2017 Rocky Mountain Front Grizzly Bear Conflict Management Summary

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Region Four

The RMF grizzly bear management program implemented in 1988 with a primary goal to reduce conflicts between bears and people living and recreating on the Front.

In 2017, R4 bear management personnel responded to a record 81 bear incident and observation calls and confirmed a total of 46 grizzly bear conflicts.

2017 RMF Grizzly Bear Conflict Summary

As December 2017, a total of 46 confirmed grizzly bear-conflicts with people, property, or livestock:

- 21 Livestock Depredation Incidents (2 cattle, 31 calves, 6 sheep, 5 goats) = monetary losses reported by livestock operators for compensation program ($90,795)
- 9 Residential Incidents (bears in proximity of homes or ranch buildings)
- 6 Property Damage Incidents
- 3 Encounters (2 hunting related, resulting in 4 bear mortalities)
- 1 Beehive Damage Incidents
- 4 Crop Foraging Incidents (grain and apple trees)
- 2 Other

In 2017, a total of 8 grizzly bears were captured, marked, relocated or removed from the RMF-NCDE, during management control actions by USDA Wildlife Services and MFWP.

- 5 subadult male grizzly bears (refer to Table 1, page 2, for specific bear capture information)
- 1 adult male
- 1 adult female grizzly with 3 cubs
- 1 subadult female
Table 1. Grizzly bears captured and marked in 2017 in the R4 Rocky Mountain Front Grizzly Bear Management Area.

2017 RMF Grizzly Bear Mortality

A record high of 12 recorded grizzly bear deaths:

- 5 self-defense shootings
- 4 bear mgmt removals
- 1 illegal shooting
- 1 train-collision
- 1 natural drowning
- (9 of the grizzly bear deaths occurred in the RMF East-Prairie Mgmt Unit)

2017 RMF Bear Conflict Prevention Management

- Completed and cost-share into 4 additional permanent high-tensile electric fence projects with livestock operators and farms; installation of 8 temporary electric fences to deter bear access to domestic goat bedding grounds, grain bins, fruit trees, and poultry pens.
RMF grizzly bear conflict prevention projects in 2017 involved fund-raising over $15,000 from federal and state agencies and conservation groups, (Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, USFWS, and MFWP).

In addition, the RMF-R4 grizzly bear management program cost-shared approximately $4500 in materials, mileage, and man-hours towards grizzly bear conflict prevention projects in 2017 on ranches, colony farms, and for home-owners.

- 95 gall bear refuse bins were provided to 6 rural home owners.
- 30 cracker shells were provided to ranchers.
- 8 sound deterrent critter-gitters were installed on fruit trees and decks.
- 52 cans of bear spray with holsters were handed out to ranch and farm owners.
- Numerous bear aware signs were posted at public use and recreational sites.

In 2017 a total of 22 livestock carcasses were removed from bear conflict sites and redistributed on the RMF.

The MFWP grizzly bear management team cooperatively worked with and informed ranchers, sheep operators, beekeepers, and rural landowners on methods to minimize or prevent grizzly bear conflicts with small livestock, bears accessing unnatural food resources, and causing property damage.

MFWP conducted over 645 landowner/homeowner contacts along the RMF. Disseminated information on grizzly bear activity and conflict avoidance through numerous newspaper releases, magazine articles, television and radio news programs, and presentations to communities and school groups, reaching thousands of resident listeners, hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreationists.
The R4-MFWP bear management team designed and implemented the second RMF community area bear aware neighbor network phone tree in the greater Choteau area in May 2017, following local public input and the positive support of the Greater Valier area network.

Know what to do if there's a bear in your yard.

Report all bear sightings and incidents on your property to your local area coordinator or MFWP.

If you feel comfortable and are near your front door or in a vehicle, make loud noises, bang pots and pans, honk your horn, air horn can work.

The more stressful a bear’s experience near human areas is, the less likely it is to come back.

If you encounter a bear in your yard, do not run. Back away slowly toward your house or vehicle. If the bear doesn’t see you, do not make any noise or get the bears attention until you are safe by a vehicle or your house door. If the bear sees you, do not run, back away slowly, don’t make direct eye contact. If the bear charges, stand your ground. If a grizzly continues to charge at you, play dead. Lay flat on the ground, face down with your arms behind your neck.

Be prepared for door encounters with bears by carrying bear spray. It works. Keep a canister of spray on your belt and near the front and back doors of your house. Bear spray is proven effective at deterring an aggressive or charging bear. Read the directions and practice drawing the canister and removing the safety clip before you start carrying it. For more information on bear spray or if you are a landowner in need of bear spray, contact FWP bear management.

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January 22, 2018