



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Glacier National Park
International Peace Park
Biosphere Reserve
World Heritage Site

P.O. Box 128
West Glacier, MT 59936
www.nps.gov/glac

406 888-7800 phone
406 888-7808 fax

Glacier National Park Fact Sheet

Removal of Conditioned/Overly Familiar Grizzly Bears

Updated: September 10, 2009

CURRENT SITUATION:

- Park bear management personnel removed a 17-year-old female grizzly bear and her two yearlings from the park's grizzly bear population on August 17, 2009.
- The female grizzly and her cubs were spotted 300 yards away from, and heading toward, the occupied backcountry campground at Oldman Lake.
- Park rangers shot and killed the adult bear. The yearlings were darted over an hour later. One male yearling died shortly after being hit by a tranquilizer dart. Rangers attempted to resuscitate the yearling by performing mouth-to-nose CPR, but to no avail.
- A necropsy conducted by a Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks' veterinarian determined internal bleeding was the cause of death of the yearling. While the dart used to tranquilize the bear did not strike a vein, it is likely that the dart nicked a vein as the bear moved after being darted.
- The other yearling, also a male, was flown from Spokane, WA, to New York, NY, on Wednesday, September 9, 2009. The bear is currently at the Wildlife Conservation Society's Bronx Zoo.
- This decision to remove the family group was made after the group repeatedly entered human-occupied backcountry campgrounds this summer, demonstrating over familiarity toward humans while purposefully approaching them in close proximity.
- Documented encounters in July 2009 indicate that the female was conditioned to humans as defined by Glacier National Park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines. That, coupled with the female's documented history of human interaction dating back to 2004, led park managers to determine that the bear and her yearlings posed an unacceptable risk to public safety, and had to be removed in accordance with the park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines.
- This park management decision is not related to a lack of available funding to conduct more aversive conditioning. Per the park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines, park managers undertake aversive conditioning when a bear is considered habituated to prevent it from becoming conditioned. Once a bear is deemed conditioned, no further aversive conditioning occurs.
- It was a very difficult decision reached by park managers after many hours in multiple meetings analyzing all available information and weighing all alternatives.

- Dr. Christopher Servheen, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is consulted on all removal actions of grizzlies. Servheen maintains close contact with all federally-authorized captive wildlife facilities and zoos which may be able and/or are willing to take conditioned, adult grizzly bears into captivity.
- No other agencies, nor any pre-approved captive wildlife facilities, were willing to take a conditioned adult grizzly.
- The park made special efforts between 2004 and 2007, utilizing Karelian Bear Dogs and other aversive conditioning methods, to rehabilitate this female grizzly. With those efforts failing, park managers could not, in accordance with Glacier National Park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines, allow the bear to remain in the population and pose a potential risk to the safety of the park's visitors.
- Prior peer review and consultation occurred with Dr. Chris Servheen, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kerry Gunther, Yellowstone National Park's bear biologist and Dr. Rick Mace, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks regarding this female grizzly bear prior to the second year of aversive conditioning in 2006. These subject matter experts previously recommended that this female grizzly and her previous set of offspring be removed from the park population.

BRIEF HISTORY OF BEAR & AVERSIVE CONDITIONING MANAGEMENT EFFORTS:

- Since 2004 numerous efforts have been attempted to aversively condition the adult female and her young to avoid human interactions and keep this bear and her offspring in the park population.
- In July 2005, the use of aversive conditioning, specifically using Karelian Bear Dogs (KBD) in the park's backcountry, was approved by then Superintendent Mick Holm. It is National Park Service policy to prohibit dogs in the backcountry of a national park.
- During the 2005 aversive conditioning, the female grizzly was released in the same location as it was caught in order to place a radio collar on her. Bear management specialists have found that capturing bears and releasing them in a different location has repeatedly proven unsuccessful, as bears, both black and grizzlies, travel extensive distances to return to their original home range.
- Park managers hoped that through a continued aversive conditioning effort, this individual bear would be able to remain in the ecosystem.
- Extensive aversive conditioning efforts such as those performed on this particular bear had not been attempted previously in Glacier's backcountry.
- A decision was made to continue the aversive conditioning in 2006 because it was felt that additional work was needed with this bear. Campgrounds and trails in that area were not reopened until late September and efforts proved inconclusive.
- The female grizzly in question has frequented the Morning Star and Old Man Lake backcountry campgrounds, both in the Two Medicine/Cut Bank area repeatedly for the last five years. During that time, the female grizzly has produced two sets of cubs.

- Between 2004 and 2006, both the mother and her offspring approached hikers, forcing them off trails, came into cooking areas while people yelled and waved their arms at the bears, and sniffed at tents during the night.
- Further review of case incident reports shows the female grizzly, without cubs, was aversively conditioned in 2007.
- There were no documented reports of close contact with the female grizzly in 2008; she had a new litter of cubs in spring 2008.
- The decision to remove the family of grizzlies is the result of Glacier's ongoing coordination with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the agency charged with administering the Endangered Species Act.

BACKGROUND:

- Every effort was made to deal with the bear's conditioning to humans in a non-lethal manner. The grizzly bear is protected by the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species.
- Glacier's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines incorporate comments from consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and numerous other agencies, individuals and the public.
- Glacier National Park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines are dynamic management tools that receive periodic national and international peer review.
- The park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines state the conditions of how the NPS manages Glacier's bear populations, both black and grizzlies. These tools also reflect the best available knowledge and management techniques that bear managers can employ.
- Glacier's bear management program is recognized nationally and internationally, and bear management rangers regularly assist in the creation of similar plans at other parks, both domestically and internationally.
- Glacier's bear management policy is to maintain natural population dynamics and, to the extent possible, promote natural behavior by bears in the presence of humans.
- Glacier utilizes area closures for a wide variety of reasons related to bear management, but does not utilize broad, indefinite closures when there is a conditioned bear. This is because managers cannot predict where the bear might go, or when it would show up.
- Removal of grizzlies from the park is a rare occurrence. The last time a grizzly bear had to be removed from Glacier National Park was 1998; after it was determined a family group of grizzlies was involved in a fatal mauling. At that time, the family group of grizzlies was killed.
- There have been 10 human fatalities resulting from grizzly bear attacks since the park was established in 1910.

- There have been 172 grizzly mortalities in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem between 1998 and 2007. Only 2 percent of those mortalities occurred in Glacier National Park (May 1998 – family group of three removed after fatal mauling.) (Source: USFWS, Dr. C. Servheen)
- Aversive conditioning is the application of non-lethal negative reinforcement aimed at behavior modification. Rangers use noise, Karelian Bear Dogs, and other non-lethal stimuli to encourage the grizzly to keep away from humans and backcountry campgrounds.
- Countless park bears, both grizzlies and black bears, receive aversive conditioning in various forms. Anecdotally, these collective efforts appear to be quite successful when performed early enough.
- Glacier National Park has previously contracted with the Wind River Bear Institute to assist with aversive conditioning of bears both in the frontcountry and backcountry. They use Karelian Bear Dogs (KBD) as part of their aversive conditioning program. KBDs are also used by bear management specialists with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

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