National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Glacier National Park
International Peace Park
Biosphere Reserve
World Heritage Site

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Glacier National Park Fact Sheet

Planned Removal of Conditioned/Overly Familiar Grizzly Bears

CURRENT SITUATION:

- Park bear management personnel plan to remove a 17-year-old female grizzly bear and her two yearlings from the park's grizzly bear population.
- This decision was made after the family group repeatedly entered human-occupied backcountry campgrounds this summer, demonstrating over familiarity towards humans while purposefully approaching humans in close proximity.
- Documented encounters in July 2009 indicate that the female is conditioned to humans as defined by Glacier National Park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines. That, coupled with the female's history of human interaction dating back to 2004, led park managers to determine that the bear poses an unacceptable risk to public safety, and must be removed in accordance with the park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines.
- It was a very difficult decision reached by park managers after many hours in multiple meetings analyzing all available information and weighing all alternatives.
- Bear management staff and park managers carefully examined the bear's behavior and evaluated that data with decision-making criteria outlined in the park's Bear Management Plan.
- The park made special efforts, utilizing Karelian Bear Dogs and other aversive conditioning methods, to rehabilitate this female grizzly. With those efforts not proving successful and subsequent "conditioned" behavior being observed by park personnel, park managers cannot, in accordance with Glacier'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.
- In the end, the preponderance of evidence led park managers to believe that she was displaying behavior consistent with the "conditioned" category. As such, according to Glacier National Park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines, conditioned bears that display over familiarity must be removed, and no further aversive conditioning would be attempted.
- 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.
- Rangers are currently attempting to locate the bears in the park's backcountry. A GPS collar has been placed on the adult female; however, data is received only one time a week and only for a one-hour period. Her most recent location placed her west of the Continental Divide in the general vicinity of Cut Bank Valley.
- Trails in the vicinity of Cut Bank Valley remain closed at this time.

- Dr. Chris Servheen, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 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, and is consulted on all removal actions of grizzlies.

- At this time no pre-approved captive wildlife facilities are willing to take a conditioned adult grizzly.

- Barring the identification/location of a federally-approved captive facility or zoo willing to accept the adult bear, park rangers will attempt to lethally remove the female from the park's backcountry in as safe a manner as possible.

- Every effort will be made to capture the yearlings and relocate them to the Bronx Zoo in New York; however, at this time the priority is to locate and remove the female.

- 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 bear biologist and Dr. Rick Mace, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks regarding this female grizzly bear before the aversive conditioning.

- These subject matter experts from other agencies previously recommended that this female grizzly and her offspring be removed from the park population.

BRIEF HISTORY OF BEAR & AVERSIVE CONDITIONING MANAGEMENT EFFORTS:

- Since 2004 numerous efforts have been attempted to haze the habituated bear in question and 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. 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 habituated bear would be able to remain in the ecosystem.

- Extensive 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. 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, have come into cooking areas while people yelled and waved their arms at the bears, and sniffed at and licked tents during the night.

- There were no documented reports of close contact with the female grizzly in 2007 or 2008; she had a new litter of cubs in spring 2008.

- Consultation has occurred with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the agency charged with administering the Endangered Species Act about the park's management decision.

BACKGROUND:

- The grizzly bear is protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and as such, every effort was made to deal with the bear's conditioning to humans in a non-lethal manner. The Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem population of grizzlies is currently listed as a "threatened" species under the ESA.

- 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 international peer review.

- The park's Bear Management Plan and Guidelines clearly 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 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 in the presence of humans.

- 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. A family group of three grizzlies were removed after it was determined the entire family group grizzly 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 predation since the park was established in 1910.

- Countless habituated park bears, both grizzlies and black bears, receive aversive conditioning in various forms. Anecdotally, these collective efforts appear to be quite successful.

- 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 habituated bears to keep away from humans, campgrounds, trails and backcountry campgrounds.

- Karelian Bear Dogs (KBD) are used by bear management specialists with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Glacier National Park has previously contracted with the Wind River Bear Institute to assist with aversive conditioning of bears.

- KBDs are used in combination with other non-lethal aversive conditioning tools such as cracker shells and rubber bullets.

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