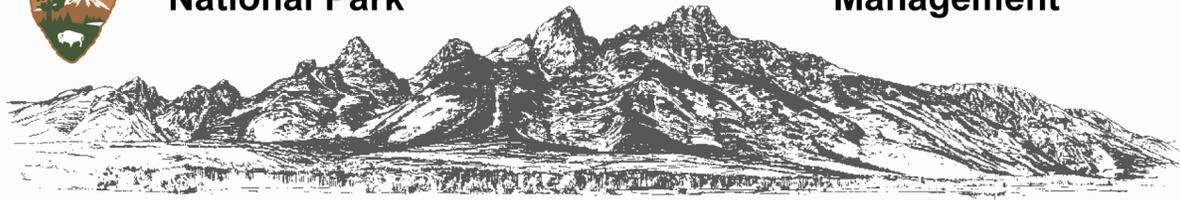




Grand Teton National Park

Science and Resource Management



2009 Wildlife Management: Human-Bear Interface

BACKGROUND

Grand Teton National Park (GRTE) provides habitat for healthy populations of black (*Ursus americanus*) and grizzly (*Ursus arctos*) bears. The park is responsible for maintaining bears as free ranging, naturally regulated populations throughout the park and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway (JDR), and providing for visitor enjoyment, education and appreciation. GRTE receives nearly 4 million visitors per year, most of whom visit during the peak summer season (June through September). Consistently high levels of human recreation in prime bear habitat maintain a similarly high potential for human-bear conflicts.

APPROACH

Visitors, concession employees, in-holders, and GRTE staff all share the responsibility of preventing human-bear conflicts. In an effort to decrease conflicts, all park facilities, including employee housing, concession areas, and visitor campgrounds, have bear resistant garbage receptacles and food storage regulations that are strictly enforced. The park delivers a “Be Bear Aware” message to the public via public interpretive programs and park publications such as the *Teewinot*, which educates visitors about food storage, hiking and camping in bear country, and other general bear information. In addition, National Park Service staffs provide annual bear management training to its employees as well as to concession employees. Bear management is necessarily designed as a park-wide, multi-divisional effort.

The GRTE Bear Management Office (BMO) is responsible for the implementation of the park’s Bear Management Plan and for recording all data related to bear management activities in the park and JDR. The primary focus of the BMO is to keep human foods away from bears.

RESULTS

An excellent berry year in 2009 coupled with an above average whitebark pine crop provided ample foraging opportunities for both black and grizzly bears and helped keep nuisance bear behavior to a minimum. In 2009, we recorded 71 human-bear confrontations and 5 human-bear conflicts, almost identical to num-

bers reported in 2008 (Fig. 1). Confrontations are defined as incidents where bears approach or follow people, charge or otherwise act aggressively toward people, enter front-country developments, or enter occupied backcountry. Incidents where bears enter developments or occupied backcountry campsites are listed as confrontations due to the potential threat to human safety, even if bears involved did not behave aggressively. Bear-human conflicts are defined as incidents where bears damage property, obtain anthropogenic foods, or injure people.



Black bear with stuff sack at Marion Lake, 2009 (R. Pacioni photo).

Conflicts

There were 5 confirmed human-bear conflicts in 2009.

- On June 12, 2009 a light brown/cinnamon colored black bear approached campers eating breakfast at Phelps Lake. The bear was not aggressive; however, it had very little fear of humans. The campers left the area and upon their return observed that the bear had bit a portion of a stick of deodorant and successfully left with a bag of trail mix.
- On June 23, 2009 a group of bighorn sheep researchers returned to their base camp in Webb Canyon and observed bear tracks (species unknown) around their tent and 2 holes in the top of the tent. No food or scented items were left in the tent.

- On June 30, 2009 a grizzly bear with 2 blue ear-tags was observed eating a bag of trash along the North Park Road just north of Flagg Ranch. It appears that the trash bag fell out of a vehicle and the bear opportunistically found the trash in the middle of the road.
- On July 8, 2009 a blonde black bear with green ear-tags received a food reward at Marion Lake. The bear walked through camp and was scared away by people but returned 2 times and took a stuff sack containing food items from one of the campsites.
- On July 31, 2009 a bear matching the same description received a food reward from one of the Marion Lake campsites.
- A sixth possible conflict was reported in the Death Canyon Camping zone on July 10, 2009. Campers reported that a bear ate hiking pole handles and pack straps during the night. However, the campers never saw a bear and could not verify via tracks that a bear was responsible. This type of chewing behavior is common among other wildlife such as deer and marmots and has therefore been left out of the final conflict summary for 2009.

Hazing

Hazing is used to encourage a bear to leave an area

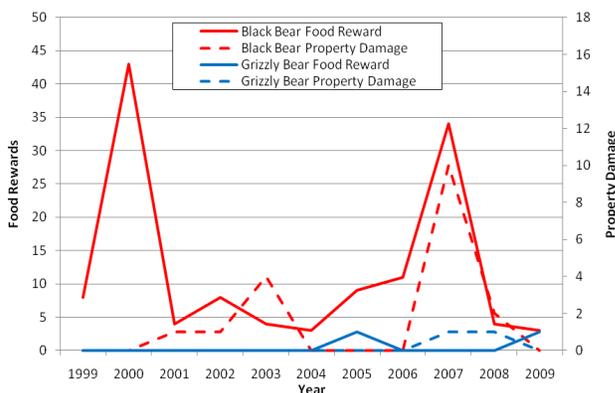


Figure 1. Bear human food-rewards and property damage documented 1999-2009.

and involves noise making, throwing rocks, or the firing of bean bags and cracker shells. There were 7 reports of park staff hazing bears in 2009. Two grizzly bears and 1 black bear were hazed away from park roads, two grizzly bears were hazed from the Flagg Ranch developed area, 1 black bear was hazed from the Moose developed area, and 1 black bear was hazed from the Signal Mountain Campground.

Injured Bear(s)

On May 19, 2009 a blond black bear with yellow ear-tags was hit by a car on Highway 89/191/26 0.2 miles

south of Antelope Flats road. The bear sustained an obvious injury to its rear left leg but was able to walk away. The bear was observed again on May 25, 2009 in the Moose developed area and rangers noted that the bear was limping but able to climb a tree. On June 15, 2009 a blond black bear with a limp was observed north of Taggart Lake Trailhead feeding on the east side of the road. The last observation of an injured black bear was on June 24, 2009 when a visitor reported seeing a blond black bear with a limp swimming in the Scwabacher's Landing area.

Nuisance Bears

No nuisance bear management actions were taken in 2009 (Fig. 2).

Closures

Seasonal area closures are used to protect secure bear habitat and to address human safety concerns. In 2009 two annual closures were implemented. The Grassy Lake road was closed to motorized use from April 1 – May 31 to protect important spring bear habitat. The Willow Flats area west of Jackson Lake Lodge, a large elk calving area, was closed to public entry from May 15 through July 15 to protect grizzly bear foraging opportunities and to lower the potential for human-bear conflicts. In addition, in 2009 GRTE temporarily closed 5 areas to public entry due to bears feeding on carcasses.

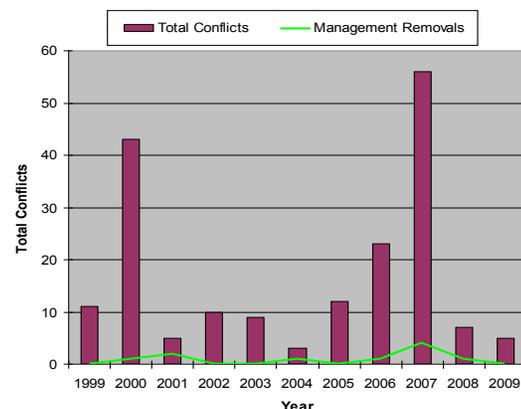


Figure 2. Total conflicts and management removals 1999-2009.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to L. Frattaroli for help with database management.

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