

Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk Mountains Grizzly Bear Ecosystems Update 10/3/2016

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(406) 293-4161 ext 205 wayne_kasworm@fws.gov Cabinet-Yaak Reports:
<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/grizzly/cabinetarchive.html>

Selkirk Mountains Research Captures

For the first time in more than 30 years, a grizzly bear was captured by wildlife biologists in Washington for radio-collaring and release so that more can be learned about this federally threatened and state endangered species.

On June 29 a young male grizzly bear was captured by a multi-agency team southeast of Sullivan Lake in Pend Oreille County in northeast Washington (Picture 1 attached). The bear was estimated to be five years old and weighed 365 pounds. It was radio collared and released at the site of capture in the Granite Creek drainage. This is only the second capture of a grizzly bear in the Washington with the first occurring in 1985 near Huff Lake in the Selkirk Mountains. A second bear was captured in Boundary Creek in Idaho on August 14. This individual was an adult female accompanied by at least one cub. The bear weighed 245 pounds. Both bears were fitted with GPS radio collars and are being monitored.

Five grizzly bears (2 females and 3 males) were captured in the Creston Valley by Dr. Michael Proctor in cooperation with the BC Conservation Officer Service from June through August of 2016. All of these animals were captured in the valley floor with the goal to determine how bears are using these lowland habitats. Another adult female was captured and radio collared about 10 miles northeast of Castlegar along the Kootenay River and released to the east in the Selkirk Mountains.

Cabinet-Yaak Research Captures

Two subadult females, three subadult males, and one adult male grizzly bear were captured in the Yaak River in the past several months. The first bear was captured on 18 July and weighed 190 pounds (Pictures 2 and 3 attached). She had been previously captured in 2014, but lost her collar in 2015. The second bear was estimated to be a three year old female captured on 15 August and weighed 200 pounds. The third individual was an older adult male captured on 18 August and weighing 435 pounds. The following day we captured a 2 or 3 year old male weighing 175 pounds. On 27 August another male was captured weighing 280 pounds and believed to be a 3 or 4 year old. All of these individuals were captured in Hellroaring Creek. On 22 September we captured a 260 pound male in Boulder Creek. The bear was estimated to be 3-4 years old. All bears were in good physical condition and fitted with GPS radio collars for monitoring.

Cabinet Mountains Augmentation

On 25 July we released an augmentation grizzly bear in the West Cabinet Mountains near Spar Lake. The bear was a 3 year-old male captured in the South Fork of the Flathead River about 20 miles south of Hungry Horse, MT. The bear weighed 205 pounds and was fitted with a GPS radio collar prior to release (Picture 4 attached). Radio locations since release have found this animal in upper Ross Creek and upper Spar Creek. Trapping for another augmentation bear was discontinued in early September because the huckleberry crop was well past the peak and hunting season was starting.

Monitoring is continuing on the remaining collared augmentation bear from 2014. She has spent most of the spring and summer in the northern portion of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, ranging from the North Fork of the Bull River as far north as Cedar Creek.

Selkirk Mountains Monitoring

We began 2016 monitoring 4 grizzly bears in the U.S. and 8 bears in BC. Several bears have lost collars and trapping has replaced most of them such that we are now monitoring 4 bears in the U.S. and 9 bears in BC. Current collared bears include 2 females and 2 males in the U.S. and 6 females and 3 males in BC. One collared female in the U.S. is accompanied by two yearlings. One of the radio collared males is a young male bear that was originally captured in the Yaak near the Idaho-Montana border and moved west across the Kootenai River during early September of 2015. He denned in the Selkirk Mountains during the winter of 2015-16. This is the second young male we have radio tracked moving from the Yaak area into the Selkirk Mountains just south of the international boundary. The first occurred in 2006 by another young male that was captured north of the international border, but moved from the Yaak to the Selkirk Mountains before losing his radio collar in the Mill Creek drainage of Washington.

Cabinet-Yaak Monitoring

We began 2016 monitoring 2 bears (female and male) in the Cabinet Mountains and 7 bears (3 females and 4 males) in the Yaak River. A male from the Cabinet Mountains could not be located during Autumn of 2015 but was located in Swift Creek north of Whitefish, MT during June of 2016. The collar was emitting a mortality signal, but the bear had lost the radio collar and was not dead. We are currently monitoring 2 bears in the Cabinet Mountains (female and male) and 11 bears in the Yaak (5 females and 6 males). A collared adult female in the Yaak is known to be accompanied by at least one yearling.

Human Caused Mortality

One young male grizzly was struck by a train and killed on 27 August south of the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge. No bears are known to have died thus far in 2016 in the Cabinet-Yaak.

Hair Snagging for Genetic Analysis

We are continuing to perform monthly check of rub trees in all study areas and place trail cameras at corrals to snag hair for genetic analysis (Pictures 5-7 attached). Corrals are left for 3-4 weeks before hair collection and removal. Corrals are equipped with a trail camera to record the presence of bears or other species. If bears do not leave hair we still have a picture of the animals involved and this is particularly useful for identifying females with young. During 2015 we checked over 600 rub trees in the Cabinet-Yaak. We are establishing more rubs in the Selkirk Mountains that will be checked on a monthly basis plus corrals with trail cameras that provide hair samples for genetic analysis.

Our genetic samples from 2015 are still being analyzed by the genetics laboratory. When complete we will finalize our 2015 monitoring reports for both these recovery areas.

Berry Production Monitoring

We annually sample several permanent berry production sites across the Cabinet-Yaak recovery area and more recently in the Selkirk Mountains. Our species of interest is mainly huckleberry, but we also sample serviceberry, buffaloberry, and mountain ash. We have conducted these annual measurements since 1989 in the Cabinet-Yaak and for the past 3 years in the Selkirk Mountains. Our 2016 sampling suggests the huckleberry crop was best described as "spotty". We had several sites with quite good production and several site with rather poor production. In 2015, most sites had lower than average huckleberry production. Another measure of the berry crop is the number of bear conflict reports that the agencies receive. This year has been fairly quiet so far, particularly when compared with 2015 when there were numerous conflict reports in Montana and north Idaho. However, we are approaching the time of

year when bears are looking for that last bit of food to add to their fat reserves prior to winter denning. Local residents are urged to keep their garbage, bird feeders, pet and livestock foods, and hunter harvested big game carcasses secure from bears. Also electric fencing can be used to protect livestock, chickens, fruit trees, and other potential bear attractants. Get some help with fencing at the web site below:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/beBearAware/bearAwareTools.html>

Conflict Captures

On 29 September an adult male grizzly was captured by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks personnel at a residence in the Yaak River where a pig had been killed. The bear had been previously captured in 2011 and 2014 as part of research efforts in the Yaak River, but was not wearing a radio collar at the 2016 capture. The bear weighed 525 pounds and was radio collared before being relocated about 25 miles north. This was the first known conflict issue for this bear.

Acknowledgements

These capture efforts and hair snagging are part of a research and monitoring effort including cooperators and funders from Birchdale Ecological (M. Proctor), British Columbia Conservation Officer Service, Colville National Forest, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Fish and Game, Idaho Panhandle National Forest, Kalispel Tribe, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Kootenai National Forest, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The effort is led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the Grizzly Bear Recovery Office but also supported by funding from the Idaho and Washington state offices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We also thank numerous private owners of timber lands that have granted access to their property for this research effort including: Caribou Mountain Lodge, Hancock Forest Management, Molpus Woodlands, Plum Creek Timber, and Stimson Lumber.



Picture 1. Grizzly bear male 1002 being measured and fitted with a radio collar in the Washington Selkirk Mountains. Biologists Tyler Vent and Alex Welander (left to right)



Picture 2. Grizzly bear female 836 in the Yaak River. Biologist Kirstie Yeager.



Picture 3. Grizzly bear female 836 in the Yaak River.



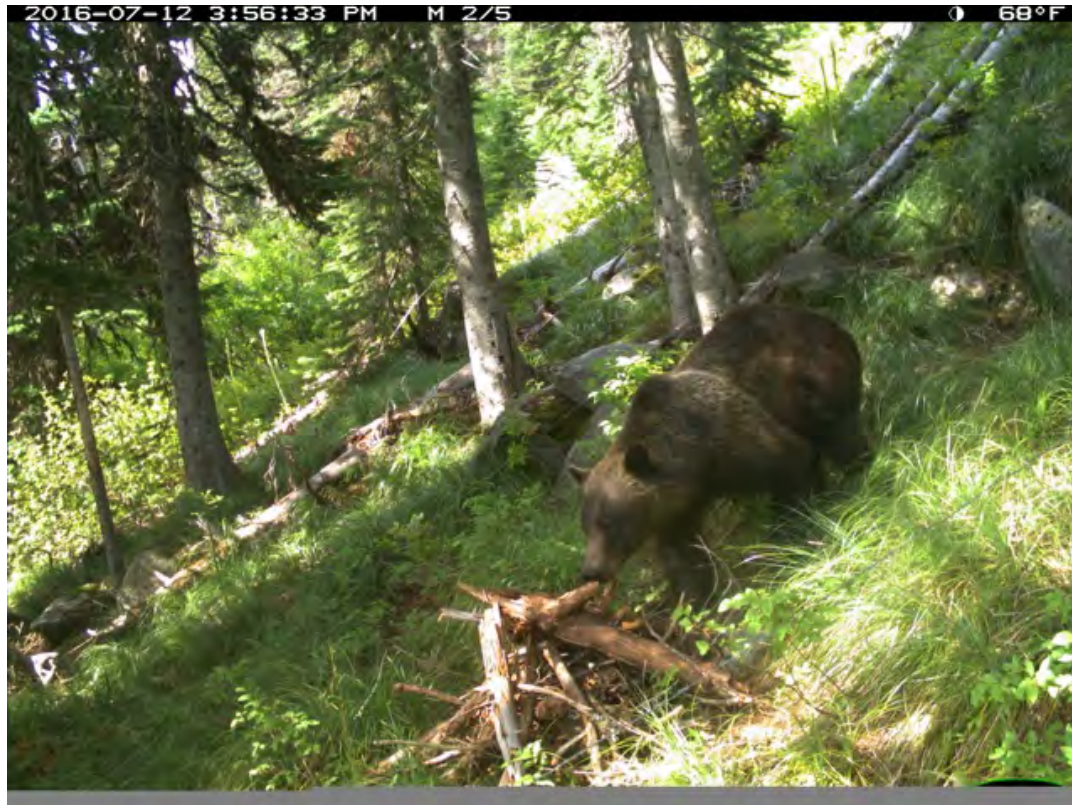
Picture 4. Augmentation grizzly bear male released in the Cabinet Mountains, July 2016. Biologist Erin Maxted.



Picture 5. Grizzly bear at a rub tree in the Selkirk Mountains.



Picture 6. Grizzly bear female with cub at a hair snag corral in the Selkirk Mountains.



Picture 7. Grizzly bear at a hair snag corral in the Selkirk Mountains.