

Daniel Madel: Wildlife Technician

Overview of Grizzly bear Management, Summer 2016

09/08/2016

This summer started out at a fast pace for Tim Manley and me. We responded to a grizzly bear conflict call my first week back at work. The call came from a resident that lives up the North Fork of the Flathead river past Polebridge. The resident told us that there was a very friendly and habituated grizzly bear that had been hanging out by his house eating clovers and dandelions in his yard. When Tim and I arrived at the resident's house we saw the bear standing in his yard. We set the trap right by the bear as it watched us and then we walked about 50 yards away. We watched the bear walk right into the trap and tug on the deer leg we had baited the trap with. We then watched as the door slammed shut and the bear hit the front of the trap trying to get out. The bear was a 3 to 4-year-old male that seemed to be food conditioned. We sedated the bear and put an Iridium radio collar on him. The Iridium GPS collar that we fitted the bear with downloads the bear's locations every 30 minutes which provides us with very detailed and interesting data on its movement patterns. We now know he has been roaming back and forth between the North Fork and Glacier National Park and has been staying out of trouble. We did a hard on-site release with this bear by shooting fire cracker shells and hitting it with rubber bullets to make it feel uncomfortable about hanging out around residences.

Our next conflict involved a bear we had dealt with last summer that had caused problems around Ferndale. A sow grizzly bear with two yearlings was roaming around Ferndale killing chickens and walking up on porches looking for food. Again we had a bear that was food conditioned and too habituated to people. She was teaching her yearlings the same bad habits. We set three different culvert traps and foot snares in the Ferndale area and ended up catching the whole family group. Unfortunately, and due to the fact that we had captured this bear three times before, the decision was made to remove her from the population and she was euthanized. The decision was made to send the yearlings to a zoo as we could not release them back into the public knowing that they had learned bad habits from their mother and would get into trouble.

Shortly after this conflict, we received another report from a resident up the North Fork of a bear that had broken into a garage and ate a bag of cat food. It then crawled up into an attic and broke through the ceiling to get out. We set a trap near the landowner's house and ended up catching a bear that we were not targeting. We caught a two-year-old male grizzly bear which we put an Iridium radio collar on and released at the same location where we had the trap set.



Our North Fork bear conflicts continued after we received calls about three camp trailers getting broken into along with a shed at a resident's place. When we arrived, we discovered a camp trailer that had its door ripped out by a bear and the inside of the trailer was a mess. We set a culvert trap right next to the camp trailer and the very next morning we had captured a female grizzly well known by residents of the North Fork and to Tim. This bear had roamed around the North Fork for a long time and had been seen by many residents that live there. For the most part she stayed out of trouble but had been captured three previous times for hanging around cabins. The decision was made to euthanize

this bear since it had broken into camp trailers and would most likely do it again.

Our next bear management calls were much different from the others this summer, we received police reports that a grizzly bear was being seen right in town in Whitefish. A resident there had also sent us pictures of a bear that had climbed up into the cherry tree in her yard. We set a culvert trap at her house next to the cherry tree. We then had a separate call from a resident near Blanchard Lake (right outside of Whitefish), that had seen a bear at her house during the night. It had drug a bag of dog food off her porch and ate it. Tim and I set a trap at this house the same day we set the other one in town. The next day we checked both traps and nothing had showed up at either of them. However, we were still getting reports of people seeing a grizzly bear right in town. Tim and I decided to drive around Whitefish to see if we could find the bear. After driving around for a while we decided to go back and check the trap and surprisingly we had caught the bear. We brought this bear to Tim's house, worked it up and put a radio collar on it. This bear was a young 3-year-old male. The next morning, we found out we had another bear in the Blanchard Lake trap. This bear was a four to five-year-old male grizzly. We also brought this bear back to Tim's house, worked him up and fitted him with a radio collar. We then decided to release both of the bears up by Frozen Lake near the Canadian Border where they would stay out of trouble and have plenty of berries and vegetation to eat.

Along with the six bear conflict captures we had this summer, we were also busy implementing our augmentation trapping up at Spotted Bear. We set about five culvert traps up near Spotted Bear while trying to capture both a young female and young male grizzly to translocate to the Cabinet mountains near Libby. The purpose of augmentation trapping is to help maintain the population of grizzly bears in the Cabinet/Yaak ecosystem. While trapping, we caught a three-year-old male grizzly that we moved to the Cabinet mountains but were not successful in capturing a young female. We had traps set and spread out in different locations near Spotted Bear Wilderness and along the South Fork of the Flathead River from early July all the way through the end of August.

Now that summer is coming to an end and the weather is getting colder, berries and vegetation are getting scarce throughout the Northwest. Grizzly bears have been moving down to lower elevations looking for other food sources. Tim and I have been getting numerous reports from people who have had bears coming in to check out their fruit trees, feed on the fruit and often times do some damage. We recently set two culvert traps at two different houses near Kalispell. There are many people throughout the Flathead Valley who have fruit trees or small orchards. Most people make the mistake of waiting too long to pick the fruit which attracts hungry bears looking for food to fatten up for hibernation.

