

Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem

Double Tree Inn, Missoula, MT

November 29, 2016

Jim Williams / FWP Chair – Intros

Chip Weber/ USFS- Final EIS = June 2017 Final Record of Decision- December 2017

Kathy Ake- Review of 2016 Accomplishments and review of 2017 - Work plan, Agreement & Budget

Committee Present: Cecily Costello, Tabitha for Claudia Regan, Kraig Glazier, Dan Carney, Stacy Courville, Wayne Kasworm, Liz Roberts, Chip Weber, Bill Avey, Gary Bertellotti, Bryan Donner, Jeff Mow, and Jim Williams

Jennifer Fostin- USFWS

Habitat based recovery workshop was held, 36 comments received.

The habitat based recovery criteria is not about creating more habitat. It's about creating security in the core area.

Dr. Cecily Costello NCDE Trend and Mortality

Reviewed NCDE zones for the draft conservation strategy will reassess the eastern most boundaries in zone 3. The data is showing to be solid based on density.

Key Findings

- PCA is fully occupied by reproductive females
- Grizzly bear distribution was less than 55,000 sq km by 2014
- Observed vital rates= 2.3% growth rate per year
- Approx 960 bears in 2014 and 1005 in 2016
- PCA is fully occupied with female with offspring
- 64 grizzly bear captures during 2016
- 95% survival rate for females, 90% males, 55% for cubs and 64% for yearlings
- Estimated total mortality in 2016, 12 females and 5 males

Dr. Kate Kendall Bear Population Trend estimated using genetic detection preliminary results.

From natural bear rub sites – 662 bears 2009 -2012

Growth Rates

- Highest rates in Southern Half 10.8 %
- Lowest rates in Blackfoot Nation & GNP 1.6%
- Growth rate based on rubs vs. radio telemetry with fate method differ
- Both indicate a growing population
- High confidence in recovery
 - Bears are increasing their density in areas where they were previously none.

Dr. Tabitha Graves Trends in grizzly bear genetic diversity

Demographic Mechanisms

- Spatial genetic diversity is increasing .71% in NCDE compared to Kodiak .30%
- Diversity rapidly increase across time

Parentage

- 1237 assignments
- 435 triads both mothers and fathers known

- Most offspring for males was 17 and the most for females was 10
- SE Scapegoat greater in genetic density equaling 68% descend from 1 male in 2004. 13 long distance migrants came 2011-2012

Missions- 1 male= 17 offspring and 61 descendants

- East Central- no dominant individuals identified
- 14 long distance migrants in 2004
- 20 long distance migrants 2011-2012

Conclusions

- Immigration is increasing diversity in genetics
- Initial low density is the result of high reproductive success of few individuals
- Reproductive success varies by density
- Connectivity Exists

Nature vs. Nurture- sample of 8 bears

Non- problem fathers produce 26 % of problem offspring

Problem fathers produce 8% problem offspring

However, problem mothers produce 62.5% offspring that is problematic. Need to mitigate before cubs learn bad behavior from the mother.

Management Goals

- Conserve Grizzly Bears populations
- Base decisions on sound info/maximize quality
- Multiple sub goals
 - Linkage
 - Population Research
- Minimize costs

Current Projects- Collaborative

- Family tree revision
- Using effective population size to monitor trend
- Bear foods initial focus is on huckleberries
- Linkage
- Optimize monitoring design
 - Would like to be able to look more closely at dispersal

Re-Cap

Kathy Ake- Ok with funding

Cecily Costello- Statewide monitoring of at least 1000 bears

Tabitha- Genetic diversity

Chip- Best mortality info

We're our own worst enemy- The bears have been recovered, need de-listing & responsible management to move forward

Grizzly Bear Food Economies- Justin Teisberg -Cabinet Yaak Ecosystem (justin_teisberg@fws.gov)

- Diet consumption and body condition of NCDE grizzly bear
- NCDE- largest grizzly population in lower 48 (760 as of 2014)
- An expansive landscape
- Stable Isotope methods- examine for the ratios of heavy to light isotopes can tease out

Looking back in time

- Herbivores vs. Carnivores and bears= omnivores

- Bioelectrical Independence Analysis (BAI) Methods
- Body Fat content

Central Question

1. How do bear diets differ across ecosystem?
2. Do differences in protein consumption produce differences in body condition?
3. Are these population effects resulting from different food economies?

Results- PCA zone- more plant matter vs. closest to the front = more animal matter

Does higher consumption of animal matter equate to higher body fat content?

YES- but both assure productive body fat content at the end of fall

3.5% animal protein from guard hair in the spring

14.7% animal protein from underfur hair in the fall

They mix their diet to about 50/50 when available to reach max protein of about 20.7%

We do not know what % of ungulates vs. livestock makes up animal protein

Brittani Jonson MSU Grad Research (Jamie Jonkel)

How does electric fencing effect grizzly bear movement?

- Valuable Tool
- Blackfoot Valley ranchers installing miles of permanent electric of fence

Steps:

1. Develop fence that protects crops but allows bear passage 3 wire – to turn on when needed
2. Evaluate individual space use relative to existing electric fences
3. Evaluate factors influencing bear occurrence

Electric Fence Study

- 2 designs both have 3 wires tall and short
- Turned on and off every 3 days
- Baited every 3 days
- Trail cameras set

Bear occurrence study

- 60 trail cameras to measure presence or absence of bears

Individual Space use

- 4 male Grizzly Bears collared collecting GPS points every 35 minutes
- Will be able to determine if grizzly bear is walking around fencing

2016 Season update

Laurie Wolf -FWP Montana WILD, Information & Education

Southwest Montana Bear Education Working Group

- Understanding and tolerating bears in landscapes
- Reduces conflicts
- Consistent messages

15,029 people reached between May-Oct 2016

5,000 people trained in bear spray

42 Events for Bear Aware trailer

Logistics- Hard to be everywhere- trying to get 2nd truck and trailer

Bear Bio Updates

Tim Manley- Region 1- Human and Grizzly Bear Conflicts

- Most conflicts on private lands
- Human Death- Brad Treat
- Human Injury- Stoltze Property

-Elderly couple in Ferndale near Roadhouse Bar is indirectly responsible for death of approx 9 Grizzly Bears due to feeding the bears and them becoming comfortable looking for food near humans.

Dan Carney- Blackfeet Nation

- Caught largest female he's ever captured 508lbs
- 33 Depredations, 28 confirmed and 5 probable
- 83 carcasses moved due to redistribution program
- 15 Grizzly bear captures - 9 handled
- 1 Grizzly Bear mortality- hit by car on HWY 2
 - Garbage situation in Babb was like the "Golden Corral Buffet" for bears
 - Got a grant for 146K – Leslie will be in charge of conducting grant projects

Stacy Courville-CSKT

- No research captures
- Only 3 management captures
- 1 sow killed, both cubs going to Maryland Zoo
- Pheasant hunter incident

John Waller- Glacier National Park

- Human fatality of Brad Treat
- Visitation of GNP was up 20 % overall just shy of 3 Million visitors
- No management captures or removals

Jamie Jonkel- Region 2

- Intros all around
- Collared Grizzly Bear Shot- Still under investigation
- 1 female that didn't drop collar
- 6 adult male Grizzly bears captured for Brittani's study
- Most of the bears are denned.
- Good moisture equals good berry crop
- 1 Grizzly Bear got into Ovando dump
- Still having some issues with agricultural Composting Site @ Clear Water Junction that had some Grizzly Bear activity
- No attacks or maulings
- Cub of Year Road kill on HWY 83
- Lots of activity in elk horns- Identified 3 tracks
- Starting to focus on zone 2 regulations

Mike Madel Region 4

- I'm now spending a lot of time around I-15
- 42 incidents with Grizzly bears
- 1 hunter mauled east of Choteau
- 1 encounter on Golf Course
- Issues with bears getting into grain
- Captured 6 Grizzly bears
- Worked closely with communities on how to disseminate information regarding bears
 - Implemented phone tree program in Valier, would like to expand it into Choteau, Sun River and beyond.

- Saw 13 Grizzly bears together 10 miles from Rocky Mountain Front foothills in Jensen Coulee off Dry Fork Marias River
- 3 Mortalities this year

Kraig Glazier- USDA APHIS

- 84 investigations
 - 12 cows confirmed
 - 30 calves confirmed
 - 13 lambs confirmed
 - 1 horse confirmed
 - 2 alpacas confirmed

Public Comments

- How many times does a bear need to get into trouble before it is killed?
- What is the guideline on the expiration date on bear spray?
- Ranchers on The Rocky Mountain Front are past their eyeballs with Grizzly bears! Want action NOW!
- Livestock and Ag Producers- Want effective management plans from this committee and they want it now! They are going to start shooting! Please get a usable and effective management plan prior to lambing and calving seasons.
- Grizzly bears have been in the golf course multiple times! It's a human playground! Shouldn't guidelines be stricter?
- Draft strategies without peer review are putting the cart before the horse regarding delisting. The huckleberry study is just getting started. All the trends are not inclusive.
- Concerned that unrealistic goals are being set that delisting is the end all. What are Rocky Mountain Front ranchers doing besides whining and pointing fingers?

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m. The next meeting will be in the spring in Shelby, MT.