

THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT 9/9/2015

Hello everyone, this is **Eric Graham** working as the Range Rider for the Blackfoot Challenge again this season. Livestock producers in the Blackfoot Valley have turned their cattle out on summer grazing leases and some have started to bring them home. Through October I will monitor cattle, wolf and grizzly bear activity and will produce this activity report. I will be working closely with MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to monitor the locations of collared wolves and grizzly bears adjacent to ranches in the Blackfoot Valley. I have enjoyed working with all of you again this season and please call if you have any questions. Thanks!

Sigrd Olson is helping out with the Range Rider efforts in the Potomac Valley this season. She will be working until the end of September. **Molly Parks** is helping out with the Range Rider efforts around the Ovando area again this season. She will be working until October. We are glad to have both of them on board and appreciate all of their hard work.

Seth Wilson will be taking a leave of absence from the Blackfoot Challenge to teach wildlife conflict management in Slovenia for the next year. We wish him and his family all the best. 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 Range Rider (406) 240-3132

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

Scott Eggegan – 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

Black Bear activity is extremely high in Seeley Lake and Lincoln mostly related to attractants such as garbage and bird feeders. IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW THAT YOU contain your bear attractants by making them unavailable to bears – please take down birdfeeders and make sure pet food, livestock feed and garbage is contained in a secure structure or electric fence.



A black bear attracted to a birdfeeder in the Blackfoot valley. Courtesy of MFWP.

Now that bow hunting season is underway we would like to remind folks to be “Bear Aware” and PLEASE carry bear spray when hunting in the Blackfoot valley.

Wolf hunting general season starts September 15, 2015.

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: One pup was taken under Senate Bill 200. We continue to monitor the collared wolf in this pack via radio telemetry.

LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults 3 or more Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults 3 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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

UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: 2 to 3 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY

Through the month of August, grizzly bears were widely dispersed throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys and have been reported by landowners, ranchers, local residents and recreationists. There was a good hawthorn, chokecherry and kinnikinnick crop that the bears have been taking advantage of. Please keep a clean camp as fall progresses as to not attract grizzly bears. Reports have been coming in that bears are taking advantage of livestock feed and burn barrels so now is a good time to keep shed doors closed and make sure electric fence is working properly. As the fall progresses people should expect to see more grizzly bear activity and we appreciate you taking the time to call in those reports. Bears have been sighted in several agricultural fields feeding on peas, barley, oats and alfalfa.

There are three monitoring female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing population trend monitoring efforts. 1 - "Portman" is now considered to be an adult because she came out of the den with at least one cub. She has been located around Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek. Her cub of the year has not been seen on recent flight surveys. 2 - "Icel" was supposed to drop her collar on 7/1 but it appears there was a failure in the release mechanism and she is still wearing her collar. She has been localized around Woodworth, Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek. 3 - "Dreyer" is the new sub-adult female grizzly bear that was captured on 7/1 north-west of Ovando. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar for research purposes. 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>

Wildlife Services set snares on 8/2 to catch a grizzly bear that was involved with a sheep depredation East of Avon. The 271 pound female bear was captured on 8/3 and fitted with a GPS collar. The bear had no previous record and was relocated on 8/4 to the Great Bear Wilderness area in the South Fork of the Flathead. Update: this bear has dropped her collar.

There have been multiple reports of grizzly bears scavenging on Columbian ground squirrels that have been shot by gopher hunters in the Blackfoot valley.

There was a report of a grizzly bear coming into a corral area to access livestock feed. MFWP is monitoring the situation.

"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

Lincoln and Seeley Lake have seen quite a bit of black bear activity. The bears have been taking advantage of natural foods such as hawthorn, chokecherry and kinnikinnick but have also been getting into garbage, chicken feed and birdfeeders. Please keep a clean camp and be aware that

with the drought conditions black bears are already appearing in the valley floor along rivers and streams.

MFWP captured another black bear East of Lincoln related to garbage.

MFWP euthanized a wounded black bear that was in the town of Seeley Lake.

There was a report of a wounded black bear near Russel Gates. MFWP responded and no bear was found.

There were two roadkill black bears along Highway 200 between Clearwater Junction and Bonner.

As we near the end of the berry season black bears will be seeking out uncontained garbage. Please contain your attractants by making them unavailable to bears.



A photo of a black bear getting into garbage. Courtesy of MFWP.

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

ELECTRIC FENCE STUDY

Grizzly Bear Study Update

The fencing part of this study has ended for the year. We took down all fences on August 22 and have hundreds of amazing videos to watch from the trail cameras (Study A, details below). The next part of the study (Study B, details below) has commenced and we have set 30 trail cameras 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 will be 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 will be building and testing 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 or Eric Graham 240-3132. Please call as soon as possible for carcass removal, thanks.

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 BEARS AND MOUNTAIN LION ACTIVITY.**