

# **Grizzly Bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem: What you need to know**

**Factsheet** (\*\*for public-facing webpage - these will ultimately be separated out into separate factsheets or links on the webpage)

## **History and Timeline of Grizzly Bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem**

The Bitterroot Recovery Zone (BRZ) is 5,830 square kilometers (1,440,624 acres) in size and encompasses the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Areas where existing Wilderness Act regulations include restrictions to human development and motorized access, and includes various sanitation/food storage guidelines. It is identified as the area within which grizzly bear recovery will be emphasized and could serve as core habitat of the recovering population.

### **History of Grizzly Bear Conservation in the Bitterroot Ecosystem**

- In 1975, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the grizzly bear as a threatened species in the lower 48 States under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- The 1982 Recovery Plan called for evaluation of the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE) as a potential recovery area.
- In 1993, USFWS designated the BE as a recovery zone in the revised Recovery Plan.
- In 1996 the Recovery Plan was supplemented with planning details for the BE. At that time, the last verified grizzly bear sighting had occurred in the 1940s. The BE Recovery Plan Chapter stated that recovery through natural recolonization was a remote possibility, and would require reintroduction. It recommended drafting an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to examine a full range of grizzly bear recovery alternatives, and to designate any grizzly bears reintroduced as a nonessential experimental population to achieve recovery. The Chapter did not delineate a recovery zone, but delineated a Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Evaluation Area, that would be the foundation for future delineation of a recovery area.
- In 2000, USFWS designated the BE as a nonessential experimental population, and released a final EIS with a decision to reintroduce bears. To date, USFWS has taken no action on this alternative. The first known grizzly attempting to immigrate into the BE traveled south from the Selkirk Ecosystem in northern Idaho but was killed in 2007 near Kelly Creek, Idaho.
- In 2019, a collared grizzly bear from the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem traveled to the BE. The bear localized southeast of Lolo Pass, near Kelly Creek in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. A second probable grizzly bear was also observed in the BE near Whitebird, Idaho over the summer (picture captured on a trailcam); this bear's origin is unknown. Several other grizzly bear sightings and a grizzly bear capture have occurred just east of Highway 93 in Montana.

- A male grizzly bear that dispersed from the Selkirk Ecosystem was documented in 2019 and again in the spring of 2020 near Grangeville, Idaho. We do not know the current status of this bear.
- USFWS has updated species occurrence maps to help inform any potential future consultations and looks forward to continued partnerships with tribes, as well as local, state, and other federal agencies to ensure the conservation of listed species. Visit the USFWS's grizzly bear webpage for more information: <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/es/grizzlybear.php>.

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# Grizzly Bear Safety and Conservation

Messaging from IGBC (credit here or direct link to IGBC webpage)

The primary challenges to grizzly bear conservation are human-caused mortalities and availability of suitable grizzly bear habitat. To address these challenges, management direction regarding grizzly bear education programs, motorized access, livestock grazing, recreation site development, food storage, and other activities should be considered. General direction for conservation actions to address these challenges could include:

- Grizzly bear education program (Bear Aware messaging and conflict prevention) – develop an education program for forest users (developed recreation sites, Wilderness areas, hunters, outfitters and guides, grazing permittees) and residential/summer home areas.
- Motorized access – maintain secure habitat for grizzly bears through the management of motorized access.
- Livestock grazing – manage grazing as necessary to decrease the potential for human-grizzly bear conflicts, livestock depredations, and impacts to habitat.
- Recreation site development – manage recreation site development in a way that decreases the potential for human-grizzly bear conflicts and minimizes impacts to habitat.
- Food storage – maintain consistency with other land managers in the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE) (USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and State), develop and enact a food storage order to minimize human-grizzly bear conflicts.

**Bears can be anywhere (assume their presence).**

**Avoiding conflict is easier than dealing with a conflict.**

- Stay alert and use all of your sense to detect bear activity, especially where visibility or hearing is limited (woods, bushy areas, streams).
- Travel in a group. Groups of people are usually noisier and less likely to surprise bears. Don't let your group get spread out. Stay in close proximity of each other so everyone is visible and can gather even closer together if a bear is encountered.
- Make noise by talking, singing or clapping. This may not be necessary continuously, but is critical when visibility and hearing are limited. Do not scream or shriek, as this may startle or confuse a bear.
- Carry bear spray close in an accessible place and know how to use it.
- Avoid traveling at night, dawn, or dusk.
- Avoid carcass sites and evidence of carcasses (such as groups of scavenger birds).
- Anyone moving quickly (i.e. mountain biker, trail runner) is at a higher risk of surprising a bear.

**Keep food and other attractants away from bears.**

- Bears are curious and food driven.
- Feeding bears puts people and bears at risk.
- Securing food and garbage means keeping it in an approved bear resistant container (locked car,

bear box, bear resistant garbage can, etc.) See <http://igbconline.org/certified-products-list/> for list of approved products.

### **Be prepared to handle a bear encounter.**

- In any bear encounter, your behavior matters. Bears respond to your actions. Both grizzly bears and black bears pose a risk. The bear's behavior should determine your response.
- During an encounter with a bear:
  - Never run away. You cannot outrun a bear. Running may trigger a bear to chase.
  - Never approach a bear.
- Different situations call for different responses:
  - If you see a bear at a distance, the bear appears unaware of you and you can move away undetected, do so quietly when the bear is not looking toward you.
  - If you cannot avoid a bear that sees you, stand your ground and watch its behavior. Move away when it “disengages” or becomes uninterested in you.
  1. If a bear is not actively engaged with you (looking away, ignoring you, running away, or retreating):
    - Give the bear space by backing away slowly from the bear and going in the opposite direction of the bear.
  2. If a bear shows agitated/defensive behavior (huffing, jaws clacking, head swaying back and forth, bellowing, swatting the ground, hopping forward, and/or drooling):
    - Stand your ground, prepare your bear spray, or discharge your bear spray if the bear is within range, and speak in a calm manner until the bear moves off.
  3. If a bear charges, or appears ready to charge:
    - Stand your ground.
    - If it charges, use your bear spray.
    - If the defensive bear is going to make contact with you, go face down on the ground, cover your neck and head as much as possible, and deploy your bear spray in the bear's face. If you are unsure of the species, but you recognize it is defensive, play dead. Never play dead in an encounter with a black bear.
  4. If a bear shows predatory/curious behaviors (follows you, or slowly, purposefully or methodically approaches you):
    - Stand your ground.
    - Get aggressive: wave your arms and shout vigorously.
    - Get bear spray out and ready.
    - Fight back if it makes contact.
  5. If a bear enters or reaches into your tent:
    - Use your bear spray.
    - Fight back.
- Why bear spray?

- It has a high level of effectiveness.
- For most people, it's easy to use.
- When rescuing a person being threatened or mauled by a bear, bear spray poses less risk of collateral damage than a firearm.

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## **AUDIENCE SPECIFIC MESSAGES:**

*\*Most Universal and Specific Messages also apply to Audience Specific Messages*

### **Campers:**

- Keep food and anything with a scent out of tents.
- Dispose of garbage in provided containers; otherwise, take it with you and dispose of it properly elsewhere. Do not bury or burn garbage.
- Properly store unattended food and anything else with a scent. Food storage options are:
  - Bear boxes
  - Hard-sided vehicles (car, truck, RV). Avoid leaving attractants in vehicles for extended periods of time (backcountry trips)
  - Certified bear-resistant containers
  - Electric fencing, depending on local regulations and model or configuration of fence.

### **Hunters:**

- Pack meat out as soon as possible.
- Avoid cutting up carcass at dusk or night.
- If you kill an animal at dusk, be prepared to cut up carcass in the dark by carrying strong headlamps. Be extra vigilant and watch for bears.
- If you must leave your animal, return to the site carefully. Leave it in an area that is easily observable from a distance.
- If possible, separate carcass and gut pile by at least 100 yards as soon as possible.

### **Anglers:**

- Make noise when approaching streams or rivers where visibility is poor and/or rushing water makes it difficult for bears to hear you approaching.
- Carry bear spray on you, especially if you are wading or shore fishing.
- When possible, clean fish at a designated fish-cleaning station, or at home.
- Fish are attractants, store them properly.

### **Mountain Bikers & Trail Runners:**

- Anyone traveling quickly on trails (i.e. mountain biker, trail runner) is at higher risk of surprising a bear.
- Watch for signs of bear activity and avoid riding in these areas.
- Avoid riding fast on trails that feature seasonal food sources for bears, such as berries.
- Do not run or ride while intentionally impacting your ability to hear natural noises (i.e. wearing ear buds or headphones).
- Make noise and slow down when line of sight is poor.
- Make noise and slow down when ambient sounds make it difficult to hear ( i.e. wind, rushing streams).
- When possible, ride in groups and stay together.
- If you encounter a bear, stop, get off your bike, and follow bear encounter recommendations.

- Never try to outrun or outpace a bear.
- Carry bear spray on your person not on your bicycle.

#### **Landowners/Residents (Permanent & Seasonal):**

- Properly store garbage in a certified bear-resistant bin or in a secured building (four walls, roof, and door with latch) at all times, until the day of disposal.
- Do not leave out pet food, bird feeders and bird seed, or livestock feed.
- Keep grills and BBQs clean of food and grease. Store in a secured building when not in use.
- Bears are attracted to fruit-bearing trees and bushes, gardens, and compost piles. Install electric fencing. Pick fruit immediately when ripe.
- Secure vulnerable livestock (i.e. chickens, goats, sheep) with an electric fence.

#### **Agricultural (Farmers & Ranchers):**

- Store and remove attractants, such as grain spills, food waste, and scented products.
- Do not leave out pet food, or livestock feed and supplements.
- There are many effective tools to reduce conflicts between humans and bears in agricultural settings, and they vary greatly from one operation to another.
- Many attractants can be secured in hard-sided buildings with four walls, a roof and locking door.
- Dispose of carcasses and afterbirth through sanitation services, inside an electrified boneyard, or by distributing away from people, buildings, and livestock. Electric fences can be placed around fresh carcasses and bone piles until they can be permanently removed.
- Install electric fences around non-removable attractants, such as birthing grounds, sheep-bedding areas, bee apiaries, compost piles, gardens, fruit trees, berry bushes, or corn fields.
- Vulnerable animals should be secured within an electric fence when unattended by people or at night. Vulnerable livestock include young, sick or injured livestock, and small livestock such as poultry, goats, sheep, or rabbits.

#### **Methods for Securing Attractants:**

- Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC)-certified bear-resistant container. See <http://igbconline.org/certified-products-list/> for list of approved products.
- Hard-sided building, shed, or barn with a locking/latching door
- Steel drum with locking lid or locked metal boxes
- Within an IGBC-certified electric fence

## Grizzly Bear Glossary

Reintroduction: The intentional movement and release of individuals to establish a population outside a species' current range but within its historical range.

Relocation: A management action that moves an individual animal or family group (such as a female with young) from one area within occupied range to another, usually in response to a human-bear conflict. Sometimes differentiated from translocation by moving a bear from a capture site to a location **within** its likely home range, often in attempt to **temporarily** mitigate bear conflicts.

Translocation: A management action that moves an individual animal or family group (such as a female with young) from one area within occupied range to another, usually in response to a human-bear conflict. Sometimes differentiated from relocation by moving a bear from a capture site to a location **outside** its likely home range, often in an attempt to **permanently** mitigate bear conflicts.

Augmentation: The intentional movement and release of individuals into an existing population in order to enhance population viability. This is ongoing only in the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem.

Population: Verified evidence within the previous six years of at least two different female grizzly bears with young, or one female seen with different litters in two different years, in an area geographically distinct (separate) from other grizzly bear populations (65 FR 69627). Such evidence can include photos, verified tracks, and/or sightings by reputable scientists or agency personnel within the area in question.