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## Beating The Heat At The Seeley-Swan Bear Fair

By Mark Ruby



*Kids pose with a bear mount at the second annual Bear Fair in Condon. Photos provided.*

Between 250 and 300 people attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Seeley-Swan Bear Fair on August 1<sup>st</sup> beat the heat on August the 1<sup>st</sup> to beat the heat at the Hungry Bear restaurant in Condon. Attendees enjoyed bratwursts and cold beer as they visited with management biologists, land planners, experts on living with wildlife and other parties that all have a role to play in the bear conservation world.

The event was hosted by Swan Valley Bear Resources, a collaborative group that works with the public to devise better living practices for bear conservation. The bear fair is held each year on the first weekend in August.

The fair began its full docket of events with a demonstration by Wind River Bear Institute. Both kids and adults met the Karelian bear dogs after learning about how the dogs are used to haze bears away from human residences.

Dr. Chuck Jonkel of the Great Bear Foundation took time away from helping folks make plaster casts of grizzly, black bear, and wolf tracks to give a short summation of the importance of bear conservation and the changes he has seen in bear management throughout his career.



*Families meet the Karelian bear dogs after the demonstration by Wind River Bear Institute.*

Between presentations and demonstrations folks mingled with the experts on hand. Taking time to thumb through information on tables, learn about radio telemetry for radio collared animals,

inquire about maps of bear movements, or examine animal hides and skulls on display.

“I have gotten a lot of very good questions,” commented Scott Mackay of Cenex Harvest States. Mackay spoke for about twenty minutes about electric fencing and how it can effectively be used to deter bears from reaching human attractants. “Electric fencing can seem like voodoo to people and I am glad people are here to see how easy it really is.”



*A father and son check out the family sized bear culvert trap on display brought by MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks.*

Other presentations were from Dave Parker of Counter Assault and Tim Manley of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Parker demonstrated how to use bear pepper spray and fielded questions from the audiences on the effectiveness of bear pepper spray and specifications of the product. Onlookers were able to try inert cans of bear pepper spray for themselves at the end of Parker’s demonstration.

Tim Manley, Region 1 grizzly management specialist of MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, capped the event off with a brand new video segment of the management work he does trapping, relocating and preventing problem bears associated with properties. The audience sat captivated as Manley narrated the footage.



*Counter Assault master trainer Dave Parker looks on as a member of his audience practices with an inert training canister of bear pepper spray.*

A score of other activities punctuated the bear fair including a raffle for prizes, a bake sale, an interpretive bear trail, and a kids activity table which had a water balloon toss, a bean bag throw, coloring books, prizes, and oodles of goodies. MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks, MT Trust for Public Land, Gallagher Fencing, Defenders of Wildlife, Counter Assault, Wind River Bear Institute, Northwest Connections, USGS, Missoula County Rural Initiatives, all had tables at the event.