

Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk Mountains Grizzly Bear Ecosystems Update 10/30/2017

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Reports: <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/es/grizzlyBear.php>

Trapping

Trapping in the Selkirk Mountains yielded seven captured grizzly bears during 2017. Two were subadult males, two were adult males and three were adult females. One of the captured adult females was accompanied by 3 cubs. Trapping occurred during May and June on or around the Boundary Creek Wildlife Management area with three of the male captures occurring during this time. Later in June trapping occurred in Cow and Smith Creek drainages with an adult male and an adult female being captured. During July, trapping shifted to the upper Priest River and 2 adult females were captured. Both of these bears had been previously captured in 2012. August trapping was shifted to the Pack River in the Hellroaring and Caribou drainages. No grizzly bears were captured during this effort. Thanks go to Idaho Fish and Game and the staff at the Boundary Creek Management area for assistance during the spring trapping effort. Also thanks Hancock Timber for access to private lands during our trapping efforts.

Three grizzly bears were captured in the Creston Valley by British Columbia (BC) biologists. Two (siblings) were relocated to the West Fork of the Yaak River, though only one was radio collared. The other bear was released at the capture site with a radio collar. This project is designed to track bears in the Creston Valley to investigate habitat use. The two relocated bears were later recaptured at a residence in the upper Yaak River where they were frequenting a bird feeder and eating grass on the lawn. The bears had visited several homes and been seen frequently. After capture and discussions with BC biologists, it was decided to split the pair and return one to BC and release the other in the U.S.

Five bears were captured in the Cabinet-Yaak. Two were subadult females, one adult female, one adult male, and one subadult male. The subadult male was captured in the Bear Creek drainage of the Cabinet Mountains during June. An adult male and a subadult female were captured in the East Fork of Pipe Creek during June. A subadult female was captured in August in 4th of July Creek and an adult female was captured in Hellroaring Creek during September.

Selkirk Mountains Monitoring

We began 2017 monitoring four grizzly bears in the U.S. and four bears in BC. Current collared bears in the US include two females with one accompanied by a yearling and one accompanied by two cubs and two males. We are monitoring four females in BC but could not get a visual to know their reproductive status. One of the radio collared males in the US 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 and 2016. Another young male captured at a Yaak River conflict site in 2016 has also recently moved to the Selkirk Mountains and is currently in BC. One of the collars placed on males during 2017 has come off due to neck size almost the same size as the head which makes it difficult to fit a collar. We also had three additional collars placed in previous years release as programmed by the detachment mechanism or have a spacer deteriorate and fall off. All collars that came off were retrieved.

Cabinet-Yaak Monitoring

We began 2017 monitoring two augmentation bears (female and male) in the Cabinet Mountains and 10 bears (three females and seven males) in the Yaak River. Ten of those collars came off during 2017 and all were retrieved. The adult male lost his radio collar after about 2 weeks. The bear was in very good condition with a neck of greater circumference than his head and therefore difficulty in retaining a collar.

The 2016 augmentation male from the Cabinet Mountains could not be located during November or December of 2016 but was located in early May of 2017 and he lost his collar during June of 2017. The download of his radio collar revealed extensive movements to the south end of the recovery area during November and December of 2016 prior to denning on Graves Peak in Deep Creek about 12 miles north of Thompson Falls, MT . He emerged from his den in early April and has since returned to the main Cabinet Mountains Wilderness where he lost his collar in June of 2017. Figure 1 traces his route from November when we lost his signal south to his den and then from den emergence north to his location in May.

Another interesting movement of a native male originally collared in Hellroaring Creek in the Yaak is displayed in Figure 2. This animal was captured in August of 2016 and I lost his signal for a significant amount of time in 2017 but located the collar again in August and retrieved the collar in September when it had come off the bear. This is the third male bear we have identified moving into the Cabinet Mountains in the last five years. No movements into the Cabinet Mountains were detected by telemetry or other means in the preceding 30 years. While this is good news, we ultimately want to see evidence of gene flow (breeding and successful reproduction).

Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk Mountains Human Caused Mortality

No bears are known to have died in the Cabinet-Yaak thus far in 2017. We are aware of two male mortalities in the Selkirks thus far in 2017. One was a self-defense in BC and the other was a case of mistaken identity by a black bear hunter in the U.S.

Hair collection and Genetics

We have completed our hair collections at rub trees and corrals with cameras. All samples will be screened to determine which will be sent to the genetics laboratory for analysis. During 2017 we checked almost 800 rub trees and 50 corrals in the Cabinet-Yaak and almost 200 rub trees and 160 corrals in the Selkirks.

Our genetic results from 2016 came back during September and we are still summarizing the data. Using all data from rubs, corrals, and captures, we got DNA from 28 different bears in the Selkirks (18 Males : 10 Females) and 34 in the Cabinet-Yaak (20 Males : 14 Females). We will finalize our 2016 monitoring reports soon for both these recovery areas with this information. Several pictures from captures and trail cameras follow in this update.

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, Stimson Lumber, and Weyerhaeuser Timber.

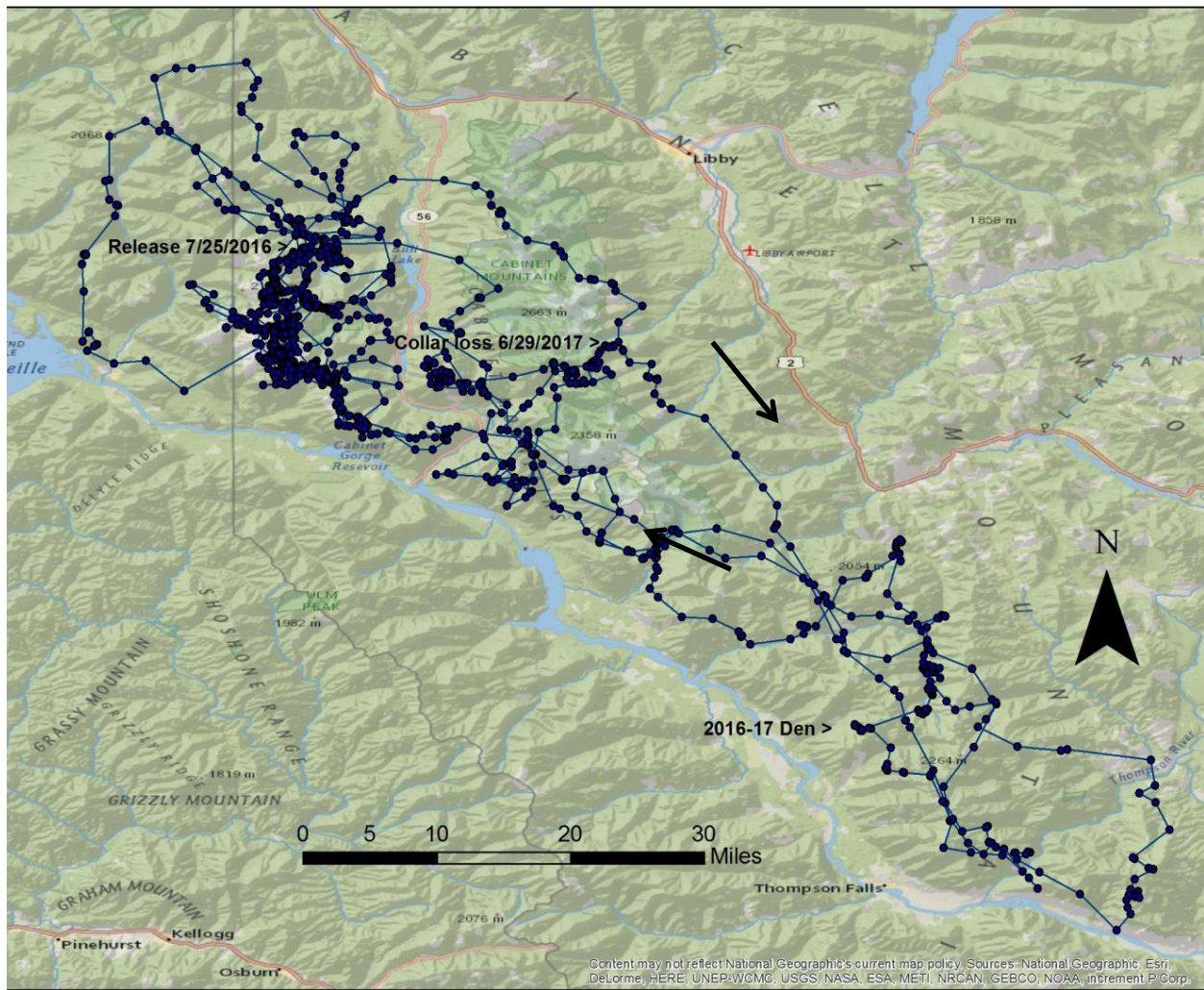


Figure 1. Locations of male augmentation grizzly bear 926 in the Cabinet Mountains from his release in July of 2016 to collar loss in June of 2017. The lines link subsequent locations.

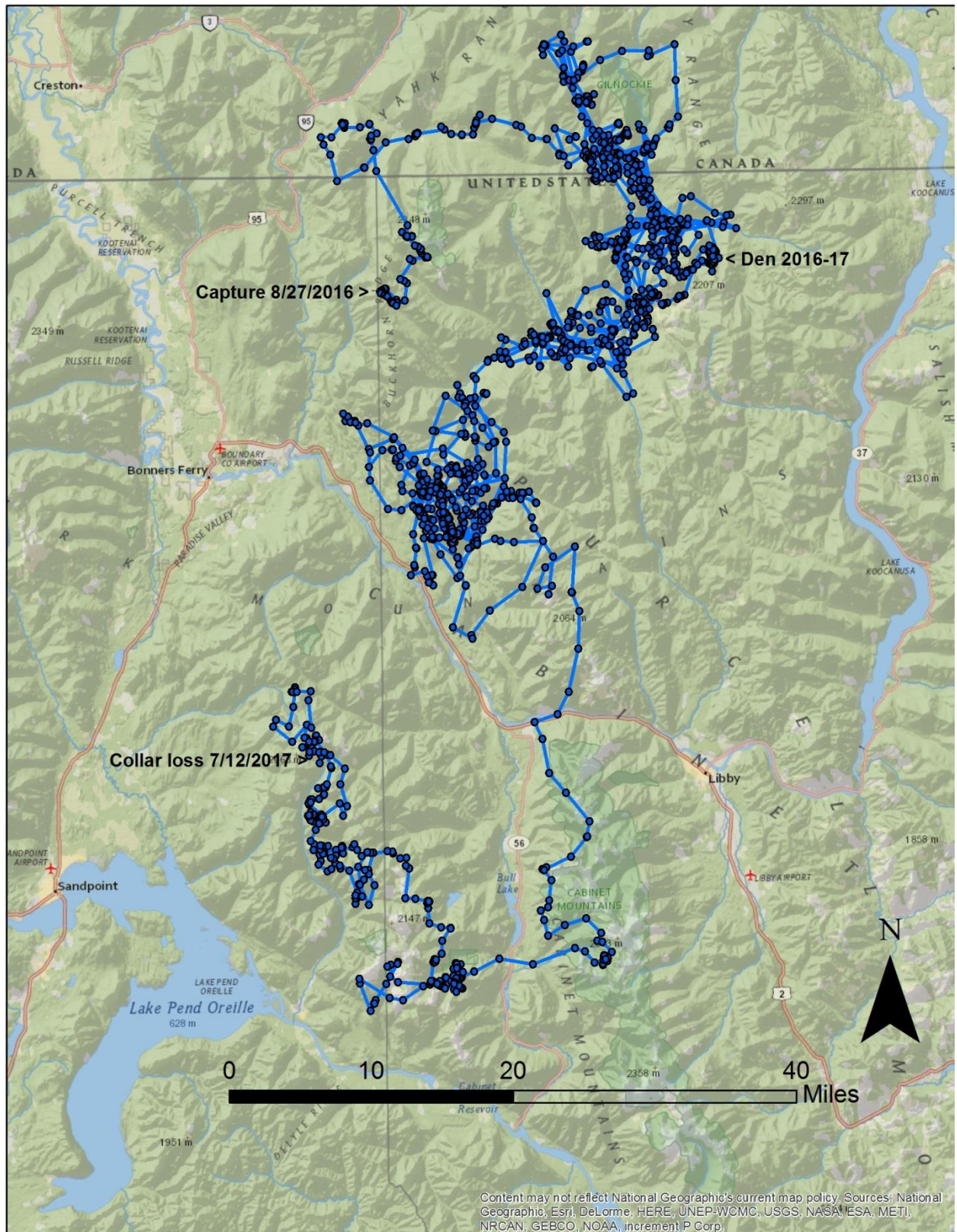


Figure 2. Locations of male grizzly bear 821 in the Yaak River and Cabinet Mountains from capture in August of 2016 to collar loss in July of 2017. The lines link subsequent locations.



Figure 3. Female grizzly bear 2003 with 3 cubs post capture in the Selkirk Mountains, 2017.



Figure 4. Female grizzly bear 810 at a capture site in the Yaak River, 2017.

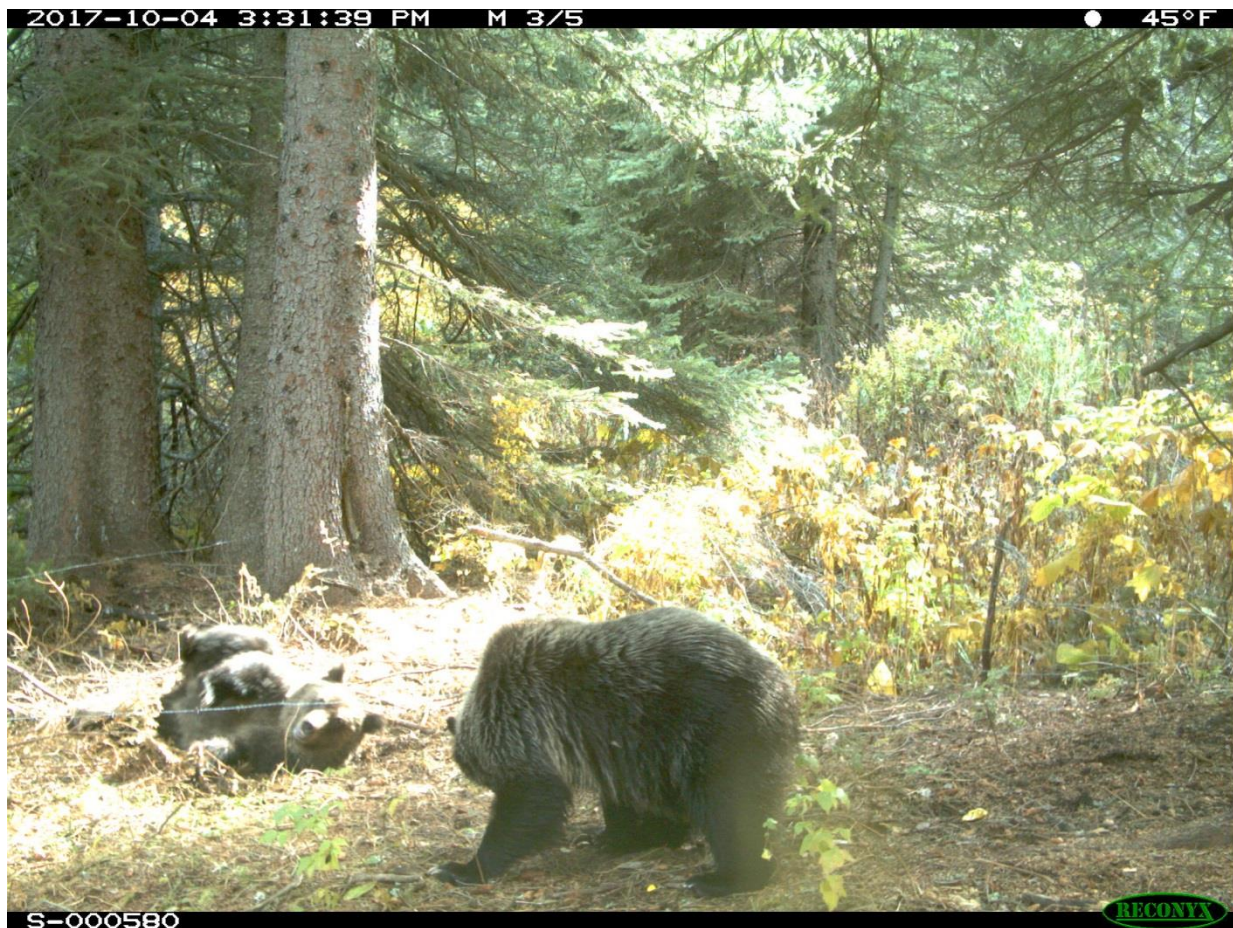


Figure 1. Young grizzly bears at a corral hair snagging site in the Cabinet Mountains, 2017.



Figure 2. Female grizzly bear with young at a hair snag corral in the Selkirk Mountains, 2017.