

GRIZZLY BEAR MANAGEMENT CAPTURES, RELOCATIONS AND REMOVALS IN NORTHWEST WYOMING

2006 ANNUAL REPORT



Submitted to the Wyoming Legislature's Joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Interim Committee, and this report is available to the public at each Wyoming Game and Fish Department Regional Office and on the Department's website at http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife_management/grizzly/index.asp. This report is in partial fulfillment of the requirements in Wyoming Statute 23-1-1001. All questions about this report or its content should be directed to Mark Bruscano, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, 2820 State Highway 120, Cody, WY 82414, (307) 527-7125, Mark.Bruscano@wgf.state.wy.us

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December 2006

Introduction

Human-bear interactions and conflicts are typically a result of bears seeking unnatural foods in association with people, property, or when they kill livestock. The number and location of human-bear conflicts is influenced by unsecured unnatural attractants (e.g. human foods and garbage), natural food distribution and abundance, and human and livestock use patterns on the landscape.

Capturing bears in areas where they may come into conflict with people and relocating them to remote wildland settings is a common practice used where humans and bears live together throughout the world. Relocating bears serves several social and conservation functions: 1) relocating a bear from an area where the potential for conflict is high reduces the chance of property damage, livestock damage, or human interactions; 2) relocating bears reduces the potential for bears to become food conditioned or human habituated which often times results in destructive or dangerous behaviors; 3) relocating a bear may allow the bear to forage on natural foods and remain wary of people, preventing its removal from the population, which may be beneficial in meeting population management objectives.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department routinely relocates and removes black and grizzly bears as part of normal Department operations. The decision to relocate or remove a bear is made after considering a number of variables including age and sex of the animal, behavioral traits, health, physical injuries, type of conflict, known history of the animal, and population management objectives. Grizzly bears are relocated after consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and in accordance with Federal law, regulation, and policy.

In 2005 the Wyoming Legislature enacted House Bill 203, which created Wyoming Statute 23-1-1001 (Appendix I). This statute requires the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to:

- (a) Upon relocating a grizzly bear or upon receiving notification that a grizzly bear is being relocated, the department shall provide notification to the county sheriff of the county to which the bear is relocated within five (5) days of each grizzly bear relocation and shall issue a press release to the media and sheriff in the county where each grizzly bear is relocated;
- (b) The notice and press release shall provide the following information:
 - (i) The date of the grizzly bear relocation;
 - (ii) The number of grizzly bears relocated; and
 - (iii) The location of the grizzly bear relocation, as provided by commission rule and regulation;
- (c) No later than January 15 of each year the department shall submit an annual report to the joint travel, recreation, wildlife and cultural resources interim committee. The annual report shall include the total number and relocation area of each grizzly bear relocated during the previous calendar year. The department shall also make available the annual report to the public.

Subsequently, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission promulgated regulations in Chapter 58 (Appendix II) of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission regulations to further direct the implementation of Wyoming statute 23-1-1001.

This report satisfies the requirements set forth in section (c) of the statute and provides additional information on grizzly bear captures, relocations and removals in Wyoming during 2006.

Grizzly Bear Management Captures, Relocations, and Removals

During 2006, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department captured 18 grizzly bears on 16 occasions in an attempt to prevent or resolve conflicts. Twelve captures were of individual bears while 4 captures were of family groups or siblings consisting of 2 or more bears. All eighteen bears (100%) were initially relocated from areas where they were causing conflicts with livestock or property, or moved preemptively to avoid conflicts (Fig. 1). One bear (#518) was later killed by management authorities because of having a history of being involved in previous conflicts, a known history of being in close association with humans, and was deemed unsuitable for release into the wild. One family group of bears (#472, G110, G111) were relocated twice after the family returned to the original capture location and continued to eat grain at a cattle feed lot operation. Three bears (17%) were non-target captures and were moved to a safe release site away from humans (Fig. 1).

One bear (5%) was captured in Fremont County with the remaining 17 bears (95%) in Park County (Table 1). Of the 18 bears moved from their capture sites, 12 (67%) were released in Teton County, 1 (5%) in Fremont County, and 5 (28%) were released in Park County (Table 1). All bears relocated because of conflicts or moved preemptively to prevent conflicts (n=18) were released in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone (RZ) (n=17) and on U.S. Forest Service lands with the exception of Bear #519. Bear #519 was captured in April and snow conditions prevented his release at a suitable site in the RZ therefore he was released in occupied grizzly bear habitat on the Inberg-Roy Wildlife Habitat Management Unit (Fig. 1).

All independent bears (>2years old, n=10) that were relocated were fitted with a VHF radio tracking collar to allow for their movements to be documented after being released. Movement and location data was obtained approximately every 7-14 days after release. Relocated bears wearing radio collars moved a mean distance of 31.1 miles from the release site to their last known location in 2006. Two adult bears and two dependant young that were relocated in 2006 returned to their original capture site and continued to cause conflicts. One female with 2 cubs of the year were relocated a second time, and one sub-adult female was euthanized. One additional relocated bear (#523) was killed in an encounter with a hunter during the fall of 2006. Seven of the 9 bears (78%) that remained alive were in the grizzly bear RZ as of their last known location in 2006.

Notification to the County Sheriff and the Media

Within 5-days of releasing a grizzly bear, the county Sheriff was notified by e-mail and a press release was distributed to all local media contacts in the county where the bear was released. The media release contained information on the location of the grizzly bear release, the number of grizzly bears relocated, the date of the relocation and the reason the grizzly bear was relocated (Table 1).

Table 1. Date, bear numbers, number, capture location, release site, and reasons for capturing, relocating or removing grizzly bears.

Date	Bear No.	Number of Bears	Capture County	Relocation Site	Relocation County	Reason	Comments
4/30/2006	519	1	Park	Bear Creek	Fremont	Cattle Depredation	Snow prohibited release in recovery zone
6/1/2006	G105, G106	2	Park	Thorofare Creek	Teton	Residential Area	Preemptive-relocated to a remote area
6/5/2006	523	1	Park	Togwotee Pass	Teton	Human Food Reward	Being fed by resident
6/14/2006	G107	1	Park	Middle Boone Creek	Teton	Food Reward	Bird Feeders
6/16/2006	525	1	Park	Moccasin Basin	Teton	Cattle Depredation	Relocated to an area with no livestock
6/26/2006	G108	1	Park	Sunlight Creek	Park	Food Reward	Bird Feeders
7/20/2006	304	1	Fremont	Sunlight Creek	Park	Cattle Depredation	Relocated to an area with no livestock
7/21/2006	530	1	Park	Cascade Creek	Teton	Cattle Depredation	Relocated to an area with no livestock
8/13/2006	505	1	Park	Togwotee Pass	Teton	Residential Area	Apple Trees
9/14/2006	540	1	Park	Pilot Creek	Park	Residential Area	Preemptive-relocated to a remote area
9/24/2006	472, G110, G111	3	Park	Jackass Creek	Teton	Food Reward	Grain at feed lot
9/27/2006	G112, G113	2	Park	Sunlight Creek	Park	Residential Area	Preemptive-relocated to a remote area
9/29/2006	518	1	Park	North Boone Creek	Teton	Food Reward	Grain at feed lot
10/4/2006	542	1	Park	Togwotee Pass	Teton	Residential Area	Preemptive-relocated to a remote area
10/21/2006	472, G110, G111	3	Park	Squirrel Creek	Teton	Food Reward	Grain at feed lot-2nd relocation
11/3/2006	518	1	Park	NA - Killed	NA	Food Reward	Grain at feed lot- previously moved-killed

Appendix I. State of Wyoming's Grizzly Bear Relocation Statute

ARTICLE 10 GRIZZLY BEAR RELOCATION

23-1-1001. Grizzly bear relocation.

(a) Upon relocating a grizzly bear or upon receiving notification that a grizzly bear is being relocated, the department shall provide notification to the county sheriff of the county to which the bear is relocated within five (5) days of each grizzly bear relocation and shall issue a press release to the media and sheriff in the county where each grizzly bear is relocated.

(b) The notice and press release shall provide the following information:

(i) The date of the grizzly bear relocation;

(ii) The number of grizzly bears relocated; and

(iii) The location of the grizzly bear relocation, as provided by commission rule and regulation.

(c) No later than January 15 of each year the department shall submit an annual report to the joint travel, recreation, wildlife and cultural resources interim committee. The annual report shall include the total number and relocation area of each grizzly bear relocated during the previous calendar year. The department shall also make available the annual report to the public.

Appendix II. Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Grizzly Bear Relocation Regulation

WYOMING GAME AND FISH COMMISSION

CHAPTER 58

NOTIFICATION OF GRIZZLY BEAR RELOCATION REGULATION

Section 1. Authority. This regulation is promulgated by authority of W.S. §23-1-1001.

Section 2. Regulation. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission hereby adopts the following regulation governing notification to the County Sheriff and the media of grizzly bear relocations in the State of Wyoming. This regulation shall remain in effect until modified or rescinded by the Commission.

Section 3. Definitions. For the purpose of this regulation, definitions shall be as set forth in Title 23, Wyoming Statutes and the Commission also adopts the following definitions:

(a) "County Sheriff" means the County Sheriff's Office in the county where a grizzly bear is relocated.

(b) "Location of the grizzly bear relocation" means the proper name of the drainage in which a grizzly bear is relocated and the estimated number of miles from the relocation site to the nearest municipality, topographical feature or geographic location.

(c) "Provide a press release" means the department shall provide to the County Sheriff and the media in the county in which a grizzly bear is relocated, a press release including the location of the grizzly bear relocation, number of grizzly bears relocated, date of the relocation and the reason the grizzly bear was relocated.

Section 4. Notification of relocation.

(a) Upon relocating a grizzly bear or upon receiving notification that a grizzly bear is being relocated, the department shall notify the County Sheriff of the date, number of grizzly bears relocated, the location of the grizzly bear relocation and the reason of the relocation via direct telephone conversation, written or electronic correspondence, or personal contact within five (5) days of the date of the relocation. The department shall provide a press release to the County Sheriff and the media in the county where a grizzly bear is relocated of the date, number of grizzly bears relocated, the location of the grizzly bear relocation and the reason of the relocation within five (5) days of the date of relocation of any grizzly bear.

Section 5. Savings Clause. If any provision of this regulation is held to be illegal or unconstitutional, such a ruling shall not affect other provisions of this regulation which can be given effect without the illegal or unconstitutional provision; and, to this end the provisions of this regulation are severable.

WYOMING GAME AND FISH COMMISSION

By: Linda Fleming, President

Dated: July 12, 2005