

## **THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT FALL 2019/SPRING 2020**

In coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Region 2 (R2), the Blackfoot Challenge (BC) produces this wolf and bear activity report. These reports are typically compiled during our range rider season in the spring, summer and fall. We were unable to complete a report last fall so that information has been included in this spring update for wolf and bear activity in the Blackfoot watershed.

Most of the grizzly bear management, prevention work and grizzly bear research trapping are handled by Eli Hampson (FWP) and Eric Graham (BC). Jamie Jonkel (FWP) will assist as needed and will handle calls from the public and provide logistical support. We welcome Rory Trimbo who is a bear management technician stationed in the Deer Lodge Valley that will be assisting in the Blackfoot as well.

Wolf, lion and bear depredations or livestock loss reimbursement are handled by Wildlife Services (WS) and the Livestock Loss Board (LLB). When depredations are not an issue - Tyler Parks (FWP) handles all the wolf related management, wolf research trapping and reporting. Eli Hampson (FWP) handles mountain lion related management and black bear management along with (FWP) game wardens. Scott Eggeman (FWP) is the point person for all issues pertaining to elk and deer and all aspects of wildlife in the Blackfoot watershed.

We will continue to work with ranchers throughout the Blackfoot watershed to monitor predator activity, assist with monitoring livestock, communicate with local ranchers and continue operating the livestock carcass pickup program. A special thanks to our range riders – Sigrid Olson, Vicki Pocha and Jordan Mannix. The Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider Program was established in 2008 and is entering its 12<sup>th</sup> season. We also thank Dan Masseur and Barry Gordon who pick up most of the carcasses associated with the carcass pickup program. The Blackfoot Challenge Carcass Pickup Program has been ongoing since 2003.

Thanks again to the ranchers and landowners that make these programs 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), Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Livestock Loss Board, Defenders of Wildlife, Vital Ground, the Cross Charitable Foundation, Bunting Family Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Western Bear Foundation and numerous individuals.

If you have any questions about any of the Blackfoot Challenge wildlife programs call the **Wildlife Committee Chair - Randy Gazda (406) 880-4386 or the main office at (406) 793-3900**

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR REPORTING WOLF, BEAR AND/OR LION ACTIVITY:**

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

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

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

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

**Rory Trimbo—MFWP Deer Lodge Bear Management Technician (406) 465-9343**

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

If you have a suspected livestock depredation, please notify USDA **Wildlife Services** 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**

Montana FWP uses a Patch Occupancy Model (POM) to estimate Montana’s wolf population and track trends. Details on POM can be found in the Annual Wolf Report on the FWP website <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/wolf/>. The transition to POM means that collecting minimum pack counts is no longer a high priority for monitoring wolf numbers. Therefore, the pack structure for most of the packs below is unknown. The rough numbers below are based largely on public reports and represent pack counts after the general hunting season, which ended on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

**ARRASTRA CREEK PACK**

Pack Structure: 3 to 4

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

**AVON PACK**

Pack Structure: ~4

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

**BELMONT PACK**

Pack Structure: ~4

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: This pack is thought to spend time on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe reservation.

BUGLE MOUNTAIN PACK

Backcountry

CHAMBERLAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

HARDSCRABBLE

Pack Structure: 2

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: This pack was recognized in 2019 and frequents Alice Creek, Bartlett Creek, Cadotte Creek, and South of Hwy 200 North of Willow Creek.

HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 3 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: ~3 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

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: ~5 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

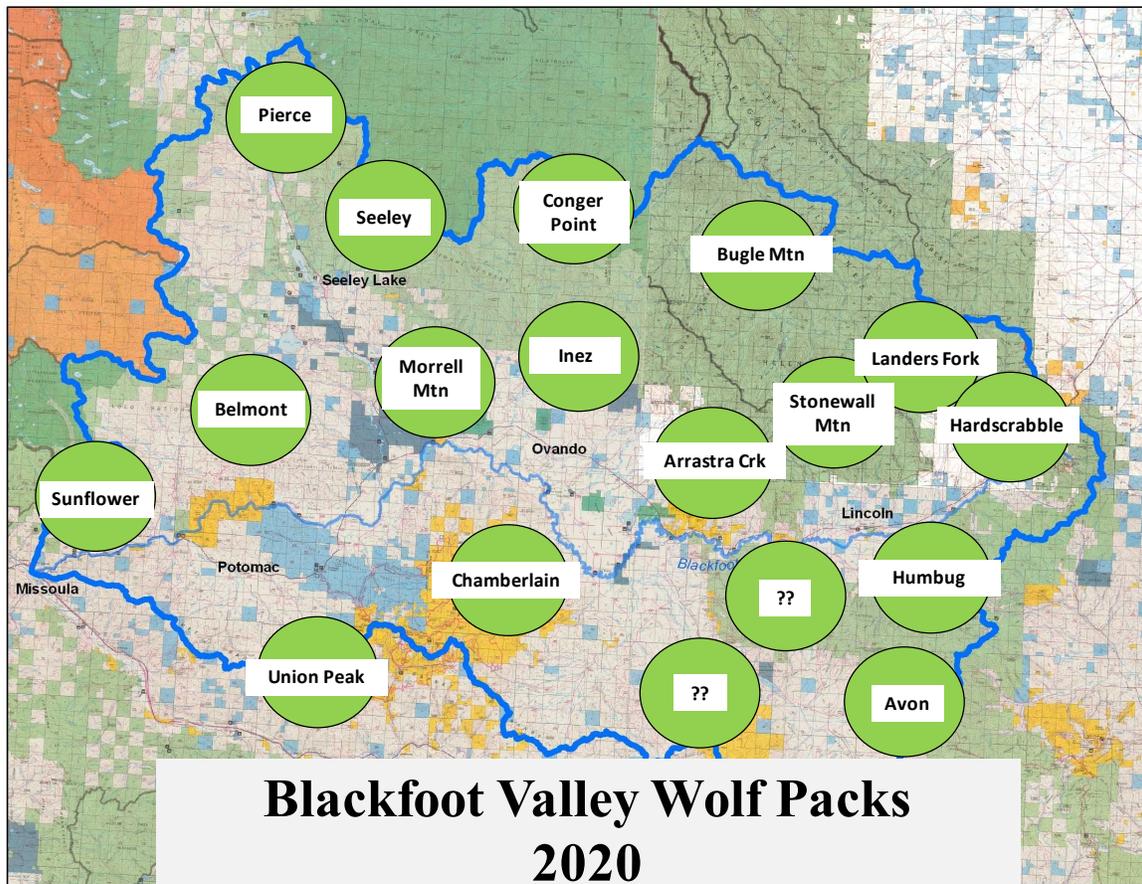
Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: ~5 or more Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.



## **WOLF ACTIVITY 2019 SUMMARY**

For 2019, in the Blackfoot watershed Wildlife Services confirmed 3 calves and 1 livestock guard dog that were injured by wolves and 5 calves and 4 sheep that were killed by wolves. WS radio collared 4 wolves and lethally removed 15 in response to confirmed wolf depredations. Eleven of the 15 wolves were removed from the chronically depredating Chamberlain wolf pack. Three wolves were removed from the Stonewall pack. A single wolf was removed west of Avon; its pack association is unknown. To assist with wolves around livestock FWP collared eight wolves in Region 2 in 2019, four of which were in the Blackfoot watershed.

## **UPDATES REGARDING GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY IN THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED**

In 2018 the Blackfoot had its highest number of grizzly bear conflicts on record. In past years, we typically averaged four to five livestock depredations and 15 or so residential conflicts mostly involving uncontained garbage, bird feeders, fruit trees, freezers and grain. But, in 2018, there was an upsurge in conflicts involving uncontained residential and agricultural attractants. Approximately 80 grizzly-related conflicts were reported (six of which were verified livestock depredations and one depredation attempt). The 70 or so home site attractants mostly involved uncontained garbage, pet food, bird seed, chicken feed other livestock feed. As a result, a handful of grizzlies in 2018 learned that uncontained attractants were available, and in 2019 a few of those bears continued to exhibit “food conditioned behavior.”

## **2019 SUMMARY**

Through the year there were abundant reports and observations of grizzlies feeding in agricultural crops, traveling through and feeding on natural foods. But, compared to 2018, there was a reduction in the number of conflicts.

The grizzly season started out with grizzly tracks being observed in the foothills and higher ridge lines as early as March 19<sup>th</sup> 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 drainage. During the spring we had good moisture and grizzlies were being observed throughout the Blackfoot watershed. In July and August, due to bountiful huckleberry, choke cherry and hawthorn production, sightings and conflicts remained low. But, as with most years, conflicts increased September through November. Historically the highest conflict period in the Blackfoot occurs in the fall. In 2019, there were a total of 47 reported residential conflicts and 4 depredations involving grizzlies. Note, most of the conflicts at residential sites were related to the radio-collared grizzly bear “Stevi” (discussed below) and the two grizzlies he was traveling with. There were, however, several other grizzlies in the Blackfoot valley and at least one lone grizzly and a family group in the Clearwater drainage that exhibited “food-conditioned behavior.”

## **LIVESTOCK DEPREDATIONS AND ONE GRIZZLY EUTHANIZED**

Between April and the end of July, the Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services and FWP R2 responded to four verified livestock depredation incidents and a handful of additional calls about livestock where the 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.

- On 4/19/19, Wildlife Services investigated wounds on a newborn calf at a ranch near Helmville, 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 4/20/19, 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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 bear would be euthanized and the second bear was not captured. Adjacent to this ranch, in 2018, there were multiple calf depredations by grizzlies at the neighboring calving ground. Traps were set at this site last year on three occasions, but no bears were captured. For more information you can go to this link:  
<https://www.blackfootvalleydispatch.com/story/2019/05/01/news/grizzly-euthanized-after-cattle-depredations-in-helmville-valley/1001.html>
- On 5/23/19 two calves were killed by a grizzly at another ranch near Helmville, MT. Wildlife Services set traps at-site, but the bears had consumed the calves and did not return. Traps were closed after several days of trapping.
- On 6/15/19 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.
- Last spring, Wildlife Services investigated 7 additional calf carcasses where it was determined the calves had died of natural causes and were scavenged on 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 on 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. After June 15<sup>th</sup>, there were no additional depredations reported in the Blackfoot watershed.

## **RESIDENTIAL RELATED CONFLICTS AND TWO GRIZZLIES EUTHANIZED**

Two grizzlies were euthanized in 2019 as a result of their extreme food conditioned behavior.

- The first of these bears was “Stevi,” a sub adult male, captured the fall of 2018 after digging up worms at the Stevensville Golf Course. This male was translocated from the Bitterroot Valley to the headwaters of Belmont Creek adjacent to the Rattlesnake Wilderness. He came out of his den, located in the southern Mission Range, on March 17<sup>th</sup>. 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 open porches, sheds and buildings for garbage, grain, dog food and BBQ grills. He was documented at multiple residences in the Seeley Lake area, Clearwater Junction area, Ovando area and Woodworth area. On July 18<sup>th</sup> he was captured and euthanized after entering a building and accessing dog food on a porch at a ranch near Woodworth, MT. For more information you can go to this link: [https://missoulian.com/news/local/grizzly-that-prowled-stevi-golf-course-euthanized-after-seeley-lake/article\\_6d24e8a2-2d9d-5565-bc1e-72cb9db35b6b.html](https://missoulian.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 12<sup>th</sup>, southeast of Seeley Lake in the Woodworth area, did not have a known history, but was observed on multiple occasions traveling with the radio-collared grizzly known as “Stevi”. Because of this bear’s extreme food-conditioned behavior, after consultation with the USFWS, it was decided to put this bear down after he was captured. This young 250-pound sub adult male grizzly broke a door open to access a secured barn in order to get grain. The bear had also been observed at adjacent home sites accessing unsecured grain, garbage, pet food, chickens and other attractants. Following the incident the landowner took it upon themselves to build bear resistant sliding doors on the barn to prevent future conflicts. 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 you can go to this link: <https://www.seeleylake.com/story/2019/05/30/news/fwp-euthanizes-two-bears-in-the-area-in-the-past-month/4868.html>.
- There was a third grizzly traveling with the two bears mentioned above that continued seeking uncontained attractants in the Woodworth and Seeley Lake areas. This bear was not captured. FWP responded to several additional incidents that that involved chicken feed and a female grizzly with cubs. One or two additional grizzlies (may have been the same bear) were reported in the Blackfoot Canyon area west of Lincoln that was involved in several incidents at residential sites involving grain and butchering scraps. FWP responded and erected a temporary electric fence.

## **ROAD KILLED GRIZZLY BEAR**

On 6/6/19 a 500-pound adult male grizzly was killed by a vehicle on Highway 200 near Patterson Prairie. This is the 12<sup>th</sup> grizzly killed by vehicles in the Blackfoot Valley since 2004. Eight of these grizzlies have been killed along Highway 200 in the Lincoln Canyon between Ovando and Lincoln, MT.

## **2020 SPRING GRIZZLY BEAR SUMMARY**

The first grizzly tracks reported this year were on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Arrastra Creek area and the first grizzly sighting was March 18<sup>th</sup> east of Placid Lake. Since that time, tracks have been observed in both the Clearwater and Blackfoot drainages. Through April more bears emerged from their dens and traveled to the lower elevations with most females with young out of their dens the first week of May.

## **GRIZZLY CONFLICTS AND ONE BEAR EUTHANIZED SPRING 2020**

On March 28<sup>th</sup> Wildlife Services investigated wounds on a newborn calf at a ranch near Helmville, MT, and determined that the injury was not grizzly-related.

Between April 10<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> a lone grizzly killed and cached three calves in a pasture bordering a riparian area on the same ranch mentioned above. Due to cold weather and snow it was not feasible to re-locate the cow calf herd. On April 13<sup>th</sup> Wildlife Services captured a 452-pound adult male. After consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in accordance with Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee guidelines, it was decided, that because multiple calves had been killed by this individual bear, it would be removed. The hide and skull were salvaged for education purposes and the Blackfoot Challenge has begun working with the ranch on a possible electric fence project.



*This is a photo of the 452 pound male grizzly that was euthanized. Photo by Eric Graham*

In mid-April there were several incidents of grizzlies in proximity to ranch compounds associated with livestock carcasses. The livestock carcasses were picked up as soon as the reports came in. FWP is recommending that after March all carcasses set aside for pickup, are stored away from ranch premises.

### **COLLARED GRIZZLY BEARS 2020**

Here is a summary of the three radio collared grizzlies in the Blackfoot:

- On April 10<sup>th</sup> during the spring radio-tracking flight it was discovered that the research female grizzly bear “Silver Queen” had dropped her collar northwest of Silver King Mountain. She had been collared since July 2018. She was originally captured northeast of Lincoln and was observed last fall with her yearling in the headwaters of the Landers Fork of the Blackfoot. This bear spent most of her time ranging the south end of the Scapegoat Wilderness between the Landers Fork and McDonald Pass. “Silver Queen” is an older 245-pound adult female.
- On April 10<sup>th</sup> the female grizzly bear “Ursa” was located at her den site in the headwaters of Falls Creek on the edge of the Scapegoat Wilderness. “Ursa” was captured last year on August 26<sup>th</sup> northeast of Lincoln, MT in the Landers Fork. It is not known at this time if she is still with her two cubs. Last year she spent most of her time

ranging the south end of the Scapegoat Wilderness between the Landers Fork and McDonald Pass. “Ursa” is an older 250-pound adult female.

- “Walking Bear”, a 535- pound adult male, recaptured in July 2018, was observed from the air on April 10<sup>th</sup>. His den site was not determined, but in 2018 and 2019 he denned in Arrastra Creek. The collar has been malfunctioning but 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 year’s past “Walking Bear” has made two trips from the Blackfoot Valley over the top of the Mission Mountains to visit the corn fields around Ronan, MT.



*“Ursa.” Photo by Eric Graham*

## **BLACK BEAR AND MOUNTAIN LION ACTIVITY**

### **2019**

Last fall black bear conflicts in the Potomac Valley and Seeley Lake were constant. In Seeley Lake, several lone black bears and a female with cubs were trapped and relocated in response to conflicts. Several black bears were euthanized and multiple other black bears were reported accessing uncontained garbage, bird seed, dog food, chicken feed and other residential attractants. Seeley Lake has an extreme issue with uncontained attractants and last fall black bears were observed accessing garbage and other attractants on a nightly basis.

Last summer in Potomac there was an extreme situation involving bears feeding on residential garbage. At the ends of county roads, multiple homes are required to bring garbage cans to certain sites for garbage service. Most of these cans are left out all week and as a result, resident black bears are obtaining garbage on a nightly basis. Since 2015, FWP has been working with the community to resolve the situation with very little progress. Last year several of these bears began visiting Potomac home sites for garbage and other attractants. In addition, there were multiple incidents of both lions and bears killing small livestock and fowl. Wildlife Services trapped and euthanized one black bear and a lion that killed goats.

Last fall FWP fielded multiple reports of lions throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys. Similar to year’s past, most of the reports came from the communities of Potomac, Seeley Lake

and Lincoln. These three communities are known for lion activity due to prime habitat and abundant deer. FWP also responded to a handful of lions in the Ninemile Prairie area that were near camp sites. There were four reports of mountain lion attacks on dogs from Placid, Seeley, and the Swan-Clearwater Divide. As a result, two mountain lions were lethally removed.

## **2020**

Black bear activity has been minimal. FWP has fielded reports of tracks and one incident of a black bear accessing garbage in a burn barrel north of Seeley Lake.

Throughout the winter FWP fielded reports of lion activity throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys. There were a handful of incidents where lions were in proximity to home sites. Similar to year's past, most of the reports come from the communities of Potomac, Seeley Lake and Lincoln. This winter there were a handful of incidents of lions being captured in wolf traps in Region 2. One of these incidents occurred in the Placid Lake area and the lion was safely removed. There were several reports of lions killing house cats in the Potomac area and Wildlife Services removed one lion that killed a goat.

Please report black bear and mountain lion activity/incidents as quickly as possible to Eli Hampson (406-210-3213), Jamie Jonkel (406-544-1447) or Scott Eggeman (406-531-6759).

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/>

## **GRIZZLY BEAR RESEARCH TRAPPING**

There are no plans for any grizzly bear research trapping in the Blackfoot watershed this season. Should one of the collared grizzly bears die or drop their collar, traps will be set for a new bear. However, some opportunistic research trapping may occur depending on resources and time. For more information related to the grizzly bear population monitoring go to:

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

## **GRIZZLY BEAR ADVISORY COUNCIL UPDATE**

Grizzly bear management in Montana is complex. While they are at recovery levels in the Greater Yellowstone (GYE) and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems (NCDE), they have yet to reach recovery goals in the Bitterroot and Cabinet-Yaak Recovery Zones. In places where bear numbers are on the rise, they are dispersing into places they haven't been for decades, sometimes causing conflicts with people and communities. Last year the Governor of Montana appointed members to the Grizzly Bear Advisory Council. The council has been working

diligently and will eventually have recommendations for grizzly bear management and conservation in Montana.

The Grizzly Bear Advisory Council is comprised of a broad cross section of Montanans with a diversity of views on grizzly bear management, conservation, and recovery. The Council has been tasked with considering broad strategic objectives, such as:

- Maintaining and enhancing human safety
- Ensuring a healthy and sustainable grizzly bear population
- Improving timely and effective response to conflicts involving grizzly bears
- Engaging all partners in grizzly-related outreach and conflict prevention
- Improving intergovernmental, interagency, and tribal coordination

For more information on the advisory council check out this link:

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

### **LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICKUP PROGRAM**

The Blackfoot Challenge's Livestock Carcass Pick Up Program runs during calving season from mid-February through mid-May. Thereafter, carcasses in the Blackfoot Valley are picked up by FWP or the Blackfoot Challenge. 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, the pickup protocol was re-evaluated and it is now recommending that starting April 1st all carcasses set aside for pickup be stored away from ranch premises by at least 400 yards.** Carcasses should be stored away from human and livestock activity at an accessible site with good visibility. If needed, the ranch can also call any of the numbers mentioned above for emergency pickup. If there is concern that a carcass will lure in bears before pick up, there is always the option of personally hauling the carcass to the Clearwater Compost site.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR CARCASS PICKUP**

#### **DURING CALVING SEASON:**

**Dan Masee (406) 793-5639**

#### **OUTSIDE OF CALVING SEASON:**

**Jamie Jonkel (406) 544-1447**

**Barry Gordon (406) 541-1078**

**Eric Graham (406) 240-3132**

**Eli Hampson (406) 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>.

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 ranches and residential sites across the watershed. Over the last two summers the Blackfoot Challenge has assisted multiple families with electrified residential containment fences. In years past the Blackfoot Challenge secured funds to electrify the Helmville Dump, the Ovando Dump, the Seeley Lake Dump and the Clearwater Junction Compost Site. These electric fences have proven effective at deterring bears.



*This is an example of a 5 wire electric fence that was built in the Blackfoot to keep grizzly bears out of calving yards and residential home sites. Photo by Eric Graham*

Electric fence 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 (406) 544-1447 or Eric Graham (406) 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>