

SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS

SPRING 2005



We've Got Bears

By Patti Sowka

If you live in the Swan Valley, you live in grizzly bear and black bear country. And regardless of how you feel about bears, it is time we all accept there are steps we must take to coexist with bears. Some people want to see bears; some people don't want bears anywhere near their property. But we need to remember that the way each of us lives affects the bears' behavior and the safety of our families and neighbors. Most importantly we need to recognize there are small steps we can take that often make a big difference.

Last year Condon had a record number of human-bear conflicts, due in part to widespread failure of the bears' natural food sources. As a result more bears spent more time down in the valley floor near homes and businesses. This put bears in the path of a "motherload" of trash containers, bird feeders, and other unnatural foods. Bears are opportunistic feeders that need to put on significant weight prior to hibernation. So, many bears hung near developed areas and took advantage of easy meals.

Many of those bears will return to those same places this spring to score another easy meal. If they don't find anything, they will probably leave. If they do find unsecured garbage, bird feeders, livestock feed, pet food or other easy calories, they will probably keep coming back. So, as spring marches forward and the bears continue waking up, now is the time to put away all of these bear attractants. If you have a secure outbuilding or garage, put these items inside a covered container and put them inside these buildings. Consider taking bird feeders down for a few months or at least hanging them high enough that bears cannot reach them.

If you don't have a secure place to store things, consider getting a bear-resistant storage



New bear-resistant container being unloaded at the Hungry Bear Restaurant, Condon.

container. We will soon have bear-resistant containers Condon residents can borrow for a week or two. Several residents used the containers last fall and had good success. If you are interested in trying one of these containers, please contact the Swan Ecosystem

Center at 406/754-3137.

We also have a local source for anyone who wishes to purchase a container. If you are interested, there are several kinds available. They range in price from about \$55 for a 30-gallon container to about \$200 for a 95-gallon container with wheels. Please contact Patti Sowka at 406/544-5307 or visit www.predatorsolutions.com.

Please remember, what each of us does affects how bears use our property...and our neighbors' properties. If we take steps to make sure bears don't get easy foods from our homes and businesses, we all win. And those who want to see bears will still see them, but hopefully not inside a dumpster or on our porches!

If you have a bear hanging out near your home, please let Tim Manley 406/892-0802 or Erik Wenum 406/250-0062 of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks know as soon as possible. They may be able to work with that bear before it becomes a problem for anyone or ends up dead.

The SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS is published as a cooperative effort of the Living With Wildlife Foundation; Northwest Connections; Swan Ecosystem Center; Swan Valley residents; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Flathead National Forest and Lolo National Forest.



Hansel and Gretel: it's not a fairy tale

By Steve Lamar

In the fall of 2004 a pair of two-year old grizzlies, nicknamed Hansel and Gretel, followed their sharp sense of smell through the forest to several residences and businesses in the Swan Valley. Lured by various sources of available food and garbage, the sibling pair found the populated areas of the valley bottom too great a temptation.

A poor berry crop and dismal whitebark pine nut harvest had bears ranging over much of northwest Montana searching far and wide for alternative food sources. The shortage of natural

foods plus the fact they were out on their own for the first time led the pair in an expanding search of food. Following their noses they found the dumpsters behind a local business.

Over a several day period a number of valley residents saw the pair feeding on the green grass along the edges of their yards. The bear siblings seemed at ease around humans. People reported seeing the bears at all times of the day near residences and businesses.

Hansel and Gretel became bolder and soon discovered dog food on a nearby resident's porch. At that point Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks bear management specialists Tim Manley and Eric Wenum were contacted. They set two culvert traps at the home that evening.

They first caught Gretel and moved her to a site near Goat Creek. She returned to the area and got into the dumpsters behind another local business. Manley and Wenum set another culvert trap and caught two black bears before finally trapping Gretel again.



She was moved up to the Puzzle Creek area near the northeast boundary of the Great Bear Wilderness. Gretel again found the lure of human food too great as she ventured to the dumpsters at a lodge on the Blackfeet Reservation. At this point, Dan Carney, bear manager for the Blackfeet Tribe, euthanized her.

Hansel was captured a few days after Gretel's initial capture at the residence where they had gotten into the dog food. He, too, was released in the Goat Creek area. Yet he went north along the Swan River and ended up in the Ferndale area about a month later where he found garbage and orchard fruit to feast on.

He was free-range-darted and moved to Unawah Creek on the east side of the Hungry Horse Reservoir.

Hansel ranged north, then west before getting struck and killed by a train near the Lake 5 area in November.

In a relatively short time period, both Hansel and Gretel became conditioned to human food, pet food, and garbage.

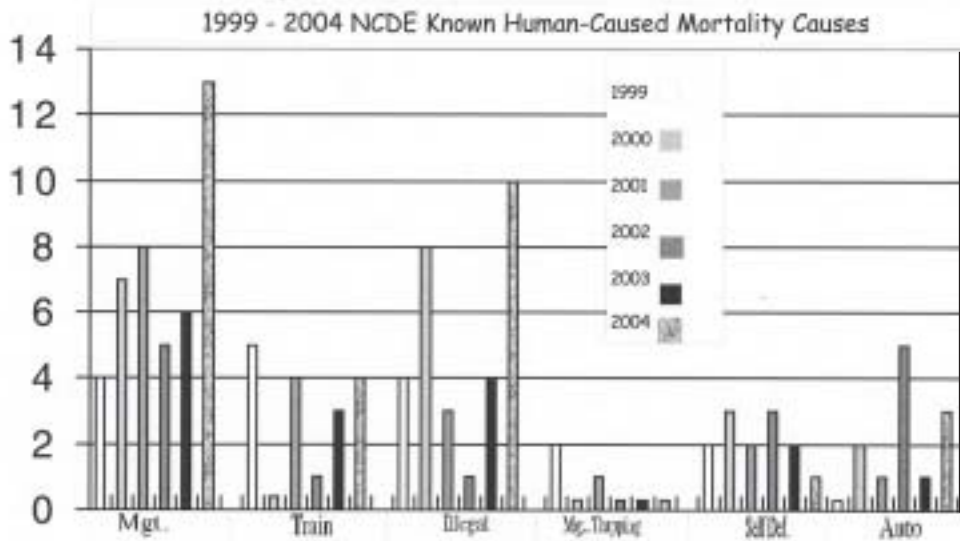
Tim Manley explained that the longer people allow the bears to hang around their homes or businesses the longer the bears have to find food and get into trouble. He emphasized that it is very important to

contact him as soon as possible so he can take measures to keep the bears from becoming human food-conditioned and eventually destroyed.

Living with Wildlife

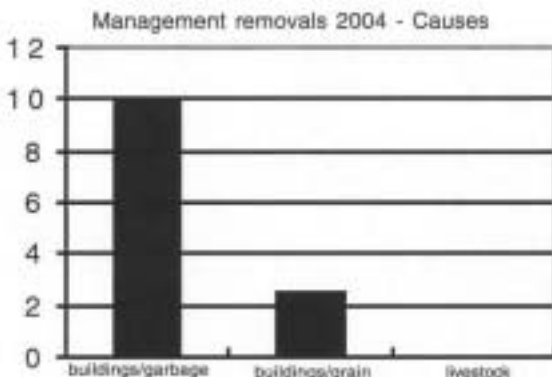
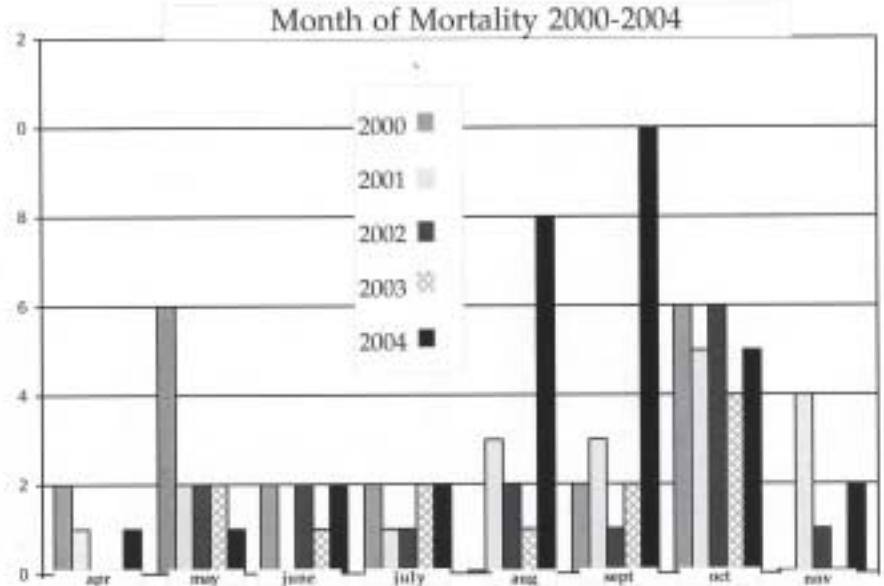
Information packets are available at the Swan Ecosystem Center. These include tips for living with bears, mountain lions, skunks, bats and other wildlife in the area. A list of contact numbers is included.

Bear Facts: Swan Valley 2004 Bear Mortality



In 2004, human-caused grizzly bear mortalities in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem increased dramatically.

In 2004, the majority of human-caused mortalities came in the months of August, September and October. A poor berry crop resulted in a scarce supply of natural foods available. That came at a critical time when bears were entering the hyperphagia period, during which time they had a strong urge to gorge on available foods in an attempt to gain weight quickly before hibernation. Many of the bears traveled far and wide seeking an alternative food source, often coming into contact with roads and residences along the way.



In 2004, bear management personnel removed 13 grizzly bears from the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. Bears lured by garbage, pet food, bird seed and grain would often return for more. Those bears were often trapped and moved. Yet they regularly returned to human residences posing a safety risk. Properly storing food sources would help prevent human/bear interactions.

Feeding Bears is Against the Law

Because food conditioned bears pose a serious threat to human safety, deliberate feeding or persistent carelessness resulting in the feeding of bears is against the law! It is a misdemeanor to continue feeding or attracting bears after one warning has been given.

To Call or Not to Call

The prevailing philosophy of bear management to prevent problems is timely action by professionals—specifically calling Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Grizzly Bear Management Specialist Tim Manley.

For many of us, calling Manley can be a tough decision. Few want to see a grizzly bear hassled, trapped, or removed and sent to a captive facility or euthanized. Calling Manley to report a bear that has been frequenting our home often feels like we're turning the bear in, securing its future with a radio collar or worse, when we would rather see the bear left alone.

Manley says if people care about bears, the best thing to do is let him know if a bear shows up in their yard or is causing a problem.

“We evaluate each situation on a case-by-case basis. If we think it is in the best interest of the bear or landowner, we trap the bear. We prefer to do on-site releases. We trap the bear, radio collar it, wait for it to come up from the drug and release it right on site to try and teach it that it shouldn't be here—that this isn't a good place to be. Then we can also keep up with the bear and monitor it, and if it comes in too close or starts breaking into buildings, we can try to teach it to stay away.”

“If people just sit and watch bears out their front windows, all they are doing is teaching the bears that it is okay to go and sit in somebody's yard, or it's okay to go and get into something in somebody's house.” The bears will continue the behavior if allowed. If a bear gets a food reward at one house, it will go to the next home and assume it can do the same.

“So, you are not just affecting the bear but you are affecting all of your neighbors,” Manley said. “If you don't let us know about it, we can't do anything to intervene, and the bear *will* progress to a point where our options become more limited, and that bear is probably eventually going to have to be removed.”

“Report it early so we can decide what action, if any, we need to take and so we have a chance of helping that bear change its behavior,” he said.



Grizzly testing bear-resistant container at Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center, West Yellowstone.

Photo by P. Sowka

Bear Resistant Gear

Bear Resistant Containers

A variety of bear resistant containers are on the market. Living With Wildlife Foundation created an easy-to-use, comprehensive resource guide full of tested products. The guide is available to check out at Swan Ecosystem Center.

Alarms

“Critter gitters” are easy to use, motion-sensor alarms that are great for hanging on the front porch, around gardens or anywhere else you don't want a bear to go snooping.

Electric Fencing

An electric fence is effective in keeping bears out of a garden or other “off-limit” areas.

Bear Pepper Spray

Anyone who lives or recreates in bear country should own one or two canisters of bear pepper spray. Be sure you know how to properly use the spray and pay attention to expiration dates.

To borrow or purchase any of these items contact:
- Living with Wildlife Foundation, 406-541-0051 or
- Swan Ecosystem Center 406-754-2593

Whom To Call

Tim Manley, grizzly bear management specialist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks:

Office phone: (406) 751-458

Cell phone: (406) 250-1265

Home phone: (406) 892-0802

Eric Wenum, black bear and mountain lion specialist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks:

Office phone: (406) 752-5501

Cell phone: (406) 250-0062

Home phone: (406) 756-1776

Emergencies

Dial **911** if you live in Seeley Lake or Condon

If you live in Swan Lake dial **886-2324**

Early reporting is critical

Trespassing Law Frustrates Bear Management

Montana's trespassing law hinders Tim Manley's ability to monitor grizzlies and help land owners prevent property damage from problem bears. Flathead County attorneys say prior permission must be obtained from landowners before entering property that is posted "No Trespassing." If the property is not posted it is permissible to enter the property to speak with the landowner,

If the property is posted, it is illegal to enter the property for any reason, even to request permission for access. This law applies to everyone. Manley says that without prior permission from landowners to enter their property, it will be impossible for him to effectively monitor or rehabilitate management bears, which sometimes have a history of breaking into buildings in search of food.

"If I know that a bear with a habit of breaking windows is on someone's property, and that property is posted and I don't have permission for access, I cannot legally drive in and alert the landowner that the bear is in the area," Manley said.

In the North Fork, more than 30 landowners have given Manley blanket permission to come on their property while monitoring a grizzly or to alert them when a management bear is in the vicinity. The following are reasons to give Manley prior permission to enter your land:

- ° He can more effectively monitor bears and track of their movements.
- ° He can let you know that a management bear is nearby and ensure that you are prepared for the animal to move through harmlessly.

° He can encourage a problem bear to move out of the area before it causes harm, and he can apply aversive-conditioning techniques to teach the animal that it is better off leaving human developments alone.

° He can help you secure bear attractants, thus preventing property damage and reducing threats to human safety.

The form below is provided for you to give Manley permission to enter your property to manage grizzly bears. If you have a question, please call Manley at (406) 751-4584 (office), (406) 250-1265 (cell), or (406) 892-0802 (home).

Cooperative Bear Efforts Underway

Last summer the Swan Valley lost nine grizzlies, many due to conflicts with humans. This year several organizations are working together to help residents prevent problems with bears in the Swan Valley and Seeley Lake. Providing this semiannual newsletter is one of the group's efforts. The emphasis will be on prevention and helping landowners identify and remove bear attractants.

The group will also host a community gathering once or twice a year to raise awareness, update people on current research and report on bear activity in the Swan Valley. The first gathering is tentatively scheduled for May 25 at the Condon Community Hall.

Contributions are welcome to Swan Ecosystem Center, earmarked: Swan Valley Bears.

Permission for Bear Managers to Enter My Property

Landowner's name(s) _____

Permanent address _____

Telephone numbers(s) _____ e-mail address _____

Swan Valley telephone number _____

Permission granted until revoked by landowner(s) (check here)

Or time period during which access is permitted (month/day/year through month/day/year) _____

Signature(s) _____

Return this form to: Tim Manley, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 490 N. Meridian, Kalispell, MT 59901

How To Prevent Bear Problems

Each of us is responsible for keeping a clean “camp,” and ensuring that we do not encourage problem behavior among bears. Here are some tips:

- Haul garbage to the dump as often as possible.
- Feed pets inside. If this is not feasible, do not leave uneaten pet food outside, especially overnight.
- Keep coolers, refrigerators or freezers **inside**, even if empty!
- Clean and securely store barbecue grills.
- Keep pet food, garbage, human food and all odorous food-like items secure in a sturdy building away from doors and windows, in a bear proof container or elevated in an Alaska-style cache.
- Do not leave food or garbage in your vehicle.
- It is best not to feed birds in summer and fall. If you must (bird species that live here do not require feeding by humans), place only a small amount of seed into the feeder each day so that it will be completely consumed before dark.
- Bring hummingbird feeders in at night or while you're away. An alternative to hummingbird feeders is a hanging basket of bright colored flowers, like fuchsias.
- Avoid planting clover. It is not native, and it is becoming a favorite among bears.
- Avoid feeding deer grain. Supplemental feeding interferes with a deer's ability to digest natural foods, and deer will attract mountain lions, an additional threat.
- If you have a vegetable garden, especially carrots, consider placing an electric fence around the perimeter, or hang “critter-gitters.” Pull carrots by September 15th, a magic carrot hour for bears according to Tim Manley.
- Compost piles are not recommended.
- Avoid using bone meal on gardens.
- Do not leave fish entrails alongside streams or trails. Puncture the air bladder and sink the entrails in deep water, or pack them out.

- Hang game in a very secure building or Alaska-style cache. Butcher meat as soon as possible. If you must hang meat outside, hang it at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet away from trees.
- Pick up fruit as it ripens.
- If there is a bear in your yard and it doesn't appear to be just passing through, make noise by banging pots and pans together and shouting to try to encourage the bear to leave. Do not approach the bear.
- A general rule of thumb: anything with an odor, even if it is not food-related can attract bears to your property. Keep anything with an odor in a secure place (bears have been known to get into motor oil, anti-freeze, gasoline, paint and cleaning agents).

Proper Use of Bear-resistant Containers

Most valley businesses have received their bear-resistant garbage containers through grants obtained by Swan Ecosystem Center and the efforts of volunteers Neil and Dixie Meyer, Mike Childs, Russ Abolt, Mark Frederick, and Kathy Koors. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this program.

Dan Larson, Larson Disposal, helped select the bear-resistant containers, which are compatible with his equipment, and he provided guidance on container placement essential to a successful program.

The bear-resistant containers need to be properly used to resist bears. Lids must be closed and the bar in place when not being filled. This is a pilot program being watched by other communities. We are anxious for the program to succeed. If businesses have problems with the containers they can call Swan Ecosystem Center for assistance.

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