

## Board of Review Recommendations

# Recommendations of the Board of Review based on the investigation of the fatality of Mr. Adam Thomas Stewart from a bear attack in Cub Creek on the Bridger-Teton National Forest on September 4, 2014

December 16, 2014

### Board of Review members<sup>1</sup>:

Steve Cain, Grand Teton National Park, Senior Wildlife Biologist, Moose, WY  
Kate Wilmot, Grand Teton National Park, Bear Management Specialist, Moose, WY

Kevin Frey, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department, Bear Management, Bozeman, MT

Dan Tyers, USFS, Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Management Coordinator, Bozeman, MT

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Frank van Manen, USGS, Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, Bozeman, MT

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Brian DeBolt, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Large Carnivore Section Conflict Coordinator, Lander, WY

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Kerry Gunther, Yellowstone National Park, Bear Management Supervisor, Yellowstone National Park, WY

There is no guarantee of safety when working in bear country. However, this Board recognizes that an awareness of the hazards involved with working in bear country can often mitigate potential dangers. Therefore, it is the recommendation of this Board that all entities (Federal, State and Private) that commission their representatives (permanent, seasonal, contractor, university affiliates, and volunteers) to work in bear country review bear safety training protocols. The Board also recommends that non-agency work groups in bear country have and implement a bear safety plan that, at a minimum, contains the 5 standard practices for working safely in bear country including:

- 1) **Bear Safety Training** – To provide a basic understanding of bear behavior including defensive and predatory aggression. There are many sources of bear safety information including but not limited to:

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<sup>1</sup> Arranged in alphabetical order by agency affiliation.

<sup>2</sup> Chair of the Board of Review.

- a. The video: Staying Safe in Bear Country produced by the Safety in Bear Country Society and the International Association for Bear Research and Management.
  - b. The book: Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance written by Dr. Stephen Herrero.
- 2) **Work Party Size** – Working in group sizes of 2 or more people or from horseback has been shown to reduce the risks of bear attack. Workers should be made aware of this fact and the potential risks of working alone in bear country.
  - 3) **Use and Availability of Bear Spray** – Bear spray has proven to be effective at stopping aggressive bear behavior during surprise encounters when the person involved has time to deploy it. All organizations should communicate this fact to their representatives/employees/volunteers and strongly encourage them to carry bear spray and to be familiar with how to rapidly deploy it. Moreover, organizations should consider providing bear spray for each of their representatives working in bear country.
  - 4) **Trip Itinerary** – A standard practice for working in the backcountry on day or overnight trips is to provide supervisors with a trip itinerary (similar to a flight plan). This can decrease search and rescue time and reduce risks to Search and Rescue personnel while also providing for more expedient location of lost or injured people and prompt medical care if needed.
  - 5) **Worker Check-in** – Although worker check-in will not prevent bear attacks, check-in's may lead to quicker recovery and medical attention should an attack occur. A standard practice for workers on day-trips in the backcountry is to check-in with supervisors when returning from the field. A standard practice for workers on overnight backcountry trips is to check-in on a prescribed schedule, usually on a daily basis. Optimally, check-in schedules and the response to check-in failures are arranged before heading into the field. There are many available technology systems to allow regular check-in of field personnel such as cell phones, satellite phones, SPOT devices, or other similar technology.

The Board encourages all organizations with representatives working in bear country to review and evaluate the application of these standard safety practices. The Board reiterates that there is no guarantee of safety when working in bear country and that application of these practices may not have changed the outcome of the Adam Stewart fatality. The Board believes that adherence to these standard safety practices should reduce the risk of future bear attacks on personnel working in bear country, speed medical care, and reduce the risks to Search and Rescue personnel involved in recovery efforts.