

THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT 9/10/2014

Hello, this is **Eric Graham**: With the fall season upon us I continue to work my second season as the full-time Range Rider for the Blackfoot Challenge. **Molly Parks** and I will monitor livestock and wolf activity throughout the watershed in order to reduce the risk of livestock losses for Blackfoot area ranchers until October 31st. This wolf and bear activity report will continue to be produced roughly every two weeks so that you have updated information on carnivore activity in the watershed.

Some of the Blackfoot Valley ranchers have started to bring their cattle home from the grazing season and we are anxious to hear their counts. Please continue to give me a call at any time if you have questions or comments regarding wolf or bear activity.

If you have any questions about the Range Rider program please call the Blackfoot Challenge Wildlife Committee Coordinator, Seth Wilson (406) 274-0507.

Contact Info for reporting wolf or bear activity:

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

Liz Bradley – FWP Wolf Management Specialist (406) 865-0017

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

If you have a suspected wolf depredation, please notify **Wildlife Services (WS)** as soon as possible to determine the cause of death;

Powell County – Bart Smith - 406-660-0368

Missoula County - Ted North - 406-274-4856.

IMPORTANT UPDATES

- On the evening of 7/26 an adult female wolf was legally shot on private land when it was seen feeding on a calf carcass in the Blackfoot valley east of Ovando. Wildlife Services confirmed the calf as killed by wolves the following day (7/27) and FWP law enforcement investigated and reported the shooting as a defense of property take. On 9/7 Wildlife Services trapped and collared a female pup in the Arrastra Creek pack. Two male pups were also caught and were killed during this action. Traps were pulled on Tuesday Sept. 9th – the end of the 45 day control period.

- The south end monitoring female grizzly bear “Smrdel” was road-killed today (9/10) during the morning hours on Highway 200 a few hundred feet west of the Arrastra Creek Bridge. The bear was south-bound and the vehicle was

west-bound. Her two cubs were not at site and FWP (Jamie Jonkel) believes that she likely lost her two cubs earlier this summer around the first week of July. Although there is no way of knowing, FWP had documented heavy use of the highway by this female and cubs—the cubs may have been hit earlier this summer but this is not verified. (more details at the end of the report).

- Thanks again to Ty Pocha for his two amazing seasons as a range rider. Ty is off the US Air Force and we wish him all the best. (Ty Pocha and Eric Graham: photo credit: Mike Johnson)



- In past seasons hunters have been very helpful reporting wolf and grizzly bear sign and sightings. Thanks for taking the time to call in those reports.
- Under new policy, private landowners can kill a limited number of wolves per year that potentially threaten livestock, domestic dogs or human safety on their deeded land. Landowners must report the take to MT FWP within 24 hours.
 - The rule was adopted to comply with Senate Bill 200, a new state law passed by the Montana Legislature last year. The annual quota allows landowners or their agents to kill up to 100 wolves a year without a hunting license. The statewide quota for this effort will be examined in four 25-wolf increments. Each time the number of wolves taken nears 25, 50, and 75, the commission must approve the next increment toward the 100-wolf quota. For more details, please see the end of this report.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK

Pack Structure: 2-3 Adults and approximately 5 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes

Pack Report: On 9/7 Wildlife Services trapped and collared a female pup in the Arrastra Creek pack. Two other male pups were also caught and were killed.

BELMONT PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults, ? pups.

Collared Wolf: Yes

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: 2-3 Adults and 4 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

Pack Report: We continue to monitor these wolves via radio telemetry.

CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

DALTON MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: FWP has been scouting for this pack but no sign has been found yet.

HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: Yes

Pack Report: WS collared a yearling female wolf northeast of Lincoln and this wolf is believed to be a member of the Humbug pack. Further monitoring is needed to confirm this.

INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 3 Adults, 3 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes

Pack Report: FWP and range riders have been monitoring this pack north of the BCWMA.

LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults last winter, ? pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: FWP made a trapping effort for this pack in late June but sign dried up and traps were pulled. Further trapping attempts will be made if the wolves are located.

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 adults, ? pups

Collared Wolf: Yes

Pack Report: FWP collared a yearling male on 7/16. FWP and range riders will continue to monitor this pack.

OVANDO MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: We continue to scout for this pack no sign has been found since the scat earlier this season on the BCCA.

PIERCE PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown; 6 adults in December

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: This pack is a border pack between FWP Regions 1 and 2 around the Clearwater Divide and so monitoring efforts are split between the Regions.

UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: 3 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: We continue scouting for this pack but no sign has been found yet.

GRIZZLY AND BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY

There continues to be a large amount of chokecherries and hawthorn berries for bears to feed on throughout the Blackfoot valley. Expect to see both black and grizzly bears taking advantage of these natural food sources while they are still available.

Multiple grizzly bears have been reported feeding on natural foods and choke cherries along Nevada Creek between Nevada Lake and Helmville. These bears also discovered several livestock carcasses and MFWP is monitoring the situation. Livestock carcasses are a major draw for grizzly bears. Livestock carcasses can be picked up year round in the Blackfoot Valley.

The Blackfoot Challenge offers free livestock carcass pick up from mid-February to mid-May each year. From May to mid-February (the "off-season"), Jamie Jonkel (544-1447) or Eric Graham (240-3132) can assist landowners with carcass removal or relocations to remote, private land sites when necessary. Please give Seth Wilson (274-0507) a call if you have any questions about the Blackfoot Challenge's Livestock Carcass Pick-up Program.

There have been several grizzly bear sightings throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater drainages. So far, there have been a couple of conflicts reported this season: a bear damaged an ATV near Helmville, and a grizzly bear killed chickens near Seeley Lake, there was a lamb depredation near Lincoln and a grizzly damaged the door on a grain silo East of Ovando. FWP and the landowners put up an electric fence around the chicken coop and grain silo.

A black bear damaged a vehicle and got into some garbage in a garage in Lincoln and was shot by the landowner.

There has been a little bit of black bear activity reported from both Seeley Lake and Potomac.

There have been reports of grizzly bear sign from bow hunters in and around the Aunt Molly river bottom. There have also been grizzly bear sightings in the agricultural fields around the area, although the bears appear to be primarily feeding on natural foods.

One of the monitoring females for the grizzly bear monitoring study, “Smrdel”, was struck and killed by a vehicle on 9/10/14. “Smrdell” has been collared off and on since 2007 and has been an important bear for monitoring the grizzly bear population parameters on south end of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear population. “Smrdel” had two litters and survived a gunshot wound during the period she was monitored. This spring she came out of the den with two new cubs that she lost, possibly to the highway or an adult male, sometime in July. Smrdel spent most of her time around Marcum Mountain, Black Mountain and in and around the river bottoms between Hwy 200/Hwy 141 Junction and Lincoln. There continue to be 3 monitoring female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing population trend monitoring effort. “Fen”, who’s collar is scheduled to drop off in October, has also been a long-time female on the grizzly bear monitoring study. Fen came out of the den in 2013 with cubs but it appears that she lost both yearlings to unknown causes sometime in June. She has been located between Monture Creek and Morrell Mountain and has been sighted on the Blackfoot Clearwater game range and near Upsata Lake. “Icel” is a sub-adult that has been hanging around the Blackfoot Clearwater game range, Shanley Creek, and Monture Creek. “Portman” is another sub-adult that has been located near Shanley Creek, Monture Creek and on the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA). Several weeks ago another grizzly bear from the Flathead Indian Reservation traveled over the Missions and has been located on several occasions around Placid Lake, Seeley Lake and the Clearwater Junction area.

This is the time of year we start to have bears going for apples and other uncontained attractants. Please contain your bear attractants by making them unavailable to bears. Take down your birdfeeders and make sure your pet food, livestock feed and garbage is in a secure structure. Contact Jamie Jonkel if you would like to talk about cost share programs to install electric fence around apple trees, chicken coops and other bear attractants. If anyone is interested in electric fence they can contact Jamie Jonkel at 544-1447. Thanks for your efforts to help to reduce human bear conflicts.

LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICK-UP PROGRAM

If you have a carcass, please call Jamie Jonkel (544-1447) and/or Eric Graham (240-3132). The Blackfoot Challenge’s Livestock Carcass Pick Up and Removal Program will run from mid-February through mid-May in 2015. **Any questions about the program please call: Seth Wilson, BC-Wildlife Committee Coordinator at (406) 274-0507**

If you would like information about black bears and mountain lions elsewhere in MT FWP R2 you can look at www.missoulabears.org



This grizzly photo was taken with a trail camera at the remote site with a cow carcass that could not be picked up and taken to the compost site. Photo by Ty Pocha and Eric Graham.

SB 200 – Additional Details: (Source: MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks)

Q: What is Senate Bill (SB) 200?

A: SB 200 was passed during the 2013 Legislative session. It expanded authority for landowners or their agents to take wolves without license or permit at any time those wolves represent potential threats to human safety, livestock, and domestic dogs on their deeded property. The landowner is not required to report the wolf to FWP prior to taking the wolf.

Q: What is “potential threat”?

A: From the recent ARM rule modification, "potential threat" means those wolves in immediate proximity to human dwellings, livestock, or domestic dogs.

Q: Is there a limit to the number of wolves that can be taken under SB 200?

A: Yes. SB 200 identified a quota to be set by the Commission. That annual quota is separate and in addition to any hunting/trapping quota. The current annual quota is up to 100 wolves.

This quota is further separated into four 25-wolf increments. Before any next set of 25 could be authorized FWP would update the Commission on details of those wolves taken up to that point in time.

Q: Can a Landowner take a wolf now under SB 200?

A: Yes. The quota was finalized at the July 10, 2014 commission meeting. This represented the last procedural step to fully implement this authority.

Q: Do these wolves need to be reported and subsequently investigated?

A: Yes, the wolf take must be reported to local FWP staff within 24 hours and the carcass may not be moved until the take is investigated. The hide, skull, and carcass must be surrendered to the department. Unless otherwise instructed (education requests, lab surveillance, etc.), FWP shall dispose carcasses in a manner consistent with other wildlife carcasses the department receives.

Q: Who is investigating wolves taken under SB 200?

A: Local FWP regional staff will be responding to reports of wolves taken under this statute.

Q: How are the SB 200 wolves being tracked and are they considered different than wolves taken in the act of harassing or killing?

A: FWP will rely upon the landowner reporting an incident to local (regional) department staff. Based upon the subsequent investigation the wolf would be assigned to the SB 200 quota or not. If the wolf was taken in the act of harassing livestock (for example), the take would be assigned to that authority and would not count against the SB 200 wolf quota.

Q: Who will track wolves taken under SB 200—the Regions or Helena?

A: Helena will monitor the quota through the regions notifying the Helena Wildlife office when any wolf is confirmed to have been taken under SB 200. This notification by the region should happen as quickly as possible. FWP would make a public news release for any quota closure and is also working on a web site status update page.

Q: Is FWP still issuing Shoot on Site (SOS) permits?

A: Shoot on Site permits remain an option. SB 200 does, however, represent an alternative. If a SOS is issued, any wolf taken on that permit would not be considered part of the SB 200 quota.

Q: Can Wildlife Services take wolves under SB200? Is that take also investigated? Would that take be counted as part of the SB 200 wolf quota?

A: Wildlife Services could act as the landowner's agent and take a wolf under SB 200 authority. Any wolf taken under SB 200 authority is required to be counted against the SB 200 quota and investigated by FWP including those taken by Wildlife Services.

Q: Can landowners legally set and bait traps to take wolves that pose a potential threat under SB200?

A: SB 200 does not speak specifically to trapping or baiting in this regard.

Q: Would a SB 200 wolf count towards the quotas in WMUs 110, 313 and 316?

A: If a wolf (threatening or not) was legally taken during an open season by a licensed landowner hunter or trapper and subsequently tagged by that person, the wolf would be counted towards the hunter/trapper harvest quota.

A: If a wolf posing a threat was taken during an open season by a landowner without a license, that wolf would not be counted under the hunting/trapping harvest quota in WMUS 110, 313 or 316.

A: If the quota for take of wolves representing a threat was open (this quota is different and in addition to the hunting/trapping harvest quota) a landowner may take a wolf representing a threat at any time of year—regardless of the hunting/trapping harvest quota status.