THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT
June and July, 2016

Hello everyone, this is Eric Graham working as the wildlife technician for the Blackfoot Challenge. We are happy to announce that we have some additional help this season. As I have been busy helping Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) with grizzly bear research trapping, both Sigrid Olsen and Jordan Mannix have been helping out with the range rider efforts. Sigrid is working out of the Potomac area and Jordan is working around Ovando and Helmville. We are working with several ranches throughout the Blackfoot watershed to help them keep an eye on predator activity and to increase herd supervision until the end of October 2016.

In coordination with MFWP we produce this monthly wolf and bear activity report. I also assist with research and management trapping efforts and monitor collared wolves and grizzly bears in the watershed. 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

The 544 pound male grizzly bear "Moose" that was captured on 5/13/16 for research purposes dropped the GPS collar he was wearing up the North Fork of the Blackfoot River. The collar was retrieved by MFWP and will be placed on another grizzly bear in the Blackfoot watershed.

On 6/19/16 – WS captured and collared a yearling female from the Stonewall Mountain Pack for monitoring purposes.

On 6/19/16 - MFWP captured a 253 pound male sub-adult grizzly bear named "Stone" north-west of Ovando and he was fitted with a GPS collar for research purposes.

On 6/23/16 - MFWP captured a 475 pound male grizzly bear named "Dan" north-west of Ovando and he was fitted with a GPS collar for research purposes.

On 6/28/16 - WS confirmed that two calves were killed by wolves west of Helmville. Traps were set and one wolf was captured and euthanized.

On 7/1/16 - MFWP captured a 304 pound female grizzly bear named "Icel" to remove her collar to be able to download the data for the NCDE population trend monitoring study.

On 7/12/16 – MFWP captured a 336 pound male sub-adult grizzly bear named "Marten" north-west of Ovando and he was fitted with a GPS collar for research purposes.

On 7/19/16 - MFWP captured and collared a 100 pound 2 year old male wolf from the Arrastra Creek pack for monitoring purposes.

A two year old male wolf collared out of the Arrastra Creek Pack by FWP.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK
Pack Structure: 5 Adults 5 Pups
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: MFWP captured and collared a 100 pound 2 year old male on 7/19/16.

BELMONT PACK
Pack Structure: 5 Adults
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: Nothing new to report.

INEZ PACK
Pack Structure: 8 Adults
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.

STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK
Pack Structure: 6 Adults
Collared Wolf: Yes (2)
Pack Report: MFWP continues to monitor via radio telemetry.

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

GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY

Grizzly bears have been widely dispersed throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys this season and have been reported by landowners, ranchers, local residents, recreationists and black bear hunters. PLEASE remember to carry your bear spray and to keep a clean camp as to avoid attracting bears to prevent conflicts.

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

MFWP has been trapping for grizzly bears to put out five GPS collars for an electric fence research project in the Blackfoot watershed. So far five male grizzly bears have been collared: “Moose” a 544 pound male was captured on 5/14/16 and has now dropped his collar up the North Fork of the Blackfoot. That collar has been retrieved and will have to be placed on

another grizzly bear in the Blackfoot watershed. “Walking Bear” a 466 pound male was captured on 5/28/16 and has been located in the Lincoln area. “Stone” a 253 pound sub-adult male was captured on 6/19/16 and “Dan” a 475 pound male was captured on 6/23/16 have both been located along the Blackfoot River near Highway 141. “Marten” a 336 pound male was captured on 7/12/16 and has been located near Monture Creek.

Here is a trail camera photo of the male grizzly bear named “Dan” before his capture.
Photo by Mike Johnson

“Sisco,” a management male from two seasons ago that was trapped, collared and relocated up to the north end of the Great Bear Wilderness by Hungry Horse Reservoir dropped his collar over by the Sun River.

Several grizzly bears have been sighted feeding on oats, peas, hay barley and alfalfa. Others have been digging for gophers out in the pivots.

Expect to see grizzly bears in the river bottoms and along riparian areas feeding on natural foods such as chokecherry, serviceberry and are soon to be feeding on hawthorn and red-osier dogwood. They have also been feeding on huckleberries at various elevations. Please pick your apples and keep your grain contained as to not attract bears near home sites. If you missed it, this recent Seeley Swan Pathfinder article highlights the importance of securing your garbage.

The electric fence at the MDOT compost site was grounded out for several days and a young unmarked grizzly was getting into the facility. The fence has since been fixed and the bear is no longer getting in.

Currently there are two research female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing NCDE population trend monitoring study. 1 - "Portman" who is wearing an ear transmitter had been located around Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek last season. She has not been located with radio telemetry this season but we believe we have seen her on trail cameras near Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek this season. Her ear transmitter is most likely not working. 2 - "Icel" continues to be localized around Woodworth, Monture Creek, the Blackfoot River above Clearwater Junction and Cottonwood Creek. MFWP re-captured her on 7/1/16 and removed her collar so that the GPS collar data could be downloaded. 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

This is a trail camera photo of the female grizzly bear named "Icel" at a trap site before her capture. Photo by Mike Johnson

"Dreyer," a research collared sub-adult female grizzly bear that was captured last season for monitoring in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) was shot and killed in the Placid Lake area. She was accessing uncontained grain and the incident is still under investigation by the USFWS. MFWP will attempt to capture and collar another female grizzly east of Lincoln or in the Helmville area to continue the NCDE grizzly bear population monitoring study.

A cow died east of Ovando and was in an area that was inaccessible for carcass pickup. The cow was fed on by several grizzly bears.

BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY

There have been several reports of black bears around Potomac, Seeley Lake, and Clearwater Junction. The bears are coming down to access the heavy serviceberry crop. If you have not done so already please take down your birdfeeders and contain your garbage and other attractants such as pet food, salt licks and livestock feed as to reduce human-bear conflicts. Thank you.

ELECTRIC FENCE STUDY

Grizzly Bear Study Update

We are in our second year of the electric fence permeability study. We built 20 small enclosures that are turned on and off every three days with small currents of electricity. We bait these enclosures with dead fish to attract animals to the area. We also deployed 25 cameras in random locations around the Blackfoot Valley to document any grizzly or black bear presence in those areas.

In June we documented a lot of black bear activity at the sites and a few grizzlies visited as well. In July we have observed fewer black bears and grizzlies at the sites. A few black bears have been shocked when the fences were turned on however most bears this year have not attempted to pass through the enclosures, even when they are turned off.

A young black bear is shocked while touching his nose to the fence.

A grizzly bear walks around this unelectrified enclosure.

Grizzly Bear Study Design

During the summer of 2015, 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.