THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT
October and November 2016

Hello everyone, this is Eric Graham working as the wildlife technician for the Blackfoot Challenge. In coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) we produce this wolf and bear activity report. In response to wolf activity in the valley the Blackfoot Challenge and MFWP created this seasonal range rider program in 2009. We work with several ranches throughout the Blackfoot watershed to help them keep an eye on predator activity and to increase herd supervision. In addition, I also help monitor collared grizzly bears and wolves in the watershed and assist MFWP with research and management trapping efforts.

This fall most of the producers reported good counts at shipping time, although a couple reported some unknown losses. We will increase our efforts in those grazing allotments next season. Thanks to both Sigrid Olsen and Jordan Mannix for helping out with the range rider efforts this past season. Sigrid worked out of the Potomac area and Jordan worked around Ovando and Helmville. Our range rider program wrapped up at the end of October and we will be up and running again from May to October in 2017.

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, 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 individuals.

If you have any questions about the wildlife 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 11/23 a female grizzly bear cub of the year was reported as roadkill south of Seeley Lake. Photo courtesy of MFWP.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK
Pack Structure: 5 Adults 5 Pups
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: MFWP continues to monitor this pack via radio telemetry.

BELMONT PACK
Pack Structure: 5 Adults 5 Pups
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: WS collared one wolf and euthanized 8 following a confirmed depredation.

INEZ PACK
Pack Structure: 5 Adults ~5 Pups
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: MFWP 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: MFWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

SEELEY LAKE PACK
Pack Structure: 3 Adults 2 Pups
Collared Wolf: No
Pack Report: Radio collared wolf was found dead. The cause of death is unknown.

STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK
Pack Structure: 5 Adults
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: MFWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry. One radio collared wolf was found dead. The wolf appeared to be a hunting loss.

UNION PEAK PACK
Pack Structure: Unknown
Collared Wolf: No
Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY

Grizzly bears were widely dispersed throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys this season and were reported by landowners, ranchers, local residents, recreationists and hunters.

Bob Wiesner inspecting the old den of a previously collared grizzly bear named "Dreyer." The den appeared to have collapsed in over time. "Dreyer" was shot and killed this spring and the case is still under investigation. Photo by Mike Johnson.

Currently there is one research female grizzly bear in the valley to support the ongoing NCDE population trend monitoring study. Throughout the season "Icel" was located around Woodworth, Monture Creek, the Blackfoot River above Clearwater Junction and Cottonwood Creek. 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

A MFWP flight survey on 11/10 attempted to locate the collared grizzly bears known to spend time in the valley. "Icel" and "Walking Bear" appeared to be denned up in the high country.

“Marten” was located north of Ovando. “Dan” and “Stone” were not located on the survey and another survey will be arranged to try to locate them.

This fall east of Ovando there was a grizzly bear reported feeding on apples very close to a residence. When MFWP responded the landowners were removing the tree to avoid future conflicts and they are exploring the idea of electric fence to contain attractants.

What is suspected to be the same grizzly bear as mentioned above was reported to be feeding on harvested elk scraps in the area. MFWP responded and removed the elk scraps to avoid human bear conflicts.

Next spring MFWP will be trapping again for research grizzly bears. We hope to get that 5th collar back out on a male grizzly bear to be associated with the electric fence study. In addition we hope to get a new collar out on a population monitoring trend study female grizzly bear.

Throughout hunting season there was not much reported for grizzly bear related conflicts. In the Ovando area a grizzly took over a deer carcass in the river. The deer was suspected to have been shot by a hunter. The carcass was removed by MFWP and the bear moved on.

There were 4 or 5 reports of hunters running into grizzlies but the bears moved on.

Near Placid Lake a grizzly took over a deer carcass that was left overnight.

MFWP typically gets reports of bear activity up to the end of hunting season. Most of the bears in the valley have denned up by now but in years past there has been bear activity reported through December.

We appreciate you taking the time to call in all of your grizzly bear observations including tracks and sightings. If possible take photos and a measurement of the width of the front foot of grizzly bear tracks.

On 11/25 this grizzly bear track was reported north of Ovando. The width of the front track measures 6.25 inches. Photo by Karen Laitala.

BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY

Black bear season is winding down. Conflicts were quiet this year as there were good natural food sources available through hunting season. There were a few garbage and birdfeeder related issues reported through September in the Potomac and Seeley Lake areas.

For more 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 STUDY

Grizzly Bear Study Update

Hello everyone,

The electric fencing study has ended for the year. This was our second field season. Hopefully there is enough data to give us some definitive answers, but if not, we will carry out a third field season next summer from June to mid-August. Now that I've had my fun with two

field seasons, the hard and not so fun part begins where I spend my days learning how to and then analyzing the data. I do not have any definitive answers yet, but once that data is available I will be sending it out in this report. We had a lot of bear activity this season, and once again the majority of the activity was from black bears.

I have three things left to do for the study: 1) develop a map of all permanent electric fences in the Blackfoot Watershed, 2) collect data from five collars the bear management team deployed this year and analyze that data in a year, and 3) write a paper detailing the study and its results and recommendations.

I would love to hear from landowners who have permanent electric fence on their property so I can develop our map. After we have developed this map, we will overlay the grizzly bear GPS points from the five collars and look for any patterns of avoidance or use where electric fence is present. If you have permanent electric fence, feel free to give me a call at 406-214-5749.

I would like to thank everyone for your support during our field seasons. It has been a wonderful experience working in the Blackfoot Valley!

Brittani Johnson

Figure 2 - This grizzly walks around the fence multiple times but never attempts to pass

Figure 1 - This black bear eventually crawls underneath the fence while it's turned off to reap the rewards of some rotten fish

Grizzly Bear Study Design

During the summers of 2015 and 2016, 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. To learn more about this program, click here: "Living with Carnivores: Boneyards, Bear & Wolves"

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 http://www.missoulabears.org along with more detailed reports on grizzly bear, black bear and mountain lion activity.