

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Glacier National Park
West Glacier, Montana 59936

BEAR MANAGEMENT PLAN

Glacier National Park

(Reviewed April 2004)

Recommended by: _____ Date

Stephen J. Frye,
Chief, Division of Visitor Services

Date

Leo F. Marnell
Chief, Division of Science and Resources

Approved by: _____ Date

Mick Holm
Superintendent, Glacier National Park

INTRODUCTION:

Glacier National Park was established on May 11, 1910, protecting 4,100 square kilometers (1,013,594 acres) of wilderness in the northern Rocky Mountains, an area of glaciated peaks, glaciers, knife-edge ridges, forests, lakes and meadows. Bear species in the Park include both black bear (Ursus americanus) and grizzly bear (Ursus arctos), the latter is a threatened species protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Visitor use in Glacier has increased from about 4,000 in 1910 to near 2.0 million annually. Most visitation occurs during the summer when bears are most active. Increasing use of the Park exerts an increasing pressure on bears for space and solitude.

In addition, current and proposed activities adjacent to Park boundaries, such as sub-divisions, logging, and oil and gas exploration and development, continue to reduce regional habitat and place increased pressure on bears as they range in and out of the Park.

The staff of Glacier National Park is responsible for protecting and perpetuating the naturally functioning ecosystems in the Park, including bears and their habitat, and for providing visitors the opportunity to enjoy the natural setting. In addition to this Bear Management Plan, Bear Management Guidelines assign responsibility and list guidelines for the prevention and management of human/bear encounters in Glacier. The Chief, Division of Resources Management is responsible for both documents.

Glacier comprises approximately 20% of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem (NCDGBE), and supports the goals of the Grizzly Recovery Plan. Glacier National Park bears may be used to augment or restock populations in the NCDGBE or other ecosystems, if the Park's naturally functioning ecosystem would not be significantly damaged.

This Plan incorporates comments received from "Formal Consultation" with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Any exception to this Plan must be approved by the Superintendent.

GOALS

1. To provide for the long-term survivability of the grizzly bear in Glacier National Park and the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem. This Plan conforms to the regulations and guidelines set forth in the Endangered Species Act, as they pertain to the threatened grizzly bear.

2. To fulfill the mandate of Congress, as expressed in the Organic Act of 1916. The act states that the Park will: "...conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

The Park will strive to protect and maintain the natural habitat and status of grizzly and black bears, and maximize the security and safety of the Park visitor, while recognizing the inherent dangers of a natural wilderness, such as Glacier National Park. When bears consistently occupy a specific backcountry area for natural food or some other reason, visitors may be temporarily excluded. In developed areas efforts will be made through management, education, and law enforcement to minimize or eliminate unnatural bear attractants. If, despite these efforts, a bear's behavior indicates habituation to an artificial environment, such as a developed area, hazing, aversive conditioning, or relocation techniques may be used. If there is a continuing safety hazard related to bears in any area of the Park, the area will be closed to visitor use until the hazard is resolved.

3. To minimize the number of incidents involving bear/human confrontations. Grizzly bears and black bears are part of the native post glacial fauna of Glacier National Park. Both species have demonstrated an exceptional ability to successfully inhabit the Park environment. At the same time, bear nutritional requirements, inherent behavior, and learning capacity, combined with human-use patterns and behavior, have led to competition for space and conflict with Park visitors. An active management program is therefore required to assure conservation of bears and to enhance the safety of Park visitors.

Glacier's bear management policy is to maintain natural population dynamics and, to the extent possible promote natural behavior in the presence of humans. (It is recognized that shyness may be a desirable, but not a completely natural behavior resulting from selective pressures during the past century against certain traits considered undesirable by humans.)

Glacier's bear management policy is implemented using individual bear behavior as the basis for management decisions. Natural defensive behavior, including the protection of young and natural foods, will usually result in a management response directed at controlling human activity. Behaviors considered undesirable, including unprovoked, overt aggression and human predation, will result in a management response directed toward bear removal. Bear behavior that reflects habituation to developed areas and/or humans will result in management actions directed toward discouraging the behavior, such as; hazing, aversive conditioning or relocation of the bear. Opportunity for bear/human confrontation will be further minimized through other forms of Park-wide human-use management.

The Bear Management Plan is developed from a base of scientific information collected in the Park or extrapolated from studies in other areas. Park policy recognizes the unique contribution that a relatively undisturbed bear population makes to the regional ecosystem. Field studies will, therefore, minimize invasive research techniques, such as trapping, handling, marking, collaring, and aircraft operations which disturb natural behavioral processes.

OBJECTIVES

- 1. Provide specific training opportunities about bear biology and management to all persons employed in the Park.** Bear management training will be conducted annually for Park staff and additional specific training will be provided to employees involved in bear management. Park staff also receives periodic training through opportunities provided by a variety of sources outside the Park which meet minimum animal handling requirements outlined in NPS 77, Natural Resources Management Guidelines and Glacier's Bear Management Guidelines.
- 2. Inform visitors and potential visitors of the presence of bears and the inherent dangers of visiting bear country.** Inform visitors how best to minimize risk and enjoy a quality experience. Education of park visitors is recognized as a key element in the bear management program.
- 3. Provide reasonable visitor information and consistent regulation enforcement to encourage compliance with proper food and garbage handling procedures.**
- 4. Aggressively enforce residential and commercial food storage and solid waste disposal regulations within the Park.** Glacier National Park will also serve as a catalyst in resolving local sanitation situations adjacent to the Park.
- 5. Assure "bearproofing" of all garbage containers and garbage storage and handling facilities in the Park.**
- 6. Incorporate bear reports received at Park Headquarters into summaries, and disseminate to District and Subdistrict Rangers, Information Centers, and adjacent cooperating agencies on a regularly scheduled basis.** Summary reports will aid in assessing potential bear-human problem areas.
- 7. Initiate aggressive management actions when indicated to assure that objectives of this Plan are achieved.**
- 8. Provide for research and monitoring of the biological aspects of the bear management program to assure that the program activities are consistent with the best available scientific information available.**
- 9. Assess all current and proposed Park operations, policies, management actions, and resource management programs for compatibility**

with the management and conservation of grizzly and black bears.

10. Collaborate with Federal and State agencies, Indian Tribes, and private individuals and organizations in the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem to enhance the regional survivability of the grizzly bear.

11. Incorporate appropriate research findings into the Bear Management Plan and Guidelines.

12. Cooperate with other agencies; including the U.S. Geologic Survey Biological Resources Division, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Montana, the Blackfeet Tribe, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, county governments, Waterton Lakes National Park, and the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, to facilitate beneficial grizzly bear and prey species management and research.

13. Review the Bear Management Plan and Bear Management Guidelines biennially, and revise as needed.

RESEARCH SERVICES

The Park will initiate, coordinate, and encourage research on the biology, ecology, and behavior of bears to provide a sound scientific basis for the Bear Management Plan. Research will be supervised by the Chief, Division of Resources Management. Non-manipulative research techniques will be encouraged to minimize disturbance to bears.

Collection permits for research projects involving grizzly bears (as well as other threatened and endangered species) must be approved by the Superintendent. Prior to issuance of a collection permit the principle investigator for the project must prepare and present, along with the request for a collection permit, a comprehensive safety plan addressing the field activities associated with the project. Researchers and assistants working in Glacier will be required to follow the protocols for conducting research in Glacier as outlined in the terms and conditions of the individual collection permit.

The Park will participate in and encourage the timely exchange, review, and evaluation of scientific information related to bears and bear management with other agencies and scientists to assure that current information is available to management. The Park will coordinate with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Blackfeet Tribe, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and other neighbors in monitoring grizzly bears released in or adjacent to the park. Monitoring will be accomplished by radio tracking, when feasible.

TRAINING AND INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION

Training and informational programs will be monitored in the field and evaluated by the Chief, Division of Resources Management. Subject material for training sessions or public programs will be reviewed with the Chief, Division of Resources Management and Park staff. All seasonal personnel should consult with their permanent supervisor, prior to presenting public programs. After each training session, a Case/Incident Report will be submitted, which identifies the training presented and lists the names of NPS or Concession employees who attended. Interpretive programs given to the public do not require a Case Incident Report.

All seasonal Park employees, new permanent employees, and concessioner employees will receive a bear safety packet upon reporting for duty.

AVAILABILITY OF TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Employees and other interested parties will be able to study the "Bear Management Plan" and "Bear Management Guidelines" in any staff office, Subdistrict Office, or Information Center. The Chief, Division of Resources Management will send to each of these locations and to the Communications Center a copy of the Bear Management Plan and a description of the Park's bear monitoring system. Further technical information and research related to bears and their habitat is available in Glacier's "George Ruhle Library" at Park Headquarters and in the Science Center Library.

MANAGEMENT SITUATIONS

Glacier National Park has been mapped according to the "guidelines" set forth by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Only two of the five "management situations" have been selected for application in Glacier. Over one million acres (1,006,236 acres) has been established as Management Situation 1, which states, in part, that management decisions will favor the needs of the grizzly bear when grizzly habitat and other land-use values compete and grizzly-human conflicts will be resolved in favor of grizzlies, unless the bear is determined to be a nuisance. The remainder of the Park, 7,359 acres, has been designated "Management Situation 3". This management direction states that grizzly bear habitat maintenance and improvement are not the highest management considerations; grizzly bear presence will be actively discouraged; any grizzly involved in a grizzly-human conflict will be controlled. Further details on the "management situations" can be obtained at Park Headquarters, from the Chief, Division of Resources Management.