

Grizzly Bear Subcommittee Meeting Minutes, February 27 , 2023

Attendance:

Austin Terrell, OSC
Barb Moore, Idaho Fish & Game
Ben Robertson, Boundary County
Brittani Rosas, Vital Ground Foundation
Caleb Davis, District Director, US Rep Russ Fulcher'
Carl Petrick, US Forest Service
Chris Bachman Conservation Director, Yaak Valley Forest
Chuck Roady, Landowner
Darcy Lammers, Citizen
Eddie Whitcomb, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Jake Garringer, Governor Little's Office
Jeff Gillberg- Citizen
Jonathan Luhnnow, IDL
Josh Stanley, IDFG
Julie Smith, Office of Senator Crapo
Karen Schumacher, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Kierstin Cox, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Kris Boyd, Troy MT
Marc Klimer, Office of Senator Risch
Mitch Doherty- Conservation Director
Rob Morries, IDFG
Sandy Ashworth, Social, Cultural, Historical
Shawna Kelsey, Troy MT
Shelby Therrian, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Scott Soult, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair
Tim Dougherty, IFG
Tom Mackey, Landowner
Theresa Wheat, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, KVRI Facilitator
Wayne Kasworm, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
William Barquin, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Scott Soults began the meeting with a tentative agenda, and attendees introduced themselves. The agenda included a presentation by Wayne with the USFWS Selkirk-Cabinet/Yaak Ecosystem update/presentation
IDFG/FWS Conflict Specialist position and funding update
Nixle and notification improvements
Bear Country brochure review and submittal to KVRI board
Troy Apple Festival Presentation
Public Service Newspaper Announcement (Draft) – Emergence of bears/Nixle

Wayne Kasworm provided an update on the Cabinet Yaak-Selkirks ecosystem.

Wayne Kasworm had trap teams in Washington on the Washington side of the Selkirks Idaho and Cabinet Yaak as well. He discussed the field season capture from the previous year, mentioning that the bears have been relatively quiet. The team successfully captured four grizzly bears in Washington, with three of them being two-year-old bears from the same family group, and the fourth being a four-year-old male. The captured bears ranged in size from approximately 100 lbs to 280/275 lbs. The team prioritizes animal welfare during captures, tracking temperature, respiration, and pulse of anesthetized bears, also providing oxygen when necessary. The team uses various accessories to ensure the well-being of the bears during the capture process.

During July and August, the team worked diligently in the Selkirks. They successfully captured two female bears north of Priest—one a two-year-old and the other a 10-year-old. These bears are particularly valuable to the study as their collars provide vital information not only about their survival, but also their reproductive habits. As such, these individuals play a crucial role in the ongoing research.

In the Cabinet-Yaak area, the team managed to capture three bears within the Cabinets. The first one was a young female who was fitted with a radio collar, followed by a 6-year-old male, and lastly, a remarkably old 25-year-old female. All three bears contributed to the study, enhancing the understanding of the local bear population.

The genetic results from 2021 were received, and almost 2900 samples of hair were collected, with around 850-900 sent to the lab for testing after being screened for black bear samples. Out of almost 2900 samples collected, around 500 were identified as grizzly bear samples, with a total of 39 individual bears (13 females and 26 males) being identified from the samples. However, this number is not yet complete as they are still reviewing photographs to identify more bears, particularly young bears that may not have left DNA or hair samples.

Wayne Kasworm presented a family tree diagram for bears in the Cabinets, tracking the offspring via lines, with pink circles representing females and blue squares representing males. The diagram tracks the augmentation program bears that have reproduced. *Wayne* emphasized the importance of genetics information to track reproduction and the fact that younger bears are more adaptable to being augmentation bears.

One of the slides showed a map with different colored dots to represent grizzly bear activity in different locations, with gold dots representing rubs, blue dots representing corrals, and red dots indicating where grizzly bear hits were detected. In 2021 there were funding and personnel issues that limited the ability to conduct comprehensive population estimates, and that the number of bears detected is simply a minimum.

It was discussed that there had been some mortality in the bear population, with three males being killed or dying in the Selkirk population. One was killed in self-defense by a hunter in June, and the other two were removed by management, one being a 6-year-old 570 lb bear and the other a 5-year-old 470 lb bear. The decision to remove these bears was based on concerns about their size, previous history of livestock depredation, and potential for future incidents.

The typical annual home range for adult female bears (75-100 sq. miles) and adult male bears (300-500 sq. miles), with an average bear management unit (BMU) of around 100 sq. miles. The purpose of the BMU is to have a manageable area for accounting purposes that mimics an adult female's home range.

Regarding the impact of fires on bear habitat, bears can modify their home ranges in response to changes in food availability and cover. While large fires can wipe out vast areas of bear habitat, pockets of unburned or lightly burned areas may still provide opportunities for bears to find food and cover, such as fall foods like berries or gut piles from hunted animals.

Participants discussed the data collected by the wolf cameras, with Wayne noting that the cameras are spaced out across the state and pick up unusual animals besides wolves, such as bears. He also mentioned the importance of being conservative in identifying individual bears from camera images, as a picture of a bear at one site may not necessarily add to the count if the same bear was captured elsewhere.

There was also discussion on the process of tracking female bears with cubs in a given recovery area for the purpose of counting them and reaching the recovery targets. The notes mention the transit boundary survey to Canada and the estimate of 90 bears on the BC side of the South Parks. It is a requirement of to have 15k to support trans-boundary population estimate. The goal is to integrate the US data with the Canadian data for a single population estimate for the Selkirks on both sides of the border. Refer to presentation on KVRI website under Grizzly Bear Subcommittee.

Next on the agenda was discussion of the use of Nixle in reporting interactions between humans and predators, such as bears. There are different types of reports that go with Nixle, including reoccurring sightings, natural encounters, incidents, and attack reports. Reoccurring sightings are when a predator is frequently seen in an area where people are dwelling. Natural encounters are unexpected direct interactions between a human and a predator. Incidents refer to interactions that can have serious results, such as a bear eating pet food. Attack reports refer to situations where a predator has attacked a human. Nixle is used to inform the public of these interactions and provide safety information. It is important to note that just because you don't receive a Nixle report about bear sightings or activity in your area, it doesn't mean that there are no bears around. We don't want people to become complacent and let their guard down. It's crucial to remain mindful of securing attractants and taking necessary precautions, especially if you live in bear country. So, please continue to be bear aware even if you don't receive a Nixle report.

Scott presented a new brochure with information about grizzly bears and ways to protect oneself from them. The brochure contains a lot of great information and will be presented to the KVRI Board for their review. The audience was encouraged to review the brochure and provide any comments or questions. The brochure is a living document that will be distributed widely, from real estate agents to visitor centers, to provide general information to anyone who asks about reducing conflicts with Grizzly bears. The brochure covers a range of topics including, reducing conflicts in the backcountry and around households, as well as a current contact list for those who may encounter a Grizzly bear.

Kris Boyd and Shawna Kelsey then talked about working on conflict prevention in the community related to Grizzly bears. They came across a grant for farmers markets and started the Apple Festival,

which has become a successful gathering place for people in Troy, Montana. The festival involves local farmers and incorporates the existing culture of the community to create a fun way to promote bear awareness and prevention. The goal is to create a positive relationship with people before having to have difficult conversations about bear conflicts.

They shared the various activities and events that take place during the Apple Festival. The festival centers around picking fruit from trees for bear prevention and a mobile cider press, which is used to press about 75 gallons of apples gathered by kids from town and others who bring their own apples. The festival also includes bear aware activities such as bear spray training and a bear trail that educates people about bear signs in the woods. Additionally, there are outreach booths with agencies and organizations, kids games, and a raffle is held where people can enter to win bear safety prizes. The festival also features an extended farmers market with around 45 vendors and various advertising methods are used to promote the event. The notes highlight the importance of funding and the difficulty in sustaining these projects with just volunteer work and grant funding.

They are branching off professionally to develop a marketing solution for the bear-apple challenge by opening a distillery to incentivize people to pick their trees and pay them for their apples to create a product that can be distributed nationally. The group hopes to expand their gleaning program and make a significant impact on the amount of fruit that goes to waste in the community. It is called the Pink Bench Distillery” you can check out their website for more information.
(<https://pinkbenchdistilling.com/>)

Scott presented an advertisement for a newspaper that informs people about bears waking up during spring and fall. The advertisement also promotes signing up for Nixle to stay informed. Additionally, Scott suggested working with Idaho Fish and Game and the Sheriff's Office to provide information about who to contact in case of bear conflicts instead of calling 911. He also mentioned tying in Black bear hunting season and recommended running the advertisement before the 1st of May, around the first day of spring.

There was a discussion on whether Idaho Fish and Game write any local newspaper articles or if all information is through their website. The committee talked about the need to educate the public about electric fencing and techniques. There was a suggestion to organize workshops and PSAs to reach a wider audience. A proposal was made to hold a workshop facilitated by Kim, who is an expert on the topic. There was a concern about low turnout at previous events and suggestions were made to hold events at high schools and fairs.

During the meeting, it was highlighted that holding events at high schools and fairs could be a great way to reach a wider audience. In particular, it was mentioned that having a presence at the fair could be a valuable opportunity to educate the public about electric fencing and techniques and include bear spray training. However, the committee also expressed concern about the low turnout at previous events.

To address this issue, the committee suggested the need for volunteers to help with organizing and promoting these events. Specifically, volunteers could assist with setting up booths and exhibits, distributing educational materials, and answering questions from the public.

Scott Soults thanked everyone for coming and the meeting was called at 12:55 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Kierstin Cox.