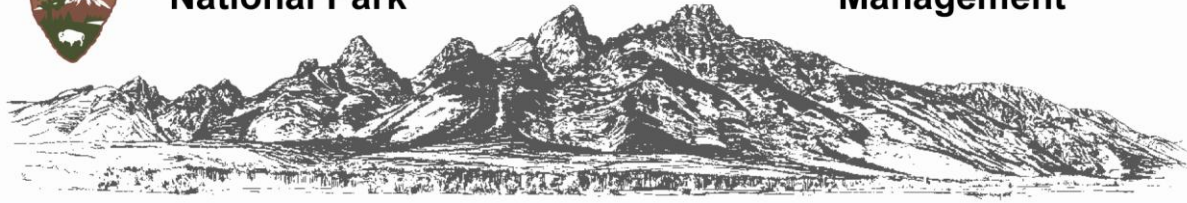




# Grand Teton National Park

# Science and Resource Management



## 2007 Wildlife Management: Human - Bear Conflicts

### BACKGROUND

Grand Teton National Park (GRTE) provides habitat for thriving populations of black (*Ursus americanus*) and grizzly (*Ursus arctos*) bears. The park strives to maintain bears in free ranging, naturally regulated populations throughout the Park and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway (JODR), while also providing for visitor enjoyment, education and appreciation. GRTE receives nearly 4 million visitors each year, most of whom visit during the peak summer season of June through September. A high level of human recreation in prime bear habitat creates the potential for bear-human conflicts.

### APPROACH

Visitors, concession employees, in-holders, and GRTE staff all share the responsibility of preventing bear- human conflicts. In an effort to decrease bear-human conflicts, all park facilities, including employee housing areas, 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 general bear information. In addition, National Park Service staffs provide annual bear management training to its employees as well as concession employees. Bear management is necessarily designed as a park-wide, interdisciplinary effort.

The GRTE Bear Management Office (BMO), supervised by the park’s senior wildlife biologist, was created in 2007 in an effort to formalize and focus bear management activities. The primary focus of our approach is to keep human foods away from bears. The 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.

### MANAGEMENT RESULTS

Continued drought conditions in 2007 resulted in poor production of natural forage for bears. This

caused bears to seek unnatural foods in human developed areas. GRTE recorded 210 bear-human confrontations and 56 bear-human conflicts (Table 1) in 2007. We define confrontations as incidents where bears approach or follow people, charge or otherwise act aggressively toward people, enter front-country developments, or enter occupied backcountry campsites without inflicting human injury. 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. We define bear-human conflicts as incidents where bears damage property, obtain human foods, or injure people.

Table 1. Bear-human conflicts reported in Grand Teton National Park, 2007

Species	Anthropogenic Foods	Property Damage- No Food	Human Injury	Human Death
Grizzly bear	0	1	1	0
Black Bear	34	10	0	0
Unidentified bear species	9	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

GRTE destroyed a record 4 black bears in 2007 for displaying aggressive, food conditioned behavior. A fifth food-conditioned black bear, #22044, disappeared from developed areas prior to a successful management removal. Black bears across the Rocky Mountain west faced a shortage of natural foods in 2007, causing an unprecedented number of bear-human conflicts and management removals due to nuisance behavior.

### Nuisance Bears

Black bear #22068, an approximately 3 year old male, was captured in a management trap at Spalding Bay on June 5, 2007. The trap was set for a nuisance black bear in the Leigh Lake area that was reported as aggressively approaching people, trying to gain entry into tents and the Leigh Lake patrol cabin, and showing little reaction when people tried to scare it away. The bear matched the description of the Leigh Lake problem bear and was immobilized and fitted with a GPS collar and released on site. On June 22, 2007

#22068 climbed the fence at Jenny Lake Lodge and raided improperly secured recycling bins, peered into Lodge windows, and tried to enter the back of the Lodge restaurant. He was aggressive towards rangers who were trying to haze him. #22068 was later darted at the Lodge and euthanized at a remote location. GPS data from its collar confirmed that its home range included the Leigh Lake area.

Black bear #22057, a 4-5 year old female, had a history of frequenting the Colter Bay campground since 2006. In 2007, she received multiple food rewards and was becoming more and more aggressive. On August 29, 2007 #22057 received a substantial food reward (donuts, snicker bars, bread, potato chips) from the hiker-biker loop in the Colter Bay campground and according to rangers was extremely aggressive. Initially a culvert trap was set in a closed loop of the Colter Bay campground with no success. Bear #22057 was eventually free-range darted in the closed loop and euthanized on August 29, 2007.



Black bear #22073 sniffing food items through a small opening in car window. (Park visitor Photo).

Bear #22073, a 5-6 year old female black bear, was caught in a management trap at Lupine Meadows Trailhead on August 18, 2007. The trap was set for a bear that had been frequenting the trailhead and trail system approaching visitors, seeking food in open cars, stealing backpacks, and receiving food rewards. #22073 was fitted with a GPS radio-collar and relocated to the Grassy Lake Road. She was back at Surprise Lake on August 26, 2007 where she approached campers, rummaged through their camping

gear, and bit a hole in their tent. #22073 continued this behavior until September 3, when she broke a car window that was slightly open in the Jenny Lake Campground. On September 5, 2007 #22073 was free-range darted near the south shore of Jenny Lake and euthanized at another location.

An unmarked male yearling black bear was free-range darted and euthanized on September 10, 2007. This bear had a several-week history of human habituation and food conditioning in the Jenny Lake area, beginning near Inspiration Point, then fanning to nearby trails, and finally at the Jenny Lake boat dock and campground. He aggressively displaced campers preparing food and was rewarded for this behavior on many occasions.

#### Human Injury

On June 13, 2007 a 54-year-old male resident of Lander, Wyoming was injured by grizzly bear #399 while hiking near Jackson Lake Lodge. The incident occurred during the early morning hours when the victim apparently surprised the adult sow and her 3 yearling cubs at close range on a fresh elk calf kill. He reported watching elk on his right side then noticing the 4 bears at very close range. He yelled and #399 came toward him. He yelled again, jumped off the trail away from the bear, and laid on his stomach. At this point the bear bit him on the back and buttocks 3 times before being alarmed by an approaching lodge employee. No action was taken against the bears because #399 was determined to be acting naturally in the defense of her cubs and a food source. This was the first human injury attributed to a grizzly bear since 2001, when an elk hunter surprised a sow with cubs and was mauled during the park's elk reduction program.

#### Hazing

Hazing is used to encourage bears to leave developed areas and involves noise making, throwing rocks, or the firing of bean bags and cracker shells. There were 6 reports of park staff hazing bears in 2007. One black bear was hazed away from a roadkill so the carcass could be removed and 5 black bears were hazed out of developed areas.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thanks to L. Frattaroli for her dedication to bear management activities in Grand Teton National Park.

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