

Draft Meeting Record
July 27, 2023 10:00 a.m.
Grizzly Bear Sub Committee Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

in Attendance:

Adam Isaac, Citizen
Austin Terrell, OSC
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry
Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League
Brittani Rosas, Vital Ground Foundation
Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher
Cathy Joy, Citizen
Chris Anderson, People and Carnivores
Chris Bachmann, Yak Valley Forest Council.
Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Cindy Lewis, NRCS
Deosa Bahe, KTOI
Diane Probasco, USFS
Eddie Whitcomb, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Gunnar Wickman, Citizen
Heather Havelock, WSU Bear Center

Heiko Jansen, WSU Bear Center
Jenna Ditzel, Idaho Soil & Water Conservation
Jeremy Gaffield, IDFG
John OConner, Citizen
Karen Schumacher, KTOI
Karissa Huntsman, Idaho Conservation League
Kierstin Cox, KTOI
Lauren Reichenbach, Bonner County Daily Bee
Marc Kilmer, Office of Senator Risch
Mike Williams, USFWS
Rob Morris, IDFG
Scott Soultz, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Shelby Therrian, KTOI
Theresa Wheat, KTOI
Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair

Presenter:

- Chris Anderson, Special Projects for 'People in Carnivores'
- Background in Wildlife Biology and Ecology

Project Overview:

- Located primarily in Western Montana, working mainly with ranchers.
- Expanding into Idaho.
- Last summer, conducted an infrastructure survey of campgrounds in Idaho's Panhandle National Forest.
- Collaboration with Brad Smith (brainchild of the project), ICL, and IPNF managers including Diane Perbasco.

Survey Details:

- Surveyed 59 sites: 33 front country sites and 26 backcountry sites.
- Several planned sites weren't surveyed due to access issues, including snow and downed trees.

Project Focus:

- Barrier-related infrastructure and awareness.

Geographical Details:

- Covered all three forest zones in five districts of IPNF (depicted on a map in the presentation).
- Zone boundaries are demarcated, along with recovery zones and Grizzly Bear distribution areas.

Survey Questions:

- Included questions about bear-related infrastructure (bear boxes, trash cans, dumpsters, poles), bear-related signage, status of pack-in-pack-out areas, and habitat description.
- Also asked if the site was in a food storage order area, federal recovery zone, occupied Grizzly Bear Range, or Grizzly Bear may be present area designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service

Key Findings:

- **South Zone:**
 - 12 sites surveyed (all front country)
 - Minimal bear-related infrastructure or signage, except for one unofficial bear pole and one non-resistant dumpster.

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- **Central Zone:**
 - 8 sites surveyed (all front country)
 - One site with a bear-resistant canister
 - All sites had bear-related signage
 - No bear-proof infrastructure despite four sites being in potential grizzly territory
- **North Zone (most important due to its location in the Grizzly Bear recovery zone):**
 - 39 total sites (13 front country, 26 backcountry)
 - Some sites had bear-resistant dumpsters or cans, bear boxes, and bear-related signage.
 - Two sites had bear poles, but neither was fully functional.
 - The backcountry had notably more bear boxes than the front country.
- **Lakeshore Trail on Priest Lake:**
 - 11 dispersed campsites with bear boxes along the trail
 - Lack of awareness and signage informing visitors of bears or food storage orders, despite all sites being in a recovery zone.

Infrastructure Damage:

- Noted various types of damage to bear boxes (cracked, bowed out, missing clips, or full of trash, making them non-functional.)

Overall Observations:

- Signage and awareness are lacking in many areas, particularly in the Lakeshore Trail on Priest Lake.
- There is a need for repairs and maintenance to existing bear-related infrastructure.

Next Steps/Recommendations:

- (Not explicitly stated in the meeting, but it may involve suggesting improvements in signage, infrastructure repair, and public awareness initiatives based on the survey findings.)

Discussion revolves around the presence and effectiveness of signage in areas where people might encounter bears, such as campgrounds or trailheads. There is a noted lack of adequate signs informing visitors about the presence of bears in certain areas and the requirements for food storage, referred to as "poor awareness."

The primary spots where visitors are expected to get this information are at kiosks or billboards at campgrounds' entrances and at trailheads. Despite the utility of signs, it is acknowledged that people may ignore or not read them. However, it is emphasized that having signs is a low-cost, minimum measure that can help inform people about potential bear presence and food storage requirements.

A question arises about whether food should be stored in a bear box or a car when in bear territory. It is suggested that this might be a question best directed to the Forest Service but notes that using a bear box is likely safer, as bears have been known to break into cars.

The conversation overall highlights the importance of adequate and clear signage in bear-prone areas to protect both people and wildlife, and it touches on the complexities of food storage in these regions. Adam Isaac, a local resident and outdoors enthusiast, expressed concern about the extensive commercial huckleberry picking he observed in his area. He fears this could severely impact the food

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source for bears, especially Grizzly Bears. On a recent camping trip, Adam encountered numerous camps set up for commercial huckleberry picking, including a group washing large quantities of huckleberries in a creek. He is worried about the unusually high scale of picking this year and the limited law enforcement capacity to manage the situation. Adam suggested potential solutions, such as requiring permits for commercial picking, setting limits on the quantity that can be picked, and establishing checkpoints to enforce these limits. He is engaging with local authorities to explore regulatory options to protect the environment and wildlife from the impact of large-scale huckleberry picking.

Since the release of the report on bear safety at forest recreation sites, the team has verified the conditions of various campsites and assessed the need and condition of bear boxes. Unnecessary or irreparable boxes, especially around the lake area, are being removed, while essential bear boxes in disrepair are being fixed or replaced. The team has consulted with the Recreation Manager to strategize placements of new bear boxes, funded partly through sources like the GAOA. A proposal is in progress for Rack Funding to secure helicopter time for box replacements in the north end of the forest. There are ongoing collaborations, notably with Idaho Fish and Game, to increase signage about food storage and bear activity at key locations like the entrance to Priest Lake. The report, mainly contributed by People and Carnivores, Chris, and Brad, has been pivotal in these actions and future planning, reflecting significant progress since the early 2000s in developing and maintaining campground infrastructure.

Bear Conditioning Project Summary

Presenters:

- Heiko Jansen: Professor in the Physiology Department at the Vet School at WSU
- Heather Havlock: Undergraduate student working in the School of Biological Sciences at WSU
- Collaborative Project with WSU Bear Center (operational for 13 years)

Objective:

- Develop a strategy to condition bears (and potentially other animals) to avoid certain areas or foods by associating a specific odor (e.g., TBZ compound or lemon oil) with an unpleasant experience (vomiting or feeling ill.)

Key Strategies and Approaches:

1. Use of TBZ Compound:

- Induce a mild sickness in bears using TBZ when they consume bait, creating a negative association with a specific odor.

2. AI and Facial Recognition:

- Employ AI technology to identify individual bears and track their behavior over time without physical tagging.

3. Bait/Testing Stations:

- Establish stations with TBZ-laced bait to expose bears to the compound and associated odor.

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- Rename from 'bait stations' to 'testing stations' to reduce potential misunderstanding of purpose.
4. **Community and Stakeholder Involvement:**
 - Involve community members or stakeholders, potentially via a citizen science approach.
 5. **Pilot Testing in Problem Areas:**
 - Initially implement the project in identified problem areas where bears are already an issue.

Research Focus:

- Modifying bear behavior to reduce conflicts with humans (e.g., trash accessibility and crop damage)
- Partnership with various federal agencies aimed at addressing economic and safety issues caused by bears.

Evidence:

- Conflicts are prevalent across various regions in the US, leading to bear euthanizations and human safety concerns (e.g., West Yellowstone, Flathead Lake area).

Data:

- Study conducted on 11 captive Grizzly Bears at WSU Bear Center (7 captive-born, 4 wild-born.)
- Bears exposed to TBZ and lemon oil showed avoidance behavior in subsequent trials.
- Wild-born bears learned the quickest and strongest aversion, indicating a persistent learned aversion.

Implementation and Future Direction:

- Discussion on deploying this strategy in real-world scenarios, such as around crop fields.
- For crop scenarios, TBZ with lemon oil could be applied in stations around fields to condition bears.

Key Considerations and Challenges:

1. **Unintended Behavioral Consequences:**
 - Avoid inadvertently training bears to seek human areas.
2. **Effects on Non-Target Species:**
 - Consider potential effects of the TBZ substance on non-target species.
3. **Dosage and Side Effects:**
 - Determine TBZ dosage to minimize distress to bears, accounting for individual differences in response.
4. **Odor Association and Sensory Perception in Bears:**

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- Ensure strong, memorable, and specific association between specific odors and unpleasant experiences.
5. **Determining Efficacy Without Collaring or Tagging:**
- Consider how to definitively measure treatment effectiveness without marking bears.
6. **Legal and Ethical Considerations:**
- Address ethical and legal questions related to potentially causing distress to animals.
7. **Implementation and Scaling:**
- Develop a strategy for scaling the project if pilot testing proves successful, and consider long-term sustainability.
8. **Bear Movement to New Conflict Areas:**
- Consider how to ensure bears don't move to new conflict areas after being conditioned.
9. **Potential Environmental Effects of Odors:**
- Assess the potential effects of lemon oil or other odors on crops or the environment.
10. **Large Scale Application:**
- Discuss practicalities of applying this strategy at a large scale.

Next Steps:

- [To be defined; e.g., consult with wildlife experts, develop a detailed project plan, engage with relevant regulatory bodies, etc.]

Several more topics were discussed. Financial matters were addressed, including the acquisition of \$5,000 and a trailer cost of \$8,600. The Supply Club International Foundation contributed \$6,000 towards the trailer's cost. The trailer had been ordered three to four weeks prior and was expected to arrive in about two to three weeks. Plans were in place for fabricating a winch and setting it up. Additionally, an agreement with the county was being finalized, allowing for free landfill dumping for the first year, possibly leading to a composting program.

The group discussed the possibility of a bear day event in the fall at Bonners Ferry, featuring activities like cider pressing and bear education. New signs were obtained to replace ones taken down, focusing on safety in bear country. Plans were outlined for attending the Boundary County Fair, where bear spray and fencing demonstrations were proposed. The team aimed to offer bear safety information, distribute brochures, and potentially conduct a raffle.

The Northwest Pacific Trail and its management were discussed, with the Forest Service's comprehensive management plan being under review. Concerns were raised about lightweight hikers lacking proper food storage measures. The discussion also touched on personnel shortages affecting enforcement.

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Meeting concluded and was called at 12.07 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Kierstin Cox