

## THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT 8/10/2015

Hello everyone, this is **Eric Graham** working as the Range Rider for the Blackfoot Challenge again this season. Livestock producers in the Blackfoot Valley have turned their cattle out on summer grazing leases. Through October I will monitor cattle, wolf and grizzly bear 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!

**Sigrid Olson** is helping out with the Range Rider efforts in the Potomac Valley this season. She will be working until the end of September. **Kate Whitney** is headed back to college after helping out with the Range Rider efforts in the Arrastra Creek area since mid-July. We appreciate the hard work and dedication from both of them.

**Seth Wilson** will be taking a leave of absence from the Blackfoot Challenge to teach wildlife conflict management in Slovenia for the next year. We wish him and his family all the best. If you have any questions about the Range Rider 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 Range Rider (406) 240-3132**

**Jamie Jonkel – MFWP Bear Management Specialist (406) 544-1447**

**Scott Eggegan – 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**

Wildlife Services set snares on 8/2 to catch a grizzly bear that was involved with a sheep depredation East of Avon. The 271 pound female bear was captured on 8/3 and fitted with a GPS collar. The bear had no previous record and was relocated on 8/4 to the Great Bear Wilderness area in the South Fork of the Flathead.



This is a photo of the grizzly that was captured East of Avon. Photo courtesy of WS.

MFWP captured and collared a wolf from the Landers Fork pack on 7/14 and will monitor via radio telemetry.

Wildlife Services investigated a bottle fed calf depredation on 7/14. The incident was East of Ovando and WS confirmed it involved a grizzly bear. Rather than trapping the bear the landowners decided to set up an electric fence to contain the remaining calf and goats.

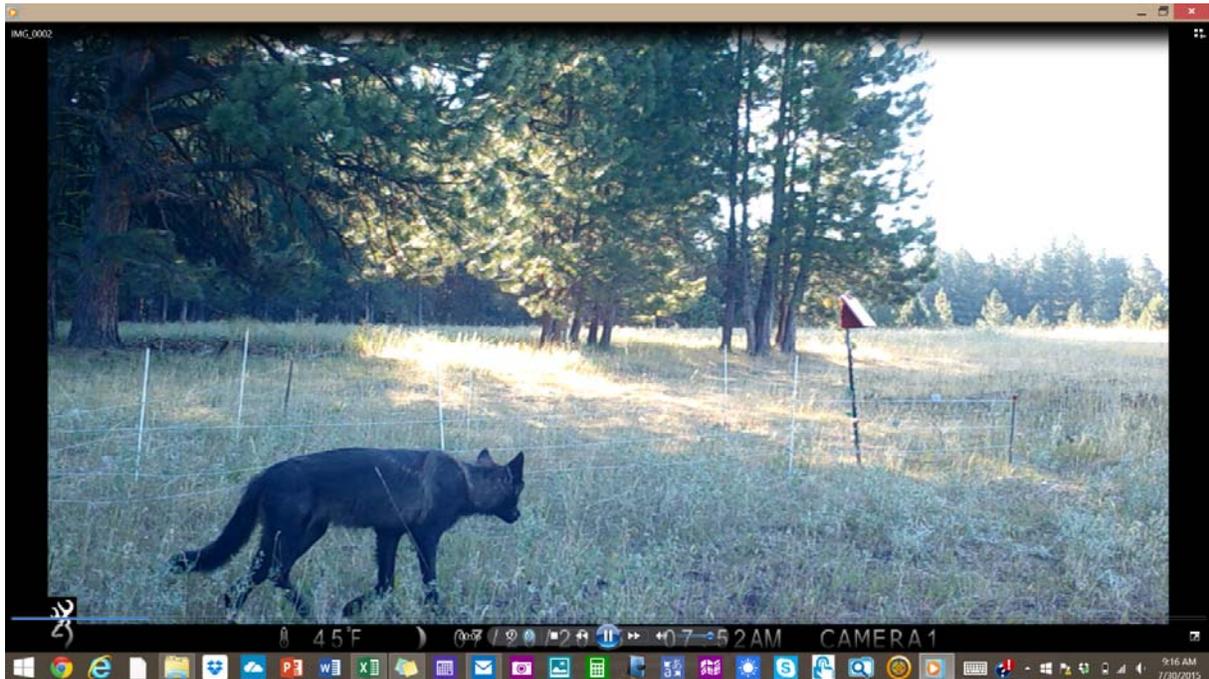
MFWP relocated a grizzly bear up the North Fork of the Flathead on 7/8 that was captured following a domestic sheep depredation East of Lincoln. The bear had no prior record and was fitted with an ear transmitter for monitoring purposes.

On July 4<sup>th</sup> Wildlife Services set snares North of Avon for a grizzly bear that depredated on a llama. No bear was captured.

MFWP captured a sub-adult female grizzly bear for research purposes on 7/1 north-west of Ovando. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar for research purposes. The bear has been localized in the Woodworth, Horseshoe Hills and Cottonwood Cr. areas.

There have been multiple reports of people seeing bear scat containing corn in Kleinschmidt Flats, Arrastra Creek and the Blackfoot River bottom. According to Montana State law it is illegal to feed or salt wildlife.

### **BLACKFOOT VALLEY WOLF PACKS**



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

### **ARRASTRA CREEK PACK**

Pack Structure: 6 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### **BELMONT PACK**

Pack Structure: 2 to 3 Adults

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

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: Unknown

Pack Report: The previously collared wolf from this pack was recently found dead by MFWP (unknown cause of death). It is possible that the collared Murray Cr. wolf may be a part of this pack and we will continue to monitor.

#### CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

#### HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults 4 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf via radio telemetry.

#### INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 4 Adults 5 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: We continue to monitor this wolf via radio telemetry.

#### LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: 6 Adults 3 or more Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: New collar deployed 7/14. We will begin to monitor via radio telemetry.

#### MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: 2 Adults 3 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

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 landowners, ranchers, local residents and recreationists. The huckleberry and serviceberry crop was decent and bears were feeding on them through July. Landowners report the chokecherry and hawthorn berry crops are decent and the bears will be switching over soon. With the drought conditions be aware that more bears than normal may appear in the valley floor along rivers and streams, especially in August when the chokecherry becomes ripe. Bears have been sighted in several agricultural fields feeding on peas, barley, oats and alfalfa.

There were 4 monitoring female grizzly bears in the valley to support the ongoing population trend monitoring efforts but "Fen" has dropped her collar and there are now only 3 monitoring females. The three monitoring female grizzly bears are: 1 - "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. Her cub of the year has not been seen on recent flight surveys. 2 - "Icel" was supposed to drop her collar on 7/1 but it appears there was a failure in the release mechanism. She is still wearing her collar and MFWP is still hoping to capture and re-collar this bear. She has been localized around Woodworth and Cottonwood Creek. 3 - "Dreyer" is the new sub-adult female grizzly bear that was captured on 7/1 north-west of Ovando. The bear is now wearing a GPS collar for research purposes. 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>

MFWP captured a 474 pound male grizzly bear "Mollet" on 6/28 north-west of Ovando. The bear had been previously captured and collared twice and is now wearing an ear transmitter as part of the research efforts again. We have not detected the bear since and think he may have moved into the Bob Marshall Wilderness but will continue to monitor.

On 7/4/15 Wildlife Services had investigated and set snares at a grizzly depredation of a llama North of Avon. No bear was captured. It is unknown if the grizzly bear that was recently captured East of Avon was involved in the event.

There have been multiple reports of grizzly bears scavenging on Columbian ground squirrels that have been shot by gopher hunters in the Blackfoot valley.

There had been reports of grizzly bears among cattle from North of Lincoln. MFWP did capture and relocate a black bear that was getting on porches and into cat food in the same vicinity. Ranchers reported a grizzly bear was observed on 7/10 in and amongst cattle West of Helmsville.

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.

"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.

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.

### **BLACK BEAR ACTIVITY**

A yearling male black bear was reported as a road kill along Highway 141 South of Helmville.

Black bear activity continues to be reported in and around Potomac, Lincoln and Seeley Lake. Conflicts have been minimal most likely due to the availability of berries.

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**

Our bear study ends on August 22. There has not been much activity this month at the fences, but the activity that we have seen has been interesting. The bears are crawling under the taller fences (shown in the picture below) regardless of whether they are electrified or not. This is a young grizzly at one of the sites that eventually crawls into the fence to grab some bait leftovers.



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 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.

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 2016, please call Jamie Jonkel 544-1447 or Eric Graham 240-3132. Please call as soon as possible for carcass removal, thanks.

### **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 bear sites that might attract bears or other wildlife. More information is available at [www.missoulabears.org](http://www.missoulabears.org)