

# **2024 BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT**

## **April 23, 2025**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Region 2 (R2) and the Blackfoot Challenge (BC) produce this wolf and bear activity report. These reports are typically compiled at the end of field season and include information on wolf, lion and black bear activity in the Blackfoot Valley and grizzly bear activity and management throughout FWP R2.

During 2024, FWP R2 and the BC worked with ranches and property owners throughout the area and assisted with electric fencing, range riding and livestock carcass removal. The BC Range Rider Program was established in 2008 and is ongoing. Eric Skelton, Sigrid Olson and Christina Proops were the range riders in 2024 for the Challenge. The BC Carcass Pick Up Program has been ongoing since 2004. We thank Dan Masee and Barry Gordon for picking up most of the carcasses associated with the annual carcass pickup program. Sadly, Barry Gordon passed away in the early winter of 2025 and is remembered as a dedicated partner in supporting Blackfoot wildlife programs. Dan and Bri Cunha, along with Eric Skelton, will now be picking up carcasses for the Blackfoot Challenge during the 2025 summer months. Thanks again to the ranchers, landowners, partners, and funders that make these programs possible. Outside of the Blackfoot Valley, carcass pickup programs are also occurring now in the Deer Lodge and Drummond areas as well as in the Bitterroot Valley.

Most bear management, preventative management and grizzly bear research trapping are handled by the FWP R2 Grizzly Bear and Black Bear Management Team. In the Blackfoot Valley the agency works in conjunction with Eric Graham (BC Wildlife Program Coordinator) who focuses on preventative projects and works closely with communities, homeowners, and landowners in the Blackfoot and Clearwater drainages. Eli Hampson (FWP) based out of Missoula, works throughout R2 (Blackfoot Valley, Missoula Basin, Bitterroot Valley, and lower and upper Clark Fork Valleys) and assists where needed. Brad Balis (FWP) is stationed in the Deer Lodge, Butte, and the Big Hole Valleys, but assists where needed. Brandon Davis (FWP) replaced Bruce Montgomery and is stationed in the Bitterroot Valley and assists where needed. And Jamie Jonkel (FWP) based out of Missoula, works throughout R2, and assists where needed, but mostly handles calls from the public and provides logistical support.

Lee Tafelmeyer is the new FWP wildlife biologist for the Blackfoot Valley. The wildlife biologist is the point person for all issues pertaining to elk, deer, and other aspects of wildlife management in the Blackfoot drainage. For any wildlife-related matters on issues needing the attention of a biologist or game warden, contact Lee Tafelmeyer, Lincoln Game Warden Ezra Schwalm or Seeley Lake Game Warden Garrett Kocab.

Wolf, lion and bear depredations and livestock loss reimbursement are handled by Wildlife Services (WS). The main contact for Powell County, Granite County, Deer Lodge County and Ravalli County is Bart Smith (WS). The main contact for Missoula County, Flathead County and Mineral County is Ted North (WS). The main contact for Lewis and Clark and Cascade counties is John Meidke (WS). And Kraig Glazier is the District Supervisor for Western Montana. When wolf depredations are not the issue, Tyler Parks (FWP) handles all other wolf-related management, wolf research trapping, mitigation, and reporting. Eli Hampson (FWP) handles mountain lion-related management across the region.

We would like to recognize all partners that provide funding and technical assistance – FWP, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Missoula Conservation District, the Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Heart of the Rockies Initiative, the Livestock Loss Board, Northern Rockies Conservation Co-op, Defenders of Wildlife, Wildlife Services Nonlethal Initiative, Safari Club International, Vital Ground, the Cross Charitable Foundation, People and Carnivores, the Stranahan Foundation, the Western Bear Foundation, and numerous individuals.

A quick reminder that all attractants on the ranch or homesite should be unavailable to bears. For example, be sure to lock up all sheds and barns where garbage, grain and other attractants are stored and if you need additional electric fence materials or energizers for containing carcasses, other bear attractants (grain, sweet licks, garbage, etc.) or if you have any questions about the BC Wildlife Committee, community-based bear management in the valley, the range rider, or the carcass pickup program, call the **Wildlife Program Coordinator Eric Graham (406) 240-3132**. For information on bears, lions, or wolves or reporting conflicts within the Blackfoot Valley or areas outside of the Blackfoot Valley contact one of the FWP personal below.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR REPORTING WOLF AND/OR WOLF, BEAR AND LION ACTIVITY:**

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

**Eli Hampson---FWP Bear/Lion Management Technician (406) 210-3213**

**Brad Balis—FWP Deer Lodge Bear Management Technician (406) 465-9343**

**Brandon Davis—FWP Bitterroot Valley Bear Management Technician (406) 422-6184**

**Tyler Parks – FWP Wolf Management Specialist (406) 531-4454**

Again, if you have a suspected livestock predation, please notify USDA 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 mountain lion/wolf/black bear/grizzly bear predation, you can request an investigation to see if the losses were due to a confirmed or probable depredation. The Livestock Loss Board can pay only for confirmed or probable losses as determined by USDA WS. For more information go to this link: [Livestock Loss Board \(mt.gov\)](https://www.livestocklossboard.mt.gov).

**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**  
**Western Montana District Supervisor- Kraig Glazier (406) 458-0106**  
**Department of Livestock - Livestock Loss Board (406) 444-5609**

And for any other wildlife-related matters needing the attention of a game warden or biologist contact:

**Ezra Schwalm– FWP Lincoln Game Warden (406) 438-3666**  
**Garrett Kocab – FWP Seeley Lake Game Warden (406) 210-1299**  
**Lee Tafelmeyer – FWP Blackfoot Wildlife Biologist (406) 210-3479**

## **IMPORTANT UPDATES ON 2024 GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY IN THE BLACKFOOT VALLEY**

### 2024 Grizzly Bear Conflicts and Depredations in the Blackfoot Watershed

In 2024, there were a handful of conflicts and multiple reports of grizzly bears. The first report of grizzly tracks was on February 23 north of Ovando, with additional tracks and sightings reported through March. As the spring progressed, tracks and sightings became more common through March and April. The first report of a female with offspring was near Helmville on May 9. During the remainder of the year, grizzly activity in the Potomac Valley, central basin and headwaters of the Blackfoot Drainage was constant with abundant reports of grizzlies feeding in crops, traveling near homesites and towns, and feeding on natural foods on private lands. Grizzly activity was documented through December with most bears in the den by Christmas. Compared to years past, there was a reduction in the number of conflicts in the Blackfoot Basin:



*Grizzly bear sightings are increasingly common in agricultural areas of the Blackfoot Valley. Photo by Mike Thompson.*

- On March 31, a sub-adult grizzly accessed a bag of grain stored on the back of an ATV at a residence south of Helmville. The bear returned on several occasions in early April and FWP assisted with a temporary electric fence around a chicken coop. The bear received a shock and did not return. The BC and NRCS are assisting this family with a permanent electric fence.
- On April 3, a grizzly killed and consumed a calf at a ranch south of Helmville. MT. WS set traps, but the bear did not return.
- On May 15 during the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area opening, several antler hunters encountered a female grizzly with cubs at close range. Shots were fired in the air and the family group moved off. Other antler hunters observed the bear as she moved to the south and crossed Hwy 200.

- On May 19, two sub-adult grizzlies were reported to be investigating a home site south of Helmville.
- On May 28, an unmarked grizzly accessed the Montana Department of Transportation's carcass composting site at Clearwater Junction. FWP opened all the gates, turned off the electric fence and set a trap inside the compost site. During the night the bear left the enclosure.
- On July 9 near Helmville, a grizzly was able access garbage in a bear-resistant garbage can that was not functioning. The BC replaced the can.
- Between July 15 and August 12, an adult male grizzly killed four calves on a remote private grazing allotment in the Arrastra Creek area. WS destroyed the bear on August 13. The culprit was a male grizzly known as "Walking Bear" that had been captured trice in the past for research purposes.
- On July 20, a female grizzly with cubs accessed an electrified ranch compound near the Aunt Molly Wildlife Management Area to feed on a cow carcass that was being stored temporarily. The electric fence and electrified cattle guard was not working at the time. The carcass was removed from the site to a safer location and the carcass was removed by FWP the next day. The family group did not return.
- On July 21, a female grizzly with offspring accessed a chicken coop near Woodworth and over the course of the summer and into the fall revisited the sight on multiple occasions. FWP erected a temporary electric fence net system and later in the fall assisted with a more permanent electric fence around the chicken coop. The NRCS and BC are working with this family on a permanent electric fence for the ranch compound.
- On July 22, WS investigated a dead calf SW of Helmville that was being fed on by a grizzly. It was determined that the calf had died of natural causes.
- On August 13, a grizzly accessed garbage from a bear-resistant can north of Seeley Lake. The damaged can was replaced.
- On August 23, a grizzly entered the Harpers Lake Campground and investigated an empty dog food bowl at a campsite. The bear moved upstream and was observed feeding on choke cherries.
- On September 2, WS investigated a dead cow near Woodworth that was reported to being fed on by a grizzly. It was determined that the cow had been killed by wolves and not a grizzly.
- On September 25, a grizzly accessed uncontained garbage at a ranch in the Helmville area.
- On September 27, a grizzly entered an electrified compound by walking over an electrified cattle guard and killed several chickens north of Ovando. The electric fence was not functioning at the time.
- On September 27, WS investigated a sheep depredation involving a grizzly in Willow Creek east of Lincoln. No traps were set, and the sheep were relocated to another pasture.
- In the Potomac area, between October 1 and October 19, a grizzly damaged several chicken coops, investigated additional homesites, and accessed an empty dog

kennel for food. FWP is actively working with the Potomac community to contain chicken coops and other attractants.

- On October 22, a grizzly tipped over multiple bear-resistant dumpsters at the Lake Alva Campground. One of the dumpsters was improperly locked and the bear received a food reward.
- On October 30, a grizzly pulled a low-hanging deer off a game pole in a hunting camp northeast of Ovando.
- On November 2 near Placid Lake, a grizzly was shot in self-defense by a hunter.
- North of Ovando on November 3, a grizzly bear family took over a hunter-killed deer that was left in the field overnight.

## **IMPORTANT UPDATES REGARDING 2024 GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY ELSEWHERE IN REGION 2:**

There was an increase in grizzly activity in the Upper Clark Fork Basin, Big Hole Valley, and the Missoula and Bitterroot Valleys.

- On March 26, a grizzly visited a chicken coop in the Ninemile Valley near Huson. MT. Over the next several days the bear was observed at multiple locations. At least two different grizzlies were reported regularly through the course of the summer. At no time did the bears act aggressively toward humans or show interest in garbage. The Wildlife Services Nonlethal Program assisted the landowner with an electric fence.
- During April, grizzly tracks were observed on multiple occasions in the Sapphire Mountains on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley in the vicinity of the Three Mile Wildlife Management Area and south to Willow Creek.
- Starting in the month of April and through the fall, FWP verified multiple reports of grizzlies in the Big Hole Valley.
- During April, grizzly activity was verified in the Prickly Pear Drainage northwest of Helena.
- Starting in April and through the fall, grizzly activity was verified in the foothills on both the east and west sides of the Deer Lodge Valley.
- Starting in April and through the fall, grizzly activity was verified in the Little Blackfoot Valley.
- In May, grizzly activity was verified in the Georgetown Lake area.
- In late May grizzly activity was verified in the Evaro Hill area north of Missoula.
- During June, grizzly activity was verified in the Priest Pass area west of Helena.
- In late June, a grizzly was observed on a game camera interacting with a black bear in Missoula's North Hills.
- On July 22, WS investigated a dead calf in the Avon area that was being fed on by a grizzly. It was determined that the calf had died of natural causes.

- On August 4 north of Butte in the Elk Park area, a grizzly was reported near homes investigating chicken coops. FWP assisted homeowners with electric fence and on August 8 captured and relocated a young adult male known as “Lowland.” The bear returned to the area and visited additional chicken coops. On August 26, the same grizzly broke into chicken coops and feed storage sheds in the Elliston area. The bear was captured and destroyed on August 29.
- In August, grizzly activity was verified in the Clinton area.
- In late October, grizzly tracks were verified in the mountains between the East Fork and the West Fork of the Bitterroot Valley.



*The bear known as “Lowland” broke into this Elliston area feed storage shed.*

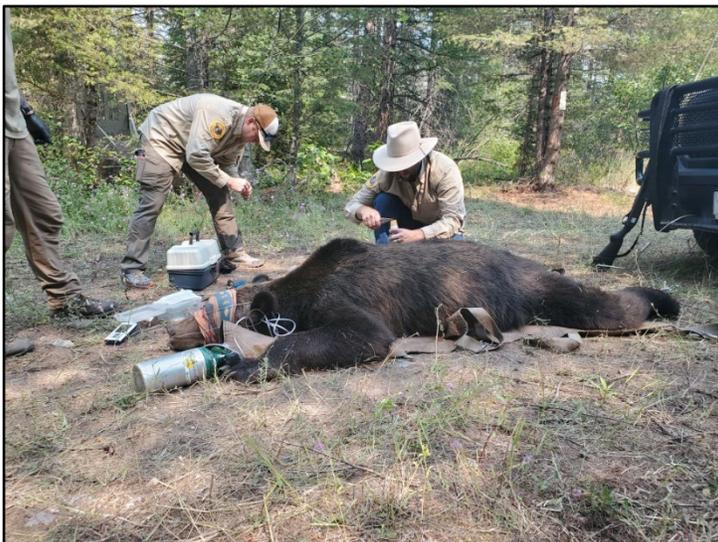
## **COLLARED AND RELOCATED GRIZZLY BEARS 2024**

Here is a quick summary of relocated and radio collared grizzlies in R2:

- In the fall of 2022, the NCDE Grizzly Bear Research Team captured and collared a female grizzly along the Swan-Clearwater Divide. The bear known as “Alpine Glow” spent time in the Clearwater River but mostly in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. She denned in the headwaters of Shaw Creek. In 2023, she spent the entire summer in the wilderness and denned in the South Fork of the Flathead River Basin. In the fall of 2024, she dropped her collar just north of Seeley Lake.
- On July 21, 2023, a sub-adult male grizzly was captured south of I-90 in the Sapphire Range southeast of Missoula. The MPG Ranch Black Bear Study captured the bear in a black bear trap. FWP responded, placed a collar on the bear and released it at site. The bear, known as “Sakaam,” was originally captured on the Flathead Indian Reservation as a yearling in December 2021 and at some point, on its own accord, ventured south of I-90 to the Sapphire Range. After this second capture, “Sakaam” spent most of August feeding on service berries on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley, a good portion of September in the Clinton area feeding on choke cherries and in October came back to the Bitterroot Valley to forage in the river bottoms between Lolo and Florence. In December 2023, “Sakaam” denned in the Welcome Creek Wilderness. He dropped his collar the spring of 2024 at the den site.
- On September 9, 2023, an adult male grizzly, known as “Butters,” was trapped outside of Choteau, MT, after several turkeys were killed. The bear was relocated near Rogers Pass. Butters spent most of his time along the Rocky Mountain Front but did make several forays into the Lincoln area. He denned in the Scapegoat Wilderness. In the spring his collar malfunctioned but he was observed on multiple

occasions in 2024. In the fall of 2024, he was mistakenly shot by a black bear hunter in the Big Belt Mountains north of Canyon Ferry.

- On June 19, two sub-adult grizzlies were captured northeast of Ovando. The siblings were feeding in an alfalfa field adjacent to homesites. Originally the two bears were scheduled to be relocated to the Yellowstone Ecosystem as part of an augmentation effort to increase genetic diversity and increase the sustainability of the Yellowstone Population. At the last minute it was decided that the two bears were not good candidates for the augmentation effort. As a result, the male known as “McNally” and the female known as “Eloise” were radio collared, separated and relocated to remote sites within their home range. Later in the month the two bears joined up and spent the remainder of the year roaming the central portions of the Blackfoot Valley. In December the two bears denned together in the Scapegoat Wilderness.
- As mentioned above the bear known as “Lowland” was captured on August 8 north of Butte in the Elk Park area. Sadly, this bear had developed food-conditioned behavior and was destroyed on August 29 after it broke into several sheds and chicken coops near Elliston, MT in the Little Blackfoot Drainage.
- On August 13, an adult male grizzly was captured east of Missoula in the headwaters of Gold Creek. The bear known as “Gold” was radio collared as part of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Monitoring Study. This bear ranges widely between the lower Blackfoot Valley, Missoula Five Valleys and the Flathead Indian Reservation. He denned on the Flathead Indian Reservation adjacent to the Rattlesnake Wilderness.
- On August 15, an adult female grizzly with two cubs was captured on the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area. The bear known as “Portman” was captured for research purposes as part of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Monitoring Study. This bear was captured on two previous occasions for research and the bear ranges widely between the Clearwater Drainage and central portions of the Blackfoot Valley. She denned in the Morrell Mountain area.



*“Gold” is a research bear, radio collared in 2024 as part of a regional grizzly bear monitoring study.*

## R2 GRIZZLY BEAR MORTALITIES 2024

In 2024 there were three confirmed grizzly bear mortalities:

- As mentioned above, on August 13 an adult male grizzly was euthanized after a series of calf depredations in the foothills east of Kleinschmidt Flats. The adult male bear known as “Walking Bear” had been collared in the past for research. Between 2016 and 2019 this bear ranged widely between Lincoln and Seeley Lake and made an annual trip each year to feed in Mission Valley corn fields near Ronan. He had no previous history of conflicts. The hide and skull were salvaged for educational purposes.
- As mentioned above the collared bear “Lowland” was euthanized on August 29 for management reasons after a series of conflicts in the Butte and Elliston areas. The hide and skull were salvaged for educational purposes.
- On November 2, a hunter killed a grizzly in self-defense south of Seeley Lake in the Placid Lake area. The hunter was not injured. The adult male, known as “Eightball” had been captured and collared for research purposes in 2010. The bear denned adjacent to the Rattlesnake Wilderness and dropped his collar in 2011. The hide and skull were salvaged for educational purposes.

## GRIZZLY BEAR AND BLACK BEAR NATURAL FOODS AND NEW MISSOULA COUNTY GARBAGE ORDINANCE SUMMARY 2024

In 2024, berry production was excellent in the Blackfoot Valley and elsewhere in the region. Huckleberries, serviceberry, chokecherry and hawthorn production were abundant and there was an ample supply of other natural bear foods the entire fall. As a result, grizzly and black bear conflicts were minimal throughout R2. The number of bear conflicts in and around the Missoula and Potomac valleys were noticeably reduced compared to past years. This was most likely due to an exceptional huckleberry crop in the higher elevations in the surrounding mountains. But the new Missoula City and County garbage ordinances no doubt had an impact by reducing the amount of uncontained garbage available to bears. Starting April 30, 2024, the City of Missoula and the county began enforcing the new regulations associated with Phase 1 of the Missoula Bear Buffer Zone and garbage ordinance. Phase 1 included all the residential areas north of Interstate 90 within the Missoula North Hills area (Grant and Rattlesnake creeks). On September 1, 2024, the Missoula County Potomac Valley bear mitigation rules went into effect. In both these areas all garbage was required to be stored in a bear-resistant manner. As a result,



*Requirements for bear-resistant garbage bins are rolling out in phases across Missoula County. Improvements in garbage containment have helped reduce bear conflicts.*

there was a noticeable reduction in the amount of garbage available for bears. In the spring of 2025, Phase 2 of the Missoula Valley ordinance (University District, Pattee Canyon, and Missoula South Hills) will go into effect. Starting on April 30, 2025, all garbage will need to be stored in a bear-resistant manner. And finally on April 30, 2026, Phase 3 covering the remaining portions of the Missoula Valley, will go into effect. For more information check out this link:

<https://missoulacountyvoice.com/bear-smart-missoula>

Note, in certain areas where uncontained garbage, and other attractants (bird seed/livestock grain/chicken feed/small livestock) have been available for many years, the phenomena of “training up” the local bear population has occurred. In these types of settings, when attractants such as garbage are contained, quite often residents and landowners will see individual bears breaking into and entering sheds and buildings because of bears escalating their attempts to access attractants that were previously available. Individual bears exhibiting these types of extreme behavior will be trapped, relocated or destroyed depending on the circumstances. Please let FWP know immediately if bears break into any sheds, buildings, or homes. If residents follow recommended “bear smart” guidelines, this type of behavior should disappear in the bear population, unless there is a time when bears are suffering from an extreme natural food-failure year. Most bear-resistant cans, dumpsters, and structures that are accessed by bears are due to human error and improper latching. Occasionally individual bears will learn to open bear-resistant garbage receptacles. But there have also been incidents of homeowners and garbage company employees disabling receptacles. Note, this type of vandalism can lead to ticketing under the Missoula and Potomac valley garbage ordinances.

#### **2024 BLACK BEAR AND MOUNTAIN LION ACTIVITY:**

Black bear conflicts in the Blackfoot, Clearwater, Clark Fork, and Bitterroot drainages occurred on a regular basis. But compared to years past the number of conflicts were below average.

In January, February and March of 2024, FWP fielded reports of lion activity throughout the Blackfoot, Clearwater, Clark Fork, Bitterroot and Missoula valleys. There were a handful of livestock depredations and incidents where lions were in proximity to home sites. FWP was called out on multiple occasions to assist trappers with freeing trapped mountain lions from wolf and furbearer traps. Please report black bear and mountain lion activity and incidents as quickly as possible and for detailed information on black bear and lion activity in and around R2 check out these two sites:

<http://missoulabears.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/missoulabears/>

## BEAR SMART COMMUNITY EFFORTS IN THE BLACKFOOT AND ELSEWHERE IN R2

The Blackfoot region and other areas in R2 are known for a community-driven approach to managing and mitigating for bear conflicts. The Blackfoot Valley has been recognized internationally for cooperative efforts and having some of the lowest numbers of grizzly conflicts in the state. Annually there are always a few grizzlies and black bears in the Blackfoot watershed that develop bad habits. Therefore, it is always best to lock up all sheds and barns where garbage, grain and other attractants are stored. Blackfoot Valley residents needing alarm devices, bear spray, electric fence materials or energizers for containing carcasses or other bear attractants (grain, sweet licks, garbage, etc.), can call Eric Graham or James Jonkel.

Collaborative community-led approaches for mitigating bear conflicts can benefit both people and bears. For many years the BC has been practicing this approach effectively and recently other communities around R2 have been developing similar programs for addressing bear-human conflicts. For example, the City of Missoula, the town of Seeley Lake, the town of Alberton and the community of Potomac Valley have organized and are working diligently on addressing garbage and other attractant issues that are the driving force for bear-related conflicts. A similar endeavor is occurring in the Bitterroot Valley. For more information on these efforts check out these links:

[County approves wider bear-buffer zone, bear-resistant bins \(missoulacurrent.com\)](https://missoulacurrent.com)

[Bear Buffer Zone regulations finalized - Seeley Swan Pathfinder \(seeleylake.com\)](https://seeleylake.com)

[https://missoulain.com/news/local/bear-resistant-trashcans-required-around-missoula-potomac/article\\_f6ec10b0-6ecf-11ee-a7c8-f7e0422b4e85.html](https://missoulain.com/news/local/bear-resistant-trashcans-required-around-missoula-potomac/article_f6ec10b0-6ecf-11ee-a7c8-f7e0422b4e85.html)

[Bear Smart Missoula – Missoula Bears](#)

[Potomac Wildlife | Facebook](#)

[Looking for in Seeley Lake | Looking for wildlife photos or videos taken in the Seeley Lake area including all of the Clearwater watershed | Facebook](#)

Resources are available for any communities interested in pursuing similar efforts. For example, the Bear Smart Community Resource Fund, is available through nonprofit group People and Carnivores: [Nonprofit offers money for communities to go Bear Smart \(missoulain.com\)](https://missoulain.com). In addition, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee has a whole website devoted to assisting communities with bear smart community efforts. For more information, contact Eric Graham or any of the R2 Bear Management Team or visit this link: [Bear Smart Communities - Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee \(igbconline.org\)](https://igbconline.org).

## **RANGE RIDER AND LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICKUP PROGRAMS:**

The Blackfoot Challenge is happy to report that a good portion of the livestock producers in the Blackfoot Valley are participating in both programs. During the spring, summer and fall, BC range riders cover the central portion of the Blackfoot Valley and the Potomac Valley. If you are interested in the range rider program, contact Eric Graham for more information. Similar range riding programs are occurring in the Bitterroot Valley.

The Blackfoot Challenge's Livestock Carcass Pick Up and Removal Program runs during calving season from mid-February through mid-May. Thereafter, carcasses in the Blackfoot Valley are picked up by FWP or Blackfoot Challenge employees. In the last few years there have been incidents of grizzly bears venturing into ranch compounds to retrieve carcasses left out for the carcass pickup program. Dead animals were either left on the ground or placed on hay bales within high activity areas on the ranch and bears were lured in to feed on the carcasses. As a result, the pickup protocol was re-evaluated, and it is now recommended that after March all carcasses set aside for pickup be stored away from ranch premises. **For carcass pick up service in the Blackfoot Valley call Dan Massee at 406-793-5639 (winter and spring), Dan or Bri Cunha (816-448-1973/816-688-8610), or Eric Skelton at 406-546-3277 (summer and fall).** If you are unable to make contact at these numbers or need carcass pickup service elsewhere in R2, call James Jonkel with FWP at 406-544-1447. The carcasses are either taken to the compost site at Clearwater Junction or the Missoula and Deer Lodge landfill sites. To learn more about this program, watch "Living with Carnivores: Boneyards, Bear & Wolves." Click here: <https://vimeo.com/131528982>.

## **ELECTRIC FENCE AND ELECTRIFIED CATTLE GUARD COST-SHARE PROJECTS:**

Multiple fencing projects have occurred at various ranches and residential sites across the Blackfoot Valley. Over the last few years, the BC has assisted multiple families with electrified residential containment fences and larger scale NRCS electric fence projects. NRCS EQIP funds have provided participants with financial assistance through the Grizzly Bear Mitigation Targeted Implementation Plan. Financial assistance will also be available in 2025 through the Heart of the Rockies Initiative, a partnership with FWP that was awarded federal grant funding through the America the Beautiful program. For smaller scale projects, funding is also available through the Defenders of Wildlife Electric Fence Incentive Program and the USDA Wildlife Services Nonlethal Initiative. These funding opportunities allow installation of electric fences and electrified drive-over mats to deter grizzlies and black bears from entering ranch headquarters and residential homes. The BC also raises additional grant funds to support working with landowners on electric fencing and electric mat projects. Similar electric fence programs are occurring in the Bitterroot, Clark Fork and Missoula valleys. Electric fencing is an excellent way to protect livestock and chickens, and contain residential attractants. Electric fence is a method of ensuring that bears or other predators that investigate yard areas will not come back again. A good

shock is the best way to teach bears to keep away. Contact Jamie Jonkel (406-544-1447) or Eric Graham (406-240-3132) 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. For information on electric fence and other options for cost-sharing on electric fence check out these sites:

<https://defenders.org/got-grizzlies>

[USDA APHIS | Wildlife Services' Nonlethal Initiative](#)

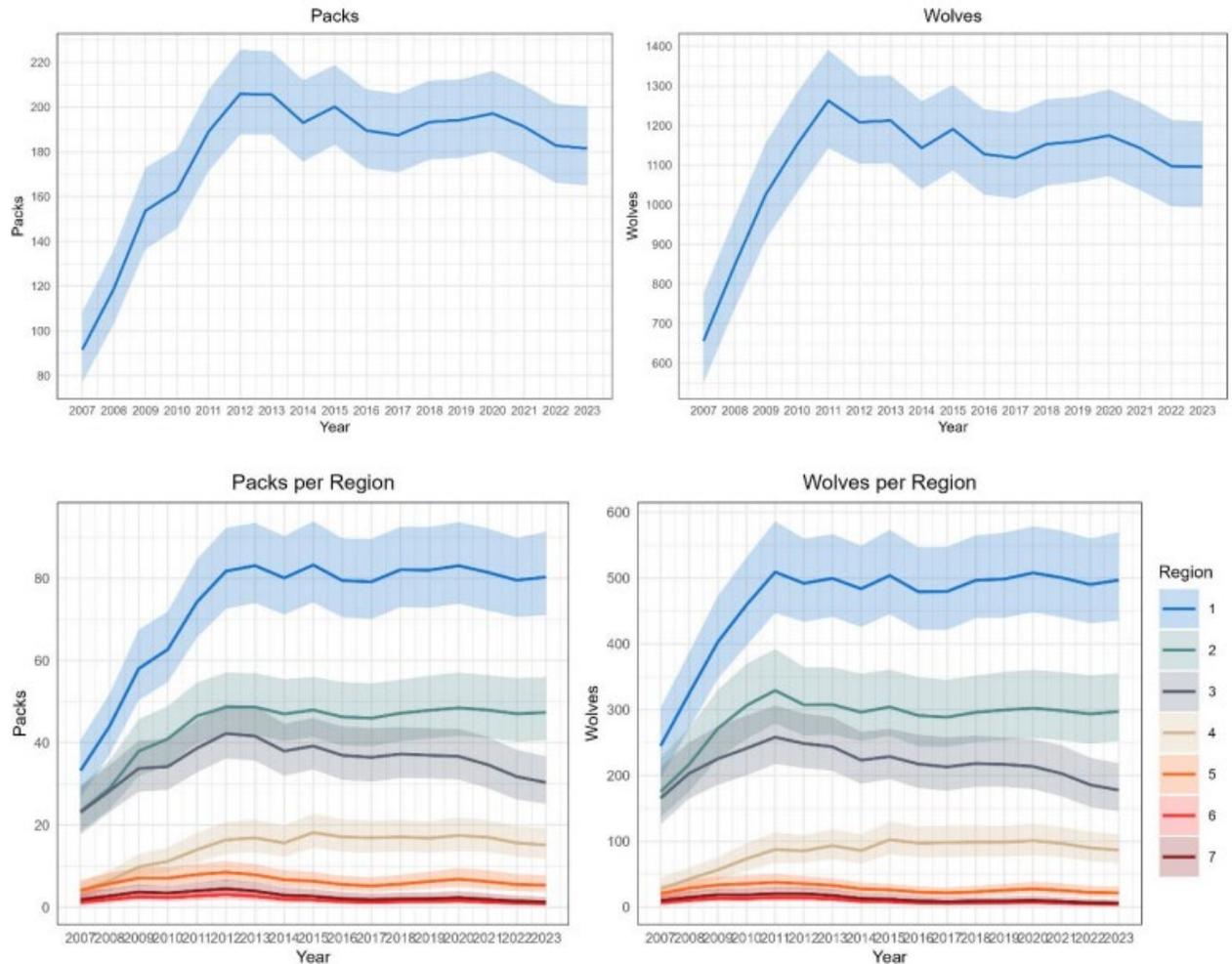
[Grizzly Conflict Mitigation Targeted Implementation Plan \(usda.gov\)](#)



*Electrified mats at ranch and homesite gate entryways are providing an effective deterrent for bears seeking access to food sources like livestock feed, garbage and fruit trees.*

## WOLF ACTIVITY 2024 SUMMARY

**Population trend:** Montana FWP uses an Integrated Patch Occupancy Model (IPOM) to estimate the state's wolf population. According to the IPOM, the statewide wolf population declined slightly from the high in seen 2011 and has been relatively stable in recent years (Figure 1). The model estimates that roughly 47 packs and 300 wolves were present in R2 as of December 31, 2024. The Blackfoot Valley is home to roughly 15 or more of those packs (Figure 2) and likely 70 to 100 wolves.

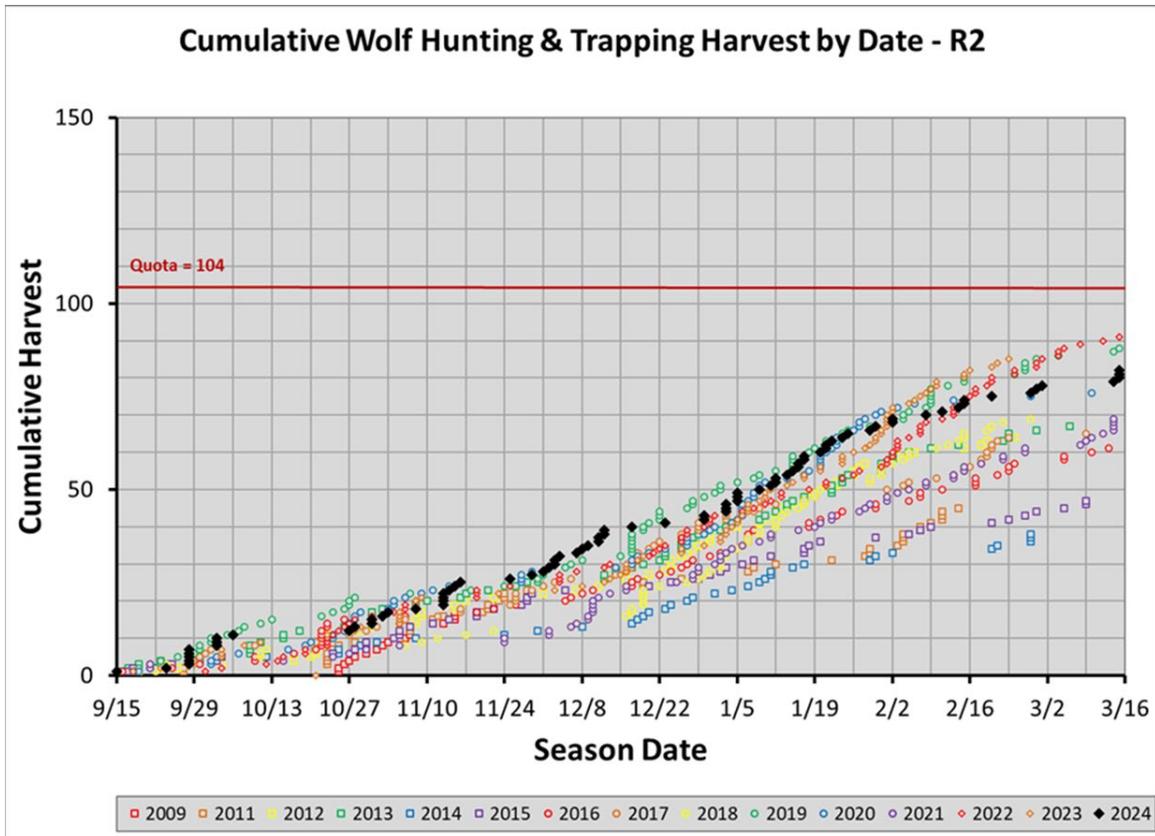


**Figure 1.** Estimated number of packs and wolves in Montana and by FWP Administrative Region, 2007-2023. Ribbons indicate 95% credible intervals (From FWP's 2023 Annual Wolf Report).



**Figure 2.** Wolf Packs in R2 during 2024.

**Harvest:** During the 2024-25 wolf hunting and trapping season, 82 wolves were harvested in R2 (Figure 3). Of those wolves, 38 wolves were harvested in the Blackfoot Valley, 11 were harvested via trapping and 27 were harvested via hunting. On average, 26 wolves are harvested in the valley every year (2012-2024 average=24).



**Figure 3.** Region 2 cumulative wolf harvest by date for seasons 2009, 2011-2024.

**Depredations:** During 2024, Wildlife Services confirmed ~13 sheep, 1 heifer and 2 calves that were killed by wolves in the Blackfoot Valley. Four wolves were removed, and one wolf was collared in response to the confirmed depredations. On average, there are 10 confirmed wolf/livestock depredations in the valley every year (2015-2024 average=10.1 livestock including cattle and sheep). It is important to note that there is likely additional livestock loss to wolves that is not discovered or confirmed each year.

**Radio Collaring:** Wildlife Services radio collared one wolf west of Lincoln to assist with wolf monitoring and depredation response. FWP captured and radio collared three wolves in the Blackfoot Valley. These wolves were collared out of the Belmont, Union Peak, and Stonewall Mountain wolf packs. During 2024, in the Blackfoot Valley, four radio-collared wolves were harvested, one was shot by a landowner under SB200, one radio collar quit giving locations after three years, and one radio-collared pup died from parvo. As of April 2025, three radio-collared wolves were still active in the valley.

## WOLF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The Blackfoot Challenge works with landowners and producers to minimize wolf conflicts with three primary tools: livestock carcass removal, ranger riders and fladry. In 2024, three BC range riders monitored livestock on summer grazing leases, keeping track of any potential wolf and bear activity in proximity to grazing livestock. As it does for bears, carcass removal particularly in the spring help quickly eliminate wolf attractants on the landscape near other livestock, ranch infrastructure and homesites. In the winter, the BC works with a couple of ranches in areas of higher wolf activity to install fladry. Installed for no longer than 60 days, fladry evokes a fear response in wolves through the movement of flagging attached to a single strand of electric wire – deterring wolves from entering livestock pastures. In 2024, the BC also piloted a virtual fencing project that served dual purposes. Cows were fitted with GPS collars that help keep them inside a virtual fence boundary that can be controlled remotely by the ranch manager. This technology reduces the need for hard fencing on the landscape, so there is less infrastructure imposed on wildlife habitats. Importantly, this technology also allowed the BC and the ranch manager to test the system for strategically directing livestock away from a wolf den site to prevent potential wolf/livestock interaction. The pilot effort continues into 2025.



*A wolf from the Blackfoot's Union Peak Pack recovers after being drugged and radio collared.*



*Wolf tracks are shown approaching fladry to deter the animals away from a winter livestock pasture.*