

IGBC Bitterroot Subcommittee Meeting

Adobe Connect

November 12, 2020

9:00 AM MST Welcome and Introductions – Chuck Mark, Chair

9:15 AM Food and Sanitation Orders – Scott Jackson

10:00 AM Section 7 Consultation Training – Lydia Allen

10:15 AM New Bear Protocol to determine when Grizzly Bears “may be present.” - Jennifer Fortin-Noreus

11:00 AM Communication Strategy Update – Sandy Fisher

11:30 AM Lunch

Public Joins the Meeting

12:30 PM Welcome and Introductions - Chuck Mark

12:45 PM Forest Plan Revision – Forest Supervisors

1:15 PM Information, Education & Outreach Committee Update – Amy Baumer, Chair

1:45 PM Science Committee Update – Mike Pruss, Chair

2:15 PM Update on Bear 927 – Wayne Kasworm

2:30 PM Review Program of Work Accomplishments and Proposed Program of Work for 2021 – Chuck Mark

3:30 PM Questions & Answers with the public

4:00 PM Next Chairs for the Subcommittee and I, E & O committee – Chuck Mark

4:30 PM End of Meeting

Gina Knudson facilitator – here to help us stay on time. Coffee and doughnuts, you should know where the bathrooms and fire exits are.

Chuck reviewed the agenda. Public is invited to participate this afternoon.

Scott Jackson started off with a discussion about food storage orders and sanitation on public lands in the Bitterroot. It is not news that grizzly bears are on their way to the Bitterroot. This is good news for grizzly bear recovery in the lower 48. As managers the question is are we prepared. Have we laid the necessary groundwork to set us on the path for success. Scott would like to focus on food storage and sanitation orders in the Bitterroot system. These will be an important component of life with grizzly bears as we move forward. Proper storage of attractants is a critical component in minimizing potential conflicts between humans and bears on both public land and private land in the front country and the back country. The 6 designated grizzly bear recovery zones in the Bitterroot is the only ecosystem that has no food storage orders in place. Even in the North Cascades where they aren't considered to have a bear population there are food storage orders in place. Although we haven't taken this step yet most folks are aware that food storage orders are going to be needed in the future the question is when and how we get there. Most of the Bitterroot ecosystem is comprised of Forest Service land so we are looking at things from that perspective. These are just in order that a forest supervisor can implement that requires the safe storage and handling of food and attractants for the purpose of minimizing conflicts and adverse interactions between bears and humans. Most of the orders restrict or prohibit certain uses on all or portions of the National Forest Lands. Most orders also include a map of where the order applies as well as the dates for which they are enforced or if there are any exemptions from the order. These are in place throughout the other grizzly bear ecosystems and they represent our first line of defense in human safety and minimize bear mortality risk by reducing potential conflict. Certainly, human safety is a huge consideration from the context of bear recovery it lowers bear mortality risk and other situations where a bear might need to be removed because of repeated problems. This is not just a grizzly bear concern, black bears throughout the ecosystem have also had conflicts as well. Food storage orders and taking sanitation measures into account are important not just for grizzly bears. At this time we can focus our attention on black bears. There are some ESA implications for food storage orders in reducing bear mortality risks and reducing conflicts. There will be further discussion in the next couple presentations about where we implement food storage orders for instance do we implement food storage orders anywhere that grizzly bears may be present or do we hold off until we have a definition of occupied status reached. There are many benefits to controlling access to garbage and food by not just grizzly bears but black bears and other wildlife as well. Food storage orders and sanitation measures have been proven to be effective when they are implemented as intended with proper infrastructure in place with enforcement of the orders as well as a robust information and education component. A component that helps the public know how to comply in a logical and meaningful way. Even with that education component implementation can be unpopular. In other ecosystems where they experienced challenges with implementation people do learn to accept and consider them as part of the routine of camping and how you conduct your business in grizzly bear country. In areas where orders have been implemented there are very few problems. Scott would like folks to have a discussion here about some of the aspects of what it takes to implement these storage orders. Scott has a list of a few considerations such as: Areas to prioritize, When to implement – If we wait, problems will be more likely to have already occurred, Assess Needs (infrastructure, personnel) Bear boxes, dumpsters, Cost, Wilderness values, Consistency, Information/Education, Interagency and interdisciplinary coordination. Also, to be considered are the Goals: Be Proactive, Cooperative Approach, Be Consistent, Include I/E/O, Develop Implementation Framework. The first question Scott has for the group is their support for moving this forward? What meaningful steps can we take to address some of the considerations he talked about and to start making this a reality? Jamie said that

on the Lolo National Forest they did a voluntary food order for the first couple of years that seemed to help and got folks thinking about things. They had signage that suggested following food order precautions and, on those signs, said it was a voluntary order. Jamie asked Scott if this would be a positive way to start in the Bitterroot. Scott said that he heard about that also and there are lots of possibilities such as voluntary orders or giving warnings for the first couple of years. Another incremental step geographically is where we start small and expand to larger areas, all of those options are on the table. Scott said he isn't sure what the options are for Forest Supervisors when implementing an order. The bulk of our grizzly bear activity at this time is on the east side of the Bitterroot National Forest the side bumping up against the Deer Lodge National Forest in the Sapphires. That might be the best area to do an actual order.

Chuck said we have been having this discussion since last spring and it has been on folks minds. Cheryl will probably discuss what she was thinking about doing on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. What it comes down to is that in the Northern Continental Divide and the Greater Yellowstone they ended up implementing food storage orders in reaction to incidents and what we are trying to do, like Scott said, is to be proactive. We don't want to wait for a conflict to happen, we also want to be consistent as possible as an ecosystem. We need to also consider the advice of our bear experts and biologists to provide some framing around when a food storage order and sanitation guidelines should be considered for the Bitterroot. Public outreach is also a huge for us, we need to get folks to understand why we are trying to recover the grizzly bear and how we're going to do that and minimize conflicts then the first thing out the door is a restriction we usually get a lot of pushback. How do we grease the skids with the public?

Cheryl said as Chuck was saying we've discussed this for a while regarding what the implementation looks like and what are the specific actions we are going to need to do around education and information. We don't want to put orders in place that we don't have the capability for people to comply without difficulty. We need to have a structured implementation plan perhaps we do with our outfitters and guides first. The best long term outcome for the bears isn't necessarily putting in restrictions the first moment we have bear sightings. It is a good idea to start putting some things on paper about what things will look like and what makes sense regarding the where, the what and the who. And going into this with a very measured approach making us more successful.

Kirk said we are outside the loop a little bit here on the Sawtooth, but we implemented a food storage order this summer and it has gone very well as far as feedback from the community. We have met with all the outfitters and guides and resorts and sent letters to all the other permit holders. It has taken a few years to get everything put together but we have been super pleased as far as outfitter and guides go. Ours is a front country order and does not include any wilderness areas. The order is from Memorial Day to Labor Day to mitigate impacts to hunting we also worked with Fish and Game and exempted the Shoshone Bannock Tribes from traditional activities and we also exempted bear baiting. We hired a seasonal employee for education, which we will be doing again this summer. Things went very well with outfitter and guides.

J.J. said it would be nice to be very strategic with our messaging. We can start having that conversation when we are talking about bear safety and public safety. It's important that we don't start off with huge

restrictions everywhere but that we start having that conversation about what food storage is and discussing it with our sportsmen that are in these areas that might have occupancy.

Scott asked Chuck if he would be supportive of getting a group together from different forests and agencies and begin to move this forward with a working group to see what kind of ideas, they can generate for a future agenda item for the spring meeting.

Chuck said yes, he would support this and having representation from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Idaho Fish and Game. The IE&O Committee has also put some effort into looking at potential needs moving forward and will certainly be helpful as far as putting together a strategy moving forward. Cheryl said she would also like to be a part of that group as well.

Scott said he will move forward with putting that group together they will report out at the spring meeting.

Lydia Allen discussed what an expanding grizzly bear population in the Bitterroot means for Section 7 consultation obligations under ESA and what the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife service have in the works to help biologists navigate those consultations. As grizzly bear populations expand beyond recovery zones in Northern Continental Divide, the Selkirk, the Cabinet-Yaak and the Greater Yellowstone this triggers a need for federal agencies to consider how their plans management activities may affect bears in those areas where the species is considered present. For example, the eastern portion of the Bitterroot National Forest was determined to have grizzly bears present in 2017 and that triggered a need to re consult on the forest plan as well as individual projects. Then in 2019 we saw additional expansions being identified which is again triggering the need for additional consultation on landscapes in the Bitterroot and the Lolo National Forests. In response to these expanding grizzly bear populations the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service has a regional consultation team in Region 1 that have been discussing for about 3 years the best process and metrics to be used for analyzing management actions in these landscapes. A smaller working group has been focusing on this guidance with an interagency group of grizzly bear researchers from all the ecosystems which has really allowed us to hone in discussions about fact analysis under Section 7. This team is nearing the conclusion of a written guidance that we are hoping to have finalized in midwinter. Once the larger regional consultation team reviews that guidance we will share that with leadership and then other regional Forest Service offices. The plan is to have that written guidance done by the end of March or early April. The immediate need for consultation, for the local biologists that haven't been dealing with grizzly bears that is being done on a one to one basis between Lydia and our Fish and Wildlife consultation buddies. Lydia hopes to set up a workshop to try present the guidance and sideboards sometime in March or April of next year.

Jennifer Fortin-Noreus presented New Bear Protocol to Determine When Grizzly Bears May be Present.

“May be present” is specific to the consultation process and is a pretty low bar as we've been told by a few litigation cases. “May be present” does not mean occupied. We have distributions that are calculated for each of the ecosystems every other year that represent occupied range that is continual

occupancy. "May be present" doesn't represent occupied range we don't know if the bear is transient or a resident because often it is a verified sighting rather than collared information.

Why is methodology needed?

- The Forest Service and BLM have the primary land management responsibility across the range of grizzly bears
- Many of these units are currently, or soon will be, undergoing plan revisions
- To implement long-term planning, these agencies need to understand what management actions, and other ESA section 7(a)(1) and 7(a)(2) measures may be necessary or appropriate to support grizzly bear recovery.
- Identifying where grizzly bears "may be present" across their project areas is a key first step in the process.
- The methodology provides clarity and consistency for how the FWS determines where grizzly bears "may be present"
- Will assist action agencies when they are evaluating potential impacts of a project and inform coordination with the FWS on best management practices that may be implemented to minimize or eliminate effects to grizzly bears

Development of methodology

Grizzly bears occur across 3 FWS Interior Regions, 3 Forest Service Regions and multiple BLM units. Engaged with our Federal, State and Tribal partners to develop the mapping methodology to ensure stakeholder input was considered.

Provides clarity and consistency for how the FWS determines where grizzly bears "may be present"

Methodology – Partner agencies are critical in gathering data on current distributions and verifying outliers. Most verified outliers in the Bitterroot right now are by way of sightings. Only verified sightings will be used for "may be present".

We hope to have new maps layers for IPAC by the end of the month.

Chuck asked if other than the implications for consultation under Section 7 are there any other implications for the "may be present" map and methodology?

Jennifer said there are no other implications, but that they are also working on a communication plan because there may be some confusion for the public between "may be present" and occupied.

Chuck suggested a list of talking points in addition to a joint memo discussing the methodology.

Jennifer said she would share her presentation notes with the group as well as draft methodology.

Sandy Fisher discussed Communication Strategy Update

A subset of folks from the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife service met early this year to have some conversations about proactive conservation measures around Endangered Species Act issues to

plan for grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot. From that meeting a smaller group of public affairs staff from both agencies were tasked with drafting a communication strategy around grizzly bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem. The intent of which was to develop a common understanding around how we message our path forward and what our priorities are around education and outreach as bears move closer to the ecosystem. What we have in draft now is a series of communication related documents. We will be seeking comments on these documents from this subcommittee. Those documents include something that we are calling a communication plan that speaks to the coordination between the Fish and Wildlife service and the Forest Service and the strategy behind our messaging. We also have a Q&A document that is meant to be an internal document to help us all be on the same page with common questions and associated answers. There is also a fact sheet that lays out the history and timeline of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot as well as messaging around grizzly bear safety and conservation. Finally, there is a news release that urges bear awareness in our communities. These documents were developed by the Fish and Wildlife service and the Forest Service public affairs staffs they have undergone review from local leadership at both agencies the next step is to get review and comments from the subcommittee and once we've gotten that review the next step would be to send it up to our headquarters for review and final approval. Because we need to have that final approval those documents need to be kept in house with the subcommittee until we have that final approval.

Ally Turner added that they didn't include information regarding "may be present" because that group was planning their own communication plan. Additionally, they would be happy to assist with talking points regarding the methodology for "may be present"

Chuck said that appreciates the work that everyone has put into this. Chuck said that he goes back to the meeting last January between the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service in Missoula. They spent a fair amount of time talking about the importance of a comprehensive communication plan. Chuck said he's stating this to inform the review process, but he feels like we're missing the mark. They talked a lot about getting everybody on the same page internally as far as the history that has brought us up to this point of grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot ecosystem. Then they talked about being proactive about what and what we are doing to recovery of the grizzly bear. Chuck said he doesn't think we're there yet, he believes this is a real need. Chuck said he's not trying to be critical of the IE&O committee. He is more critical of himself and that he and the subcommittee haven't provided enough of a framework and intent for what we want to see in this comprehensive communication plan. Chuck is curious what others think about what he said.

Jody said that Sandy sent out information to the subcommittee in September and she received no comments back. This was a joint development between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service the whole idea behind it was to get on the same page about what our messaging is including talking points so we would all be using the same words when we talk to our partners. The communication plan just explains that and provides a background on how we got here. It's very hard to give you something else when we don't know what you want. We can send the information out again, but until you tell us what we're missing it's hard to fix it.

Chuck said he agrees. With the recent back and forth we've had regarding the history behind the re-introduction with the previous proposal with the EIS 10(j) rule. There is some political sensitivity around

that and at this point in time it looks like we're not going to put that forward. That is a key part of the history about how we got here today. It is essential for us to be specific, to get people from where we were to where we are today.

Cheryl said she agrees with Chuck and that she also takes responsibility for not getting her comments sent in. We as a subcommittee need to make a commitment to review that body of work. Part of that review needs to be what do we need to say to answer the questions of our constituency. The harder the question the more important it is that we have talking points that clearly articulate the answer across the board. The tough questions are going to come first, and we need to be on the same page.

Ally said that in response to Chuck's comment about the removal of some of the history regulation content in the communication plan. We are finding that in the current political climate communication plans are taking a lot longer to go through the review process at headquarters. When our regional office reviewed the communication plan, they thought it would move through more quickly and smoother if we removed references to regulations. We have been working to accelerate the release of these communication plans, so it seemed advisable to remove that content to move things through a little faster.

Chuck said he appreciates Ally bringing that forth. Chuck just doesn't want to lose the history and also how important it is to have the path forward clearly stated. The information that has been put together is great. There is just more that we need to do to make us successful and have a pertinent outreach effort regarding grizzly bear recovery.

Comment on the communications are due after the first of the year.

### **Public Joins Meeting**

#### Update on Forest Plan Revision

Cheryl Probert, Forest Supervisor Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. Since the last meeting we have put out our draft EIS for public review and comments, we had a number of comments and added an additional 30 day to that review period. We have been reviewing those comments and are working on what that final decision will look like. We received quite a few comments on grizzly bears and we are looking at developing a couple of plan components that specifically speak to grizzly bears. Hopefully at this time next year we will be looking at having a signed Forest Plan.

Carolyn Upton, Forest Supervisor Lolo National Forest. We have parts of three grizzly bear populations on the Lolo. The Bitterroot ecosystem, the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem and Northern Continental Divide ecosystem all overlap some piece of the Lolo National Forest. We also have seven National Forest neighbors two in Idaho and five in Montana. The Lolo is going to share in forest plan management and habitat management decisions with a variety of neighbors. There will be a lot of coordination. Our official kickoff to our forest plan revision is in FY23.

Cole Mayn, Staff Officer Bitterroot National Forest. We are on the schedule as the Lolo for forest plan revision. Like Carolyn said we will be coordinating with a number of forests as well. Currently we are working on a forest plan amendment on elk habitat effectiveness. Part of that is based on road densities, with that change we are also looking at grizzly bear consultation on the Eastside. We decided to move forward with consultation across the forest. That amendment should have a draft EA soon.

Chuck Mark, Forest Supervisor Salmon-Challis National Forest. About a year ago Chuck paused the forest plan revision effort on the Salmon Challis. Up to that point we had completed our forest plan revision assessment, and need for change based on that assessment. We completed a draft wilderness evaluation, which is one of the three concurrent processes, we had completed a draft Wild and Scenic River eligibility report and had draft species of conservation concern. The reason for the pause was due to a fair amount of controversy and a lot of interest around those three concurrent processes. Local communities were very concerned about further restrictions on access and activities on the National Forest. The concurrent processes specifically the Wilderness Evaluation and Wild and Scenic River eligibility consumed a lot of time and controversy. Chuck next has a decision to make about what to do as far as revision. One plan, two plans, amendments.

Information, Education and Outreach Committee Update from Amy Baumer.

The Bitterroot National Forest received a \$5000 grant from the IGBC to fund a front country bear Ranger. That Ranger was in place from May to September of this year. This Ranger is carrying on a multi-year program that he started in 2015. This Ranger is a middle school teacher that teaches life science and has been teaching grizzly bear education to his students. Although this year has brought a lot of challenges with the pandemic there has been additional use in recreation sites as well as a new demographic recreating on the Forest.

With the predicted increase in use on forest lands and increase of people moving into the valley in the foreseeable future, focused educational efforts in the coming years will be essential to help mitigate wildlife conflicts, enhance public safety, and promote coexistence of people and bears. The Forest would like to enhance the coordination/educational efforts with FWP and start compiling a plan for food storage signage and infrastructure in recreation sites.

Goals for the Bitterroot IEO Subcommittee

- Interagency Cooperation
  - o Develop good relationships between all agencies (state, federal, county, and city).
  - o Partner with other agencies to use resources available.
  - o Support Montana FWP efforts using Bear Trailer.
- Safety
  - o Have a consistent safety message across the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE) about grizzly bears.
  - o Reduce human-bear interactions as much as possible.
  - o Work towards reducing risk factors for bear/human conflict.
- Public/Outreach
  - o Promote the use of Be Bear Aware messaging to external audiences.
  - o Help the public have safe and successful visits to National Forests in the BE.



- o Attend annual Bear Fairs for IEO messaging opportunities.
  - o Increase public recognition that grizzly bears are or will soon be present in the BE.
  - o Work towards public acceptance of the presence of grizzly bears in the BE.
  - o Increase efforts towards public education about identifying and reducing risk factors on private property.
  - o Promote use of bear-resistant food storage containers for camping in or near BE.
  - o Support FWP efforts with Bear Trailer.
  - o Maintain website linked to IGBC.
  - Internal
    - o Increase efforts to promote Bear Aware messaging to internal audiences.
    - o Train all agency personnel to use bear spray.
    - o Provide bear spray for trained employees and require or encourage carrying in when in the field
    - o Agencies will bear-proof all attractants.
    - o Work towards developing and implementing a common food storage order for National Forests across the BE. Implement a voluntary order in the interim.
  - Legal
    - o Uphold obligations as management agencies regarding Threatened and Endangered species
- Priorities for the Bitterroot IEO Subcommittee
- SAFETY of our public, partners, and staff is our #1 priority.
  - Keep the public informed about grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem, including both the presence of bears in the BE as well as information on how to be safe in bear country.
  - Train agency personnel in Bear Aware practices, use of bear spray, other?
  - Identify bear attractants. (e.g. garbage collection sites, livestock boneyards, hunters bait sites, and anthropogenic foods) across the BE
  - Research funding opportunities for IEO work

MT Dept Fish, Wildlife & Parks: Special thanks to the Wind River Bear Institute for assisting FWP with community outreach and conflict response. Also, thank you to the Be Bear Aware Campaign for all the outreach this summer at communities along the Bitterroot and Lower Clark Fork Drainages.

Question about when the communication plan will be out. Chuck said after the new calendar year.

Science Committee Update Mike Pruss.

The science committee is a newly formed committee we had a kickoff meeting in mid-June. The science committee is made up of a bunch of members with previous experience. We have an advantage being able to borrow information from other science committees in other ecosystems. However, gathering information from our own ecosystem is absent. In our first meeting we discussed the membership makeup and structure of the committee itself. We also identified a list of information we had and work products we would like to produce. We had a second meeting in early September, at that meeting we identified our cochairs. In that second meeting we came up with a list of products and actions we want to focus on. We broke them up into short term and long term. Under the short term we identified to initiate DNA and camera survey, which Hillary will give an update on. Get the verified location database finalized and populated. Continue working on and keep updated the conflict database. Under long term

habitat monitoring, BMU mapping, human attitude survey for the Bitterroot. The human attitude survey might have some overlap with the IE&O Committee.

Hillary said have talked about doing some monitoring for a couple of years. We would like to do some noninvasive work to determine if we have any bears in-between ecosystems. We were planning on starting to do some work last summer and COVID shut us down. We're hoping to do some work this coming summer. We are coordinating with Defenders of Wildlife who have offered us some volunteers. Those volunteers were involved with a wolverine monitoring survey, that survey has now ended, and they are interested in continuing to work on this survey. We are thinking of using hair snares and cameras. We are still looking at areas and that will be fluid. Just want everyone to know what we are doing. Top two items on the five-year plan involves surveys.

Update on Bear 927 by Wayne Kasworm, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Wayne works primarily in the Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk. They have a program that is related to grizzly bear augmentation. There was an exceedingly small population that was about to disappear entirely. With their partners at Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks they instituted an augmentation program where they brought bears into the Cabinet to bolster the population. One of the bears that they released in the Cabinet Mountains in 2018 made a trip south. That bear #927 was captured in July of 2018 as a two-year-old male captured north of Whitefish Montana and brought to the Cabinet Mountains and released in the west Cabinet Mountains to help bolster the population. Initially the augmentation program was going to target females, but we've had relatively few males doing the breeding in this population so our attempt by moving males is to broaden the gene pool by getting more males that can contribute genetic material into the population. The two-year-old was not exceptionally large weighing about 120 pounds when it was released it remained in the Cabinet Mountains for several months but went south of the Clark Fork River and was photographed at a black bear baiting site in early September 2018. At that time the bear was recaptured as part of a preemptive move to get it out of the black bear baiting site which was on private land. The bear was released back in the Cabinet Mountains but went back to the Clark Fork and returned to the Cabinet Mountains to den. In late March 2019 the bear emerged from his den moved south of the Clark Fork River in late April, crossed Interstate 90 in early June and crossed Highway 12 in early July 2019. He then spent two and a half months in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness before heading north back to the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness to den for the winter of 2019-2020. In 2020 he went northeast to the Whitefish Range and lost his collar in August of 2020.

Program of Work Accomplishments and Proposed Program of Work for 2021

Goal #1 Document presence/absence of grizzly bears in the ecosystem. This summer in the Bitterroot Valley we were able to verify the presence of two grizzly bears. We received photographs of a unmarked young adult male grizzly just upstream from the community of Lolo in late September. We believe this is the same bear that was observed by a bow hunter just prior to receiving the photographs. In early October we received photos of a second unmarked adult male grizzly in upper Miller Creek Southeast of Missoula. Anecdotally, we verified a third unmarked grizzly in the North Hills of Missoula two weeks ago. This last spring grizzly activity was again verified on the south side of the Anaconda

Pintlers and this September FWP received photos of a grizzly in the Pioneer Mountains. We received a handful of additional reports that we could not verify.

Goal #2 Promote natural recovery of the population through immigration.  
Implement measures to improve connectivity in > 50% of linkage areas by 2020

Established a "Bitterroot Science Team": SCIENCE COMMITTEE  
Michael Pruss – Chair  
Nez Perce-Clearwater NF

#### MEMBERS

Evan Ohr  
US Fish & Wildlife Service (Idaho)  
Amy Jacobs  
Flathead National Forest  
Katherine Oelrich  
Idaho Department of Fish & Game  
Cecily Costello  
Montana Dept of Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Lydia Allen  
Northern Regional Office, Forest Service  
Hilary Cooley  
US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Jennifer Fortin-Noreus  
US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Jason Dungan  
Salmon-Challis National Forest

MPG assisted with preparing a Google Earth presentation on "Ethyl the Grizzly Bear" and the ranch has started a black bear research project that will give insight on how bears are using habitat.

1) USFWS proposes a one-year pilot project to systematically monitor for grizzly bear presence and potential connectivity.

- Survey Location: Areas to the east of the BE, between the BE, NCDE and GYE.
- Survey Sites: ~15-30 sites expected; based on grizzly bear sightings and recommendations of agency biologists.
- Timing: Summer 2021; future work TBD.
- Methods: Hair corrals (with lure) and remote cameras.

2) Defenders of Wildlife has offered to coordinate a volunteer, community science effort to monitor linkage areas and nearby sightings.

- Survey Location: Lower Clark Fork, Ninemile and Sapphire Mountains.
- Survey Sites: ~12-25 sites expected; based on sightings, mapped linkage areas, and recommendations of agency biologists.

- Timing: Summer 2021 as pilot year, with future work expected.
- Methods: Hair corrals (with lure) and remote cameras.

Increase landowner and community tolerance for grizzly bears in linkage zones and the recovery zone by 2022

Bitterroot NF: The Bitterroot NF received \$5,000 from the IGBC to fund a front-country Bear Ranger for May-Sept 2020. The funds were used for Nathan Beckwith's salary again to carry out an educational program that he had created in 2015 and to make public contacts with a variety of recreationists across the Bitterroot National Forest. Nathan is a high-school science teacher during the year and works for the Forest Service during the summer months. His 7th grade life science class has participated in an "Inspire" online collaboration with FS and other interested parties. They have done interactive video conferencing, studied grizzly bear recovery in the 5 recovery zones, studied grizzly bear diets, land space, etc. and ultimately gave class input on the delisting prospect of grizzly bears in the greater Yellowstone recovery zone. The COVID pandemic struck in March 2020 and the Bitterroot National Forest observed an increase in use at all recreation sites and trails that opened up. Forest employees took on additional duties to keep up with the increase in use and to ensure recreation sites were maintained for the safety of the public. The Forest was also short staffed due to not having the regular work crews, such as the YCC program or Trapper Creek Job Corps students. Historic ways of conducting business were altered. Instead of conducting face to face public contacts, employees visited with the public through their vehicles or from a greater distance and tried to reach people through more educational material posted on information boards.

The Bear Ranger Program faced challenges this year, due to the above-mentioned factors, but also due to a change in visitor demographics, conservation education programs being cancelled, and an increase in bear activity within front country developed recreation sites. Visitor demographics were hugely different than previous summers. There was a large influx of out of state visitors, new to the area and many new to Forest recreation. With this influx came a larger need for education on Leave No Trace principles, food storage etiquette, how to minimize interactions with wildlife, etc. The community events and conservation education programs with the schools that the Bear Ranger historically attended were also cancelled this year. There was an increase in bear activity this spring in the developed recreation sites.

To follow the new safety protocols in place for making public contacts and working in recreation sites, Nathan had to carry out the Bear Ranger duties in a different manner. Fewer public face to face contacts were made and Nathan primarily focused his efforts on posting educational signs (Bear Aware, Food Storage, and Responsible Recreation/LNT), ensuring volunteer campground hosts had educational material to make available to guests, visiting with the public when protocols could be followed, and working with district staff on bear sightings and conflict mitigations in developed recreation areas.

Prevent human-caused mortality throughout the plan period.

## Questions and Answers with the public

Hannah had a question for Chuck on BMU's, when do they have to be designated and if they correspond with forest planning timelines.

Chuck said he would have to defer to Jennifer Fortin-Noreus. Jennifer said there was not a timeline set in the recovery plan supplement for the Bitterroot. For those delineations the two things that are usually used are habitat standards and monitoring distribution of females with young. Currently we have no known females within the ecosystem or within the recovery zone so it's not a huge rush to get those delineated because we don't have a known population and given the slow dispersal rate of females and where they are currently at we have a little bit of time to get some habitat monitoring done.

Michele Dieterich: I am happy to hear that you are working on food storage orders and consistency. Is there any talk of coordinating with communities and bear aware communities? Chuck said in our discussion this morning we talked about getting community buy into what we do. In order to do that we need to establish a dialogue and a relationship with our local communities, which we are doing. Certainly, communities that have invested more as far as being bear aware we would definitely want them on board not only from the standpoint of having them on board but having them be our ambassadors for bear recovery and how to live with bears. Scott said it is a multi-prong approach to get food storage done successfully it has to be both on private land and public land. We discussed this morning how to move forward primarily on public lands and setting that example. It is essential to have coordination on both sides of the boundary if we're going to be successful.

Cheryl Probert: In order to have the best outcome for the bears, we definitely need to be involving communities. It would be great if communities who have been living with grizzly bears connect with communities that have not had bears and share their own knowledge and experiences.

Michele Dieterich: Also wondering about bear baiting in Idaho. Will the BMU affect that? And is there any analysis of the affect of bear baiting on connectivity.

Fish and Game in Idaho... good question. Right now the state of Idaho and the Fish and Game will allow bear baiting in Idaho, I don't know about any current literature or research being done on connectivity. It is important for us to get out with our sportsmen and talk about being bear aware.

Michele Dieterich: Yes thank you. Aren't there areas of Idaho that do not allow bear baiting and what made that happen?

JJ Teare: Michele, yes there are areas in Idaho where we restrict Bear Baiting due to increased potential with human/bear conflict. ie. Island Park. But we do allow baiting where G-bears are known to be present.