THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT 7/07/2015

Hello everyone, this is **Eric Graham** working as the Range Rider for the Blackfoot Challenge again this season. Most of the livestock producers in the Blackfoot valley have turned their cattle out on summer grazing leases. Through October I will monitor cattle, grizzly bear and wolf activity and will produce this activity report. I will be working closely with MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to monitor the locations of collared wolves and grizzly bears adjacent to ranches in the Blackfoot valley. I look forward to working with all of you again this season and please call if you have any questions. Thanks!

We are happy to announce that **Sigrid Olson** will be helping out with the Range Rider efforts in the Potomac valley this season. She will be working from July to the end of September.

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 and/or bear activity:
Eric Graham – Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider (406) 240-3132
Jamie Jonkel – MFWP Bear Management Specialist (406) 544-1447
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.
Powell County – Bart Smith (406) 660-0368
Missoula County - Ted North (406) 274-4856
Lewis & Clark County - John Meidtke (406) 855-8429

IMPORTANT UPDATES

MFWP captured a sub-adult female grizzly bear on 7/1 north-west of Ovando. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar for research purposes.

MFWP captured a male grizzly bear on 6/28 north-west of Ovando. The bear is now wearing a VHF ear transmitter for research purposes.

MFWP euthanized a grizzly bear on 6/28 after the bear killed domestic sheep near Lincoln.

Please contain your bear attractants by making them unavailable to bears – please take down your birdfeeders and make sure your pet food, livestock feed and garbage is contained in a secure structure.

Please note the changes that have been made to update the Blackfoot Valley Wolf Packs.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS

This gray wolf caught on a trail camera is most likely from the Inez pack. By Brittani Johnson.

ARRASTRA CREEK PACK
Pack Structure: ~6 Adults, ? Pups
Collared Wolf: No
Pack Report: FWP will be scouting this area in July

BELMONT PACK
Pack Structure: 2 to 3 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: Unknown
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: The status of this pack is unknown. Several wolves from this pack were harvested this past winter. The collared male is still in the area but it is unknown whether he is traveling alone or still with other pack members.
* Wildlife Services collared a male wolf west of Helmville in June but it is unknown if this is a lone wolf, member of a new pack in the area, or part of the Chamberlain pack. So far this wolf has not been located with the Chamberlain male.

CONGER POINT PACK
Backcountry

HUMBUG PACK
Pack Structure: Unknown
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf but have no visuals recently from aerial flights so it is unknown how many wolves may be in this pack.

INEZ PACK
Pack Structure: ~4 Adults, ? Pups
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf via radio telemetry.

LANDERS FORK PACK
Pack Structure: ~6 Adults, ? Pups
Collared Wolf: No
Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK
Pack Structure: 2 adults, ? Pups
Collared Wolf: Yes (1)
Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf via radio telemetry.

UNION PEAK PACK
Pack Structure: ~2 to 3 Adults, ? Pups
Collared Wolf: No
Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY

Grizzly bears are widely dispersed throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys this season and have been reported by ranchers, local residents and recreationists. With the extreme drought conditions, be aware that more bears than normal may appear in the valley floor along rivers and streams especially in mid-July when the chokecherry becomes ripe. There will likely be more bears foraging in the agricultural fields this season as well.

Through August, if the weather permits, MFWP will continue trapping grizzly bears in the Blackfoot valley for research in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE). 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

There are three monitoring female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing population trend monitoring efforts. 1 - “Fen” continues to be a long-time female on the grizzly bear

monitoring study and does not appear to have cubs this year. She has been located around Morrell Mountain, Shanley Creek, Cottonwood Creek and Horseshoe Hills. 2 - “Portman” is now considered to be an adult because she came out of the den with at least one cub. She has been located around Monture Creek and Cottonwood Creek and may have lost her cub that has not been seen on recent flight surveys. 3 – “Dreyer” is the new sub-adult female grizzly bear that MFWP captured on 7/1 north-west of Ovando. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar for research purposes.

MFWP captured a 474 pound male grizzly bear “Mollet” on 6/28 that was traveling with “Icel”. The bear had been previously captured and collared twice and he is now wearing an ear transmitter and is a part of the research efforts again. “Icel” dropped her collar on 7/1 and is not a part of the monitoring efforts at this time. She had been localized around Woodworth and Cottonwood Creek.

MFWP euthanized a grizzly bear on 6/28 after the bear killed domestic sheep near Lincoln. WS responded to a call from the livestock producer on 6/25 and confirmed that the sheep were killed by a bear. A remote camera at the sheep depredation site captured photos of a lone grizzly with a green ear tag. The bear returned to the site on multiple occasions before it was captured giving wildlife officials confidence that it was the offending individual. MFWP discovered from tagging records that this bear had killed three sheep at the same location in 2012 and had been relocated to the South Fork of the Flathead River. It was a male, now weighing 430 pounds and the decision was made to euthanize the animal because of its history of returning to the same area and killing livestock.

This is a photo of the male grizzly that killed sheep and was euthanized. By Bob Wiesner.
There have also been reports of grizzly bears among cattle from north of Lincoln. MFWP and WS are monitoring the situation.

"Sisco," a management male from last season that was trapped, collared and relocated up to the north end of the Great Bear Wilderness by Hungry Horse Reservoir has not been detected this season by anyone using radio telemetry.

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, pigs, goats, sheep, bee yards), fruit orchards, gardens and other bear sites that might attract bears or other wildlife . More information is available at www.missoulabears.org

BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY

East of Salmon Lake there had been problems with black bears getting into garbage and being up on residents porches. MFWP had a trap set to catch one bear in particular that had become comfortable around people. That bear was captured and relocated west of Missoula in the Bitterroot Mountains in early June.

Black bear activity continues to be reported from Potomac, Lincoln and Seeley Lake. The majority of the reports have been related to bears getting into birdfeeders and uncontained chicken feed and garbage.

Black bear and grizzly bear relocation information is available on the MFWP website. http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/relocation/default.html

ELECTRIC FENCE STUDY

During the summer of 2015, a small wildlife study will be 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 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 will be building and testing 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.

This black bear is about to get a shock from one of the electric fences. Photo by Brittani Johnson.

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 wirer 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.

STUDY UPDATE: The first month of the study has gone smoothly. We have had a lot of black bear activity, and the grizzly bears are starting to come down from the mountains and show themselves at some of our sites. We have had a few black bears receive shocks from the fences, and some have come back to the sites after being shocked and some have not. We will continue the study into July and potentially into August.

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 2016, please call Jamie Jonkel 544-1447. **Due to the intense heat please call as soon as possible for carcass removal, thanks.**