



Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem

Spring Meeting Notes

Tuesday, April 30, 2019
Hilton Garden Inn, 1840 US Hwy 93 South, Kalispell, MT

Welcome provided by NCDE Chair, Jeff Mow and Vice-Chair, Randy Arnold.

DOT Representative to NCDE Update

- Jim Williams introduced Joe Weigand, Missoula District biologist for the Montana Department of Transportation. Supported by the NCDE Sub-Committee, Joe will be now be joining the NCDE sub-committee working on habitat connectivity and working relationships. The goal is to keep wildlife moving across highways and people safe.
 - MDT is glad to be a partner. Collaboration with agencies and public entities are so important. MDT in conjunction with USFWS and CSKT have created a working group with local agencies and experts to address bear mortalities on US 93.
 - Planning now for I15 and I90 projects is timely. Subdivisions proving to be problematic with loss of space through corridors.
 - Bears crossing Highway 93, in 2018 had total of six grizzly deaths. Private driveways and road intersections make ensuring success of crossing structures difficult due to gaps in wildlife exclusion fence. More fencing is planned and the use of a new electric paving which acts similar to cattle guards are being researched.

NCDE Conservation Strategy Update

- The NCDE Conservation Plan was shared with the IGBC at the last meeting. Not all agencies have signed the strategy plan which are waiting for minor edits. Vice-Chair Randy Arnold shared a flow chart for the protocol for proposed changes.
 - Proposed changes to the Conservation Strategies will be submitted to the editor. Editor determines if proposed change is only grammatical or clarifying, if the answer is yes, the editor makes the change and posts to “Summary of Editorial Changes”.
 - If the answer is not sure, the proposed change will be submitted to the NCDE Subcommittee.
 - The NCDE Subcommittee Consensus Vote on whether it is simple grammatical or clarifying if the determination is yes, the editor makes the change and posts to “Summary of Changes”.
 - If No, assign a group to review proposed change and the recommendation is brought back to the NCDE Subcommittee.
 - Next NCDE Meeting:
 - Discuss proposed change
 - Take public comment
 - Consensus vote on making recommended change.
- Move forward with caution on way the wording is submitted; dependent on Chapter and research. Even minor changes can affect documentation with other agencies which has adopted this plan into their agency plans.
- The Subcommittee agreed in spirit and asked members to send comments concerning the flow chart to Randy Arnold. In the interim the Subcommittee will follow this protocol.
- The NCDE Conservation Strategy Plan may be found on the IGBC website. Randy will follow up with Dillion on capturing changes. Version date will reflect which is most current.

NCDE Conservation Strategy Changes (continued)

- Joe Ashsor, BLM representative shared the BLM suggested editorial changes to the NCDE Appendix 11. BLM propose making the changes and documenting it to the Summary of Editorial Changes to the 2018 NCDE Conservation Strategy document.
 - Suggested edits:
 - Remove “Draft” and for Management Zone 1 from the title of Appendix 11 to accurately reflect that the Appendix contains standards for Zone 1, Zone 2 and PCA. Add “for Missoula, Butte and Lewiston Field Offices”
 - Add “for Zone 1” to the first header Road Density Standard to accurately reflect the Zone 1 strategy standards.
 - Add Header “Road Density Standards for PCA” before the 4th and 5th paragraph of Appendix 11 to accurately reflect that these management standards apply to PCA lands.
 - Remove “Missoula Field Office” from paragraph 4 of Appendix 11 to accurately reflect that the PCA road density standards apply to all BLM lands with PCA, not just the Missoula Field Office. Begin the paragraph with “Baseline levels of secure core, OMRD and TMRD will be maintained in each BMU subunit”. “Insert “each” before “field office” at the end of the paragraph.
- Consensus to make changes from the Subcommittee.

Update on Governor’s Advisory Committee – Randy Arnold

- Mid-March Governor Bullock announced that he would establish a Grizzly Bear Advisory Council to help initiate a statewide discussion on grizzly bear management, conservation and recovery. The state has received an overwhelming response to sit on the council. The Governor is planning less than twenty to serve on the council and participants will range throughout Montana. NCDE and IGBC will not participate on the council only upon request for their expertise.
 - Objectives include:
 - Maintaining and enhancing human safety
 - Ensuring a healthy and sustainable grizzly bear population
 - Improving timely and effective response to conflicts involving grizzly bears.
 - Engaging all partners in grizzly-related outreach and conflict prevention.
 - Improving intergovernmental, interagency, and tribal coordination.
- The Governor is planning broad public meetings similar to NCDE. The first meeting is planned in June.

Subcommittee Mortality Review

Hilary Cooley

- 2018 seen a high rate of a total of 51 grizzly bear mortalities.
- Mortality rate data from 1975-2018 reveal 91% human caused, 5% natural and 4% undetermined. Higher mortality rates are seen on privately owned lands.
- 2018 seen a high rate of grizzlies killed on Highway 93; six deaths were documented. In one incident one sow and her cubs were all killed. Percentage for 2018 includes:
 - 22 % Poached/malicious activity
 - 12% Defense of life
 - 8% Taken by hunters, mistaken identity for black bears
 - 6% Site conflicts/defense of property
 - 15% Site conflict/removed by agency
 - 12% Livestock related
 - 13% Vehicle/Train
 - 3% Removed

- 10% other, accidentally killed
 - Through monitoring and site identification grizzlies are expanding out of the DNA. Pushing out of the area they are seeing a higher mortality rate. Yellowstone guides are completing a mandatory bear training and use of bear spray and work continues with ranchers and livestock defecation through education - proper storage of grains, electric fencing, etc.
 - IGBC has requested input from NCDE for recommendations to decrease grizzly mortalities. Input is due to the IGBC in time for their meeting on June 25, in Missoula.
 - Primary list – could go with top 6, or a smaller group of bear specialists.
 - Recommendations – What are we going to do on highways and livestock protection?
 - Implementation Strategy
- A small group of bear biologists from USFS, NPS, FWP and CKST will work on this request. Hillary will oversee the project and work with biologist to have the information to the IGBC by the end of May.

2019 NCDE Work Plan – Jeff Mow

- Housekeeping
 - I &E Chairs will be added to the table.
 - Science subcommittee – future plans, not yet implemented.
 - IGBC Summer Meeting
- Work Plan spreadsheet (All agencies follow the same template). Jeff shared the NCDE Work Plan with the IGBC prior to their last meeting.
- There are three main categories of the plan:
 - Delisting, on-hold
 - Response to Conflicts
 - Indicate engagement – address connectively.
- Jeff and Randy will review Work Plan and share with the Subcommittee.

Region 4 Prairie Zone 3 Spring Plans -Gary Bertellotti

- Accomplishments and Updates
 - Grizzly expansion continue increases in the prairie.
 - Carcass pick-up and delivery to the Valier dump; which is fenced.
 - Delay rehiring the driver position due to CDL and other requirements.
 - Prevention
 - Livestock grains education and outreach in Stanford and Lewiston areas.
 - Working with private landowners, building relationship through education to prevent conflicts.
 - Bear tracks were found on private land in the Beartooth.
 - Three sightings of the same bear in the Jennifer Range, lost sighting in mid-December.
 - Eastern areas still showing way out of outreach and education; still in the “react” mode.
 - Continue outreach in the future however, limited staff and funding is available. Will continue to search for available funding.

Science Team Update/Trend Monitoring Cecily Costello

- Integrated population (UM,GYE,CY)
- Human Survey (University of Montana)
- Den chronology (CY, GYE and Gates of Artic)
- Isotope Study
- CKST fence study
- GNP Moth Studies- working with Amy Secrest on Cut throat and moths
- Parentage from DNA samples (USGS)
- Huckleberry Study (USGS)
- Highway 2 Study – John Waller (NPS), Tabitha Graves (USGS), Joe Weigand, (MDT)
- Habitat use analyses – long term – fire and fire management

Agency/Tribal Updates

USGS Bear Projects Update- Claudia Regan

- Published in 2017 the USGS Collaboration Potential of Movement between the NCDE and GYE.
- Connectivity – links on the USGS website for published material and project updates.
- Huckleberry Mapping – Tabitha Graves is tracking huckleberry productivity in Glacier NP and the Swan and the affects to bears.

USFWS Hilary Cooley

- Delisting
- Working on GYE, field stage no briefing yet; due by end of May.
- Annual agency report
- Draft Strategic Plan identifying focus
 - In addition vehicle collisions
 - Bitterroot Survey
 - Continue work in the Yack
 - Communication w/ multi agencies
 - North Cascades – DOI Environmental Assessment- NPS handling comments and moving forward.

USFS Updates Chip Weber

- The new Forest Plan was signed on December 24, 2018. The purpose of the new plan is to put in place continued conservation for grizzly populations. Working with multiple agencies on “Shared Stewardships” working hand in hand.
- Succession management upon retirements. With Kathy retiring we are looking at ways to meet the needs; we all need to consider succession management.
- USFS bear safety plan is available for forest workers and those working in forests. Increase bear activity this provides information on how to work in bear country safely.
- The USFS is under USDA and now email mail address will reflect this. Please use same name@usda.gov
- USFS is adding a bear biologist for the Swan.
- Amendments for other plans
 - Helena-Lewis & Clark – Conservation Plan

CSKT/Tribal Updates

CSKT Stacy Courville

- Four grizzlies were collared last year, one collar signal has been lost. Plan to collar four more this year.
- 10 grizzlies were lost last year on Highway 93.
- The pair of yearling are on the move, the last sighting was February 22.

Blackfeet Dustin Weatherwax

- Blackfeet Tribal Council continue to work on the Grizzly Management Plan.

BLM

- 90 day comment period – ending May 17.
- BLM is in support of the Range Riders.
- Need for food storage orders – statewide.

Wildlife Services/Ag Board Updates Kraig Glaser

- April 1 – 20, 12 cattle defecations, captured sub-adult male grizzly which was removed. Cannot confirm all deaths were grizzly related.
- Wildlife Service Workshop is planned with research teams sharing information on preservation with producers.

- Addition of wildlife specialist for Glacier County/Blackfeet.

Education Updates Lori Roberts

- 20 grant proposals totaling \$68,000 will help fund the Kootenai Bear Rangers, Bridging the Gap and spring talks. The committee will review additional educational needs.
- Kate Smith and Dillion Tabish will make updates on the IGBC and FWP-Bear Advisory Council websites.

NCDE Subcommittee Leadership Changes Jeff Mow/Randy Arnold

- Presentation to Jeff Mow, NCDE Chair (2017-2019) in appreciation for the last two years of service. Randy Arnold, current vice chair will now move to the Chair for the NCDE for the next two years. Bill Avey was nominated to be the next vice-chair and a unanimous vote the subcommittee approved the nomination. Sara Mayben, USFS – Lewis & Clark NF accepted on behalf of Bill.

Public Comment

- Concern of the Flathead National Forest additional 79 miles of bike trails and the Whitefish race to Big Mountain through prime grizzly habitat.
- Conservation since 2011 there has been a high impact of tourism over 400,000 people using the same lands of 1,000 grizzly bears. Caution on land agencies for preservation.
- Agriculture provides large landscapes which are prime habit for grizzly bears. Agencies need to work with ranchers.
- Would like to see park wide food storage orders for all agencies.
- Statement of Lolo NF has reopened nine miles of roads that were closed and the Swan sixty miles were reversed. Who is keeping track of all the reversals and accumulative effects on conservation? (Unconfirmed)

Adjourned at 3:45pm.

Attending Subcommittee members:

Chair, Jeff Mow – Vice Chair, Randy Arnold - Lolo NF Supervisor, Carolyn Upton – BLM Great Falls, Mark Albers – FWP R-4 Great Falls, Gary Bertellotti – USFS Flathead NF, Chip Weber – USFS Helena Lewis/Clark, Sara Mayben – MT DNRC, Ross Baty – FWP, Jim Williams – USFS, Ben Conrad – Kootenai NF, Bryn Donner – USGS, Claudia Regan - FWP, Cecily Costello – CSKT, Stacy Courville – MDT, Joe Weigand and Chair Assistant, Connie Stahr.

An estimated 60 guests attended this meeting.