

June 25, 2019

Ed Schriever
Director
Idaho Fish and Game Department
Box 25
Boise, ID 83707

Sent via email to administrative assistant Kim Rau at kim.rau@idfg.idaho.gov

Dear Director Schriever:

We are writing you about the recent sighting of a grizzly bear near Kelly Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Clearwater River. This was reported on the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's (IDFG) website on June 19, 2019.¹

We are writing to ask Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to extend its bear-baiting prohibitions to all the units where grizzlies may be encountered in Idaho. These include IDFG's big game units 2, 3, 4, 4A, 5, 6, 7 and 9 in the Panhandle Region; units 10, 12, and 17 in the Clearwater Region; and units 61 (partial prohibition), 64, 65, 66, 66A, 67, 69 and 76 near Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.² Currently, IDFG prohibits bear baiting in occupied grizzly bear habitat immediately adjacent to Yellowstone National Park and the northern tip of the Panhandle; IDFG also prohibits bear baiting near Hells Canyon, and in far southeastern Idaho. (Units 1, 22, 31, 32, 32A, 61, 62, 62A, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, and 78).

Bear baiting is lethal for grizzly bears. Hunters have reportedly shot and killed at least eight grizzly bears at bait stations in national forests in Idaho and Wyoming since 1995, and this number does not consider the unreported incidents. As this agency is aware, a hunter killed a grizzly bear at a bait station in the North Fork of the Clearwater in 2007. That bait station was also in the Kelly Creek drainage. The 2007 incident is poised to repeat itself in the same area if IDFG fails to act. While mistaken identity at bait sites is obviously a problem, the actual practice of bear baiting is a bigger one.

Introducing human food to grizzlies can be lethal for the grizzlies. Idaho allows bear baiting with human food, which starts a potentially lethal chain reaction for grizzlies that begin with these bait stations. Baiting with human food, such as doughnuts, hamburger buns, or syrup can habituate grizzly bears and black bears to this human food. Human food can in turn motivate grizzly bears to seek food rewards in homes or outbuildings on private lands, or even at campsites, leading to property damage or personal injury. At the same time, this presents IDFG with the opportunity, as Idaho's wildlife management agency, to initiate a broader public education program informing people how to live in grizzly bear country, including proper pet/livestock food/garbage storage, removing bird feeders and other attractants during non-denning season, electric fencing for chickens and bee hives, proper disposal of livestock carcasses, and the like.

Our society's response to grizzlies that have become habituated to human food is to lethally remove them, unnecessarily leading to more dead grizzlies.

¹ https://idfg.idaho.gov/press/black-bear-hunters-urged-use-increased-caution-after-grizzly-spotted-unit-10?fbclid=IwAR3tGxlypnLb1_QiwDazA1DXXqUbT_MCkvJS9zi0XqIGkEIUQrVuO0ZMBE

² See Idaho Fish and Game 2019-2020 Idaho Big Game Seasons and Rules, available at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/seasons-rules-big-game-2019-2020.pdf>.

Bear baiting creates other concerns amplified by the presence of grizzlies. Grizzlies are known to guard bait as they would a carcass. For this reason, bait locations that have drawn in a grizzly and where a human happens upon could create grave safety issues for the human. Additionally, bear baiting entirely undermines other efforts to reduce human-bear conflicts; for example, campers could be exercising proper food storage behavior in bear country when IDFG rule-compliant bear baiting site with human food could exist less than a quarter of a mile away.

Bear-baiting prohibitions are sensible in areas where grizzlies may populate. Such prohibitions would remove the threats described above that bait stations pose to grizzlies. IDFG has the knowledge and ability to prevent what happened in the Kelly Creek drainage in 2007 from repeating itself. Please end baiting in the units where grizzlies may occupy.

Sincerely,

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