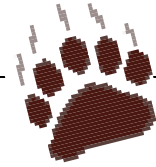


SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS

SPRING 2009



Spring at Montana Wildlife Rehabilitation Center

By Patti Sowka MWRC Manager

As spring approaches, staff and volunteers at the Montana Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (MWRC) in Helena, Montana prepare for the busy season. The spring season brings new life to the wilds of Montana. Spring also brings the spring black bear hunt, which opened in Montana on April 15th. While it is illegal to harvest female black bears that have cubs, occasionally it happens.

Bears give birth in their winter dens in January or early February and the cubs nurse and grow quickly while mom snoozes. Then in late March or early April, the bears begin to emerge from their dens. The cubs weigh between five and ten pounds at this point and are very dependent on mom to keep them safe.

Cubs orphaned during the spring hunt are not likely to survive without a little help from humans. That's where the MWRC comes in. The wildlife center gives orphaned cubs a second chance at life. Not all of the cubs brought into the MWRC are orphaned during the spring hunt, however. The center also receives cubs whose mothers were killed due to collisions with autos or trains, and sometimes when the mother gets into trouble with people.

The MWRC is the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) wildlife rehabilitation center and is the only facility in the state that cares for orphaned or injured bear cubs. They are typically brought in by FWP game wardens or biologists and are often cold and hungry when they arrive. The cubs are placed in indoor enclosures where they are fed milk replacer, produce and game meat. Cubs are housed in groups and are very social at this age. Very young cubs require comfort and reassurance and rearing cubs in groups reduces the amount of time and contact that staff members must have with the cubs.

It is really interesting to watch the evolution of the cubs' confidence. They typically come in scared and timid

Grizzly Monitoring Via Hair Snaring

By Jeff Stetz USGS

The U.S. Geological Survey is beginning a new research project this summer to assess grizzly bear population status and trends in the Northern Continental Divide

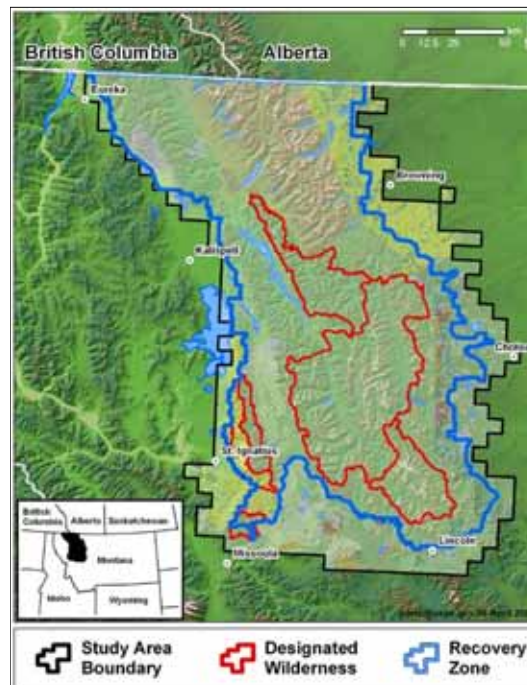
Ecosystem (NCDE) of northwestern Montana. This work is based on methods similar to those used in the 2004 Northern Divide Grizzly Bear Project. However, instead of a snapshot of population size, distribution, and genetic structure, this new work will collect bear hair over multiple years to estimate population growth rates and other characteristics important to determining how this population is faring.

Field work this year will consist of surveying forest trails, roads, and other travel routes used by bears to identify natural bear rubs. Small strips of barbed wire will be attached to the rubbed surface to facilitate hair collection. No lure or attractants will be used. Hair samples will be collected periodically throughout the summer and sent to a lab for genetic analysis. It only requires a few hair follicles to obtain a great deal of information about the bear that left the sample: species,

individual identity, gender, and potential relationship to other bears.

Collecting hair from bear rubs has been shown to detect a large portion of the population. In 2004, over 18,000 visits were made to 4,795 bear rubs, with nearly 13,000 hair samples collected. From these samples, over half of the estimated number of male and over a quarter of all female grizzlies were detected on bear rubs. Newer statistical approaches can use these detections to look at finer-scale trends in this population, including how bears are distributed on the landscape, if there are any barriers to geneflow, and whether the number of bears is increasing, decreasing, or stable.

Bear rub surveys will be conducted across essentially all lands occupied by grizzlies associated with the U.S. portion of the NCDE. Also, Canadian researchers and managers have been invited to extend sampling beyond



Rub tree based monitoring study area: USGS

Montana's Grizzly Bears: MTFWP Statewide Recap

By Diane Tipton MTFWP

Montanans interested in the well being of grizzly bears have had good and bad news recently. After 26 years, the Yellowstone grizzly bear population was declared recovered from the federal list of endangered and threatened species in April 2007, though grizzlies in Yellowstone still face challenges. "Human caused grizzly mortalities continue to be scrutinized, especially for female grizzly bears that are critical to the survival of the bears in the Yellowstone Ecosystem," said Chris Smith, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks deputy director and a long time member of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee.

"A serious issue for grizzly bears is the unprecedented attack of mountain pine beetles on whitebark pines," said Smith. Whitebark pine seeds are a staple in grizzly bears' diets in the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems (NCDE). Smith



Whitebark pine cones: US Forest Service

said some bear biologists are concerned that the loss of the nutritional whitebark pine seeds could in turn reduce the grizzly bears' reproductive success. "Providing areas where grizzlies can expand their range and find new foods will be an important part of helping the bears cope with the loss of whitebark pine trees," Smith said.

In another part of the state, the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Project concluded there were an estimated 765 grizzly bears in the NCDE in 2004—well about what was expected. This project involved two years of fieldwork by more than 200 researchers and crew and three years of analysis of more than 34,000 bear DNA samples.

The NCDE grizzly population is one of five grizzly bear recovery zones in the lower 48, located in portions of Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Washington.

Continued, page 5

Profile of a Grizzly Den in the Swan Valley

By Mark Ruby

While looking for a radio collar dropped by a grizzly bear last fall in the Swan Valley along with my colleague MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks Bear Technician Erik Peterson, we stumbled across a vacated grizzly bear den dug into the steep west facing slope of a hillside. Naturally, after crawling inside and taking in the full denning experience for ourselves, I wondered if what Erik and I were seeing was characteristic of most grizzly bear dens.

The den was excavated into a 30 degree slope at about 6800 feet. It was placed amongst a small stand of trees between two would-be winter avalanche chutes. The entrance led directly into the hillside and hooked left at a large boulder that probably made excavation impossible in that direction.

Inside the largest part of the den, piled bear grass covered the floor. More dried bear grass was piled out front of the den, no doubt pushed out when the bear exited the pre-



MTFWP Bear Technician Erik Peterson at the opening of a bear den found in the Swan: Mark Ruby



Mark Ruby and Erik Peterson inside a Swan Valley bear den: Mark Ruby

vious spring.

Grizzlies utilize a variety of locations for denning, including hollows under trees, natural caves, and excavations into sloping hillsides. Reported material used for bedding by the bears has included conifer boughs, twigs, grasses, moss, beargrass, and simply bare earth.

Grizzly Dens are typically found between 5900 and 6600 feet. However, a study examining grizzly denning in the Mission Mountains, indicated the majority of bears denned at 6500-8200 feet of elevation. Den sites commonly are placed in areas of high snow depth, which provides insulation and retention of body-warmed air as well as security for the long denning period. Sloping ground is common for den sites, allowing a thick enough roof overhead to prevent collapse. Dens are commonly on northern, eastern, and western aspects.

Bear Aware Neighborhood Approach in the Seeley-Swan 3

By Erin Edge Defenders of Wildlife

Living and recreating in and around Seeley Lake and the Swan Valley during warmer seasons comes with many benefits: beautiful summer sunsets, the sounds of loons, horseback riding, lounging on the lake, and watching the wildlife. These benefits are some of the many reasons that development and recreation increase each year in the Seeley-Swan valley.

In order to preserve the qualities we love about this region we need to be responsible stewards of the land. Being a responsible steward could be as simple as picking up a discarded Coke can on a hike or it could involve volunteering in your local community. Being Bear Aware while living and/or recreating in the Seeley Swan is an important aspect of being a responsible steward of the land we all love.



A pair of grizzly bears in a Swan Valley yard: Northwest Connections

In an effort to reduce human-bear conflicts in the Seeley-Swan valley, local residents, the Swan Ecosystem

By Diane Tipton MTFWP

Summer vacations and camping trips in “grizzly country” can be simpler and more convenient this summer.

“The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee has identified a couple of bear resistant coolers that will eliminate the need to suspend food out of bears’ reach,” said Chris Smith, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks deputy director.

Smith said the newly approved products make it much easier for outfitters and recreationists to comply with food storage orders in grizzly country.

These rugged ice-boxes have airtight seals, special fittings, and stainless steel patches or padlocks. The IGBC publishes an online list of products approved for use where food storage orders are in effect and other approved products such as electric fencing at: <http://www.igbconline.org/>. Prior to the certification of these new coolers,

Center, Northwest Connections, Seeley Lake Bear Aware, Living with Wildlife Foundation, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Defenders of Wildlife will be working together to launch a “neighborhood network” trial project. The “neighborhood network” concept was initiated in the Blackfoot by the Blackfoot Challenge and has been very successful.

The goals of this project will be to:

- Designate networks by identifying bear-human conflict “hot spots” in the project area.
- Identify area coordinators for each network.
- Minimize the availability of human-related attracts in each network.
- Encourage communication among neighbors about bear activity through a bear activity reporting protocol via a phone and email tree.
- Report observations, incidents, and bear behavior that may pose problems to a designated “area coordinator.”
- Area coordinators will keep MFWP informed on bear activity, and if individual bears develop unacceptable behaviors, MFWP can step in and use aversive conditioning, trap, remove or relocate bears, depending on the situation.
- The overall goal of the effort is to teach black bears and grizzly bears to avoid humans and areas inhabited by humans.

A Food Storage Alternative for Campers

food had to be hung at least 10 feet in the air and four feet from a tree.

Smith said US Forest Service food storage restrictions are for the public’s safety and to foster grizzly bear recovery by preventing bears from becoming food-conditioned, that is conditioned to finding an easy meal from garbage cans, coolers, and the like.

For more information on bear food storage orders like on the Flathead, Helena, Lolo, and Lewis Clark National Forests contact your local ranger district or check out the website at: www.fs.fed/r1/flathead/wildlife/grizzly_bear_index.html.



Bear-resistant cooler. Coolers must meet IGBC engineering specs and pass a live bear test.

but after just a few days of playing and roughhousing with each other, they become more confident. Certain cubs also begin to assert more dominance over the others.

When the cubs are about 15 pounds, they are moved into outside enclosures behind the main rehabilitation building. They are weaned from the milk replacer and are given only produce and game meat. The cubs are also introduced to den boxes that are made of wood and are approximately 4 feet long, 2 feet high and 2 feet wide. The boxes make great play structures and will later serve as a snug place for the bears to hibernate.

When the bears reach about 20 pounds, they can finally go into the big outdoor enclosures where they will spend the summer and fall months playing and gaining the weight they need to sustain them through the cold winter months that lie ahead. Bears' instincts are very strong and the cubs begin to forage for food and build dens without being taught these behaviors.

We simply provide them with opportunities to forage for food by hiding nuts and produce under logs and rocks, and by hanging berries from branches that are placed in the enclosures. Concrete block den buildings provide a place for the cubs to get out of the wind and snow and a place to begin their hibernation. The wooden den boxes are placed in the den buildings along with several bales of clean, dry straw. The bears do the rest. It's really funny to see three or four cubs all pile into the same box and leave one or two boxes empty.

Our goal is to get the bears to a size that will make them much less vulnerable to predators. We feed them foods high in protein and fat to help them grow quickly

and accumulate enough fat reserves to get them through hibernation. If environmental conditions allow, the cubs (now almost a year old) are placed into prepared winter dens in the wild. They are immobilized and ear-tagged so that they can be identified later if they are harvested by a hunter, killed by a car or train, or removed due to management reasons.

The bears are placed, still drowsy, into the dens and the dens are covered with branches, snow, straw, wood shavings or other insulating material. Our hope is that the bears will remain tucked in the dens until spring when they emerge and begin foraging for food and finding their new home range.

If conditions in the field are not conducive to a winter den release, the bears will remain at the MWRC until their release in late May or early June which will give them time to explore their new habitat

without the pressure of being hunted right away. It also gives MWRC staff extra time to bulk the bears up and make sure they have extra fat reserves in case availability of natural foods is low.

So, the group of 13 yearling black bears currently housed at the MWRC will remain here for about one more month at which time they will be released back into the wild. The release of those bears completes one cycle just as another begins. Cubs orphaned this spring will also come to the MWRC until they too can be returned to their homes in the wild.

I consider myself lucky to play a part in giving these cubs a second chance. My respect and passion grows as each new group of cubs teaches me something new. Bears truly are amazing animals.



Black bear yearlings at the rehabilitation center: P. Sowka

USGS Monitoring, continued

the border. This will provide a more realistic understanding of what is happening with the 'biological' population, not simply the population defined by political boundaries. The study area is extremely diverse and offers many challenges to conducting field work. However, one of the many advantages of bear rub surveys is that all work is conducted on recognized travel routes. Further, bear rubs are known to exist on all types of lands found in the NCDE, forested or otherwise.

With improved distribution of bear rubs and a slightly longer sampling season, it is expected that even more bears will be detected by this new project. More detections will result in more reliable inferences being made about what is happening in this population, and a better understanding of the progress made towards recovery. Surveying bear rubs is safe and efficient, and is consistent with wilderness ethics as no trapping or overflights are



Grizzly bear photo captured by motion sensor camera using a rub tree: USGS study: USGS

required. Bear rub surveys are also an excellent way to engage the public in wildlife conservation research as little training is required, and there is no more risk to people (or bears) than would be expected on any hike in the woods. To learn more go to: http://www.nrmc.usgs.gov/research/NGSbear_monitoring.htm.

Montana grizzly summary, continued

In the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem, the grizzly population is the smallest in the state, about 40 bears. FWP’s work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to boost this population by transplanting a limited number of young female bears has met with some success and a recent setback. The two female bears released in this ecosystem in 2008 died about two months after their release—one was struck by a train and the other shot and killed at a residence outside of Noxon. The work to augment the grizzly population in the Cabinet-Yaak will continue.

The ultimate good news would be that grizzly bears are finding ways to interbreed between the recovery zones. IGBC scientists and the US Geological Survey recommended genetic testing to discover whether grizzly bears in the Yellowstone region have interbred with grizzlies from elsewhere.

“Interbreeding between grizzly bear recovery areas is important insurance for the future because it will maintain the genetic diversity they need to withstand diseases and other pressures on them,” said Smith.

In the meantime, Montana’s grizzly bears are experiencing significant reductions from pressures and changes in key habitat, fragmentation of travel corridors between ecosystems, changes in foods available to them and increased contact with humans. “The successful management of grizzly populations includes a commitment to address the challenges posed by many environmental changes the bears face,” Smith said.



Bear Troubles, Who to Call

Tim Manley

Grizzly Bear Management Specialist
(Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks):
Cell phone: (406) 250-1265
Home phone: (406) 892-0802

Eric Wenum

Black Bear and Mountain Lion Specialist
(Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks)
Office Phone: (406) 752-5501
Cell Phone: (406) 250-0062
Home Phone: (406) 756-1776

Emergencies

Dial **911** if you live in Seeley Lake or Condon
If you live in Swan Lake dial **886-2324**

Permission for Bear Managers to Enter My Property

Landowner’s name(s) _____

Permanent address _____

Local address _____

Telephone number(s) _____ email _____

Swan Valley telephone number _____

Permission granted until revoked by landowner(s) (check here)

Or time period during which access is permitted (month/day/year through month/day/year) _____

Signature(s) _____

Return this form to: Tim Manley, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 490 N. Meridian, Kalispell, MT 59901

How To Prevent Bear Problems

Each of us is responsible for keeping a clean camp and ensuring that we do not encourage problem behavior among bears. Here are some tips:

- Haul garbage to the dump as often as possible.
- Feed pets inside. If this is not feasible, do not leave uneaten pet food outside, especially overnight.
- Keep coolers, refrigerators, or freezers **inside**, even if empty!
- Clean and securely store barbecue grills.
- Keep pet food, garbage, human food, and all odorous food-like items secure in a sturdy building away from doors and windows, in a bear-proof container or elevated in an Alaska-style cache.
- Do not leave food or garbage in your vehicle.
- It is best not to feed birds in summer or fall. If you must, (bird species that live here do not require feeding) place only a small amount of seed into the feeder each day so that it will be completely consumed before dark.
- Bring hummingbird feeders in at night and while you're away. An alternative to hummingbird feeders is a bright basket of flowers such as fuchsias.
- Avoid planting clover. It is not native, and is becoming a favorite among bears.
- Grain attracts bears. Avoid feeding deer grain. Supplemental feeding interferes with a deer's ability to digest natural foods, and deer attract mountain lions, an additional threat.
- If you have a vegetable garden, especially carrots, consider placing an electric fence around the perimeter, or hang "critter-gitters." Pull carrots by September 15th, a magic carrot hour according to Tim Manley.
- Compost piles are not recommended.
- Avoid using bone meal on gardens.
- Do not leave fish entrails along streams or trails. Puncture the air bladder and sink the entrails in deep water, or pack them out.
- Hang game in a very secure building or Alaska-style cache.

Butcher meat as soon as possible. If you must hang meat outside, hang it at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet away from tree trunks.

- Pick fruit as it ripens.
- If there is a bear in your yard and it doesn't appear to be just passing through, make noise by banging pots and pans together and shouting to try to encourage the bear to leave. Do not approach the bear.
- A general rule of thumb: anything with an odor, even if it is not food-related can attract bears to your property. Keep anything with an odor in a secure place (bears have been known to get into motor oil, antifreeze, gasoline, paint, and cleaning agents).

The **SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS** is published as a cooperative effort of the Living With Wildlife Foundation; Northwest Connections; Swan Ecosystem Center; Swan Valley residents; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Flathead National Forest.

THE BEARS NEED YOUR HELP

Swan Valley Bear News is funded in large part by private donations. To donate, please send a check earmarked "Bears" to Swan Ecosystem Center, 6887 Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826. To donate by credit card, contact us at 406/754-3137, 406/754-3138.



Visit our Bear Aware web page at SwanEcosystemCenter.com

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