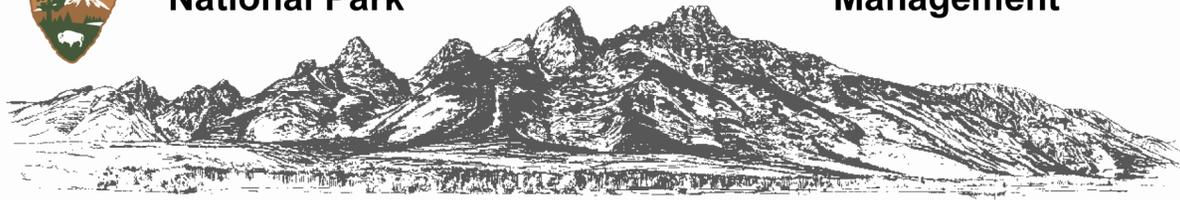




Grand Teton National Park

Science and Resource Management



2009 Wildlife Conservation: Wildlife Brigade



Wildlife Jam in Grand Teton National Park.

BACKGROUND

Grand Teton National Park (GRTE) experienced nearly a doubling of bear incidents involving human food rewards and/or property damage in campgrounds and a 10-fold increase in roadside wildlife jams involving large animals between 2005 and 2006. Park managers held several interdisciplinary meetings during the winter of 2005-2006 to discuss the increased risk for both human injury and wildlife mortality. As a result of these meetings, a new “Be Bear Aware” campaign was initiated in 2007. This effort resulted in an emphasis on improving management of the human-wildlife interface. New information and education materials were developed, and the Wildlife Brigade, a corps of paid and volunteer staff, was created to respond to wildlife jams, enforce food storage at campgrounds, picnic areas, and other developed areas, and continue refining the park’s bear management program.

APPROACH

The Wildlife Brigade managed congested roadside wildlife jams, promoted ethical wildlife viewing, patrolled developed areas to secure bear attractants, maintained bear information and education materials throughout the park, and educated thousands of visitor about safety in bear country.

The accurate collection and analysis of wildlife jam data required collaboration between Wildlife Brigade and Teton Interagency Dispatch Center (TIDC) staff. Wildlife jams lasting ≥ 20 minutes were formally recorded by TIDC (e.g. location, responding units, time on scene, resolution, etc...), while wildlife jams lasting < 20 minutes were simply tallied.

RESULTS

The 2009 Wildlife Brigade was comprised of a permanent supervisory park ranger, 2 seasonal park rangers, 11 volunteers and 1 Student Conservation Association (SCA) Intern. In addition, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC), a non-profit conservation and advocacy group, partnered with GRTE for a second year and provided 2 interns who worked with the Brigade for 12 weeks. To fill the internship positions, GYC recruited students studying parks and recreation management, wildlife biology, or a similar field from undergraduate and graduate colleges across the western United States. The Brigade grew by 2.5 positions in 2009, adding a new campground bear education host in the Colter Bay campground, a new SCA intern, and converting a previously part-time VIP position to a full-time VIP position.

In 2009, we recorded 611 wildlife jams, 63% of which lasted less than 20 minutes. Of the remaining wildlife jams lasting ≥ 20 minutes, we managed a minimum of 59 grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) jams, 52 black bear (*Ursus americanus*) jams, 99 moose (*Alces alces*) jams and 17 jams for other species such as bison (*Bison bison*), elk (*Cervus elaphus*), and wolves (*Canis lupus*). Black bear jams were up slightly from 2008, and grizzly bear jams were down significantly, a result of the natural break up and dispersal of a prominent grizzly bear family group. Law enforcement and interpretive rangers also contributed a significant amount of time managing wildlife jams around the park and parkway, with a minimum of 235 and 68 hours, respectively.

Wildlife Brigade staff led several bear safety education and outreach programs during the summer, contacting approximately 385 people (e.g., concession employees, park employees, local residents, and construction contractors). They also maintained bear informa-

tion and education materials, patrolled campgrounds, picnic areas, and other developed areas throughout the park, and wrote 1,334 food storage warning notices. The volunteers and interns contributed over 5,740 hours of time toward this important bear conservation and public education program.

2009 marked the second year of a partnership with the Grand Teton National Park Foundation (GTNPF) to cost-share expenses for purchasing and installing bear-resistant food storage boxes. The National Park Service and the Grand Teton Lodge Company partnered with GTNPF to purchase and install 104 new boxes in GRTE. Forty-eight boxes were installed in Colter Bay Tent Village, 27 in Colter Bay Campground, 27 in Signal Mountain Campground, and 2 boxes were installed at the Lupine Meadows Trailhead. Because of the need for several hundred additional food storage boxes, this human-bear interface improvement project will likely be on-going for years to come.

Additional funding for the 2009 Wildlife Brigade program was secured through a National Park Service competitive grant program. GRTE was awarded approximately \$71,000 for fiscal years 2009 and 2010. Funds received in 2009 were used to further develop the Wildlife Brigade volunteer program, to assess the effectiveness of using volunteers to augment the work of park rangers and resource managers, and to initiate a study to evaluate our “Be Bear Aware” educational and media campaign. In the latter endeavor, GRTE has partnered with University of Wyoming sociologists Dr. Patricia Taylor and Nanette Nelson, who will be conducting visitor surveys in 2010, pending OMB approval. The results of the survey will help park staff



Bear-resistant food lockers at Lupine Meadows Trailhead, Grand Teton National Park.

understand how successful we are in our efforts to get the bear safety message to the public, and how to enhance our presentation and focus for better results.

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