

Some Information on Grizzly Bear Ecology in Robson Valley and Surrounding Regions 1987–2000.

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We have studied the distribution, abundance, range, movements, food, habits and other ecology of grizzly bears in the field for the last 12 years using bear sign and sightings throughout Robson Valley, the Prince George District to the vicinity of Purden Lake, portions of the North Thompson watershed, and in portions of Mount Robson and Jasper Parks. Tracks, scats, sightings, digs, rubbing sites, hairs, fur mats, ground scrapes, trails, partly-eaten or broken vegetation, claw marks, bedding sites, feeding sites, kill/cache sites, DNA hair analysis, literature, interviews, and other inventory methods were used to indirectly determine abundance, movement, migratory corridors, and the frequency and seasonality of habitat-use throughout the region. Old growth, riparian zones, Antique Rainforest, and salmon-eating grizzly at lower elevations were more intensively sampled in Robson Valley.

These data were used to roughly estimate the total number of adults inhabiting each watershed and the seasonal frequency of bear-use of BCMOF forest cover polygons, especially for Antique Rainforest. The most plausible conservation corridors through critical habitat and the use of grizzly bears for umbrella, focal, key, flagship, or indicator species were also studied. Some effects of proximity to human habitation and industrial-use on bears, especially clearcuts, hunting, right-of-ways and other land uses were also determined.

Grizzly population size began at about ½ potential and generally declined 5–15% from 1987 to 1997, especially during 1992–1997, when a slight return to some former ranges occurred during 1998 and 1999 in Robson Valley (+2%). The Robson Valley is becoming known as the last site in the Rocky Mountains where grizzly still feed on wild anadromous salmon. It may also be the site of the largest population of low-land grizzly using the Inland Antique Rainforest. Benchmark areas, cross-valley corridors, and an Inland Rainforest Grizzly Bear Sanctuary are now being proposed by several scientists, conservation groups, and residents using these and other data. The degree of salmon-use, old forest use, movement between the Rockies and Cariboos, bear age and sex, conservation corridor mapping, and other factors may be further refined during 2000–2001.

In general, proximity to human habitation, clearcut logging, poaching, right-of-ways, and other factors are removing this slow-reproducing species at an alarming rate, and these factors include bear declines in Jasper and Mount Robson Parks, especially where bear ranges crossed Park boundaries and right of ways. Therefore, there is strong scientific support for the conclusions of Soule and Sanjayan (1998, Science 279:2060) and Woodroffe and Ginsberg (1998, Science 280:2126), that not enough protected areas, human habitation, clearcutting disturbances, lack of effective conservation corridors, roads, and the lack of buffers around current protected areas will most likely lead to the extirpation of grizzly bears from large portions of Robson Valley over the next decade, unless new land-use proposals arise from the above and other information.