



SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS: 2016 Year In Review

FALL 2016

Male Grizzly Killed By Vehicle Collision

In the early morning hours of September 6, 2016 a large, adult male grizzly bear was hit and killed by a semi truck on Highway 83 in the Swan Valley near Buck Creek. This bear was found to have been one previously captured in the Swan Valley for research purposes. The male was estimated to be 11 years old and weighed over 500 pounds. Known as 19/18 due to its numbered green ear tags (19 and 18), this bear had originally been captured by tribal biologists in 2006 on the Flathead Indian Reservation on the west side of the Mission Mountains. In 2008, the male was captured for research in the Swan Valley, and was fitted with a GPS radio collar. 19/18 wore this GPS collar between May of 2008 and April of 2009.



Male grizzly 19/18 was usually observed to be dark black in color.

The movements of 19/18 are unknown for the summer of 2009, but in the fall of 2009, 19/18 was incidentally captured for research again. Once more, the big male was fitted with a GPS collar which he wore into the den, but dropped in the Swan Valley the following spring. During the fall of 2009, 19/18 spent his time in the Swan between Elk Creek and Holland Lake, but moved into the Swan Mountains in October and November back to the headwaters of Tango and Dart Creek. Additionally, hair collected opportunistically from a rub tree in Cold Creek in July of 2015 was determined to belong to 19/18 through genetic analysis.

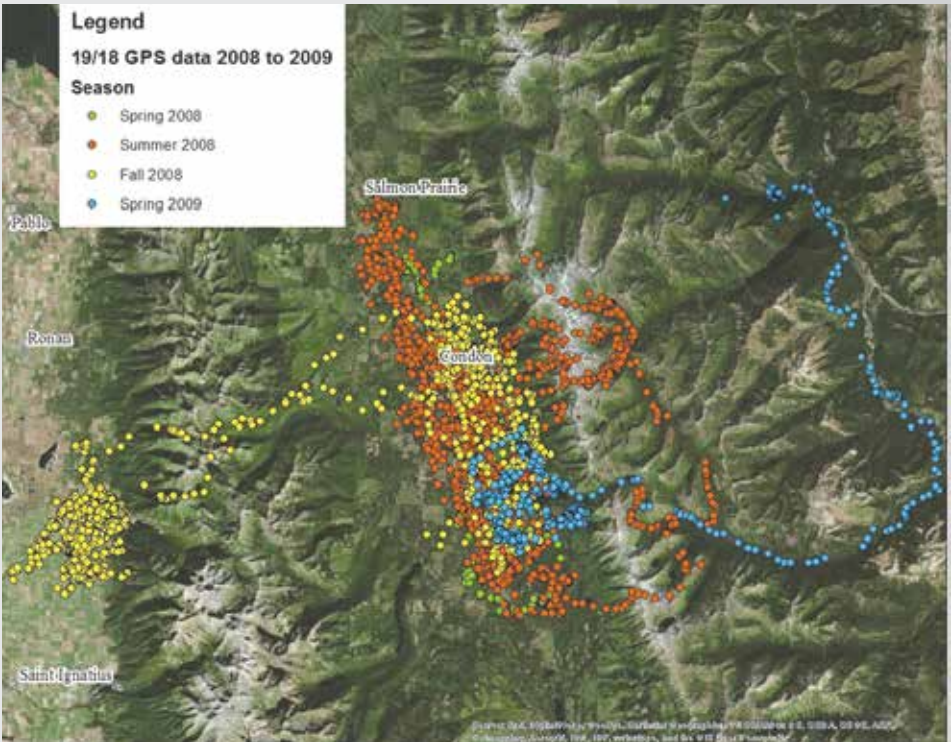
Between 1995 and 2016, there have been seven known vehicle caused grizzly mortalities in the Swan Valley on Montana Highway 83. Three grizzlies were killed in the Swan Valley on highway 83 in 2015 and only one has been recorded in 2016. Vehicle related grizzly mortalities vary from year to year across the ecosystem. Mortalities from vehicle collision compose 8% of the total documented grizzly mortalities in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem between 2004 and 2014.

GPS radio collars and genetic analysis of bear hair provides valuable information to managers on grizzly bear habitat use, survival, population size and population trend. With these tools, managers have found that the grizzly population in the NCDE has grown beyond recovery goals and the population trend is stable to increasing.



The GPS collar collected coordinates on the bear's position every 30 minutes over the course of the year. In 2008, 19/18 spent the beginning of June in the Bob Marshall Wilderness just east of Holland Peak in the head of Tango and Dart Creek Drainages and then moved back to the Valley over the ridge south of Wolverine peak for the rest of the month. In July, 19/18 again moved into the Swan Mountains and walked south into Shaw Creek. In August, 19/18 spent his time back in the Swan Valley lowlands. In the fall, the male exited the Swan Valley over the Mission Mountains by way of Elk Creek and spent time in the Mission Valley just west of McDonald Lake. At the end of October, 19/18 returned to the Swan Valley. It is unknown where the male denned for the winter between 2008 and 2009, however in April of 2009, 19/18 traveled down Gordon Creek to the South Fork of the Flathead River and shrugged free of the radio collar in the Little Salmon drainage. The GPS collar was found by hikers on the trail and returned to Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the summer of 2009.

Top - SVC remote camera photo of 19/18 at a bear rub. Left - Tim Manley, MT FWP Bear Management Specialist and Maria Mantas, SVC Executive Director pose with Bear 18/19 who was recaptured in the fall of 2009 in the Swan Valley. Right - Movements of 19/18 from spring of 2008 to spring of 2009. Each colored dot represents a GPS location collected by the radio collar. The GPS data is categorized by season and year.



Human/Grizzly Bear Conflicts In The Swan

Tim Manley, MT FWP Grizzly Bear Conflict Management

To date, 2016 has been a fairly quiet year in the Swan with regards to reported conflicts between grizzly bears and people. During the spring there were several reports of an unmarked subadult grizzly bear that was observed grazing on lawns in the area around Salmon Prairie. A trap was set just west of Hwy 83 for the bear, but the bear did not return to that area.

We also received a few reports of a larger grizzly with a green ear tag that was seen in the Salmon Prairie area. It is possible that this bear was bear #19/18 that was hit and killed on Hwy 83.

In the community of Swan Lake, a female grizzly bear with two cubs of the year may have killed several chickens. We responded by assisting the landowner with installing electric fence and putting up remote cameras. We have documented a grizzly bear and a female black bear with two cubs that checked out the chicken coop but didn't get through the electric fence.

The lower Swan drainage had the most reports of conflicts with grizzly bears. A radio collared female with two yearlings continued her activities at numerous homes in the Ferndale area. During 2015 and 2016, we know this family group killed domestic rabbits, chickens, and ducks. They also got into pet food, livestock grain, and apples. The entire family group was recaptured in July and the decision was made to remove them from the population. The adult female was killed and the two yearlings were sent to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Center in Helena. The two yearlings are currently at Zoo Montana in Billings and will eventually be at the St. Louis Zoo.

Landowners have also reported at least one other family group of grizzly bears in the Ferndale area in recent weeks, but we have not had any reported conflicts.



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Adult female grizzly with two yearlings in the Ferndale area.

We received reports of landowners intentionally feeding grizzly bears in the Ferndale area and game wardens are following up on those reports.

We appreciated all the efforts that landowners in the Swan have made to secure or remove attractants in order to reduce conflicts with grizzly bears. The work of Swan Valley Connections and Swan Valley Bear Resources has really helped landowners with education, bear resistant garbage containers, and electric fencing. We have seen that grizzly bears can be very adaptable and as long as they aren't receiving any food rewards at residences, conflicts with people can be reduced.

Bear Troubles? Contact:

To report grizzly bear conflicts you can contact Tim Manley at 406-250-1265 or tmanley@mt.gov

If you want more information on living in bear country you can visit the MT FWP website at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/beBearAware/default.html>

Swan Valley Bear Resources at: <http://www.swanvalleyconnections.org/swan-valley-bear-resources>

Defenders of Wildlife can also assist with electric fencing and they can be contacted at: <http://www.defenders.org/got-grizzlies>