

THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT 11/5/2015

Hello everyone, this is Eric Graham wrapping up my 3rd season as a Range Rider and Wildlife Technician for the Blackfoot Challenge. Even though the predators were known to be in close proximity to the livestock this season, livestock producers have reported good counts at shipping time. A big thanks to all of the ranchers and landowners that make this program possible every year in the Blackfoot. Thanks to Sigrid Olson, Molly Parks and Kate Whitney for their Range Rider assistance with monitoring cattle and predators throughout the valley. Thanks to Liz Bradley, Scott Eggeman, Jamie Jonkel and Tyler Parks at MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) for providing technical support and making it possible to produce this wolf and bear report. This season would not have been possible without the continued support of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), US Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Livestock Loss Board, Northern Rockies Conservation Co-op, Defenders of Wildlife and Vital Ground. The upcoming 2016 Range Rider season will run from May - October.

If you have any questions about the Range Rider program please call:

Eric Graham - Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider (406) 240-3132

Randy Gazda - Blackfoot Challenge Wildlife Committee Chair (406) 793-7402.

Contact Info for reporting wolf and/or bear activity:

Eric Graham - Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider (406) 240-3132

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

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. 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

An orphan black bear cub of the year that was reported near Helmville was captured and taken to the Montana Wildlife Center in Helena. 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/>



Kevin Ertl of the US Fish and Wildlife Service helps transfer an orphan black bear cub into another trap for transport to the Montana Wildlife Center in Helena. Photo by Eric Graham.

Now that big game hunting season is underway we would like to remind folks to be “Bear Aware” and PLEASE carry bear spray while hunting.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

BELMONT PACK

Pack Structure: 2 to 3 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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: Unknown

Pack Report: It is possible that the collared Murray Cr. wolf may be a part of this pack and we will continue to monitor.

CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults 4 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf via radio telemetry.

INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 4 Adults 4 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: We continue to monitor the collared wolf in this pack via radio telemetry.



This is a photo captured by a trail camera of two wolves most likely from the Inez wolf pack.
Photo by Eric Graham

LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: 5 Wolves (Adult/pup structure unknown)

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: The collared wolf was harvested.

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults 2 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf via radio telemetry. One pup hit by vehicle on Hwy 83.

UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: 2 to 3 Adults

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 most recently hunters. Now that hunting season is upon us PLEASE carry your bear spray and remember to keep a clean camp to avoid attracting grizzly bears. Big game carcasses should be

removed from the field as quickly as possible. If quick removal is not possible, make game meat inaccessible to bears by hanging it 10 feet up and 4 feet out to avoid conflicts.

The recommendation if you want to put birdfeeders out is December 15th thru April 1st.

We appreciate you taking the time to call in all of your grizzly bear and wolf observations including tracks, sightings and reports.

There were 3 grizzly bears captured this season related to sheep depredations however conflicts with grizzly bears have been low in the Blackfoot overall.

Currently there are three research female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing population trend monitoring efforts. 1 - "Portman" has been located around Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek. 2 - "Icel" has been localized around Woodworth, Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek. 3 - "Dreyer" has been located around Cottonwood Creek, Horseshoe Hills, Morrell Mountain and Woodworth. There is also a research male grizzly bear "Mollet" that has been located between the North Fork of the Blackfoot and Seeley Lake. 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>

There was a report of a grizzly bear coming into a ranch corral area to access livestock feed. MFWP set traps for several days because the bear was in and amongst calves and the feeder was unable to be contained. The bear was not captured.

A bow hunter in the Aunt Molly Wildlife Management Area (WMA) harvested an elk and upon retrieval discovered a grizzly bear had fed on the hind quarters.

A bow hunter in the Monture Creek area discovered a bear had fed on their big game carcass and packed out what was left of the meat.

A grizzly bear was reported as roadkill north of Seeley Lake but it turned out to be a live bear feeding on roadkill.

Along Highway 83 near Condon an adult male grizzly bear was confirmed roadkill.

"Sisco," a management male from last season 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.

BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY



At least one black bear has decided to den up in the Blackfoot. Photo by Bob Wiesner.

Unfortunately that black bear decided to dig the den 15 feet from a house. MFWP set a trap to try to capture and relocate this bear. The bear has not been captured. As hunting season progresses more and more bears will enter their den with most of the bears denned up by the first part of December.

In Lincoln a trap was set by MFWP for a black bear that was getting into garbage and broke into a garage. The bear was captured and euthanized.

Along Highway 200 there was a roadkill male black bear just West of Ovando and a female black bear and two cubs were reported roadkill East of Bonner.

In Seeley Lake there were two black bears that were trapped and relocated. The bears had been getting into uncontained garbage.

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

The Blackfoot valley above Gold Creek had a normal year for black bear activity and did not see anywhere near the amount of black bear conflicts that Missoula and the surrounding areas have seen this past month.

ELECTRIC FENCE STUDY

Grizzly Bear Study Update

Study B (details below) has ended for the season and we have removed the 40 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 2016, please call Jamie Jonkel 544-1447.

In regards to game damage hunts we suggest folks that have dead deer and/or elk that they disperse your gut piles well away from home sites. The livestock carcass pick-up program is not able to keep up with the demand of picking these up at this time.

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 bear sites that might attract bears or other wildlife. More information is available at www.missoulabears.org as well as more detailed reports on grizzly bear, black bear and mountain lion activity.