Grizzly Bear

Occurrence Summary 2017

Bear Management Area (BMA) 6

Alberta
Government

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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 (GBRP) intended to increase grizzly bear numbers to a more sustainable population level. In 2016, an updated draft GBRP 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 Dispersal Zone (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 (HCM) 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 (HBO). 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 4, this includes Highway 3 in the Crowsnest Pass.
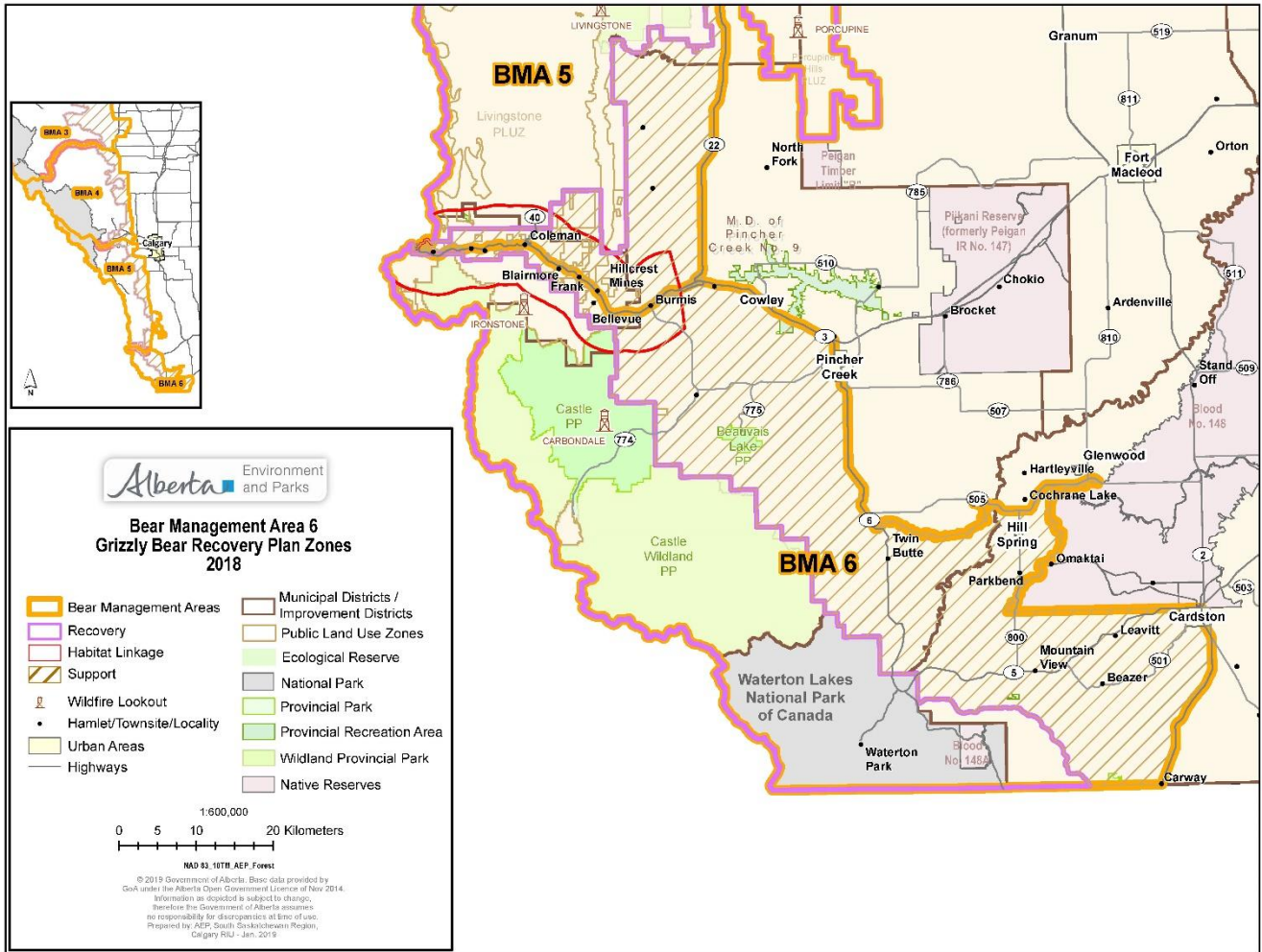
Figure 1. Bear Management Area 6

Occupancy of grizzly bears outside of the Grizzly Bear Recovery and Support Zones, i.e. Dispersal Zone, 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 ((https://www.alberta.ca/wildlife-predator-compensation-program.aspx) and Alberta Bear Smart (https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-bearsmart.aspx) 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 GBRP. Failure to gain that support from the people most affected by bears can result in increased HBC 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 conflicts 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 HBO is occurring, why it is occurring, and to provide sustainable options for reducing that conflict.

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 conflicts (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 (GOA) ENFOR Occurrence Reports. In total 35 occurrence records in 2017 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 GOA 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 (FWMIS).

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 GOA 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 GOA 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 GOA ENFOR data. For a list of terms considered for Land Use, Attractant Type and Behaviour, refer to Appendix I.

Results

Occurrences

There were 35 grizzly bear related occurrences recorded in 2017 within BMA 6 (Figure 2). These records occurred exclusively within the Support Zone except for one Occurrence in the Dispersal Zone. Most of the occurrences were Very High Level (97% or 33 of 34), primarily consisting of bears predating on livestock (82% or 28 of 34), or accessing agricultural grain resulting in significant property damage (9% or 3 of 34). There was one High Level Occurrence where two grizzly *bears were accessing grain that* resulted in minor property damage. This may be perceived to be a relatively low number of occurrences when compared with the 222 (2016) and 314 (2017) in BMA 5. While BMA 6 is significantly smaller than BMA 5, it is also possible that people are not reporting more Low level occurrences in BMA 6 to the same degree as BMA 5; this would include grizzly bears frequenting developed areas such as residential areas or ranch outbuildings. There are reports of black bears accessing garbage and fruit trees within the BMA, particularly in the Crowsnest Pass area, there were no reports of grizzly bears feeding on these *types of attractants.*

Of the 28 incidents involving livestock predation, 43% (12 of 28) were calves, 18% (5 each of 28) were cows and steers, 14% (4 of 28) were yearlings and 7% (2 of 28) were heifers. Seventy-six per cent (26 of 34) of occurrences were split evenly between the Pre-Berry and Berry seasons (13 each). There were eight occurrences during the Post-Berry season.
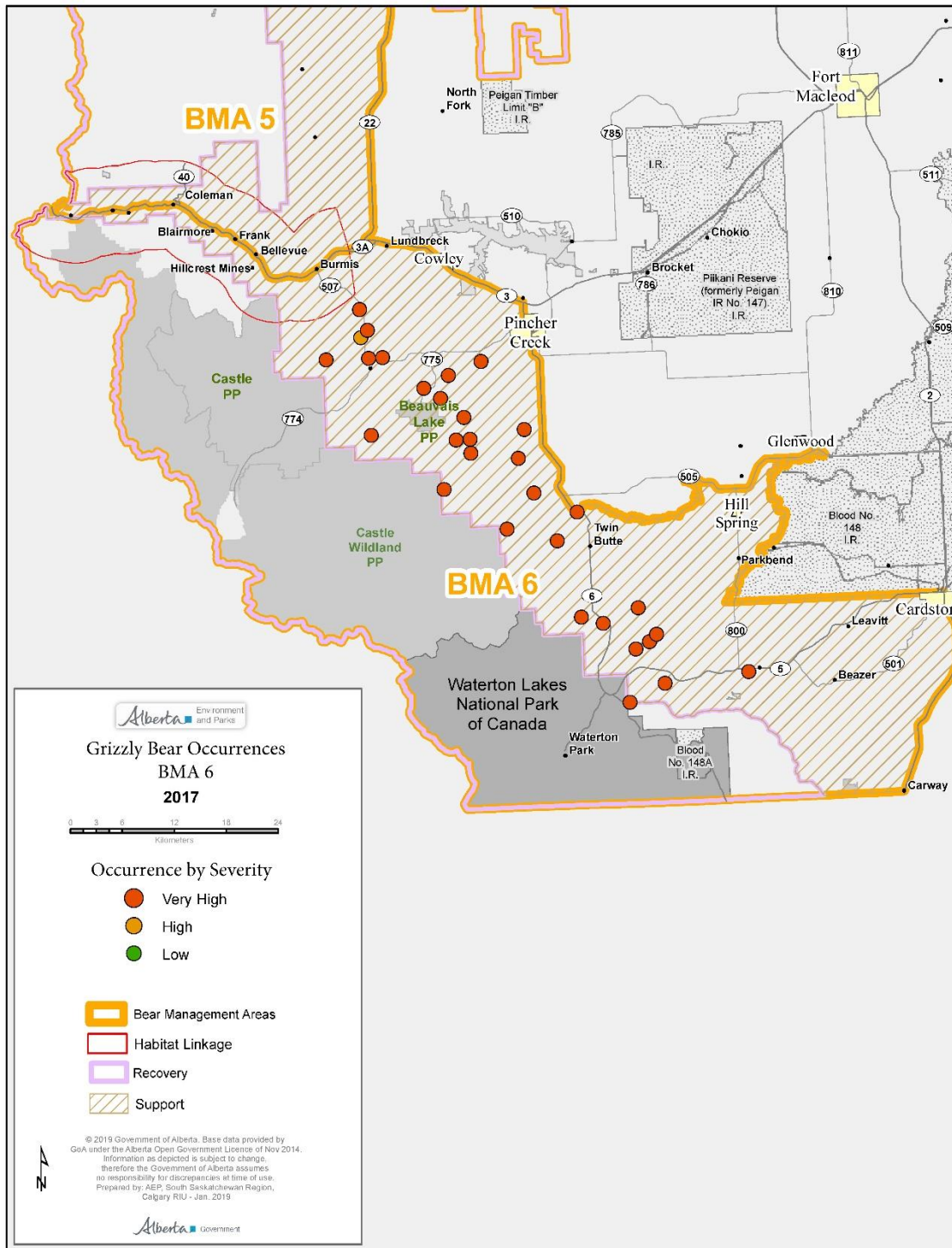
Figure 2. BMA 6 2017 Occurrence Levels (N= 35)

Mortality

There were no HCM recorded in BMA 6 in 2017. Since 2009 there have been 28 known HCM in BMA 6 (Figure 3). Since 2014 when Zone information was been recorded, 8 HCM have occurred within the Support Zone and 6 HCM east of the Support Zone. There have been no recorded HCM in the Recovery Zone since 2014. These mortality numbers do not include those bears translocated from the BMA.
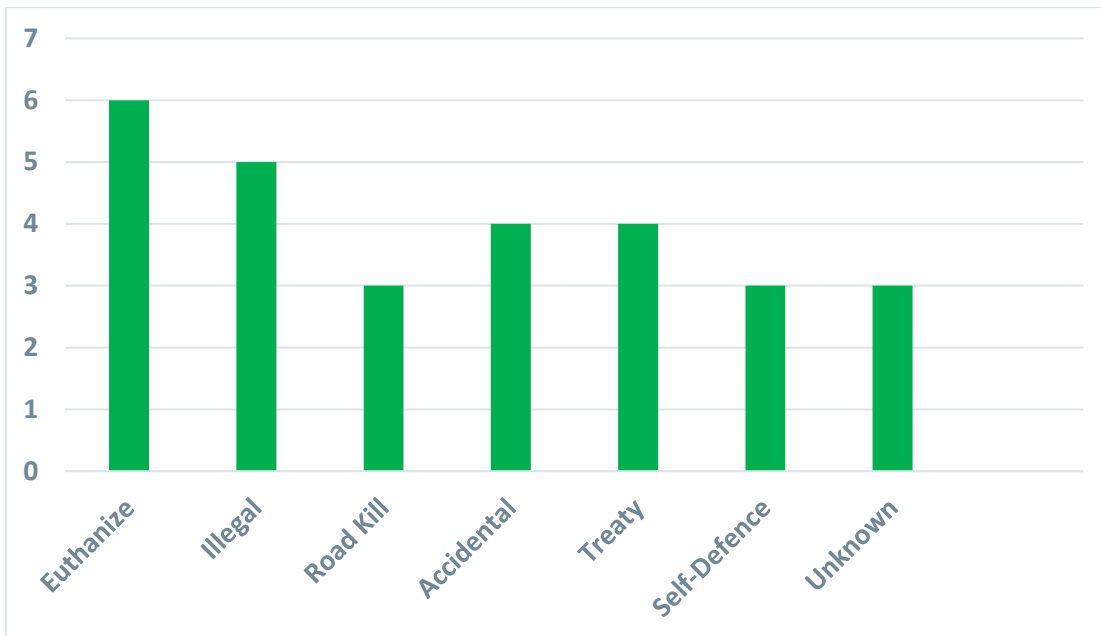

Figure 3. Human Caused Grizzly Bear Mortality 2009 to 2017 (N= 28)

Translocations

One adult male was translocated from BMA 6 (Support) in 2017 for killing livestock. A second bear was reported as moved but there is insufficient data to determine age, sex and where the bear was moved to. From 2009 to 2017, there have been 53 translocations from BMA 6 (Figure 4). Sixty-six per cent (35 of 53) of these records involved livestock.

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.
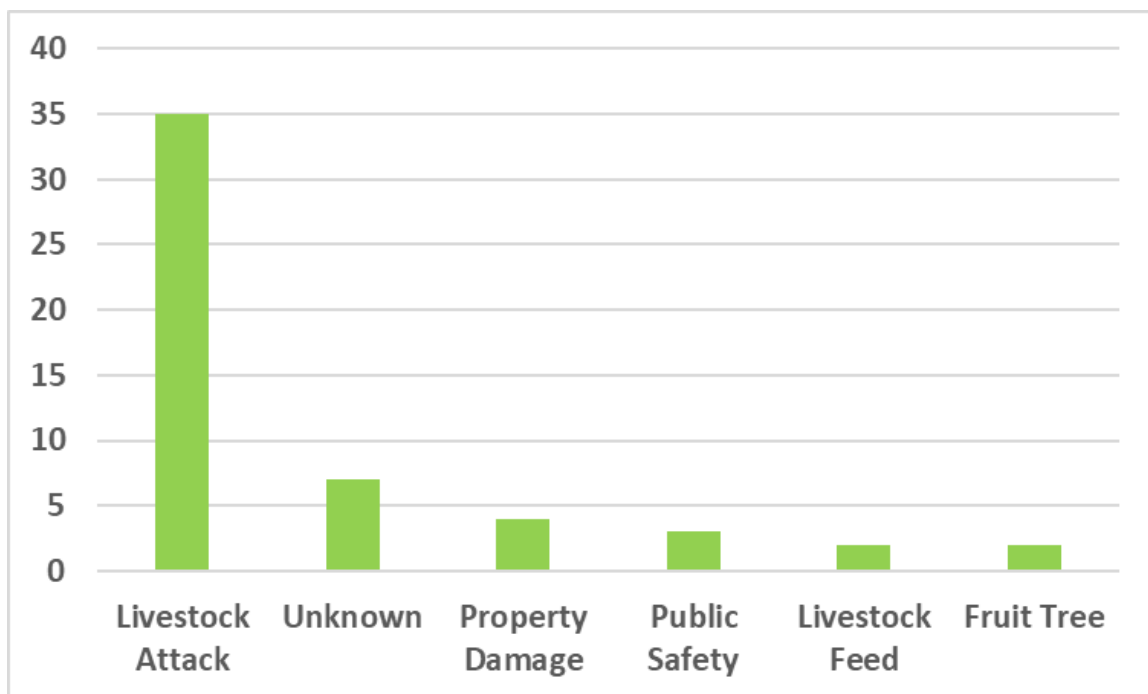

Figure 4. Grizzly Bear Translocations 2009 to 2017 (N= 53)

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 (WBR) Carnivores and Communities Program and Crowsnest Pass BearSmart (CNPBS) with support from AEP. This is an excellent example of the necessity and benefit of having local groups assisting in the delivery of effective large carnivore mitigation projects.

Attractant Management

Natural vegetation, primarily buffaloberry, which exists in developed areas is a continued source of conflict, particularly in the Bow Valley. Programs to physically remove buffaloberry are ongoing within Kananaskis Country and the Town of Canmore. This work is done by volunteers and paid contractors, and is considered an effective method of reducing bear activity in key areas of the BMA.

Livestock related occurrences are typically dealt with through the Predator Compensation Program. In 2017, 31 claims were 'Confirmed' (18 steers, 6 bred cows, 2 cows, 1 bred heifer, 5 heifers), resulting in $26,266 paid to producers.

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 WBR, has placed 12 deadstock bins in Cardston and Pincher Creek Municipal Districts. Ranchers can deposit deadstock into these bear proof containers free of charge. Animals are picked up regularly and deposited at a local rendering plant.

Grain is an ongoing concern, largely due to non-bear proof 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.

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. 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. Crowsnest Pass BearSmart has initiated programs intended to reduce bear activity within developed areas. These include community fruit picking initiatives and cost share programs with communities to have trees or their fruit physically

removed or to have them replaced with non-fruit bearing trees. Existing wildlife attractant bylaws are also in place.

Areas outside the Recovery Zone in BMA 6 continue to have relatively high black bear/garbage related occurrences, suggesting that garbage management remains a potential concern for grizzly bears in these areas.

Loaner Program

The WBR and CNPBS have had loan or cost sharing programs for landowners experiencing HBC since 2008 (Figure 5). This has included 99 projects that promote the use of electric fence, bear proof garbage bins, grain bin doors, sea canisters and metal hopper bottoms. In 2017, WBR provided 1 electric fence, 4 sea cans, 3 hopper bottoms, 3 bear proof grain bins and 1 bear proof grain bin door to landowners experiencing bear problems. CNBS provided 4 bear proof garbage bins to private residences. Of these 16 mitigation projects in 2017, 10 occurred within the Support Zone, 4 in the Habitat Linkage Zone and 2 east of the Support Zone. There have been no reported reoccurrences in 2017 once these mitigation systems were in place.
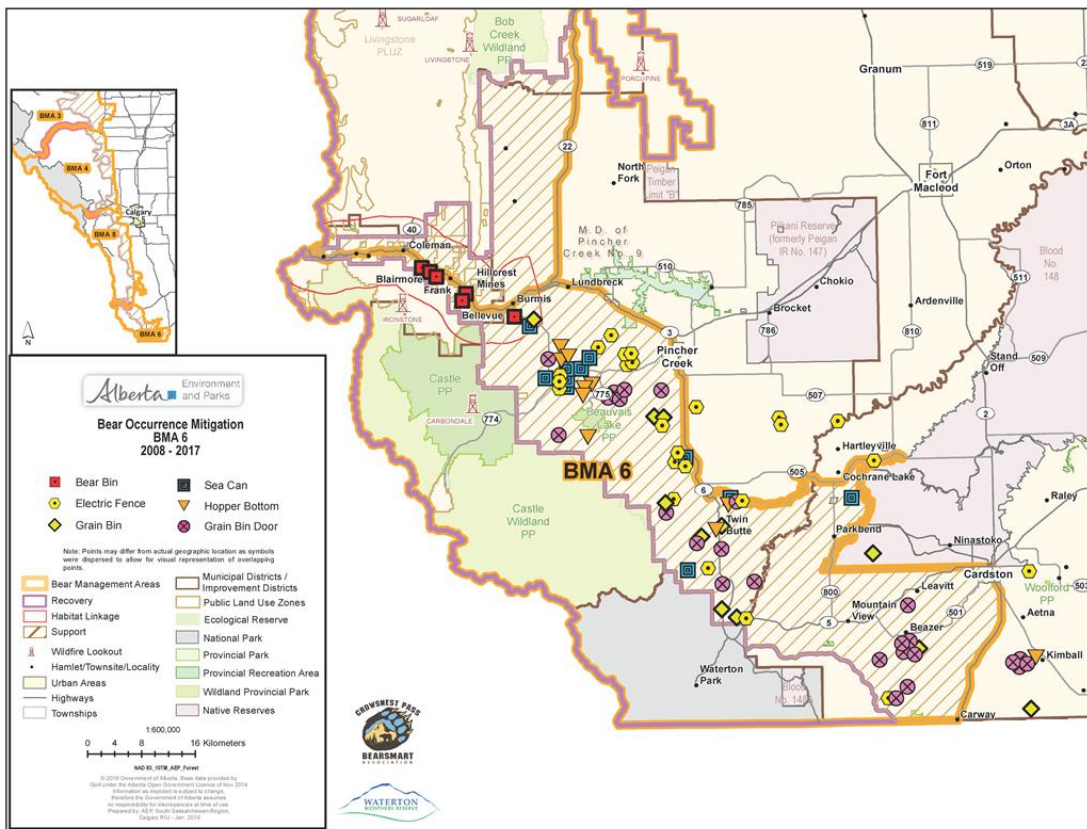

Figure 5. WBRA and CNPBS Bear Occurrence Mitigation Locations

Education

There are a number of non-profit groups assisting AEP in delivering programs to promote best practices and reduce conflict between grizzly bears and people through education. These include:

- WBR Carnivores and Communities program (http://www.watertonbiosphere.com/projects/carnivores-communities/)

- Crowsnest Pass BearSmart Association (http://www.cnpbearsmart.com/)

- Alberta BearSmart (http://aep.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/alberta-bear-smart/default.aspx)

AEP, WBR and CNPBS have created numerous educational materials that assist landowners in adopting best practices aimed at reducing HBC. They are available on their respective websites.

The WBR has been conducting Rancher Safety workshops throughout BMA 6 for a number of years now. In 2017 a workshop was held in Cardston. The workshop targets local community members and ranch families. It focuses on attractant management, how to avoid an encounter with a bear and what to do should an encounter occur. It also promotes the use of bear spray and how to use it. A can of bear spray is provided to each family that attends the workshop. These events have been favourably received and are expected to continue.

Conclusion

Recovery Progress

There are extensive ongoing conflict prevention programs in the BMA, delivered primarily by non-government groups such as the WBR Carnivores and Communities Program and CNPBS. This includes promoting the use of electric fence, bear proof sea cans, grain bins, deadstock bins and garbage cans.

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. Without a mechanism in place to effectively manage conflict increased property damage and public safety concerns will occur which will likely reduce social tolerance for grizzly bears and other large carnivores. Depredation on livestock remains a major challenge and a review of the current compensation program is required in order to build community support for grizzly bear presence.

Priorities

It is essential to continue current agricultural mitigation programs including Rancher Safety workshops and projects that promote best practices for HBC 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 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

BEARSMART
Fruit Trees 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.

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

Alberta Government

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.



Bear and bee yard conflict

Alberta Government

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.
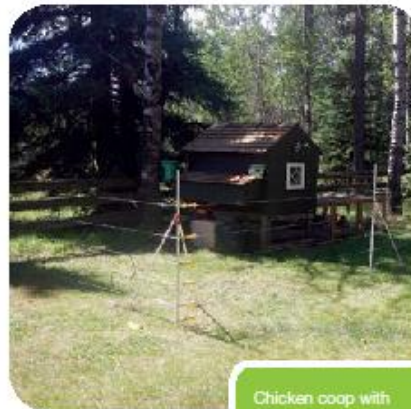
Chicken coop with electric fence

Alberta Government

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

Alberta Government

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

Alberta
Government