

# THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT

## 6/13/2016

Hello everyone, this is Eric Graham working as the wildlife technician for the Blackfoot Challenge. Once again, I am working with several ranches throughout the Blackfoot watershed to help them keep an eye on predator activity and to increase herd supervision until the end of October 2016. In coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks I produce this monthly wolf and bear activity report, assist with research and management trapping efforts and monitor collared wolves and grizzly bears in the watershed. Thanks to all of the ranchers, landowners and partners that make this program possible every year in the Blackfoot. Thanks for the continued support of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Livestock Loss Board, Northern Rockies Conservation Co-op, Defenders of Wildlife, Vital Ground, Cross Charitable Foundation, Stranahan Foundation, and numerous individual.

If you have any questions about the Range Rider 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 predator 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. 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**

On 4/9/16 - WS confirmed that two calves were injured by a grizzly bear north of Helmville. An attempt was made to catch the bear, however no bears were captured. One of the calves died and the rancher will be compensated for this loss.

On 4/25/16 - WS confirmed that a calf was killed by a grizzly bear west of Helmville. An attempt was made to catch the bear, however no bears were captured.

On 5/13/16 - A 540 pound male grizzly bear was captured for research west of Lincoln by MFWP. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar and was named "Moose."



Bob Wiesner and Eric Graham measure the length of the grizzly bear. Take note of the fighting wound. During breeding season adults males often fight and compete for breeding females. Photo by Jamie Jonkel.

On 5/17/16 - WS confirmed that a calf was killed by a grizzly bear west of Helmville. An attempt was made to capture the bear and no bears were captured.

On 5/24/16 - WS confirmed that a calf was killed by wolves west of Helmville. An attempt was made to capture the wolves and no wolves were captured.

On 5/28/16 - A 466 pound male grizzly bear was captured by MFWP for research east of Kleinschmidt flats. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar and was named "Walking Bear."

### **BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS**

#### **ARRASTRA CREEK PACK**

Pack Structure: 5 Adults 5 Pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: MFWP is trying to get a collar out in this pack.

#### **BELMONT PACK**

Pack Structure: 5 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

Pack Report: This pack is thought to spend time on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal 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: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

#### INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 8 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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

#### LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: 5 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

#### MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: FWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

#### STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: FWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

#### UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.



## **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, recreationists and black bear hunters. As camping season is upon us PLEASE remember to carry your bear spray and to keep a clean camp 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 a photo and measurement of the width of the front foot of the grizzly bear track is helpful.

In the Lincoln area there was a report of a grizzly bear in and amongst cattle.

North of Seeley Lake there was a report of a grizzly bear getting into a dumpster. The lids of the dumpster were secured with a sheet of plywood and MFWP is monitoring the situation.

MFWP has been trapping grizzly bears for a research project in the Blackfoot watershed. Up to five collars will be put on bears. So far two male grizzly bears have been collared - "Moose" and "Walking Bear."



Eric Graham looking for wounds on a 466 pound male grizzly bear. Photo by Jamie Jonkel.

"Sisco," a management male from two seasons ago that was trapped, collared and relocated up to the north end of the Great Bear Wilderness by Hungry Horse Reservoir has not been detected this season.

Currently there are two research female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing population trend monitoring efforts. 1 - "Portman" had been located around Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek last season but has not been located this season. 2 - "Icel" has been localized around Woodworth, Monture Creek, the Blackfoot River and Cottonwood Creek. Efforts will be made in the near future to re-collar her. Two additional bears captured last year, "Whiskey" and "Mollet", have not been located yet this 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>

"Dreyer," a research collared sub-adult female grizzly bear that was captured last season for monitoring in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) was shot and killed in the Placid Lake area. She was accessing uncontained grain and the incident is under investigation by the USFWS.

A management collared female grizzly bear "Snowshoe" that was captured and relocated last season related to killing sheep near Avon was shot and killed in a bee yard in the Flathead valley. The incident is under investigation by the USFWS.

### **BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY**

To follow up on some of the orphan black bear cubs from last season that were captured in the Blackfoot and throughout MFWP Region 2 (R2) and taken to the Montana Wildlife Center in Helena. 15 of the 16 rescued orphan black bears from last season were released as yearlings this season throughout R2 back into the wild. A handful of the bears were released in the Blackfoot including those in the photo below. Photo by Eric Graham.



The Montana Wildlife Center rehabilitates orphaned wildlife for the purpose of release back to the wild, while offering visitors opportunities to learn about wildlife and the natural world in a community facility specifically designed for conservation education.

More information is available at <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/wildlifeRehab/>

Black bear and grizzly bear relocation information is available on the MFWP website. <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/relocation/default.html>

There has been quite a bit of black bear activity in the Seeley Lake area including a female with 3 cubs of the year getting into uncontained garbage. There have also been several lone bears reported accessing garbage as well.

In the lower Blackfoot near Bonner there have been a handful of black bears accessing both garbage and birdfeeders.

## **ELECTRIC FENCE STUDY**

### Grizzly Bear Study Update

Year 1 of Study B (details below) was completed in the fall of 2015 and we have removed the trail cameras that were set in random locations throughout the Blackfoot Valley to determine where the bears are during their most active part of the year before going into hibernation. This information will help us determine whether they are avoiding areas that are already electrified with fence or not. This

fall and winter we will be going through the video, starting data analysis, and continue to work on the camera study until November 1. We will be giving the community an update with a public meeting either this winter or early next spring.

### Grizzly Bear Study Design

During the summer of 2015, a small wildlife study was conducted in the Blackfoot Valley. Brittani Johnson, a graduate student of Montana State University, is studying the effects that permanent electric fence has on the movement patterns of grizzly and black bears and whether or not the miles of electric fence in the valley will hinder these animals from gaining access to portions of the landscape. The study will take place over the course of two years, and there are two parts to the study.

The first part, or **Study A**, is an experiment where Brittani built and tested two different designs of electric fence:

1) The first design is a style of three-wire electric boundary fence that was recently approved by the state legislature. It is hypothesized that this style of new boundary fence will allow bears passage under the fence if only the top hot wire is hot (42"). If this fence proves to actually hinder wildlife passage when the top wire is hot it may have impacts on fence design criteria for conservation easements across the west.

2) The second style is a three-wire hot/ground/hot fence that is much closer to the ground. It is hypothesized that this style when turned on will actually prevent bears from entering. The importance of testing this fence design is that at this time the only electric fences officially approved for deterring bears from backcountry camps, sheep bedding grounds and other attractant sites is a 5 to 7 wire hot ground system. Fences that are less than five wires at this time cannot receive funding from the NRCS, Defenders of Wildlife and other groups. We are hoping to prove scientifically that three wire fences, with two hot wires and one ground wire that are just above knee height will stop bears and will be appropriate for funding in certain situations - - - such as quickly electrifying a large orchard, crop field or temporary livestock enclosure. We are hoping to prove that three-wire electric fences are applicable for deterring bears so as to get funding for the rapid deployment three wire electric fence (a new tool in the basket) that we were hoping to put around alfalfa and seed crop fields near home-sites when bears are getting too close. The overall goal is to find a fence design that when turned on, hinders bear movement into sensitive areas such as calving pastures, crop fields, and other areas that bears are not wanted at certain times of the year, but when turned off it allows the bear to go through the fence and gain access to the landscape.

Each electric fence design involves baiting the small enclosures with scent lure, and observing through trail cameras the behavior of any bear that comes to the site and tries to go through the fence. Every three days the fences will be turned on and off. When the fence is off, the bear will penetrate the fence and receive a reward from a scent lure placed inside the fence. The bear will hopefully then come back and try to penetrate the fence when it is electrified and receive a shock. Brittani will observe if the bear comes back to the fence after being shocked and tries to penetrate the fence again or if the bear



never comes back because of the negative experience of being shocked. The overall goal is to find one fence design that when turned on, hinders bear movement into sensitive areas such as calving pastures, crop fields, and other areas that bears are not wanted at certain times of the year, but when turned off it allows the bear to go through the fence and gain access to the landscape. And to test a second design, that was recently approved by the legislature for boundary fence, that will hopefully allow free passage of wildlife across the landscape when only the top wire is electrified.

The second part of the study, or **Study B**, is a presence/absence study of all grizzly and black bears in the Blackfoot Valley. Throughout the course of the two year study, 60 trail cameras will be placed at random points in the valley to determine where these animals are and where they are not. At the end of the study, these data will be used to create a map of grizzly and black bear occupancy throughout the valley, and whether or not these bears are already hindered by areas that are heavily fenced with electric fence and have been avoiding those areas because of difficulty of passage.

### **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 have a carcass before that program starts up again in mid-February 2017, please call Jamie Jonkel 544-1447.

### **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 [www.missoulabears.org](http://www.missoulabears.org) along with more detailed reports on grizzly bear, black bear and mountain lion activity.