



Update of Project Activities

In May 2004, the Yukon Government Department of Environment, in partnership with Parks Canada (Western Arctic Field Unit), the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and WMAC(NS), began a six-year grizzly bear research project on the Yukon North Slope. The research project is made up of several different studies and activities. Together they will give wildlife managers the kind of information they need to know when determining the conservation requirements of this population and in reviewing harvest quotas. All research activities are partly funded through the Inuvialuit Final Agreement.

Radio collaring program

Using radio collars to follow bear movement is an important part of the project. The collars make it possible for the biologists to follow the bears and find out what kind of habitat they are using at different times of year, how long the bears stay in an area and how far they range.

Yukon Government biologists Ramona Maraj and Al Baer were collared 30 bears during the 2005 summer field season. They replaced all the defective collars that were originally put on the bears in the summer of 2004. They also collared a number of new bears. Parks Canada provided assistance with the collaring.

The research team recorded other important biological information such as the age, weight, and physical condition of all the collared bears. There are now 19 female and 11 male grizzly bears fitted with radio collars as part of the project.

Tracking the bears

Biologists used a fixed-wing airplane to conduct four tracking flights over the summer and into The fall of 2005. These flights are done to locate the bears and retrieve the information recorded



by the radio collars. It is also a chance to check cub and adult bear survival. The first flight of the season determined that many of the female bears had cubs. Later in the year, biologists found that only two of the twelve cubs they counted earlier survived.

Aerial surveys to count bears

Over the summer of 2005, biologists tried several times to count bears from an airplane. They tried this experimental method to determine bear numbers because of a request made by the community. Unfortunately, bad weather caused a lot of problems. Even when the

weather improved, it was still only possible to fly along the coastal plain. Only 5 bears were counted in one day of flying over a two-week period.

Community involvement

Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program has provided funding for community activities related to bear management on the Yukon North Slope. WMAC (NS) is also contributing funds and personnel to this project.

One part of this program is to work with community members to develop strategies for reducing bear-human conflicts at Shingle Point. At a public meeting in December, Aklavik residents expressed concerns about the increase in numbers of bear-human conflicts at Shingle Point. Suggestions were made to set up new garbage incinerators in the area and develop other ways to keep bears away from the camps. The Aklavik HTC has given its support for the development of an educational program to inform people about managing bears and garbage. Work related to this issue will continue over the summer.

Funding is also being used to further involve local harvesters in the research. Hunters were given GPS units to track their movements during grizzly bear hunts. The GPS gives hunters the opportunity to record the location of interesting observations while on the land. It also lets researchers look at where travel corridors for hunters and grizzly bears overlap.

During the winter of 2006, Kyle Russell visited Aklavik to interview people who have been active on the Yukon North Slope for many years and know about grizzly bears. This work allows

researchers to understand grizzly bears and their environment from the local perspective, knowledge and experience, as well as through science. Kyle also spent time in Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Inuvik looking for written traditional knowledge that documents grizzly bears. More work is planned on this project.

Denning surveys

Once the bears had left their dens in the spring, biologists returned to a number of sites they had located the previous fall. They collected scats and hair samples, and recorded the size and shape of the den. They also discovered that one female bear had made a very large bed of crowberry plants at the entrance of her den. There are no crowberries growing in the area where the den is located. The bear had to bring the shrubs to her den from quite far away.

2006 summer fieldwork

The main focus of the summer's work is to set up the first DNA mark-recapture grid to get more information about the number of bears in the study area. This part of the study will begin with a hair snagging program. Biologists plan to set up 100 hair trapping stations at different locations across the Yukon North Slope. They will go to each station every nine days from June through to August to collect samples.

Fieldwork in 2006 will also include recovering and replacing any dropped collars, as well as putting collars on five new bears. Tracking flights will continue once every two to three weeks throughout the summer to get information on grizzly bear habitat use and survival. Most of the fieldwork will be based out of Shingle Point, beginning in early June.

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Also see - www.taiga.net/wmac/species/grizzly/index.html