting the edges of communities, walking near homesites, traveling the banks of rivers and in proximity to campgrounds and ranch headquarters. But, compared to last year at this time, calls involving bear conflicts are low. This year, April through the end of August, FWP and the Blackfoot Challenge have responded to 14 conflicts in the Blackfoot Valley--that is the areas up the Blackfoot river from Clearwater Junction. Some of these conflicts involved the two bears discussed in the above section, but it is important that everyone in the valley understands, that as a result of the large number of conflicts last year, we still have individual "trained up" bears that may escalate their attempts to access grain and garbage this fall.



Bear-resistant sliding door built by the Rich Ranch after a grizzly broke into the barn for grain. Photo by Eric Graham.

Please, report all conflicts involving bears to FWP or the Blackfoot Challenge as it helps us keep track and ascertain which bears have developed unacceptable behaviors. Here is a synopsis of the 14 conflicts that have occurred this summer and spring:

- There were seven incidents involving grizzlies entering barns or sheds for grain, garbage or other attractants. At four of these sites the buildings were “wide-open” and garbage, grain and other attractants were readily available. The bears walked in, helped themselves and left with the knowledge of where food was to be found.
- In three of the seven incidents, however, the buildings were secured, and the attractants were contained. But, because of previous learning experiences, the bears tested the doors, broke in and were rewarded with access to grain or garbage.
- There was another incident, probably with “Stevi” or one of the “trained-up” grizzlies being discussed, where a secure camper trailer was damaged while parked at the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area.
- The remaining six incidents involved garbage, pet food or BBQ being stored outside alongside buildings or on porches and available to bears, skunks and racoons.
- Note, there were a handful of incidents where attractants were contained and bears investigated, tested doors, and the bears moved on. These reports were not counted as conflicts, but the information allows FWP and the Blackfoot Challenge to keep track of where these individual bears are showing up and where they might be heading.

CLEARWATER VALLEY:

Similar, to the Blackfoot Basin, there have been numerous reports of grizzlies skirting the edges of Seeley Lake and walking near homesites. But, compared to last year at this time, calls involving bear conflicts have been minimal. FWP and the Blackfoot Challenge have responded to a total of 9 business/home site conflicts involving grizzlies accessing or seeking out uncontained garbage, animal feed and bird feed. Some of these conflicts were related to the radio collared grizzly bear “Stevi”, but there are other bears in the Clearwater Drainage exhibiting food-conditioned behavior.

BLACK BEAR AND MOUNTAIN LION ACTIVITY:

This summer, black bear conflicts in the Potomac Valley and Seeley Lake area have been constant. In Seeley Lake, MT, two black bears were euthanized as a result of uncontained attractants. One of these bears was blind as a result of being shot in the face with bird shot. The second bear was shot by a deputy while it was in the act of peeling boards off a home. It turned out that squirrels had stuffed the walls with dog food. At the same residence, a female black bear with two cubs was trapped and relocated. FWP is working with the landlord to have the dog food removed and to place a bear-resistant dumpster.

In Potomac, there is an extreme ongoing situation involving garbage. At the ends of county roads, multiple homes are required to bring garbage cans to certain sites for garbage service. However, most of these cans are being left out all week. As a result, multiple black bears are obtaining garbage. FWP is working with the community and the sanitation company in hopes of resolving the situation. Several of these bears started to visit home sites in July and Wildlife Services trapped and euthanized one black bear and a lion that killed goats. There was also a report of another incident with a goat being killed this summer by a female black bear with a yearling. FWP is in the process of investigating the incident.

There were a handful of mountain lion conflicts this summer in the Seeley Lake, Ninemile Prairie and Potomac areas. Most of the incidents involved lions being spotted around cabins and tent sites at local resorts and recreation areas. Reports of mountain lion activity in the Blackfoot, especially in the Lincoln and Seeley Lake areas are common. One lion was shot at a residence at a homesite near Clearwater Junction.

For detailed information on black bear and lion activity in and around Region 2 check out these two sites:

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

And for 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 COST SHARE PROJECTS:

Multiple fencing projects have occurred at various residences across the watershed. Over the last two summers the Blackfoot Challenge has assisted five families with electrified residential containment fences. And in late June, working with the Powell County Dump Board and multiple funding partners, an electric fence was erected around the Helmsville Transfer Site.

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 this website:

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



The new Helmville Transfer Site electric fence. Photo by Eric Graham.