



Update of Project Activities

In May 2004, the Yukon Government Department of Environment, in partnership with Parks Canada (Western Arctic Field Unit) and the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, began a six-year grizzly bear research project on the Yukon North Slope. The focus of the project is on grizzly bears between the Firth and the Blow Rivers.



The research project is designed to learn about grizzly bear population size, birth rate, death rate, where bears can be found at different times of the year, and how much they move around. It will also

include a review of hunter-harvest activity. It is important for wildlife managers to have this information when they are 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

As part of the research project, biologists are using radio collars to follow bear movement and to find out what habitat the bears are using at different times of year. This part of the project is designed to determine how changes in habitat can influence population size and movements. Biologists are also investigating how long bears stay in an area of the Yukon North Slope and how far they range.

Biologists must capture the bears in order to fit them with a radio collar. Capturing the bears also gives the research team a chance to get other important biological information such as

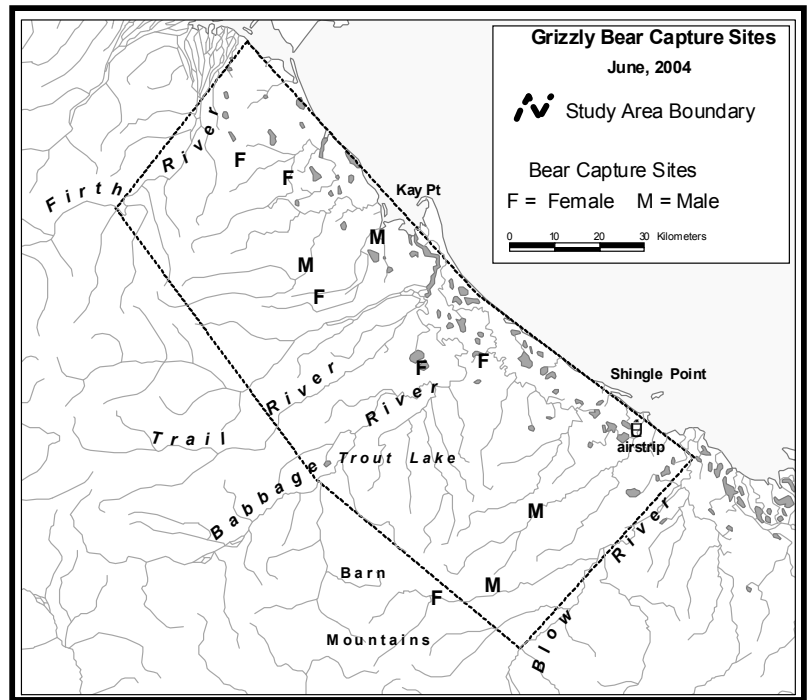
the age, weight, and physical condition of all the bears they handle. In early June 2004, biologists captured six female and four male bears in different parts of the study area and fitted them with radio collars. Just after the work was complete, the manufacturers of the radio collars told the researchers that all the collars must be replaced due to potential battery failure. As a result, biologists returned to the North Slope in early October. They were able to recapture two of the bears with the defective collars and put new collars on them. One of these bears had gained over 50 kg. since he was collared in June. It wasn't possible to recollar the other eight bears due to poor weather conditions.

Fall Denning Observations

During the fieldwork in the fall 2004, researchers found that the female bears started digging dens around the last week of September. By mid- October, all females were in their dens and most males had dug a den. By October 20th, only one of the four collared males had not dug out a den. This bear was spotted feeding on a moose carcass. Biologists think that the moose may have been injured in the rut. Bear dens were found on the coastal plain as well as in the mountains.

Traditional and local knowledge

Local knowledge and involvement is an important part of grizzly bear



management in the ISR. Harvesters and community residents can contribute important information about bear activities, numbers and distribution that is key to the success of this study.

The traditional and local knowledge component of the grizzly bear project began in February 2005. Wildlife managers from the Yukon Government, the Government of the Northwest Territories and Parks Canada spent several days in Aklavik working with the Hunters and Trappers Committee and local harvesters. Consultation in the community began with discussions on how to incorporate local knowledge and needs for information into the grizzly bear study.

Biologists have a number of important questions they the study to answer. These questions include what is the

sustainable harvest rate for male and female grizzly bears and what areas may need special conservation measures because of their importance in bear denning and cub rearing. Members of the Aklavik HTC and Aklavik residents Lee-John Meeyok, Jonas Meeyok and Danny C. Gordon reviewed all of the biologists' questions and added further questions to make sure that the study also tries find out what the community would like to know about the bears.

Biologists also spent time over the winter gathering information from previous local knowledge interviews and observational records. The focus of this review was the interviews conducted by the Government of the Northwest Territories in 1998/99 and sighting records of local harvesters. An analysis of existing information will allow managers to identify what further information needs to be collected. The Yukon Government and WMAC(NS), in consultation with the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and local harvesters, are now drafting a three-year workplan that outlines a program for community involvement in addressing information needs identified above.

2005 Fieldwork

Fieldwork for the 2005 season will begin in late April. Biologist will start by doing some fixed-wing flights over the Yukon North Slope to look for bears as they come out of their dens. They will be

concentrating their efforts on replacing the defective collars. Biologists also plan to capture and collar additional bears. The spring fieldwork includes a survey of den locations. The collaring work should be finished by early June.

Tracking the bears

Biologists will do regular tracking flights over the summer and into the fall to locate the bears and retrieve the information recorded by the radio collars. This information is used to learn



about habitat use and to see how far and how fast each bear is moving. It is also a chance to check cub and adult bear survival. These flights will be done every two weeks using a fixed-wing aircraft.

Aerial surveys to count bears

Also this summer, biologists will be experimenting with a method that uses two people to count bears from an airplane. It is very hard to be sure you are counting all bears and not missing any when you fly over a vast area. Researchers hope that by having two

people counting bears at the same time, they will be able to get a more accurate number. The method is experimental. Researchers are using it on a trial basis to see how well it works and if they can work out the best way to do it. This work will be carried out in early to mid-June.

Other activities

Collecting and analyzing scats is an important way to learn about what the bears are eating. This summer, biologists will collect scats when they put collars on the bears. They will also collect any other fresh scats they find when they are in the field.

Habitat Stewardship Program

Environment Canada, through its Habitat Stewardship Program, has provided some funding to develop community-based activities related to bear management on the Yukon North Slope. WMAC(NS) will also be

contributing funds and personnel to this project. The funding will be used to help biologists and the community develop solutions to bear- human conflicts at Shingle Point. It will also be used to further involve local harvester and people on-the-land to learn more about grizzly bear ecology.

Website information

WMAC(NS) has expanded its website to include more information on grizzly bears. You can now look on the website to find information on Yukon North Slope grizzly bear management, harvest and ecology. There is also further information on the current research program, including a fact sheet on the capture and handling of grizzly bears. Several links are listed for anyone wanting to know more about grizzly management and ecology in different parts of the Canada and the United States.

For more information contact

Yukon Government, Department of Environment, Whitehorse • 867-667-5177
Parks Canada, Inuvik • 867-777-8800

Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), Whitehorse • 867-633-5476
Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, Aklavik • 867-978-2723

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

