



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT GRIZZLY BEAR MANAGEMENT CAPTURES, RELOCATIONS, AND REMOVALS IN NORTHWEST WYOMING

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Photo of grizzly bear captured in a corn field (WGFD).

Submitted to the Wyoming Legislature's Joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Interim Committee. This report is available to the public at the Wyoming Game and Fish Department Headquarters Office, Regional Offices and on the Department website at <https://wgfd.wyo.gov>. This report is in fulfillment of the requirements in Wyoming Statute §23-1-1001(c). Questions about this report or its content can be directed to Brian DeBolt, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, 260 Buena Vista, Lander, WY 82520, (307) 332-2688, brian.debolt@wyo.gov

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Wyoming Game and Fish Department
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Introduction

In Wyoming, *grizzly bear conflicts* are defined as “interactions between grizzly bears, people and their property, resulting in damage to pets, livestock or bees, non-natural food rewards, animal caused human injury or death, and human caused injury or death to an animal other than legal hunting or a management action.” Human-grizzly bear interactions and conflicts in Wyoming are a result of an abundance, and in some areas, an over-abundance of bears seeking unnatural foods in association with people and property, close encounters with humans, or when bears kill livestock. Proactive prevention is the goal of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) in minimizing conflicts. However, the number and location of human-grizzly bear conflicts is influenced by the availability of unsecured unnatural attractants (e.g. human foods and garbage), seasonal distribution and abundance of natural foods, grizzly bear density and distribution, and human and livestock use patterns on the landscape. For purposes of this report, we will be referring directly to grizzly bears in regards to any management actions and numbers provided therein. Any relocation or removal of grizzly bears in Wyoming is dependent upon authorization from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after careful and thorough deliberation taking into account multiple factors unique to each conflict situation.

Management techniques used around the world to reduce human-grizzly bear conflicts are employed by the Department, including the capture and relocation of problem individuals. While proactive outreach, education and preventative measures are the foundation of grizzly bear conflict management, hands-on mitigation techniques are a requisite in many conflicts. Relocation achieves several social and conservation functions: (a) it reduces the chance of property damage, livestock damage, or human interactions in areas where the potential for conflict is high; (b) it reduces the potential for grizzly bears to become food conditioned and/or human habituated which often results in destructive and/or dangerous behaviors; (c) it allows grizzly bears the opportunity to forage on natural foods and remain wary of people; and (d) it could prevent removing grizzly bears from the population which may be beneficial in maintaining recovery criteria and population management objectives.

In addition to capture and relocation, the Department also removes grizzly bears, (lethally or by live placement into a zoo or other facility) in response to human-grizzly bear conflicts, when necessary, as part of routine management operations. All grizzly bear management actions were conducted in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The decision to relocate or remove a grizzly bear is made after considering a number of factors including the age and sex of the animal, behavioral traits, health status, physical injuries or abnormalities, type of conflict, severity of conflict, known history of the animal, human safety concerns, availability of suitable relocation sites, and population management objectives. Grizzly bears are relocated or removed in accordance with Federal and State law, regulation, and policy.

In 2005, the Wyoming Legislature enacted House Bill 203, which created Wyoming Statute §23-1-1001 that requires the 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 grizzly 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 Chapter 58: Notification of Grizzly Bear Relocation Regulation (Appendix I) to further direct the implementation of Wyoming Statute §23-1-1001.

This report satisfies the requirements set forth in Wyoming Statute §23-1-1001(c) and provides additional information on grizzly bear captures, relocations, and removals by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in Wyoming during 2023.

Grizzly Bear Management Captures, Relocations, and Removals

During 2023, the Department captured 23 individual grizzly bears in an attempt to prevent or resolve conflicts (Table 1, Figure 1). Of the 23 individual captures, 7 were female (4 adults, 2 sub-adults and 1 two year old) and 16 were male (10 adults, 2 sub-adults, 2 two year olds and 2 yearling) grizzly bears.

Of the 23 capture events, 11 captures were a result of bears killing livestock (cattle, sheep, and chickens), and 12 were captures involving bears that obtained food rewards (pet, livestock food, garbage, fruit trees), or were frequenting developed sites or human populated areas unsuitable for grizzly bear occupancy. Of the 23 capture events, 16 (69%) were in Park County, 3 (13%) were in Hot Springs County, 3 (13%) were in Sublette County, and 1 (5%) was in Teton County (Table 1).

Of the 23 capture events, there were 9 relocation events (Table 1, Figure 2). All of the relocated grizzly bears were released on U.S. Forest Service lands in or adjacent to the Primary Conservation Area/Recovery Zone. Of the 9 relocation events, 4 were conducted in Park County (45%) and 5 (55%) in Teton County (Table 1).

Grizzly bears are removed from the population due to a history of previous conflicts, a known history of close association with humans, or if they are deemed unsuitable for release into the wild (e.g. orphaned cubs, poor physical condition, or human safety concern). Of the 23 grizzly bears captured, 14 bears were removed from the population. Of these 14 removals, 6 (43%) were outside of the Demographic Monitoring Area, which is the area considered suitable for the long term viability of grizzly bears in the GYE.

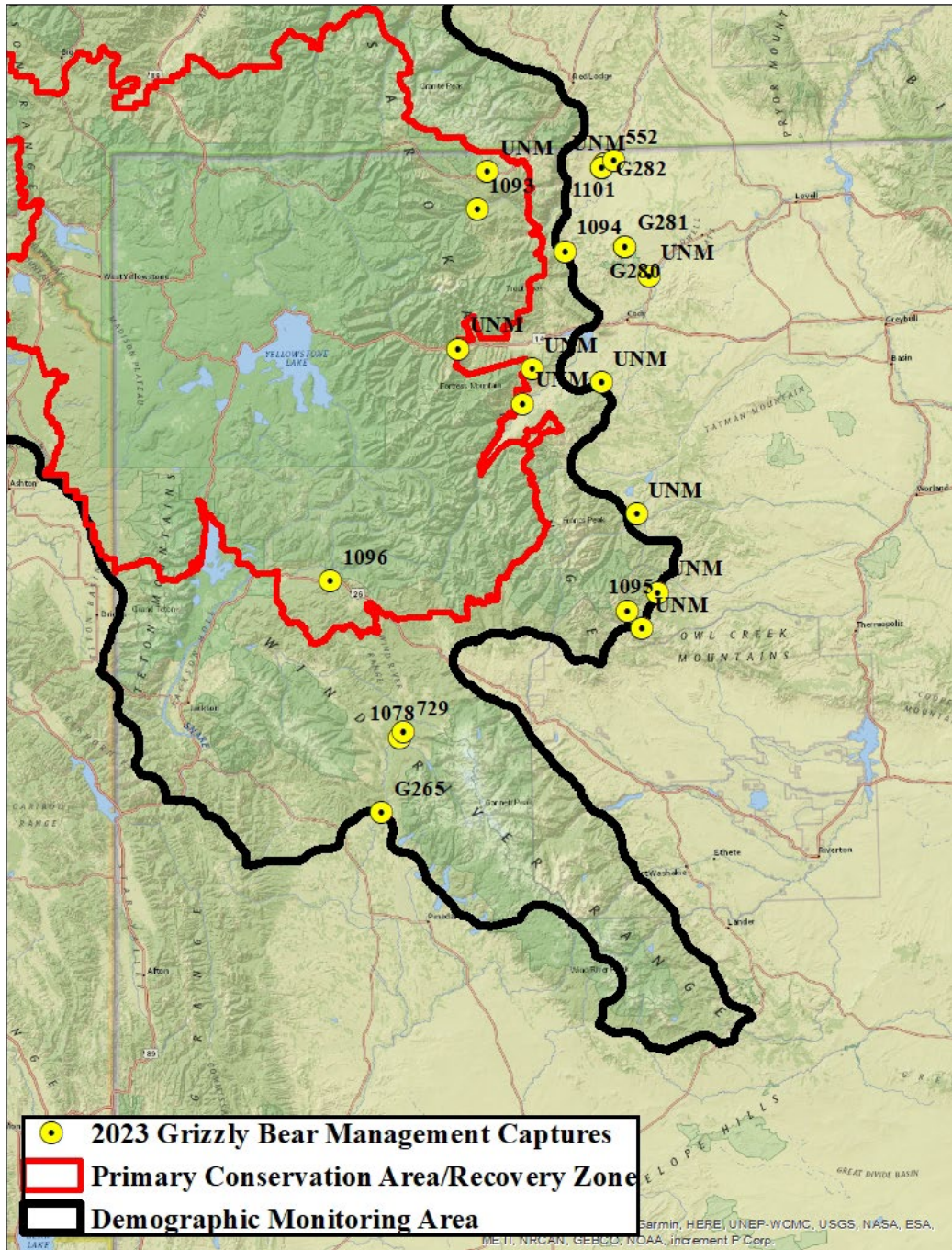


Figure 1. Capture locations ($n = 23$) for grizzly bears captured in conflict management efforts in the Wyoming portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, 2023. Because of the mapping scale, some locations are combined at one symbol. A complete list is provided in Table 1.

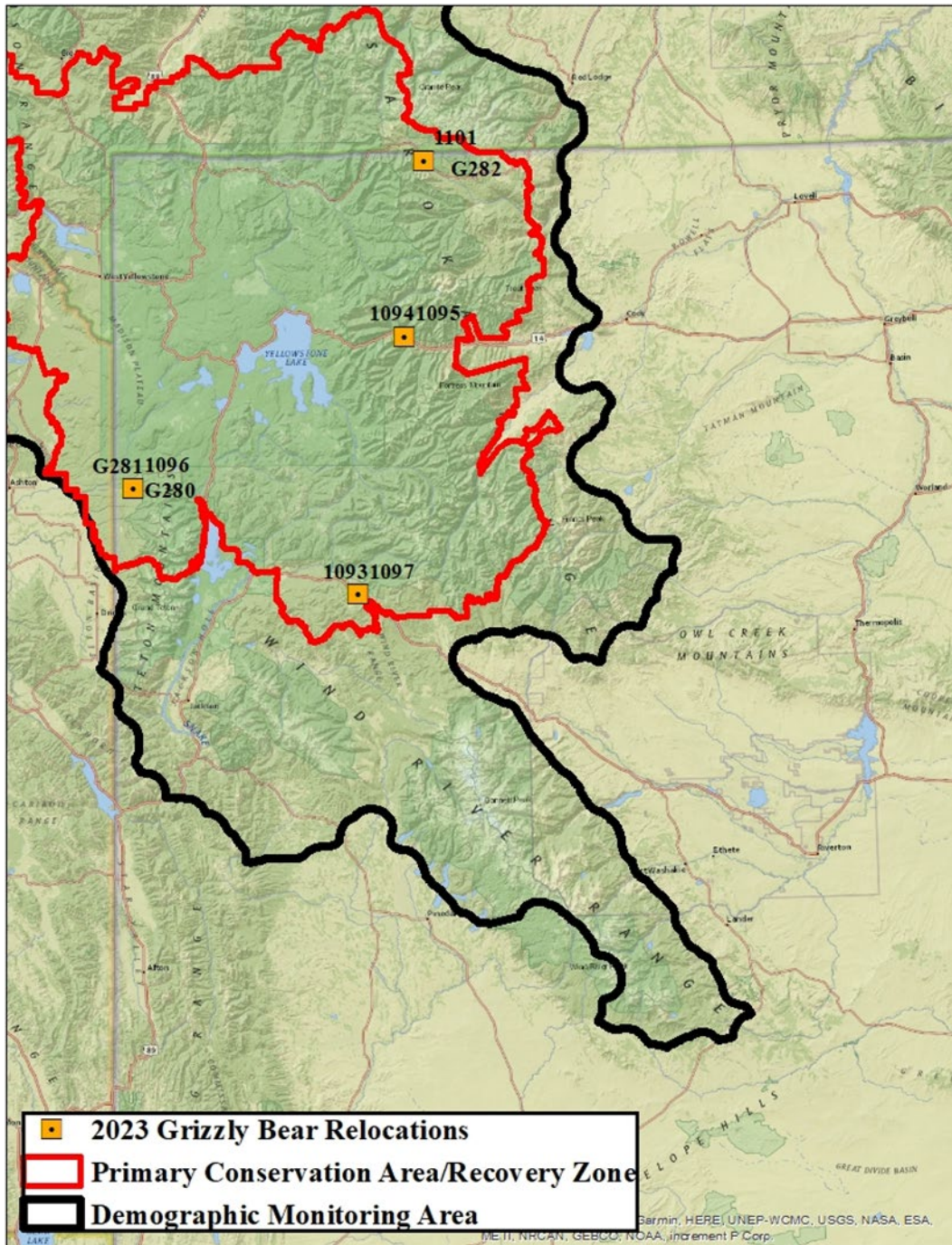


Figure 2. Release locations ($n = 9$) for grizzly bears captured, relocated, or released on site in conflict management efforts in Wyoming portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, 2023. A complete list is provided in Table 1.

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 grizzly bear was released. The media release contained: the date of the relocation; the number of grizzly bears relocated; the location of the grizzly bear relocation; the reason the grizzly bear was relocated, and additional bear safety and conflict avoidance information.

Table 1. Capture date, grizzly bear identification number (ID), capture county, relocation site, release county, and reason for capture for all 2023 grizzly bear conflict management captures ($n = 23$) in Wyoming. Grizzly bear ID labeled as “N/A” were grizzly bears removed from the population without being given a chronological capture number.

Date	ID	Capture County	Relocation Site	Release County	Reason For Capture
5/13/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
6/28/2023	G280	Park	Boone Creek	Teton	Captured and relocated for frequenting agricultural and developed areas
6/28/2023	G281	Park	Boone Creek	Teton	Captured and relocated for frequenting agricultural and developed areas
7/3/2023	G265	Sublette			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
7/8/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
7/9/2023	1093	Park	Blackrock Creek	Teton	Captured and relocated for cattle depredation
7/14/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for habituated and food conditioned behavior on roadside and in campgrounds
7/20/2023	1078	Sublette			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
7/25/2023	729	Sublette			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
7/29/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for damaging a chicken coop and obtaining food rewards

Table 1. (Continued)

Date	ID	Capture County	Relocation Site	Release County	Reason For Capture
8/6/2023	1094	Park	Five Mile Creek	Park	Captured and relocated for cattle depredation
8/6/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
8/12/2023	N/A	Hot Springs			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
8/15/2023	1095	Hot Springs	Five Mile Creek	Park	Captured and relocated for sheep depredation
8/17/2023	N/A	Hot Springs			Captured and removed for cattle depredation
8/26/2023	1096	Teton	Squirrel Meadows	Teton	Captured and relocated for habituated roadside behavior
8/29/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for frequenting corn field and human safety concerns
9/1/2023	552	Park			Captured and removed for crop and apiary damage
9/5/2023	1097	Park	Blackrock Creek	Teton	Captured and relocated for crop damage and close proximity to human occupied areas
9/10/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for frequenting agricultural areas and crop damage
9/20/2023	1101	Park	Fox Creek	Park	Captured and relocated for crop damage and close proximity to human occupied areas
9/20/2023	G282	Park	Fox Creek	Park	Captured and relocated for crop damage and close proximity to human occupied areas
9/30/2023	N/A	Park			Captured and removed for multiple food rewards and property damage

Appendix I. Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Notification of 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. Definitions. Definitions shall be as set forth in Title 23, Wyoming Statutes, Commission regulations, 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 3. Notification of relocation. 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.

WYOMING GAME AND FISH COMMISSION

By: 
Mike Healy, President

Dated: January 22, 2014