



# SIGHT LINES

FALL 2008

## NEWSLETTER OF THE SELKIRK CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

### Grizzly Bears & People Who Live in Grizzly Habitat

By: Jerry R. Boggs

You may have heard the saying "we've got to learn to get along". That is certainly true for grizzly bears and the folks who live in grizzly bear habitat which is the case for just about everyone living north of a line from the Pend Oreille River and Lake Pend Oreille in northern Idaho. It may be especially true for those who live permanently or are summer residents in the areas around Priest Lake, Bonners Ferry and, sometimes, Sandpoint.

Remember last year, 2007? A Nordman photographer lays out bait for wildlife to attract them in for photos. A young, 2 years old male grizzly, discovers this cornucopia of visceral delights. He hangs around, gets used to the human presence, scares said humans, is labeled as a "nuisance" bear and ends up shot. This year, Rob Sumas, Idaho Department of Fish & Game, responded to a call from the same general area and has talked with the landowners who, in this instance, had a totally innocent pile of fermented hay that attracted this bear. These folks have been cooperative and we can hope this bear will not acquire the tag of "nuisance" bear. If it does, there is a high probability that it too will end up dead. This potential problem may occur several times a year and in several different areas. Its potential is highest in springtime when bears break hibernation; they always come out hungry.

Here's the situation. We have plenty of good people living in grizzly bear habitat. These good people are not bear biologists; they're not "bear-aware". They don't worry about how hanging up suet to attract gray jays or hanging a bird feeder to see black-capped chickadees may draw in bears. They may forget and leave dog or cat food out on the porch overnight. They probably do not have bear-proof garbage cans or secure their garbage cans in a closed garage. They may even have gardens. Wow!!!

And we have grizzly bears which tend to eat anything and everything, i.e. grizzlies are omnivores. As grizzlies get used to eating foods provided by their human neighbors, they get used to or habituate to the human scent, even the presence of humans. They lose their normal caution, traditionally exhibited when these two-legged creatures invade their wild habitats. Grizzlies around Priest Lake that become habituated to humans will not necessarily move away. They may stand their

ground; carry out bluff charges, etc. If they do that, they will be labeled a "nuisance" bear that can potentially harm someone and they will end up dead.

So, what's the point of this article? The point is that the Selkirk Conservation Alliance is dedicated to conserving the wild creatures that are native to the southern Selkirk Mountains. We are dedicated to helping the southern Selkirks grizzly bear population recover which may not happen if IDFG has to keep on shooting them (in addition to other mortality causes) whenever they become a problem.



Photo Provided by: Wind River Bear Institute

You don't want to see this in your backyard!

IDFG has non-lethal on-site tools. If those don't work they can tranquilize bears and relocate them somewhere else in the Selkirk Mountains. That's it. They did their best in 2007. They did not want to shoot that bear but had run out of options. It is the IDFG and US Fish and Wildlife Service conclusion that when these situations develop, everyone should accept that the bear may be shot, another mortality, another loss to the population, more genetic loss, more opportunity lost.

We don't have to accept this conclusion. There is something we can do as conservationists. We can provide funds for bear management and people management tools.

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