

Selkirk/Cabinet-Yaak (SCY) Subcommittee of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC)

May 9, 2019, Meeting Notes, Spokane, WA

Subcommittee Members present:

SCY CHAIR: Rodney Smoldon (USDA, Colville National Forest)

SCY VICE CHAIR: Ben Conard (USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service)

Members: Chip Corsi (Idaho Fish and Game), Pat Seymour (for Eric Besaw, Idaho Department of Lands), Ray Entz (Kalispel Tribe of Indians), Scott Soultz (for Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho), Neil Anderson (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks), Jeanne Higgins (USDA, Idaho Panhandle National Forests), Cheryl Probert (USDA, Kootenai National Forest), Erin Carey (for Carolyn Upton, USDA, Lolo National Forest), Cindy Weston (for Linda Clark, USDI, Bureau of Land Management), Gregg Kurz (USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service), Steve Pozzanghera (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife)

I&E TASKFORCE CO-CHAIRS: Kim Annis (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks), Kristen Kaiser (USDA, Kootenai National Forest)

SCIENCE ADVISOR: Wayne Kasworm (USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service)

Grizzly Bear Monitoring Update: Wayne Kasworm

Genetic Sampling

- Hair samples from captures, rub trees and corrals with cameras
- We get species, sex, individual genotype, and parentage
- Document gene flow and effective linkage in support of eventual delisting for both ecosystems
- 2017 DNA sampling in the Cabinet-Yaak:
 - 44 individual bears identified
 - 20 females, 24 males
 - 23 in the Cabinets, 21 in the Yaak
- 2017 DNA sampling in the Selkirks:
 - 40 individual bears identified
 - 16 females, 24 males

Cabinet Mountains Grizzly Bear Augmentation

- 20 bears added since 1990 (13 females, 7 males)
- 5 bears left the target area, but one returned
- 6 bears are known dead
- 2 females known to have reproduced

2019 Research / Monitoring Plans

Selkirks:

- Radio collar malfunctions (GPS not working on 7 collars) necessitate emphasis on recaptures to change collars.
- Selkirks have an alternate year trap schedule - east side in 2019.

- May - July - Boundary Creek Wildlife Management Area will be the base for trapping in Smith, Cow, Grass, Blue Joe and Boundary Creeks. Camera placement and monitoring on the Bog Creek Road (pre and post road reconstruction work).
- July - possibly Roman Nose / Dodge Creek
- August – Huckleberry site sampling

Cabinet-Yaak:

- Two teams will split up effort.
- May – Yaak vehicle lines
- June – Eastside Cabinets, Pipe Creek.
- July – West Cabinets Canuck Creek
- August – Huckleberry site sampling

2019 Selkirk Population Estimate

Goal: assess conservation status using the following recovery metrics

- Distribution of females with young of the year
- mortality rate
- genetic diversity
- demographic (females) connectivity

Potential Methods

- Hair snag corrals established in standard 5km x 5km grid cells. Proctor (BC Grizzly Bear Research Scientist) has already received funding for prep work in BC using this method. Robust sample size if US side of the ecosystem is included, but high cost (\$300 - \$400+K).
- Hair snag corrals in modified, 7km x 7km grid cells would be cheaper to implement, somewhat more expensive metrics analysis.
- Continue current sampling relying on corrals and rub sites at the same sampling intensity.

Decision

Continue current sampling. Support Proctor's effort with equipment in 2020 (12-14 cameras, locks, cables, batteries, memory cards, etc.).

- Based on research to date, 48 bears on the US side of the Selkirk Ecosystem is a minimum number (not an estimate).
- Population trend is increasing at 3 percent / year. Mortality rate is relatively low.
- There is evidence that gene flow between Selkirks, Cabinet-Yaak, and South Purcells is improving, but this could be an artifact of an increased survey effort since 2006.
- Bears in the Selkirk Ecosystem had the lowest genetic diversity of the recovery zones, but this is improving and may now be on par with the Yellowstone Ecosystem.
- There is no evidence that Recovery Plan demographic targets for the Selkirks are flawed.
- Recovery Plan target is to have females with young of the year (FWY) in 7 out of 10 BMUs, in the US. This target has been met. FWY is determined by photos taken at hair snag corrals, radio-collared bears, and documented sightings.

- Current sampling is yielding reasonable data, but doesn't address FWY on the Canadian side of the ecosystem. BC presently assesses mortality rate, but doesn't determine FWY in their BMUs.
- Proctor is handling all prep work, lab costs, and other expenses for his population sampling effort. Subcommittee agencies should at least assist him with equipment costs to determine FWY in the Canadian BMUs in 2020 (approximately \$8,500).
- Continuing with current sampling doesn't preclude us from a more intensive population sampling in the future. We can determine how things worked in 2020 and then reassess.

Update of Food Habits and Isotope Analysis: Justin Teisberg

- Stable isotope analysis is giving us a better picture of grizzly bear diets and habitat health in the two ecosystems.
- From 1984-2016, 313 grizzly bear samples were collected (241 hair, 72 blood) from 124 individual captures. A total of 263 black bear samples 2014-16 (106 blood, 157 hair) were collected from 88 individual captures.
- Stable isotope assessment of these samples can tell us where a bear's diet is on the trophic level (vegetation < > meat).
- Diets of bears in the SCY (and northwestern NCDE) are weighted towards vegetation, compared to Yellowstone and East Front NCDE, where meat consumption is much more prevalent.
- There are seasonal shifts in trophic levels: bears access more meat in the fall. Individual bears can shift their diet dramatically. This could be due to the availability of ungulate gut piles during hunting season.
- Huckleberry use drives the system. At least 20 percent of bear diets in the SCY is berries; primarily huckleberries.
- Competition with black bears exists, but it is hard to make the case it is limiting to grizzlies. Both species are accessing meat in the fall.
- Whitebark pine – trace amounts in the SCY.
- Stable isotopes can identify bears whose diet includes human garbage.
- There is an opportunity to investigate huckleberry use by bears, hypothesized as an important food item for summer foraging.

I&E Subcommittee Update: Kim Annis and Felipe Cano

Bears and Fast-Paced Recreation Signs and Brochures

- SCY Subcommittee reviewed mock-ups of these materials. Comments were favorable and appreciative of the effort that went into their development.
- Kim and Felipe are looking for any suggestions / comments on these materials from agency biologists and recreation folks by COB on Friday, May 24, 2019.
- QR patch for smart phones will take you straight to the IGBC website.
- We should be thinking about getting this info out to bike shops, chambers of commerce, and the like.
- Comment: It would be nice to somehow figure out the actual effectiveness of signs and brochures, since we spend a fair amount of time and energy on them.
- Throw out your old, outdated pamphlets (ex., Women in Bear Habitat).

IGBC Website Changes

- I&E chairs of the ecosystem subcommittees want to take over the official IGBC website to redesign, update, and maintain the site.

- The existing site is a little outdated and hard to navigate. The language used is in need of update: ex. high-speed recreation.
- Timeline – fall?

Priorities for Reducing Grizzly Bear Mortality

The IGBC tasked the subcommittees with Identifying a preliminary list of priority issues (using the 2009 Yellowstone Mortality Report) to reduce grizzly bear mortality as bear populations expand. This was triggered by the high bear mortality rates experienced in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in recent years.

SCY Mortalities and Reduction Efforts

- Mortality rate has decreased from the 1980s and 1990s.
- Small numbers of mortalities and lots of causes make it hard to prioritize mortality reduction efforts.
- We could continue to work on management removals related to mistaken ID, and access to garbage, livestock and pet foods.
- Bear hunter ID training (state fish and wildlife agencies). The quality of the test and the required frequency of testing (i.e., annually) are important considerations.

Reporting Mortalities

- Many ways to examine mortality trends:
 - pool the two ecosystems,
 - outside the recovery zones,
 - proximity to private land,
 - proximity to roads,
 - by season,
 - related to poor food years (berry production).
- Wayne presently reports mortalities by; land ownership, distance to roads, and “management” bears. A lot of info related to mortality is already included in his annual report. Wayne proposed to update his mortality graphics and share with the subcommittee members.

Questions and Answers / Public Comments

- Bear spray is sometimes confiscated at the US / Canada border when declared as “pepper spray”. Pepper spray may be considered a weapon by customs officers, while bear spray is not. It is important to use the term “bear spray” when providing information to the public.
- Public tolerance of grizzlies is a major factor related to bear mortalities. Some causes of mortality may have already been addressed (i.e., train collisions). There could be overlapping solutions to reducing mortalities.

Next Scheduled Meeting

Next Subcommittee Meeting: November 6, Coeur D’Alene, ID @ Idaho Fish and Game Office(?).