

Grizzly Bear Occurrence Summary 2019



Bear Management Area (BMA) 6

DECEMBER 2020

Alberta

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Grizzly Bear Occurrence Summary 2019: Bear Management Area (BMA) 6

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Introduction

Humans and bears have been interacting with one another for as long as they have been in existence together. In recent times, those interactions have become a primary focus of bear management in Alberta and other areas of North America. As people move into what has historically been bear habitat, combined with bears moving from public lands eastward onto private lands along the eastern slopes of Alberta, interactions between bears and people become more widespread.

In 2010, the grizzly bear was listed as a threatened species in Alberta. Along with this status came a Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan intended to increase grizzly bear numbers to a more sustainable population level. In 2016, an updated draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was completed which identifies a Bear Management Area (BMA) specific approach to managing grizzly bears intended to address the unique management challenges within each BMA. This includes a zoning criterion with management zones: Recovery Zone, Support Zone, Habitat Linkage Zone and Outside the BMA (Figure 1). The Recovery Zone, essentially public lands along the foothills and west into the mountains, would inform the management of industrial development and human use. Managing attractants as well as other sources of human-grizzly bear conflicts that often results in public safety concerns and human caused bear mortality or translocations would be a priority within this zone. The Support Zone, those lands east of the Recovery Zone, is intended to maintain grizzly bears that have partial home ranges in the Recovery Zone. The management intention here is to maintain grizzly bear occupancy, likely at lower density than in Recovery Zones, with an emphasis given to females with cubs. The grizzly bear population in the Support Zone will likely not be self-sustaining without dispersal from the adjacent Recovery Zone. The Support Zone will contribute to grizzly bear recovery by increasing the regional population size and ensuring that bears that move in and out of the Recovery Zone can survive. Given that the Support Zone is comprised of largely private lands, it is expected to be a focal area for proactive attractant management strategies to reduce Human Bear Occurrences. The Habitat Linkage Zone identifies key wildlife movement corridors that also have significant development within including urban areas, major highways and railways. In the case of BMA 6, this includes Highway 3 in the Crowsnest Pass.

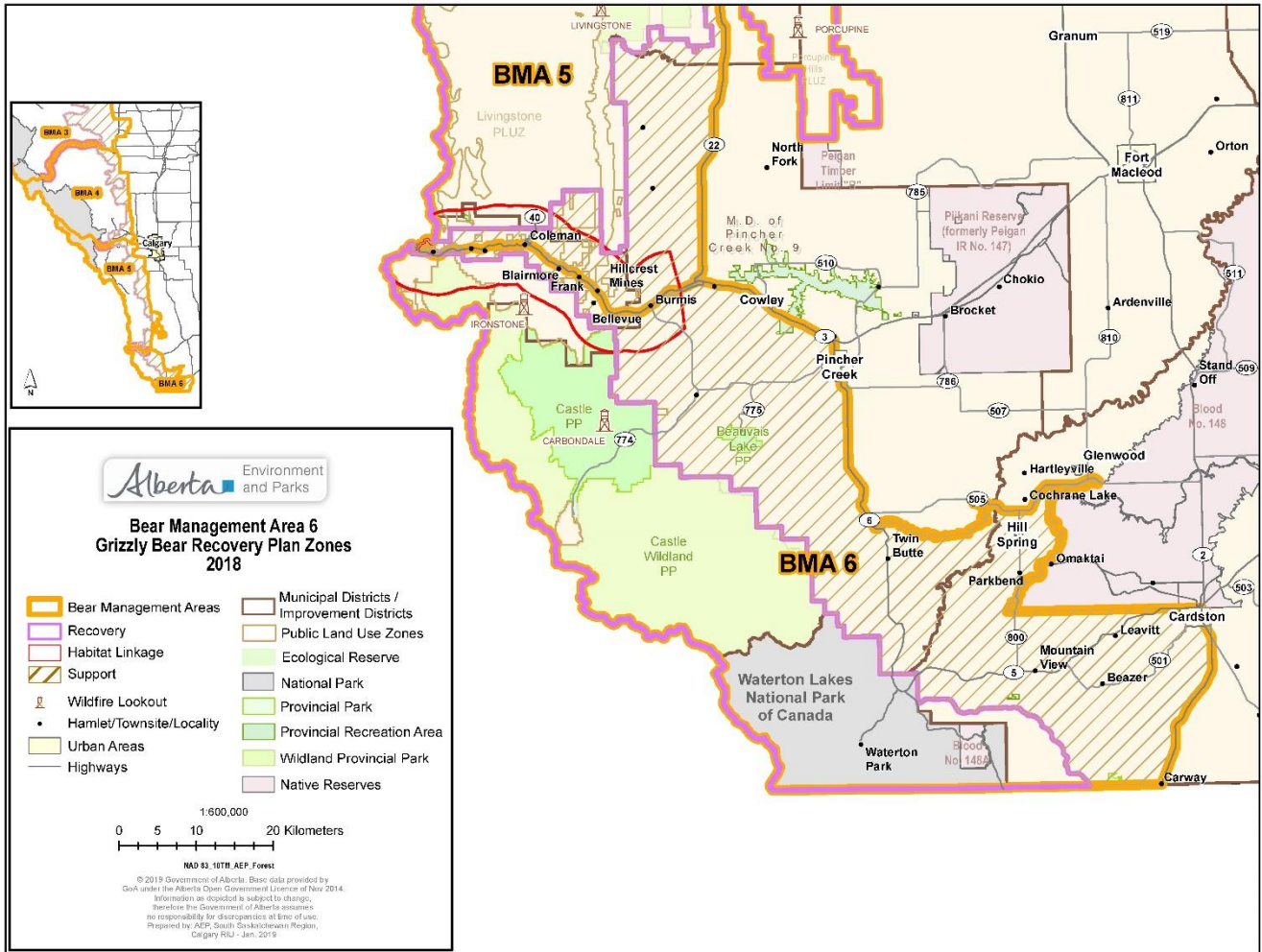


Figure 1. Bear Management Area 6

Occupancy of grizzly bears outside of the Grizzly Bear Recovery and Support Zones, i.e. Outside the BMA, is not required to recover the Alberta grizzly bear population. Management tolerance for grizzly bears that come into conflict with humans outside of the Recovery and Support Zones would be lower, resulting in increased management removals.

In the interest of public safety and conservation, wildlife managers have introduced various programs intended to reduce the number of negative interactions between bears and people. These include the [Wildlife Predator Compensation](#) and [Alberta Bear Smart](#) programs. These programs are important tools to help support communities and other stakeholder groups living, working and recreating in bear country. The social tolerance for bears in Alberta has to exist if grizzly bears (and black bears) are to sustain themselves, particularly in Support Zones outlined in the proposed Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. Failure to gain that support from the people most affected by bears can result in increased human bear occurrences and human caused bear mortality, and an overall lack of public support for bears in general.

The Wildlife Predator Compensation program is intended to compensate ranchers with livestock killed or injured by wildlife predators. Compensation currently covers cattle, bison, sheep, swine and goats that have been attacked by wolves, grizzly bears, black bears, cougars or eagles.

The Alberta BearSmart program seeks to reduce human-bear occurrences and increase public stewardship in Alberta by providing strategic information and education materials to the public, stakeholders and government agency staff dealing with bears. Stakeholders include local communities, conservation groups and industry, including oil and gas developers and agricultural producers. The program is intended to:

- Reduce the number of undesirable human-bear interactions, which may result in injury or death to both humans and/or bears.
- Reduce the number of bear mortalities and relocations that occur as a result of negative interactions.
- Reduce annual costs associated with property damage and management actions to address conflict situations.

This BMA 6 Grizzly Bear Occurrence summary is intended to identify key areas and practices where human bear occurrences are happening, why they are occurring, and to provide sustainable options for reducing those conflicts.

Study Area

BMA 6 is located in the southwestern corner of the province between Highway 3 and the U.S./Montana border. The Rocky Mountain Natural Region lies in the western portion of the BMA consisting of mountains, high foothills and deep valleys. These public lands along the western edge of the BMA comprise the Recovery Zone. The Grassland Natural Region drops abruptly eastwards into a prairie grassland landscape of private lands (Support Zone) described as some of the most productive farming and ranching land in Alberta. Over half of the BMA is comprised of private land. High levels of recreation exist within the public lands with some forestry and natural gas activity also present. Extensive agriculture in the form of cattle grazing occurs on private lands with grazing on public lands during summer months. There are several towns with small populations in or adjacent to the BMA, including the M.D. of Crowsnest Pass, Beaver Mines, Pincher Creek, Twin Butte, Waterton, and Mountain View. Waterton Lakes National Park is located along the southern border. The presence of grizzly bears within these areas of human occupied lands often results in interactions between people and bears. At times, these interactions can result in injury or death to people and/ or bears, or cause property damage or public safety concerns that lead to bears being euthanized or translocated.

Grizzly bears in BMA 6 are part of a larger population that includes Montana and British Columbia (Proctor et al, 2012). There is no ecological basis for partitioning an Alberta specific portion of this population. However, we manage grizzly bears on state and provincial boundaries so Alberta specific density and abundance estimates are important. (Morehouse and Boyce, 2016).

The Southwestern Alberta Grizzly Bear Monitoring Project, completed in 2014, estimated the number of BMA 6 resident bears (i.e. bears with home ranges centered in BMA 6) to be approximately 67. This number represents a 4% per year increase since the previous 2007 estimate of 51 resident grizzly bears (Morehouse and Boyce, 2016). This growth rate is similar to that documented in Montana (Mace et al. 2012). The study also concluded that approximately 172 grizzly bears, both resident and non-resident, use BMA 6 at different times of the year. This number represents the number of bears that local communities could be encountering and that have the potential to be involved in human bear occurrences (Morehouse and Boyce, 2016). Current occurrence data and public sighting information indicates that eastward population expansion is occurring.

Methodology

Bear occurrence data in BMA 6 was obtained from Government of Alberta ENFOR Occurrence Reports. In total 47 occurrence records in 2019 were reviewed and analyzed. Occurrences for this report were defined as:

- any situation where some form of physical damage has been done by an animal to a person's property or possessions
- the animal has obtained unnatural human foods
- the interaction has elicited a response from the bear that heightens concern over the safety of the observer
- the interaction has occurred in a location where the presence of such animals creates a high risk to public safety

In short, they include those situations where the risk is considered to be 'unacceptable' to the public and a formal response from Government staff is required. This would include situations where bears were feeding on natural foods in occupied campgrounds or in residential areas, bears feeding on unnatural foods, causing property damage, or bears exhibiting aggressive behaviour towards the public. These occurrences were attributed a risk based Occurrence Level category; Low, Moderate, High, Very High or Extreme. They are intended to categorize the severity of each incident from a public safety / risk perspective and will help to inform management priorities for instituting mitigation efforts. The categories are based on Aversive Conditioning Indices developed by the Wind River Bear Institute (WRBI, 1999). For a definition of Occurrence Levels, refer to Appendix I. Situations where people saw bears on trails or in the backcountry, and the risk involved was deemed to be acceptable given the nature of the activity, were defined as Sightings and are not included in this Occurrence Summary.

Mortalities and relocations were summarized from both ENFOR and grizzly bear capture data located within the provincial Fish and Wildlife Management Information System.

Data was separated by species; only confirmed grizzly bear occurrences were included in the analysis. It was important to identify where certain types of conflicts occurred; standardized government land use categories identified in ENFOR were used. Often, bear activity is motivated

by the search for food, so the type of attractant involved was analyzed to identify what foods were attracting bears to developed areas. Standardized ENFOR categories were used for attractant types. Temporal information was captured by dividing Occurrences into three primary bear seasons; Pre Berry (den emergence to July 15), Berry (July 16 to September 15) and Post Berry (September 16 to den up). The type of bear behaviour during the actual Occurrence was also considered. These were also obtained from standardized ENFOR data. For a list of terms considered for Land Use, Attractant Type and Behaviour, refer to Appendix II.

Results

Occurrences

There were 47 grizzly bear related occurrences recorded in 2019 within BMA 6 (Figure 2). Thirty-five (74%) of the records occurred within the Support Zone, the majority of those were Very High (31 of 35) and all involved cattle depredation. The remaining four occurrences involved grizzly bears near residences and in a Day Use area feeding on natural vegetation. Occurrences outside the BMA accounted for 7 (15%); 4 of those were High and involved 3 occurrences of bears approaching people and one of a damaged grain bin. There were 4 occurrences (9%) within the Recovery Zone – all involving cattle depredation. Finally, a bear killed six ducks in the Habitat Linkage Zone.

All of the 47 occurrences involved some type of attractant. 37 of those were livestock related and involved cattle (33), chickens (1), ducks (1), donkeys (1) and sheep (1). Other attractants included agricultural grain, garbage, human food (swiss chard) and natural vegetation. There were 5 occurrences where the attractant was Unknown. Occurrences were distributed across the seasons; Pre-Berry (25), Berry seasons (14) and Post Berry (8). Pastures were the most common location (77% or 35 of 47) followed by residential (21% or 10 of 47) Day Use area (2% or 1 of 47) and Campground Frontcountry (2% or 1 of 47).

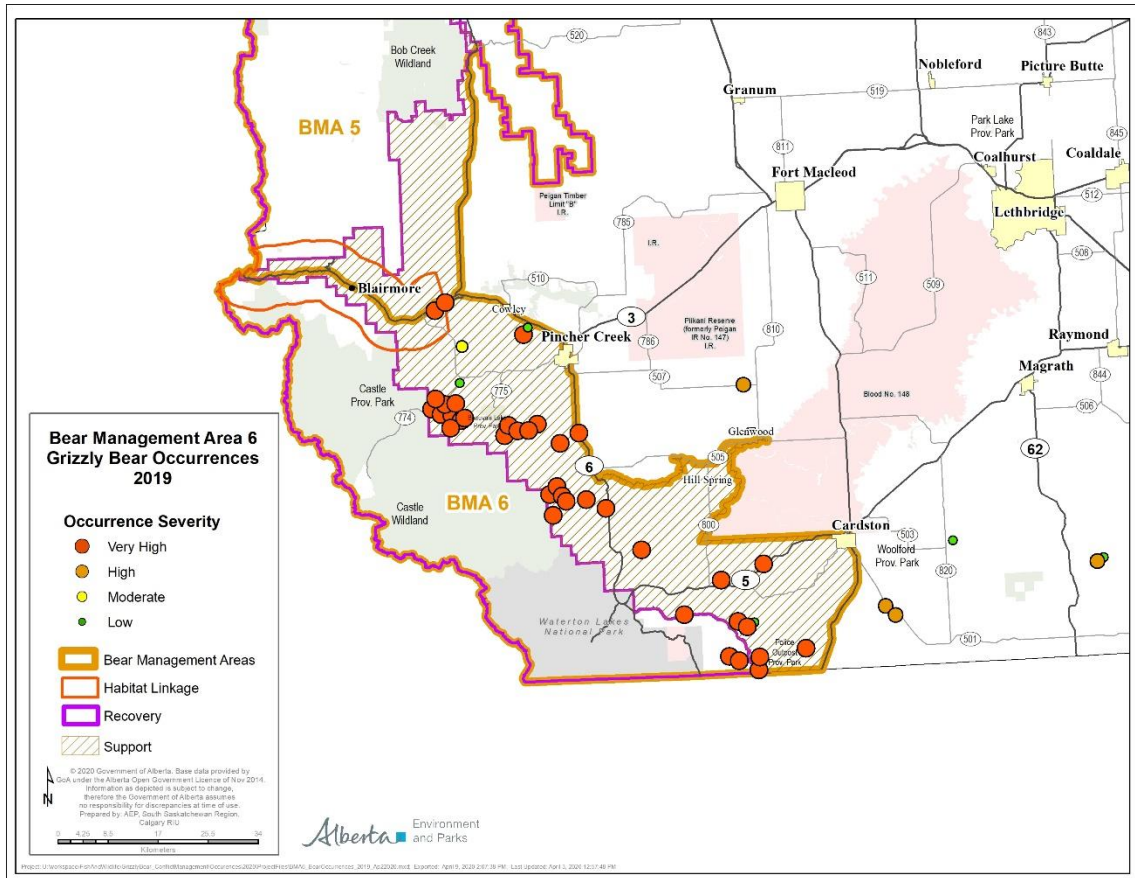


Figure 2. BMA 6 2019 Occurrence Severity Levels (N= 47)

Mortality

There were four known mortalities in 2019; a male bear was euthanized after killing cattle near Cardston in April. He was deemed to be quite old and in poor condition. The remains of an adult male were discovered in September; his death was considered to be natural, possibly from a fall off a cliff. A First Nation harvest of a male bear occurred near Twin Butte in May. Lastly, the remains of a grizzly bear were discovered on the train tracks by Rock Creek in March; due to the extent of decomposition, it is possible that this bear died in the fall of 2018. There have been 34 known grizzly bear mortalities in BMA 6 between 2009 and 2019. Seven (21%) of those bears were euthanized and five (15%) were killed illegally (Figure 3). Transportation related grizzly bear mortality totaled six (four road and two rail) or

18 per cent of the BMA total. Over half of BMA 6 grizzly bear mortalities involved male bears (62% or 21 of 34).

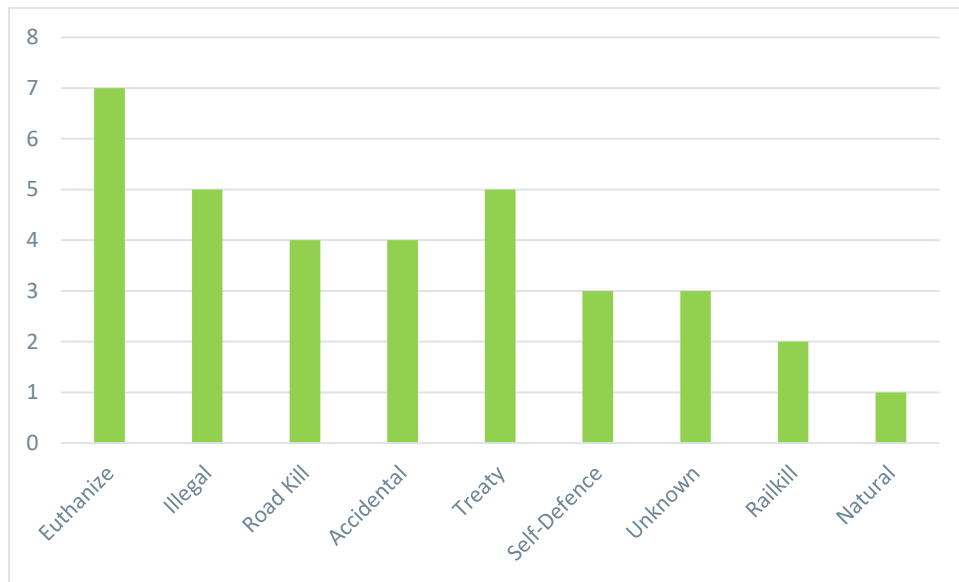


Figure 3. Human Caused Grizzly Bear Mortality 2009 to 2019 (N= 34)

Since 2014, there have not been any recorded mortalities within the Recovery Zone of BMA 6. Of the 20 recorded mortalities where a management zone was identified, 14 (70%) occurred within the Support Zone and six (30%) Outside the BMA.

Translocations

There were eight grizzly bears translocated from BMA 6, all from within the Support Zone, in 2019. Five were related to cattle depredation, one was for public safety reasons (property damage) and two bears were accidental captures at a capture sight where it was felt best to move them from the conflict area to prevent further incidents. From 2009 to 2019, there have been 63 translocations from BMA 6 (Figure 4). Seventy-five per cent (47 of 63) of these records involved livestock attacks. Of the 31 translocations where a Zone was identified, 20 (65%) occurred in the Support Zone, 10 (32%) Outside the BMA and one (3%) in the Recovery Zone.

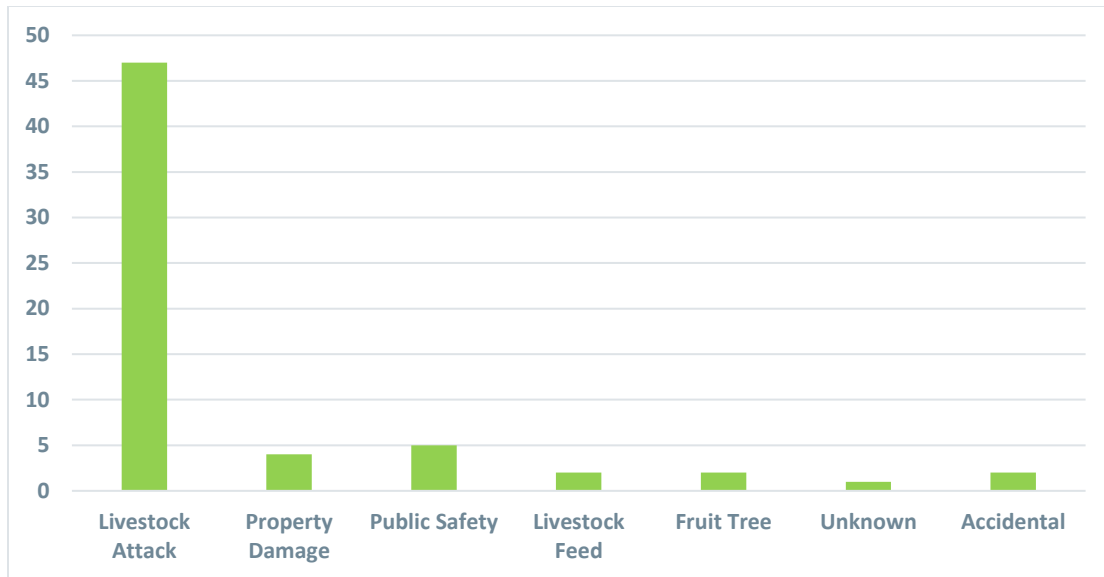


Figure 4. Grizzly Bear Translocations 2009 to 2019 (N= 63)

These numbers include incidents where a bear(s) was moved outside of its home range and does not include relocations that may have occurred where the bear was released within their home range.

Mitigation

A number of proactive mitigation programs currently exist within BMA 6, all with the aim of reducing negative interactions between grizzly bears and people. The majority of these programs are delivered by the [Waterton Biosphere Reserves Carnivores and Communities Program](#) (WBR) and [Crowsnest Pass BearSmart](#) (CNPBS) with support from Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP). This is an excellent example of the necessity and benefit of having local groups assisting in the delivery of effective proactive large carnivore mitigation.

Attractant Management

Livestock related occurrences are the main concern in BMA 6. These occurrences are typically dealt with through the Predator Compensation Program. Between 2015 and 2019, there have been 146 approved grizzly bear claims in BMA 6. Cattle (133 of 146 or 91%) make up the majority of claims followed by sheep (13 of 146 or 9%). Of these 146 claims, 10 (6%) were located in the Recovery Zone, 122 (84%) in the Support Zone and 14 (10%) Outside the BMA (Fig 9). In 2019, 37 claims were approved involving 34 cattle (25 steers, four bred cows, two calf, and three heifers) and 20 sheep (eight bred ewes, nine lambs and three rams), resulting in \$55,803 paid to producers. Of these 37 claims five (14%) were located in the Recovery Zone, 30 (81%) in the Support Zone and two (5%) Outside the BMA.

Grizzly bears are known to be excellent scavengers and dead livestock can attract bears. This becomes problematic when dead livestock is near outbuildings or where work is being carried out. A **deadstock** management program, coordinated by the Waterton Biosphere Reserve, has placed 12 deadstock bins in Cardston and Pincher Creek Municipal Districts. Ranchers can deposit deadstock into these bear resistant containers free of charge. Animals are picked up regularly and deposited at a local rendering plant. In 2019, 547 animals were picked up from 86 different producers in the Cardston / Pincher Creek Districts at a cost of \$54,338 to the program. Since 2013, the program has collected over 3,979 head in these two Districts involving multiple producers per year at a total cost of \$306,254. Financial support for this program comes from multiple funders including a multi-year AEP grant to the Waterton Biosphere. This effort removes a significant food source for grizzly bears and is expected to have resulted in a decrease in deadstock related conflict in the area.

Grain is an ongoing concern, largely due to non-bear resistant grain bins, wooden hopper bottoms and doors. Electric fence, bear proof doors, cement floors and metal hopper bottom bins have all shown to be an effective deterrent to bears where these issues exist.

There are cases of unsecured attractants involving black bears but not grizzly bears within the Support Zone and east of the Support Zone in BMA 6. Securing attractants from black bears will also benefit grizzly bear recovery in the long term. These unsecured attractants include **fruit trees, birdfeeders, garbage, chickens** and **beehives**. Most of these types of attractants can be secured with electric fence or bear proof containers. In the case of fruit trees, Crowsnest Pass BearSmart has initiated community fruit picking initiatives and cost share programs to have trees

or their fruit physically removed or to have them replaced with non-fruit bearing trees. Community based wildlife attractant bylaws are also in place in the Crowsnest Pass.

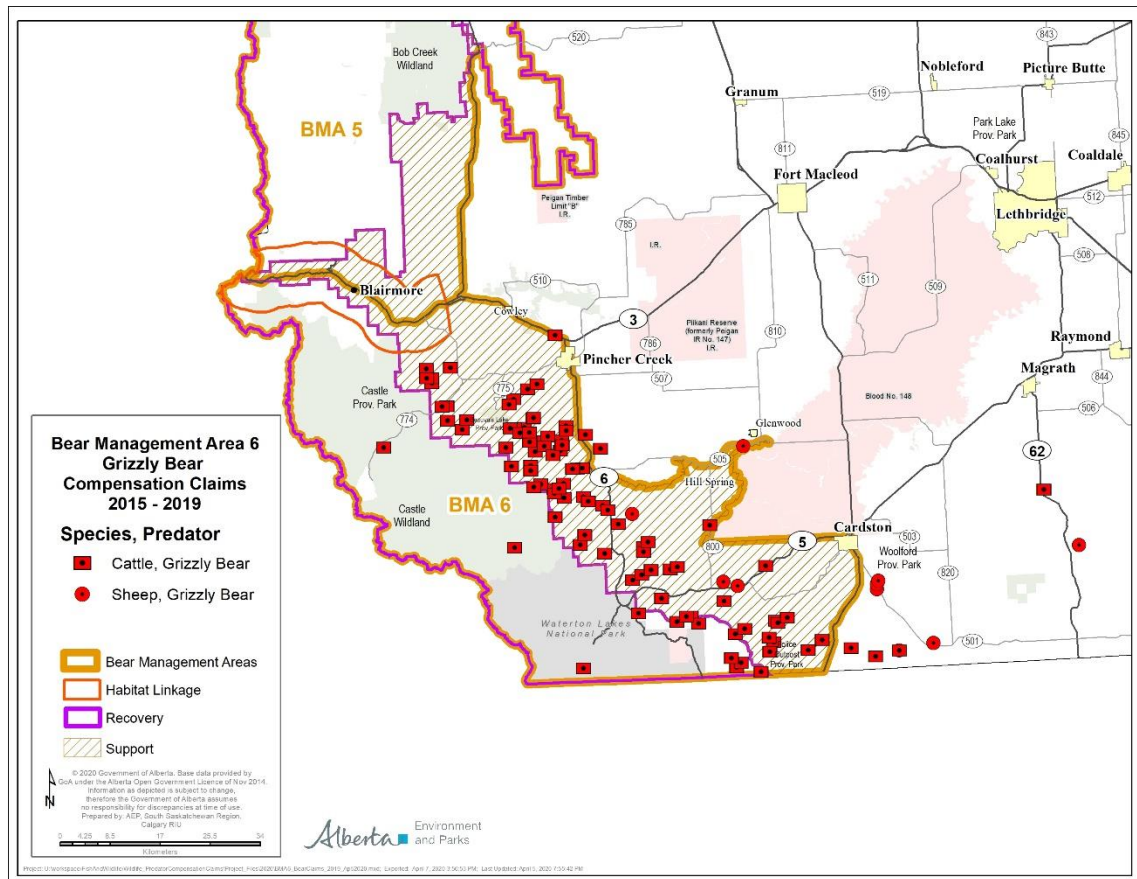


Figure 5. Predator Compensation claims 2015 to 2019 (N= 146)

Loaner Program

The Waterton Biosphere and Crowsnest Pass Bear Smart have had loan or cost sharing programs for landowners experiencing conflict since 2008 (Figure 6). This has included 105 projects that promote the use of electric fence, bear proof garbage bins, grain bin doors, sea canisters and metal hopper bottoms. In 2019, WBR provided one electric fence (sheep) and one hopper bottom bin (grain) to landowners experiencing bear problems.

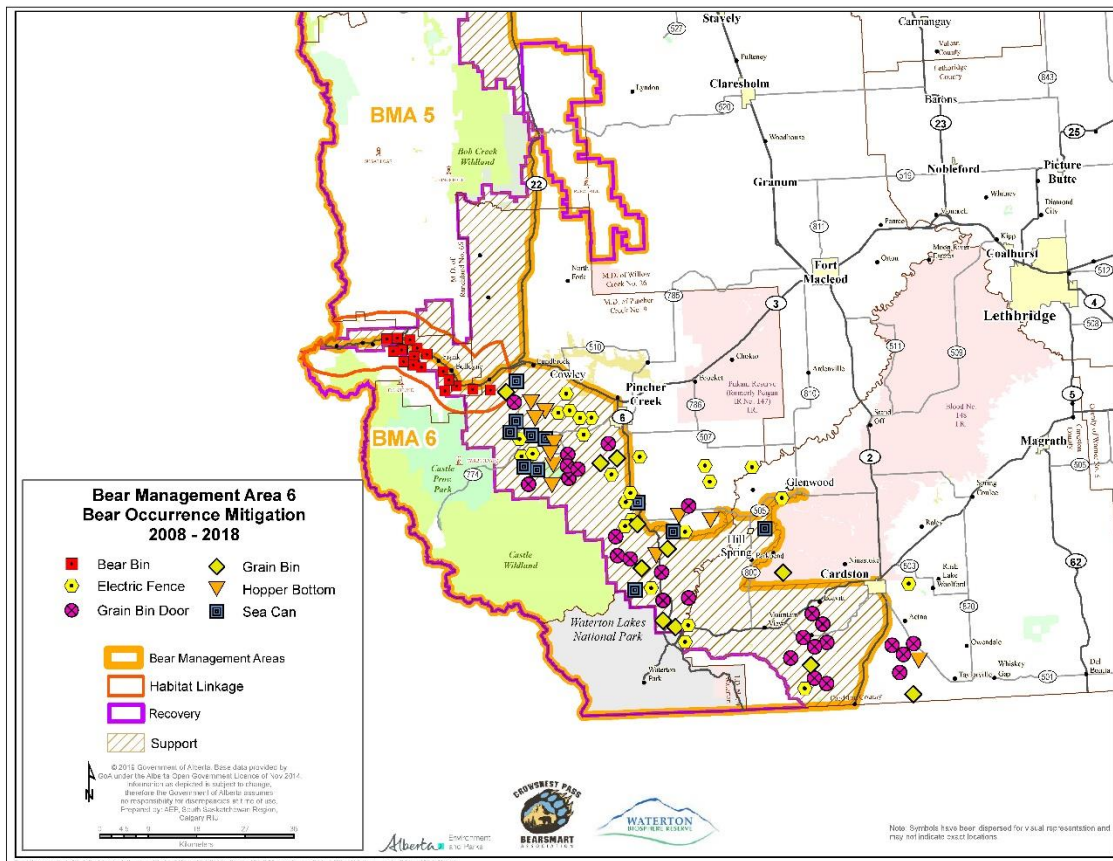


Figure 6. Bear Occurrence Mitigation Locations 2008 to 2019 (N= 105)

Education

There are two key non-profit groups assisting AEP in delivering educational programs to promote best practices and reduce conflict between grizzly bears and people. They are:

- [Waterton Biosphere Reserve Carnivores and Communities program](#)
- [Crowsnest Pass BearSmart Association](#)

The Waterton Biosphere Reserve, with assistance from AEP, delivered four large carnivore meeting updates to various communities in 2019. CNPBS delivered 25 bear safety courses to over 320 participants and attended three community markets and one tradeshow. These

programs included information on bear safety, the number of large carnivore occurrences, predator compensation, grizzly bear mortality and translocations along with best practices for prevention of large carnivore conflict. AEP, WBR and CNPBS have created numerous educational materials that assist landowners in adopting best practices aimed at reducing conflict. They are available on their respective websites.

Conclusion

Recovery Progress

There are extensive ongoing conflict prevention programs in the BMA, delivered primarily by the WBR and CNPBS and supported by AEP. This includes promoting the use of electric fence, bear resistant sea cans, grain bins, deadstock bins and garbage cans. The WBR also organizes various workshops focused on new and evolving large carnivore mitigation techniques. CNPBS continues to deliver bear safety / bear spray workshops that create awareness regarding how to live with bears and other wildlife.

Challenges for Recovery

Ongoing agricultural conflicts on private land require continued proactive mitigation efforts by local groups such as WBR and CNPBS and with the support of AEP. Sustainable financial support for these programs will result in long-term, effective management of grizzly bear related conflict issues. Depredation on livestock, a primary concern for ranchers in BMA 6, remains a major challenge.

Priorities

It is essential to continue current agricultural mitigation programs including Rancher Safety workshops and projects that promote best practices for conflict prevention. Considerations to improve the current compensation program are necessary. Managing access on public lands will reduce pressure on large carnivores in those areas. The goal should be to maintain the current grizzly bear population size, with a focus on improving public safety and reducing property damage. A reduction in negative interactions with bears, particularly on private lands within the Support Zone, will help to maintain tolerance levels for grizzly bears, an essential component of grizzly bear recovery in Alberta.

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Appendix I

Human Bear Occurrence Definitions

Occurrence	Definitions
No Occurrence	Bears feeding on natural foods in non-developed areas including backcountry trails, roads, train tracks or travelling in non-developed areas (i.e. trails) or developed areas such as day use areas, golf courses, campgrounds (frontcountry, backcountry or random)
Low	Bears feeding on natural foods (except carcasses) in or adjacent to trailheads, campgrounds, picnic areas, barns, or feeding on golf courses during the day; feeding/travelling in urban green space, facility/ playfield; feeding on unnatural food in non-developed areas or travelling through residential properties (backyards), travelling frequently through cgs or repeated sightings on trails
Moderate	Bears feeding on unnatural foods (except carcasses) not secured at or adjacent to developed area (trailheads, campgrounds, picnic areas, playfield, barns or golf courses during the day; natural foods at or adjacent to residential areas; predating on domestic animals in non-developed areas; makes physical contact with manmade structures (decks, dumpster, pickup beds); standing ground
High	Bears feeding on lightly secured non-natural foods (coolers, non-bear proof garbage cans) in or adjacent to developed area; partially enters 2 or 3 sided structure, minor property damage, closing distance (non-aggressive) to people for food or non-food related closing distance incidents
Very High	Bears depredating (i.e. hunt, chase, harass) on wild or domestic animals (livestock, dogs, cats, rabbits) or feeding on carcasses in or adjacent to developed areas including trails, major property damage, enters 4 sided structure ; charges people (no contact) including surprise encounters, defence of young or defending carcass
Extreme	Bear injures or kills people
Not Applicable	Does not apply

Appendix II

ENFOR Field Categories

Primary Attractant	Behaviour	Land Use
BBQ	Alert	Campground Backcountry
Bird Feeder	Bluff Charge	Campground Frontcountry
Carcass Livestock	Charge	Campground Informal
Carcass Wildlife	Curious Approach	Day Use Area
Compost	Indifferent	Designate Trails
Domestic Pet	Predatory Approach	Facility
Garbage	Property Damage	Golf Course
Garden	Retreat Run	Non-Designated Trails
Golf Course	Run to Cover	Other - Specify
Grain Agriculture	Stands Ground	Pasture
Human Food	Unaware	Railway
Humans	Unknown	Residential Urban
Insects	Walk to Cover	Residential Rural
Livestock		Roadside
Natural Vegetation		
Ornamental Fruit Tree		
Pet Food		
Unknown		
Unnatural Vegetation		
Wildlife		

Appendix III

Fact Sheets



our challenge Bears exist throughout most of Alberta. Black bears are found across the province, with the exception of some agricultural lands in the south east corner of the province and grizzly bears are found primarily along the Rocky Mountains and in the Foothills of western Alberta. In recent years some areas of the province, particularly parts of southern Alberta, have been experiencing grizzly bear activity in areas further east of traditional home ranges.

A large portion of Alberta's bear populations overlap areas where people live, work and play. This has resulted in increasing human bear interactions on both public and private lands. Some interactions involve bears accessing unnatural food sources including garbage, fruit trees, bee yards, livestock feed and livestock.

Fruit trees can attract bears into residential areas creating issues of public safety and potential property damage. Attempts are often made to capture and remove bears that begin to associate developed areas as possible food sources. If attractants remain available, there is a risk that other bears will eventually discover them and the issue will repeat itself. By properly securing or removing fruit from trees, bears will have no reason to frequent these developed areas and they will typically move on. The result is no loss of fruit, no property damage or public safety concerns and no need to remove bears – a win for all concerned.



Black bear in Mountain Ash tree

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BEARSMART

Bees and Bears



our challenge Bears exist throughout most of Alberta. Black bears are found across the province, with the exception of some agricultural lands in the south east corner of the province and grizzly bears are found primarily along the Rocky Mountains and in the Foothills of western Alberta. In recent years some areas of the province, particularly parts of southern Alberta, have been experiencing grizzly bear activity in areas further east of traditional home ranges.

A large portion of Alberta's bear populations overlap areas where people live, work and play. This has resulted in increasing human bear interactions on both public and private lands. Some interactions involve bears accessing unnatural food sources including garbage, fruit trees, livestock, livestock feed and, in some cases, bee yards.

Aside from the obvious loss of bees and honey, issues of public safety and property damage, are also a concern when bears access bee yards. Attempts are often made to capture and remove bears that begin to associate developed areas as a food source. If attractants are left unsecured, there is a risk that other bears will eventually discover the area and the same issue will arise.

Securing attractants results in reduced incidents of property damage and public safety concerns and the need to translocate bears; a win for all concerned.



Photo Credit: Le Galde

Bear and bee yard conflict

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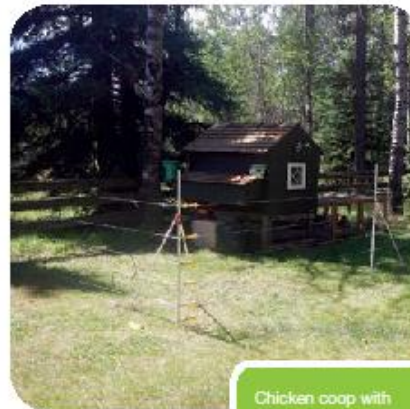
BEARSMART

Electric Fences and Bears



our challenge People living and working in bear country will, at times, experience bears. Often bears will visit because of available foods, natural or otherwise, that exists. Depending on the circumstances, this can result in a loss of livestock, livestock feed or property damage and concerns related to public or personal safety. It can also result in bears becoming food conditioned and being relocated or euthanized.

Securing available attractants as much as possible is an effective way of preventing bears from visiting in the first place. This can include placing garbage and pet or livestock feed inside buildings or in a bear resistant container or removing fruit from trees or bushes before bears can get to it. A properly constructed and maintained electric fence can be an effective way of protecting livestock and bee yards from bears. These preventative measures will reduce incidents of loss, property damage and alleviate public safety concerns. It will also reduce the need to remove or kill bears.



Chicken coop with electric fence

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BEARSMART Deadstock Composting and Bears



our challenge Bears exist throughout most of Alberta. Black bears are found across the province, with the exception of some agricultural lands in the south east corner of the province and grizzly bears are found primarily along the Rocky Mountains and in the Foothills of western Alberta. In recent years some areas of the province, particularly parts of southern Alberta, have been experiencing grizzly bear activity in areas further east of traditional home ranges.

A large portion of Alberta's bear populations overlap areas where people live, work and play. This has resulted in increasing human bear interactions on both public and private lands. Some interactions involve bears accessing unnatural food sources including garbage, fruit trees, bee yards, livestock, livestock feed and, in some cases, deadstock piles.

Attempts are often made to bury dead livestock to prevent access by bears and other scavengers. The reality is that bears are opportunistic feeders guided by a good nose and will likely discover deadstock piles at some point in time as livestock carcasses are a desirable food source for bears. If the location of the deadstock is close to outbuildings, ranch houses, or calving pens, issues of public safety, possible property damage, or future predation of livestock can be a concern.



Deadstock and grizzly bear

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BEARSMART

Chickens and Bears



our challenge Bears exist throughout most of Alberta. Black bears are found across the province, with the exception of some agricultural lands in the south east corner of the province and grizzly bears are found primarily along the Rocky Mountains and in the Foothills of western Alberta. In recent years some areas of the province, particularly parts of southern Alberta, have been experiencing grizzly bear activity in areas further east of traditional home ranges.

A large portion of Alberta's bear populations overlap areas where people live, work and play. This has resulted in increasing human bear interactions on both public and private lands. Some interactions involve bears accessing unnatural food sources including garbage, fruit trees, bee yards, livestock feed and livestock, including chickens

Aside from the obvious loss of chickens, issues of public safety and property damage are also a concern when bears access chickens for food. Attempts are often made to capture and remove bears that begin to associate developed areas as food sources. If attractants are left unsecured, there is a risk that other bears will eventually discover the area and the same issue will arise. By properly securing attractants, bears learn they cannot access food from a particular area and they typically move on. The result is no loss of chickens, no property damage or public safety concerns and no need to remove bears – a win for all concerned.



Bear and chicken yard conflict

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