

# The Bear Facts...

## Grizzly Bear Life History

**Home Range:** Grizzly bears need a large home range (50 to 300 square miles for females; 200 to 500 square miles for males), encompassing diverse forests interspersed with moist meadows and grasslands in or near mountains. The size of a grizzly bear's home range depends on its age and sex and the quality and quantity of available habitat. Female cubs often establish home ranges within or next to their mother's, but male cubs must disperse farther to establish a new home range. In the spring, bears usually range at lower elevations and go to higher altitudes for winter hibernation.

**Physical Characterisits:** Larger than the black bear, the average male grizzly bear is about 4 feet tall at the shoulder and weighs from 350 to 500 pounds. Females are smaller, usually weighing between 250 and 350 pounds. Unlike the black bear, the grizzly bear has a rather concave face, high-humped shoulders, long, curved claws and short, rounded ears.

The distinctive hump over the grizzly bear's front shoulders is a mass of muscle. That and its long claws enable the grizzly to dig for roots or bulbs or small burrowing mammals. Grizzlies are strong and agile; they can move boulders weighing hundreds of pounds and can sprint up to 35 miles an hour for short distances. The grizzly bear's coat color varies from blondish brown to nearly black, often with silver or blonde-tipped guard hairs that make the coat appear frosted or "grizzled". Grizzly bears usually live to be 15 to 20 years of age, and a few survive for up to 30+ years.

**Behavior:** Except for mating and caring for the young, grizzly bears primarily lead solitary lives, spending most of their time in constant search for food. They are extremely shy and usually choose to be alone, or in small family groups, rather than with other bears. Grizzly bears do not defend territories, and instead rely on a social linear hierarchy that permits freedom of travel and maximum exploitation of food resources. Grizzly bears avoid humans. Although a standing grizzly is commonly perceived to be a threatening pose, bears stand when they are simply curious or surveying their surroundings. Otherwise they generally remain on all fours.

**Food Habits:** The grizzly is North America's largest omnivore, meaning it eats both plants and other animals. More than 90% of their diet is green vegetation, roots, tubers, pine nuts, fruits and berries, and insects. Grizzlies eat a great deal of insects, sometimes tearing rotten logs apart and turning over heavy stones in search of the insects themselves or their larvae. Most of the meat in the grizzly's diet comes from animal carcasses, or carrion, of big game animals, although bears will sometimes prey on elk or moose calves or smaller mammals. In some areas, fish are an important seasonal food source. The grizzly bear must eat enough food to store huge amounts of fat needed to sustain it through its long winter sleep.

**Hibernation:** Early in the fall, grizzly bears begin looking for a proper place to dig their dens, and may travel many miles before finding a suitable area. Generally, they seek a high, remote mountain slope (usually above 6,000 feet elevation) where deep snow will cover the den until spring to serve as insulation. Grizzlies often dig beneath the roots of a large tree to create their dens.

The grizzly bear will generally enter its den in October or November. During the next 5 to 6 months, the grizzly will get no water or nourishment of any kind but will use up its accumulated fat. Male grizzly bears usually emerge from the den in March or April, while females emerge in late April and May. When a grizzly comes out of its den, the first food is sometimes carrion from animals that did not survive the winter. After den emergence, bears will usually travel to lower elevations to reach vegetated areas.



**Reproduction:** Grizzly bears have one of the lowest reproductive rates among terrestrial mammals. Females do not breed until age 5 or 6, and then breed at intervals of 3 years or longer, with an average litter size of 2 cubs, and a 50% cub survival rate to adulthood.

Mating season is from June through July. Males compete with each other for breeding opportunities and seek females each year. Grizzly bear embryos do not begin to develop until the mother begins her winter hibernation, although mating may have taken place up to 6 months before. As with other bears, if the mother has not accumulated enough fat to sustain herself as well as developing cubs, the embryos may not develop.

In January, one to four cubs (usually two), each weighing one pound or less, are born in the snow-covered den. The cubs gain weight quickly and often have reached 20 pounds by the time they come out of the den in April or May. Cubs remain dependent upon their mother's milk for almost a year and stay with their mother for to 2 to 3 years until she breeds again.

**Threats to Grizzly Bears:** At the top of the food chain, adult grizzly bears have little to fear from other wild animals. Grizzly cubs may fall prey to mountain lions, wolves, and other bears if they stray too far from their mother.

Many of the current threats to the survival of grizzly bears are associated with degradation of habitat due to rural or recreational development, road building, and energy and mineral exploration. Habitat destruction in valleys bottoms and riparian areas is particularly harmful to grizzlies because they use these "corridors" to travel from one area to another when they are searching for food.

Some grizzly bears are accidentally killed by hunters who mistake them for black bears, which are legal game. But the biggest threat to the grizzly is human-caused mortality. Grizzlies become habituated to humans because of what biologists call "attractants," which include garbage, pet foods, livestock carcasses, and improper camping practices. This can eventually lead to conflicts between people and bears -- not only in populated areas of the grizzly's range but also in back country recreation sites. Such conflicts often result in the death of the bear. Remember: "A fed bear is a dead bear."

## Know Your Bears:

Grizzly Bear	Black Bear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ <b>Distinctive shoulder hump</b> is a muscle mass that enables powerful digging. Rump is lower than shoulder hump.</li><li>✓ <b>Dished-in face profile</b> between the eyes and end of snout.</li><li>✓ <b>Front claws</b> are 2-4 inches long, usually light colored, slightly curved and good for digging. Claw marks are usually visible in tracks.</li><li>✓ <b>Ears</b> are round and proportionately small.</li></ul> <p><b>Color</b> varies from blond to black. Often medium- to dark-brown legs, hump, and underside with light-tipped (grizzled) fur on head, face, and upper body.</p> <p><b>Height</b> is 3.5 - 4 feet at shoulder when standing on all fours, and 6-7 feet when standing upright.</p> <p><b>Weight</b> averages 500 pounds for males and 350 pounds for females. Males may weigh up to 800 pounds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ <b>No distinctive shoulder hump</b>/muscle mass. Rump is higher than front shoulders. When head is down, may <i>falsely</i> appear to be a hump.</li><li>✓ <b>Straight face profile</b>; muzzle is relatively long and has a "roman" profile.</li><li>✓ <b>Front claws</b> are less than 2 inches long, dark colored, sharp, curved and good for climbing. Claw marks do not always show in tracks.</li><li>✓ <b>Ears</b> appear longer and are more prominent.</li></ul> <p><b>Color</b> varies from blond to black, including black, brown, cinnamon, rust and blond. The most common snout color is light brown.</p> <p><b>Height</b> is 2.5 - 3 feet at shoulder when standing on all fours, and 5 feet when standing upright.</p> <p><b>Weight</b> average in the West is 100-300 pounds, with males usually larger than females. Males may weigh up to 400+ pounds.</p>

✓ Indicates this characteristic is useful for distinguishing a grizzly bear from a black bear in the field.



## Recreation Safety Tips:



**Q: Is recreation compatible with grizzly bears?**

**A:** Yes. Grizzly bears are shy and try to avoid people, acting aggressively only as a last resort if they feel threatened. An encounter with or even seeing a bear is unlikely. As long as people use common sense in bear habitat to keep clean camps and avoid surprising bears along trails, there is little impact on either people or bears from recreation. Hundreds of thousands of people hike, fish, hunt, camp and enjoy grizzly bear habitat every year with very few conflicts of any kind.

**Here are a few tips to avoid conflicts with bears and other wildlife:**

- Avoid camping next to trails or streams as bears and other wildlife use these as travel corridors.
- Avoid camping next to bear food sources such as berries, and never camp near an animal carcass.
- Locate your cook area and food cache at least 100 yards downwind from your tent.
- Keep a clean camp. Hang your food at least 10 feet above ground and 4 feet from top and side supports, or store it in bear-resistant containers. Treat livestock feed similarly. Store garbage the same as food, and pack it out.
- Hang all other odorous items with your food and garbage including: toiletries, cosmetics and cooking gear.
- Do not sleep in the same clothes you cook in. Keep tents and sleeping bags completely free of food and odorous non-food items (such as toothpaste and toiletries) at all times.
- Travel in groups and only during daylight hours. Make noise as you travel to alert bears of your presence.

## The Fires of 2000

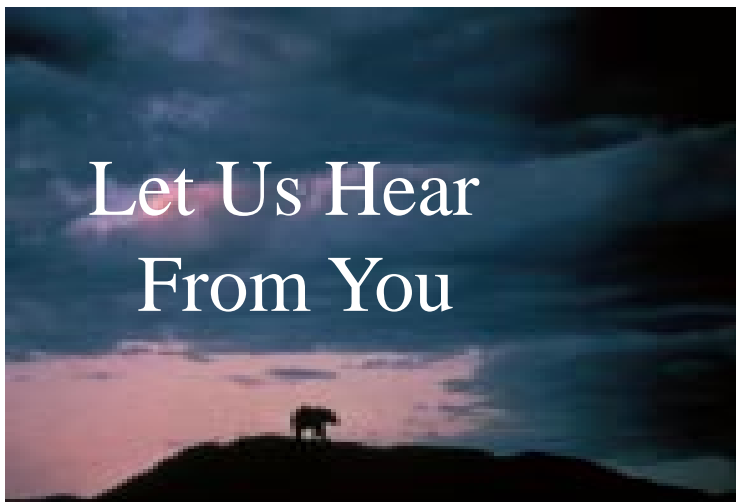
**Q: Will the recent fires in the Bitterroot Ecosystem impact the ability of the area to support grizzly bears?**

**A:** Habitat studies indicate the Bitterroot provides ample suitable habitat to support a population of grizzly bears. The recent fires of 2000 will not change this conclusion. Fire is a natural process integral to all Rocky Mountain ecosystems and grizzly bears have been living with fire in their habitat for thousands of years. In many areas habitat capability will actually improve as regeneration after the fires increases the distribution, abundance, and productivity of vegetative bear foods such as shrubs and forbs.

The 1988 fires burned 1.41 million acres of grizzly habitat in the Yellowstone ecosystem and provide an example of the impacts of large fires in grizzly bear habitat. The fires resulted in increased production of bear foods such as berries and forbs through nutrient cycling and regeneration of burned vegetation. The overall impact of the 1988 fires on the Yellowstone grizzly population was beneficial and this grizzly population has continued to occupy the burned areas, to increase in numbers, and to expand its range since the fires.

**Q: Will the fires impact the implementation of the Bitterroot recovery plan?**

**A:** Grizzly bears will not be reintroduced into the remote Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness until 2002, at the earliest. The fires are expected to have minimal impact on the habitat support capacity of this area for bears, especially since burned areas will have a chance to regenerate by the time bears are reintroduced. The fires in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana will have no impact on grizzly bears or their management. Grizzly bear presence will not be tolerated, and management agencies will actively relocate any bear on private lands outside the National Forest boundary south of U.S. Highway 12 to Lost Trail Pass and west of Highway 93.



Most of the Bitterroot project planning documents (including the Record of Decision and Final Rule) are available on the internet at the Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6 website:

<http://www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly>

If you would like more information about grizzly bears, or wish to request a copy of the Final EIS, Record of Decision, or the Final Rule, please write:

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