



2020 - Region 4 Grizzly Bear Management Efforts

Period Covered: 01/01/2020 – 11/30/2020

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Synopsis

This 2020 annual report covers the east prairie management area (two miles east of HWY-89) for the entire management season. In addition, this report also covers the Rocky Mountain Front management area beginning July 15 due to personnel shortage. Grizzly bears across these areas remain listed under the Endangered Species Act, despite being biologically recovered. Thus, final grizzly bear management decisions are under the authority of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. For the 2020 year, there was an increase in human-grizzly bear encounters while overall livestock loss was down. Grain spills continues to play a major role in human-grizzly bear conflict complaints on the prairie. FWP continues to work collaboratively with agricultural producers for long-term solutions within our management authority.

Conflict Prevention and Response Efforts

- Built eight permanent electric fences
- Installed 10 temporary electric fences
- Gave away over 50 bear sprays and 3 airhorns
- Loaned one paintball gun to a producer
- Installed over 67 scare devices
- Provided two bear-proof garbage cans
- Removed over 27,000 pounds of spilled grain that was attracting bears (Figure 1)
- Removed 23 dead animals (8 deer, 6 calves, 3 cows, 2 sheep, 4 horses)
- FWP carcass removal program removed 131 dead animals for around 30 producers (56 cows, 35 calves, 21 deer, 8 sheep, 6 lambs, 3 cow gut piles, and 2 horses)
- Conducted four education presentations to over 128 people (COVID reduced this effort)
- Created two new text alert systems to inform people (Kevin Rim, North Marias)
- Initiated neighborhood alert systems over 63 times
- Initiated two Valier mass alerts to about 300 people each time
- Initiated one Choteau mass alert to about 800 people



Figure 1: Removing spilled grain bear attractant.

- Installed six permanent bear aware signs at high-use recreation sites
- Proactively hazed 17 grizzly bears with vehicles, cracker shells, and Airedale dogs
- Conducted over 89 proactive patrols to prevent grizzly bears from coming near people
- Conducted over 146 one-on-one in person visits
- Published over 129 facebook posts
- Publicly posted every single grizzly bear sighting reported to us until 8/16 when the facebook page was discontinued for internal review
- Obtained 15 grizzly bear DNA samples to aid in conflict bear identification
- Obtained \$26,650 from Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation for operating budget
- Obtained \$5,000 from Vital Ground Foundation for conflict prevention equipment
- Initiated guard dog research aimed at protecting people and agricultural commodities

Human-Grizzly Bear Conflict Complaints

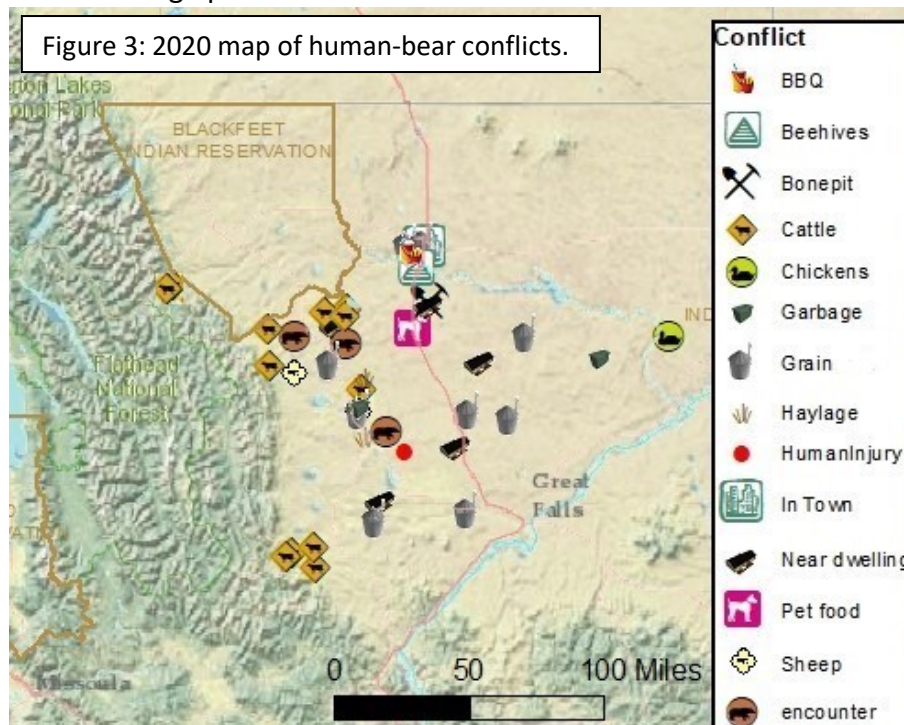
Table 1: Confirmed conflict complaints for 2020, which included two work areas.

- | | Conflict Complaint | Count |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We received over 700 calls for information or service regarding grizzly bears • We quickly responded to every call, including non-conflict contacts • 48 complaints were confirmed as conflicts (Table 1) • 206 trap nights total in response to conflicts • Cattle depredations totaled one cow and 14 calves, with seven calves confirmed killed at one ranch in the mountains west of Augusta (Figure 3). Three sheep were confirmed killed from two complaints per USDA. Additional agricultural damage complaints caused by grizzly bears included one grain bag, one grain bin door, three haylage bags, two chickens, and one apiary. • Complaints were classified as “near dwelling” when a bear did not acquire an attractant but was near a home. Two bears near residences were using shelterbelts to avoid people. Two other instances of bears near dwellings; the bear was stopped before it could obtain any attractants. When attractants were accessed by bears near homes, they were classified by the type of attractant (e.g. grain, BBQ grill, bone pit, etc.). • People encountering bears while they were on foot increased this year. One instance occurred at the Marias golf course, where the bear was observed moving through the area. Another occurred in the brush on Dupuyer creek – a large male bear stood it’s ground and growled 15 yards from a rancher who exited the area. Another incident occurred when a rancher was out spraying weeds, west of Conrad, and encountered a group of six bears together during the breeding season – the bears all ran away. Hunters on Deep Creek, south of Choteau, encounter a bear at <15 yards – the bear | Cattle | 15 |
| | Grain | 10 |
| | Near dwelling | 5 |
| | Encounter | 5 |
| | Garbage | 2 |
| | Sheep | 2 |
| | Haylage | 2 |
| | In Town | 1 |
| | Beehives | 1 |
| | Chickens | 1 |
| | Human attack | 1 |
| | Pet food | 1 |
| | BBQ grill | 1 |
| | Bonepit | 1 |
| | Total | 48 |

walked away. A bird hunter on a canal three miles East of Choteau was defensively bluff charged by a sow with young in a cattail patch – the bear charged down to 30 yards and then returned to her young in the cattails. Another encounter took place but was categorized as a grain conflict – as the producer knew a bear had been eating treated grain for days in an open garage. In this instance, the producer parked his truck in the garage and thought to look for the bear and the bear happened to be 15 yards away in the corner! The bear stayed in the corner and the producer exited and called us. We immediately responded and removed the bear from the garage (Figure 2).



- The most serious conflict this year was a human attack that occurred SE of Choteau, where a person was warned of the presence of a bear and then went to investigate, finding the bear in an old building. The bear charged out and bit the person on the arm and back. We flew two helicopter and one plane flight to find the bear involved in the attack and trapped for twelve days but were unable to locate the target bear.
- There was only one confirmed complaint of a bear in town this year, which occurred in Shelby and we promptly hazed it out. There was a seemingly reliable complaint of a bear in Dutton this summer. However, the investigation of Dutton and review of nearby security camera footage produced no evidence and therefore was not confirmed.



Grizzly Bear Captures

- 1) Adult female that was frequenting a residence SW of Shelby obtaining grain spills (6/7)
 - Relocated to Pike Creek on Lewis and Clark National Forest
- 2) Yearling male - dependent young of adult female SW of Shelby (6/7)
 - Relocated to Pike Creek on Lewis and Clark National Forest
- 3) Yearling female – dependent young of adult female SW of Shelby (6/7)
 - Relocated to Pike Creek on Lewis and Clark National Forest
- 4) Subadult male captured SW of Shelby for multiple conflicts (6/18)
 - Euthanized for severe habituation and food conditioned behaviors
- 5) Adult female proactively captured for frequenting railroad tracks near Summit (7/1)
 - Relocated to Anaconda Creek, Glacier National Park
- 6) Adult female captured on Teton River east of I-15 for proactive tracking (9/29)
 - Released on-site with landowner permission
- 7) Adult male captured for eating grain in an open garage west of Pendroy (10/13)
 - Relocated to Puzzle Creek on Flathead National Forest
- 8) Adult male (Figure 4) incidentally captured North of Choteau while we were targeting family group for grain bin damage (10/21)
 - Relocated to Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area



Figure 4: Incidental capture of a 719 lb. adult male grizzly bear. We were targeting an adult female with two cubs-of-the-year, which had been frequenting a nearby residence and damaged a grain bin door. This bear was relocated to Ear Mountain WMA.

Grizzly Bear Mortalities

- 1) Subadult male euthanized SW of Shelby for conflicts and behavior that relocation would not reasonably resolve (6/18)
- 2) Subadult female euthanized W of Augusta for repeated livestock depredations that relocation would not reasonably resolve (7/22)
- 3) Adult male killed in motor vehicle collision W of East Glacier, attracted to Highway 2 by road killed horse (9/11)
- 4) Adult male killed in motor vehicle collision W of East Glacier, attracted to Highway 2 by road killed horse (9/13)

Acknowledgements

Funding for conflict prevention work was provided by Western Bear Foundation, Vital Ground Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation. We greatly appreciate USDA Wildlife Services management efforts, investigating depredations and installing electric fences. We would like to especially thank our neighborhood call coordinators for taking the time to keep their communities informed. Along those lines, we also thank local and county law enforcement for their call coordination and assistance in the field. Thanks to Two Bear Air for one flight to search for a bear involved in an attack (Figure 5). We appreciate the schools and other organizations for inviting us out to give presentations. Also, thanks to the folks who proactively prevent bears from coming near residences, and for communicating with us when they do. Thanks to producers for their patience as bear conflicts can take time to end and for allowing us to take measures to permanently resolve conflicts. Additionally, we thank FWP biologists, management specialists, wardens and support staff for their assistance with resolving human-bear conflicts. Thanks to Sarah Zielke for her responsive efforts as the bear management technician. We appreciate our carcass pickup driver and his excellent communication skills. Finally, a special thanks to Rock Creek Airedales for donating one awesome dog named Gum.



Figure 5: Complimentary flight from Two Bear Air to locate bear involved in an attack that occurred SE of Choteau.