

TRACKS

BEARS SEEN, TIME TO GLEAN!

BRYCE ANDREWS & STEPHANIE BARRON

The Mission Valley is located on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' Flathead Reservation. This is a landscape people tend not to forget: The valley floor is green, fertile, cropped, and densely inhabited. Apple trees thrive in backyards and spring up unplanted along the banks of the valley's irrigation ditches. Small farms, homesteads, and tribal homesites surround the towns of Ronan, Polson, and Saint Ignatius. The Mission Range is home to thriving populations of grizzly and black bears—bears that make extensive use of both the peaks and the valley floor.

When apples ripen in the fall, bears take notice. Drawn by the need to accumulate fat reserves for the coming winter, they seek out fruit wherever they can find it, even when it brings them near homes. This often leads to an annual, predictable string of run-ins between homeowners and wild animals, resulting in the trapping and removal of both grizzly and black bears.



This is what we don't want to see!

This year, in partnership with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Natural Resources Department, we're doing what we can to ensure a different outcome to apple season for some bears. We've started a community effort to pick excess fruit from apple trees growing in area yards, parks, and subdivisions that create a high potential for bear conflict. The process, known as gleaning, helps both human and animal neighbors avoid encounters. It also offers an opportunity to supply food to distribution programs and local businesses with excess fruit that would otherwise go to waste.

Because a program like this succeeds best with extensive community participation, the gleaning program kicks off with a large event. On September 18th, we co-host the first annual

Mission Mountain Bear and Apple Cider Festival at the Salish and Kootenai College's event center. The festival combines education and outreach with good old-fashioned fun, as community members are able to make their own cider with four apple presses as well as learn about bear safety at several booths staffed by experts. In addition to the festival, the Mission Valley Gleaning Program maintains drop-off locations in three towns in the Mission Valley, hauling the collected fruit to processors such as Missoula's Western Cider as well as to food distribution centers in Missoula and Lake counties.



Poster for the Gleaning Festival.





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THE P&C MISSION

People and Carnivores protects, reconnects, and restores wild carnivores in the Northern Rockies by working with the region's people to prevent human-carnivore conflicts.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It has been (and still is) another busy field season, and the seasons seem to get longer each year. In this issue of Tracks, you see a lot of content about bears. Our projects this year have involved a mix of wolf, cougar, and bear deterrence, but there is no doubt that the conditions are acutely affecting bears, both grizzly and black bears, who are moving around and into developed areas more than in recent years. Usually the spring and fall are times we have more bear encounters, but it has been all summer long as well. We know we will continue to be busy this fall. On the policy front, we worry about the effects of the anti-wildlife laws now in effect, especially for wolves and grizzlies, and we have been talking with community members as much as possible to even out the mixed messages the state is sending with these new laws. Now more than ever the promise of coexistence must be reinforced wherever possible. Thank you for your commitment to wildlife and helping to make this happen!

Lisa.

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CHARISMATIC, APEX, KEYSTONE, UMBRELLA ... IT'S A LOT TO LIVE UP TO!

LISA UPSON

Large carnivores have a lot to live up to. As apex predators and charismatic, keystone, and umbrella species, their conservation is disproportionately significant. While on a day-to-day level the animals are just trying to make ends meet, we have big hopes for their survival and their opportunities to connect with others and expand their range.

Wolves, bears, and lions are described as keystone species because they hold animal communities together. If they are removed from an ecosystem, the system changes significantly; when they are present, the system is healthier, with a complete food web and natural regulation amongst species. A whole system can provide the corresponding ecosystem services such as seed dispersal, healthy streams and wetlands, and healthy soil.

The term umbrella species describes species that, when protected, indirectly protect other animals. Conservation management decisions are sometimes made using the umbrella concept as a way to efficiently conserve multiple species. The descriptor charismatic species, or charismatic megafauna, is more subjective in that it generally describes wildlife species that are so prominent they



Umbrella species like wolves and bears indirectly protect many other animals.

influence human cultures or landscapes, making conservation initiatives easier or, in some cases, more difficult.

Apex predators like wolves, grizzlies, and cougars are at the top of the food chain, which means that their presence (or absence) affects their prey species communities and in turn other predators and prey. It also means that they generally do not have natural predators, though there are some exceptions. Black bears may be considered apex predators, but the other large carnivores occasionally kill and eat them.

Some people argue that humans are natural predators of wildlife including the apex species. Either way, the large wildlife predators have disproportionate effects on their animal communities and ecosystems, so their conservation is critical and our coexistence with them imperative.

Garbage is one of the biggest attractants to bears and causes of their getting killed.



A typical rural refuse site and transfer station accessible to bears, birds, and other scavengers. A hydraulic lift will close and open the lid slowly with the push of a button.



This bear-resistant canister was placed at a ranch to help secure trash and dog food, and a grizzly bear showed up a couple days later. The canister held up.

TALKING TRASH

KIM JOHNSTON

Garbage may not be the most compelling topic, but in bear conservation it is top of mind these days. Garbage is one of the biggest attractants to bears and causes of their getting killed. Unfortunately, effective trash management remains a challenge in areas of expanding grizzly bear populations. We work with community members, businesses, NGOs, and local governments to find solutions to secure trash and other attractants, to prevent conflicts and keep bears moving across the landscape.

This year with help from P&C's supporters and partners, we were able to get more than 100 bear-resistant garbage canisters to priority areas across the High Divide that are seeing grizzly bears for the first time in decades. This is more than \$22,000 worth of garbage cans! The Animal Welfare Institute worked through P&C to purchase and distribute 50 cans, and Anaconda Disposal matched canister contributions from P&C in addition to several more we purchased with the support of funders and donors. Securing trash and other attractants such as dog food or grain reduces the risk of bears becoming food-



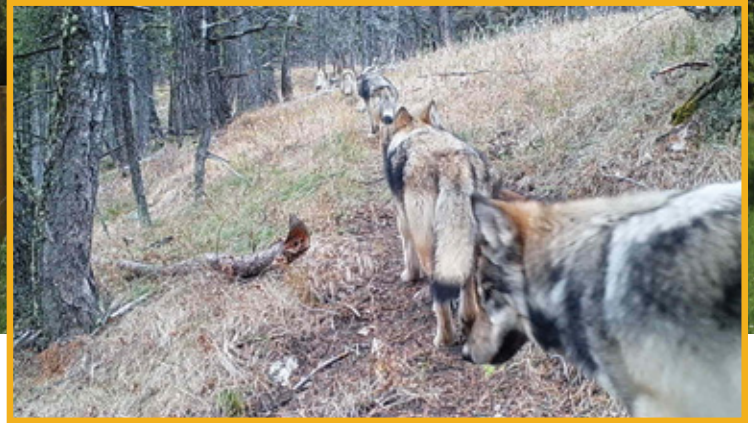
These bear-resistant canisters were delivered to P&C's partner Jeanne Krumm of Anaconda Disposal for distribution to area customers.

conditioned. When bears get unnatural food rewards, they will seek that easy meal again and again, bringing them into developed areas and close to people.

In addition to our canister efforts this summer, we partnered with Beaverhead County Solid Waste to secure two open-access transfer stations along the Big Hole River, to prevent bears from accessing refuse at these public dump sites (in most rural communities, there is no garbage pick-up). Electrified mats and fencing solutions are used to keep bears out of garbage dumps, but these don't keep other wildlife out and they wear down. We are using hydraulic lid systems. The simple push of a button will allow people easy access to the large refuse dumpsters while preventing wildlife from getting into them. We are planning another project this fall at a third site in Madison County with Animal Welfare Institute. Securing a dump site costs roughly \$12,000, but we were able to coordinate several funding sources, including the US Fish & Wildlife Service. These and other garbage security projects will provide an example for other local governments and communities looking for similar solutions to reduce bear conflicts.

“Please keep up the excellent work of defending important wildlife species that maintain a healthy ecosystem.”
-Anonymous, Canada

A permanent fence serving as a sheep night pen in an area with all of the large carnivores.



A large wolf pack traveling through the High Divide caught on our trail camera. Check out our YouTube channel to see the pack in action!

FIELD ROUND-UP

ANNA KIDD

Our 2021 field season has involved a mix of wolf, bear, and lion projects. As more people flood to Montana for the beautiful landscapes and recreational opportunities, bear safety has become increasingly important. This year we conducted several targeted bear safety trainings to educate



Our bear safety toolkits include inert training canisters, bear safety information, books on living in bear country, bear safety training DVDs, and more.

recreationists, bear technicians and private company employees working in or near the backcountry on how to properly use bear spray and stay bear-safe. We also provided multiple ranches and their range riders bear safety toolkits. The bear safety kit is our latest in a series of toolkits we are developing; kits include 6-12 inert training canisters, bear safety information, brochures, books on living in bear country, bear safety training DVDs, and thumb drive with additional resources. We continue to work with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee to create a Bear Smart Community Program for communities interested in being certified as "BearSmart," and we are wrapping up our flagship BearSmart project with Virginia City which lies in the center of a bear corridor.

To deter bears, and also cougars and wolves, we designed and installed a number of permanent and electric fences. Some fences serve as night pens or bedding grounds for sheep; the pen keeps livestock and carnivores separated while helping livestock guardian dogs bond with the livestock. We placed a handful of dogs on ranches and provided consulting to owners as well as GPS collar training. Our LGD and general coexistence tool kits continue to be popular.

Each year, we are asked to consult and advise to practitioners all over North America and even Europe occasionally, particularly on fencing. We decided to invest in development of a comprehensive digital instructional guide or manual to teach people how to build fences to deter bears. We have spent several days in the field filming while installing fences at project sites and writing instructions with technical detail. We hope to get the manual up on our website by the end of the year. There are many more projects in the works, including working through homeowner associations and vacation rental booking agencies to address attractant reduction in rural communities and at vacation homes.



One of the livestock guardian puppies we placed at a small ranch with carnivore conflicts. Others joined it soon after!

PROTECTING PEOPLE AND BEARS IN IDAHO

BRITTANI ROSAS

Grizzly bears are slowly expanding their range into historic habitat. The Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE) is a federal grizzly bear recovery zone located in central Idaho within the largest wilderness complex in the lower-48 states. But there are no resident grizzlies there. P&C has been working for years to help grizzlies walk into the BE to begin natural recolonization there. Keeping bears out of conflicts allows them to keep moving.

There are small populations of grizzlies in the Idaho panhandle, in the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak ecosystems, and we know some bears are venturing south. As bears disperse towards the BE, they may encounter deadly attractants including human foods and garbage at campgrounds and recreation sites, as well as at county refuse sites. To help prevent future conflicts in northern and central Idaho corridors, P&C is working with the Idaho



In order for food storage requirements to get enacted, bear-resistant equipment must be in place.

Conservation League (ICL), the US Forest Service and other partners to inventory bear infrastructure at developed recreation sites and county garbage dumps.

Infrastructure in bear terms includes things like food storage lockers (bear boxes) and bear-resistant garbage dumpsters. In some national forests, as in national parks, there are "food storage orders" in place that require people to store attractants. For people to comply with orders, the equipment has to be there. We were hired by ICL to collect data in certain areas around the BE and in the panhandle to eventually work with agencies to address high need areas.

WELCOME BRITTANI AND ANNA

We are excited to welcome Brittani Rosas and Anna Kidd to the People and Carnivores team! Brittani is working as our field specialist in the Bitterroot Valley adjacent to the Bitterroot Ecosystem. Brittani recently worked as a wildlife biologist for agencies in Idaho and Washington before moving back to hometown Stevensville Montana with her husband and one-year old daughter Sophia. Brittani will lead P&C's Idaho and Bitterroot projects. Anna works as P&C's Development and Outreach Coordinator, replacing Ben who moved to Utah. Anna enjoys skiing, hiking, and camping in the Montana wilderness with her dog Willow. She recently graduated from MSU-Bozeman with a degree in Conservation Biology and Ecology. Anna will coordinate P&C's fundraising and outreach activities.

"Your organization does such good work and has really creative solutions. Thank you for protecting our important carnivores!"

-Kathy Schwery, Plattsmouth, NE



An oil painting of a mama grizzly and her two cubs by our new Development Coordinator Anna. Beautiful!



Our new field specialist Brittani working on our Corn Bear fence in 2018. Brittani's masters research was on bear deterrent fencing.

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ONE SMART (OR LUCKY?) BEAR FIGURING OUT PHYSICS!

This series, courtesy of P&C's project partner Western Transportation Institute, shows a black bear finding a way to get back out of the fence with a melon. Over two years we tested a fence and gates at Dixon Melons to inform a dozen state transportation departments around the west on gate efficacy.



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