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Subject: Conflict Update
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Hi all. Please see the conflict update below. As many of you are probably aware, there were a number of human-bear encounters this past week. There is still information coming in on some of these encounters, and we will keep folks updated accordingly. In the meantime, please reach out with any questions or concerns.

GBRP Conflict Update October 11-17

Montana

- 10/11 - We received word that a hunter had been attacked by a grizzly bear near Choteau, MT, along the Rocky Mountain Front. Initial reports were that a couple was pheasant hunting when they were charged by a grizzly bear. The husband was reportedly bitten by the bear, and shot the bear twice in self-defense, once with his shotgun and once with a handgun. The bear retreated into the shrubs, apparently wounded. FWP was able to locate the bear and requested permission to euthanize the bear. After speaking with the FWP bear manager on the scene, we had questions as to whether the encounter was an actual attack as initially described, or a surprise encounter. We clarified that an encounter between a human and a grizzly bear did not necessarily equate to removal of the bear. However, if the bear had in fact been wounded by multiple gunshots, there may be elevated concern for human safety. We therefore gave FWP permission to remove the bear if they could safely confirm that the bear was indeed wounded and that it was a lone bear (i.e., not a female with cubs). FWP was able to locate the bear again with the drone using Infrared imagery and felt confident it was a single bear. They were eventually able to flush the bear as well, and determined the bear was injured significantly enough that it was a human safety threat. At that point the bear was shot and killed by FWP enforcement. We were told FWP would be putting together a press release, and we requested to review any materials before they were released.

- 10/12 - FWP sent the press release for review around 9:30am and said the release had to be sent to Helena before noon. However, the email was not received until that afternoon, by which time the release had already been sent out ([FWP News: Hunter attacked by grizzly bear near Choteau - Montana Hunting and Fishing Information \(montanaoutdoor.com\)](#)). Upon reviewing this initial press release we had multiple concerns:

- The press release inaccurately called the encounter an attack. In reality, the bear ran over the hunter while trying to escape and stepped on the hunter's leg, injuring him.

- The press release suggested that FWS authorized approval to remove the bear because a hunter was attacked. However, as stated above, approval to remove the bear was specifically based on concerns over a wounded bear and predicated on it being wounded and not a female with cubs.
 - The timeframe in which the press release was put forth did not allow adequate time for review by FWS. Further, to the best of our knowledge, the press release was written without input from anyone at the scene of the incident and was not reviewed by any of the FWP bear managers involved in the incident.
- 10/13 - Another story about the encounter was published, in which several new and important details were put forth ([Grizzly bear attack in Teton County, Montana, leaves hunter injured \(usatoday.com\)](#)).
 - Moving forward, we will look to work with FWP Comm Ed and FWP managers to come up with a process that ensures more thorough reporting and a more adequate review process in situations involving grizzly bears and in grizzly bear management, especially in situations where FWS are involved.
- 10/14 - FWS collaborated with FWP to produce a short PSA on the importance of carrying bear spray during hunting season.
 - Collar data from the two subadult grizzly bears captured south of I-90 in the north end of the Bitterroot and relocated to the Welcome Creek Wilderness on 10/3 - 10/4 show the bears moving back north across I-90 towards the Blackfoot, where FWP bear managers believe they came from in the first place.
 - FWS Conflict Specialists continue to assist FWP with various fencing, conflict mitigation, and bear education efforts.

Wyoming

- 10/12 - A person was injured near Dubois by a grizzly bear during a surprise encounter with a grizzly family group. The person sustained non-life-threatening injuries, and WGF determined no management action was warranted.
- 10/15 - Two shed hunters were injured by a grizzly bear south of Cody in what was determined to be a surprise encounter. Both individuals were taken to a Billings hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. WGF investigated the incident and decided no management action was warranted. [Wyoming Game and Fish Department - Wyoming Game and Fish Department investigates after individuals are injured by grizzly bear](#)
- No additional sightings of 399.

- 863 and her cubs were spotted crossing the highway on 10/11. A USFS Bear Ambassador was on scene to manage traffic, and the bears moved off without incident.

Tribes

- 10/16 - We received a call from CSKT Wildlife Management that a pheasant hunter shot a grizzly bear in self-defense on the Flathead Reservation. Initial reports indicated that the hunter shot the bear twice, including once in the face, at close range with his shotgun. The bear retreated into the trees, at which point the hunter said he saw two small cubs. The Ninepipes Wildlife Management Area was closed for the remainder of the day while CSKT and FWP enforcement searched the area. Aerial support was not available, but ground searches turned up no sign of the bear or her cubs, and no sign of injury.

Notes

- Based on the two encounters in Montana this past week along with feedback we've received in both situations, we will look to work with FWP bear managers as well as FWP and FWS enforcement to develop protocols for responding to injured grizzly bears. We will also work with FWP on ways to increase outreach and education during fall hunting seasons.

Thank you,
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