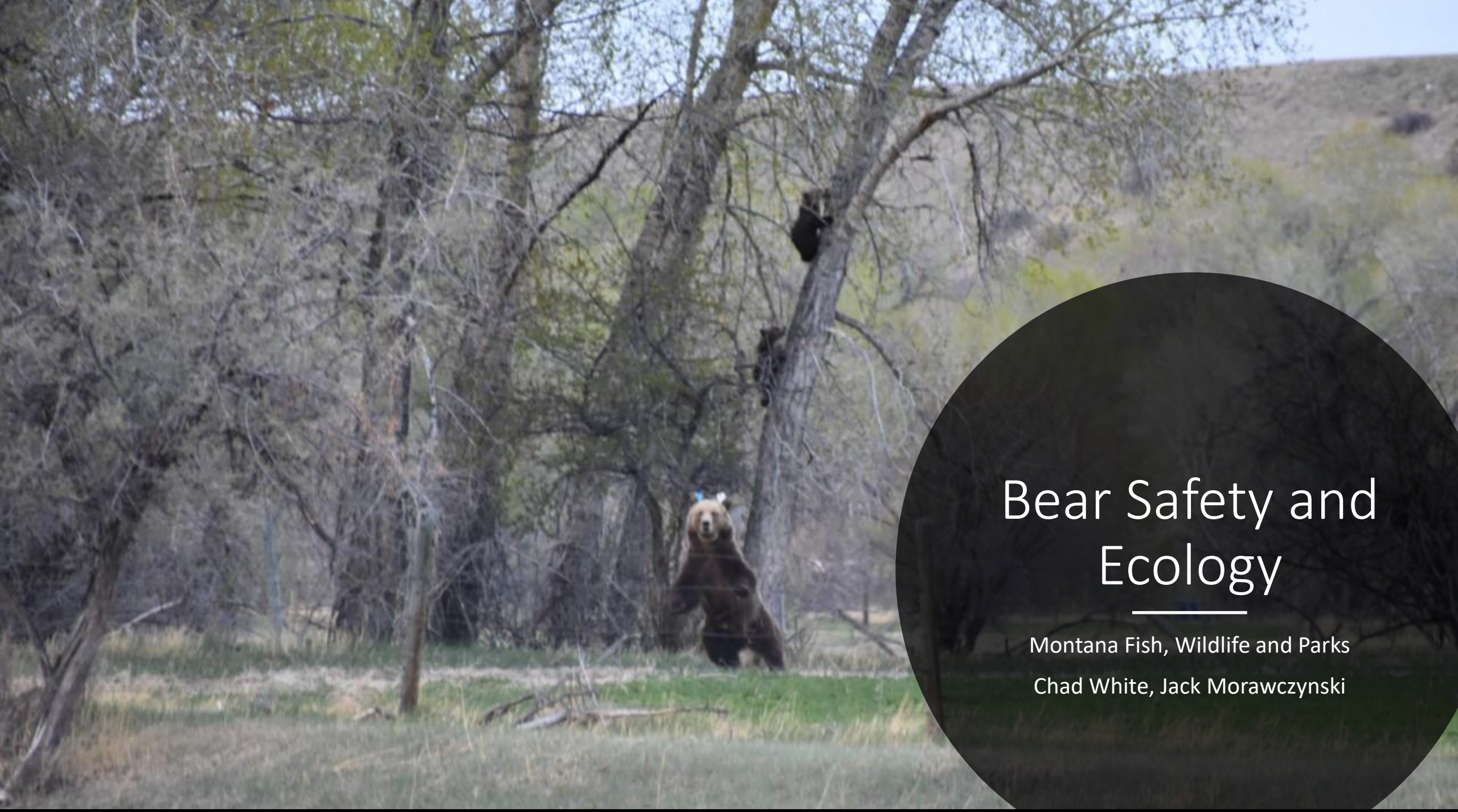


Bear Safety and Ecology

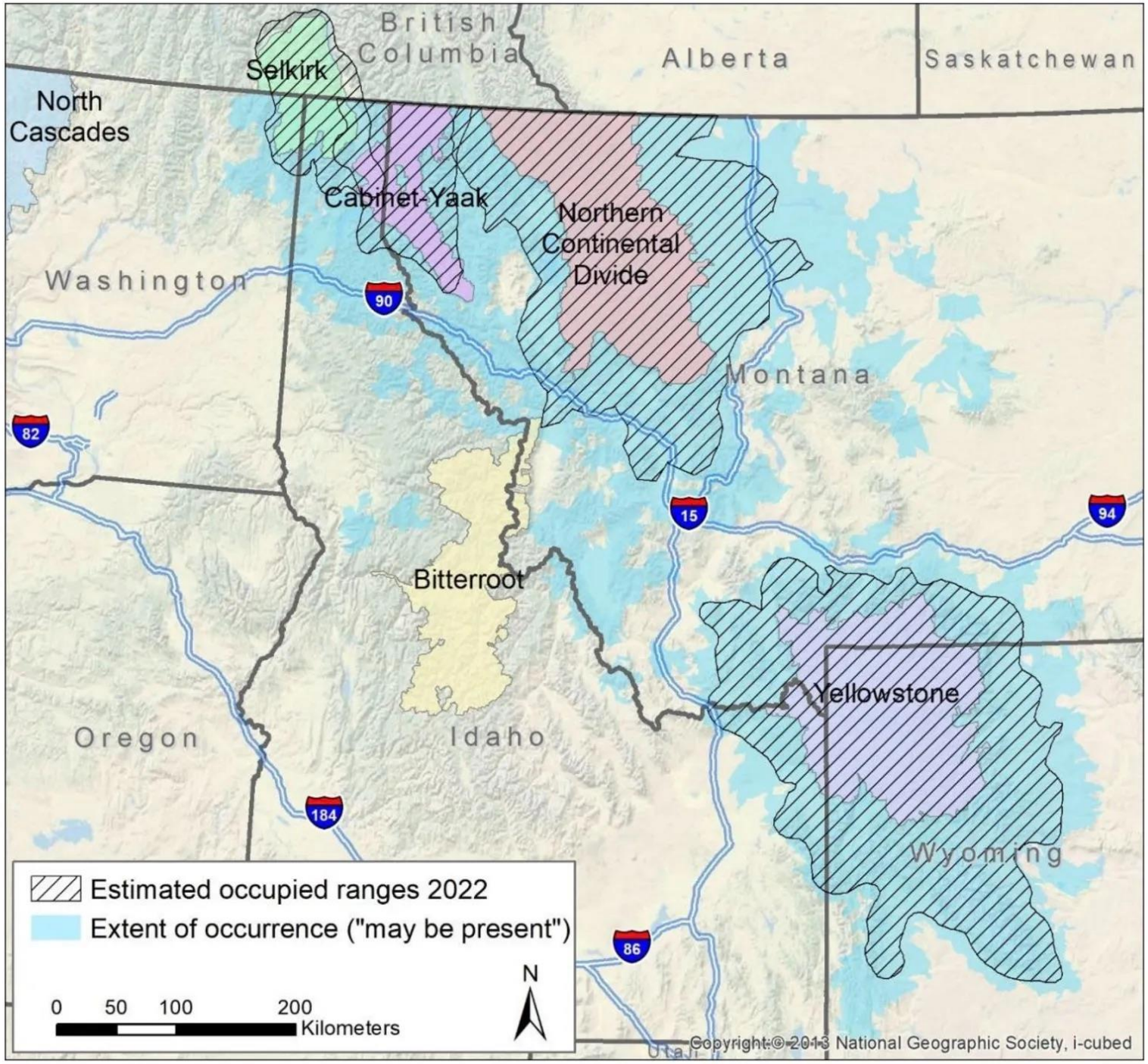
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Chad White, Jack Morawczynski

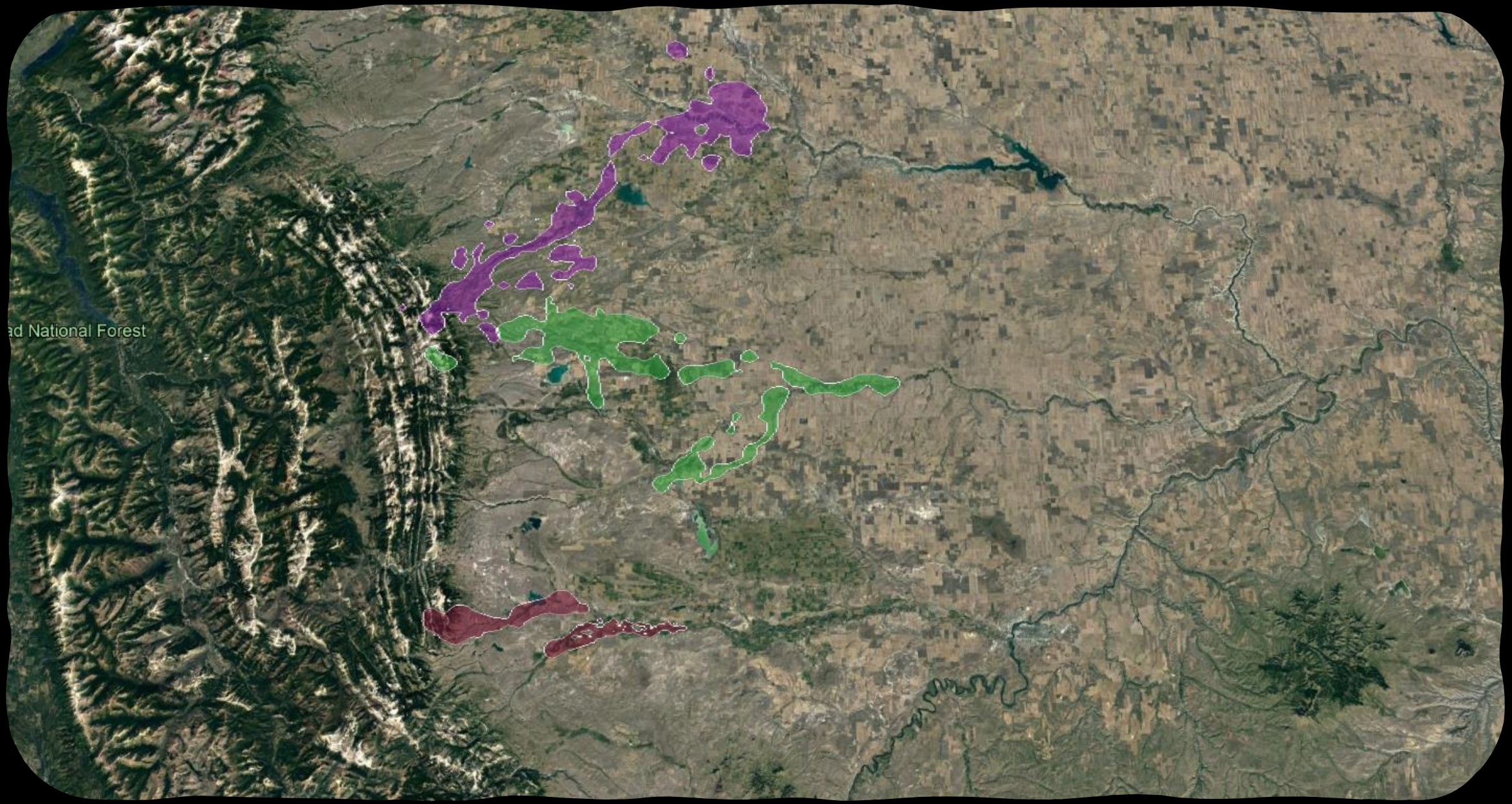
Take a picture so you'll know who to call

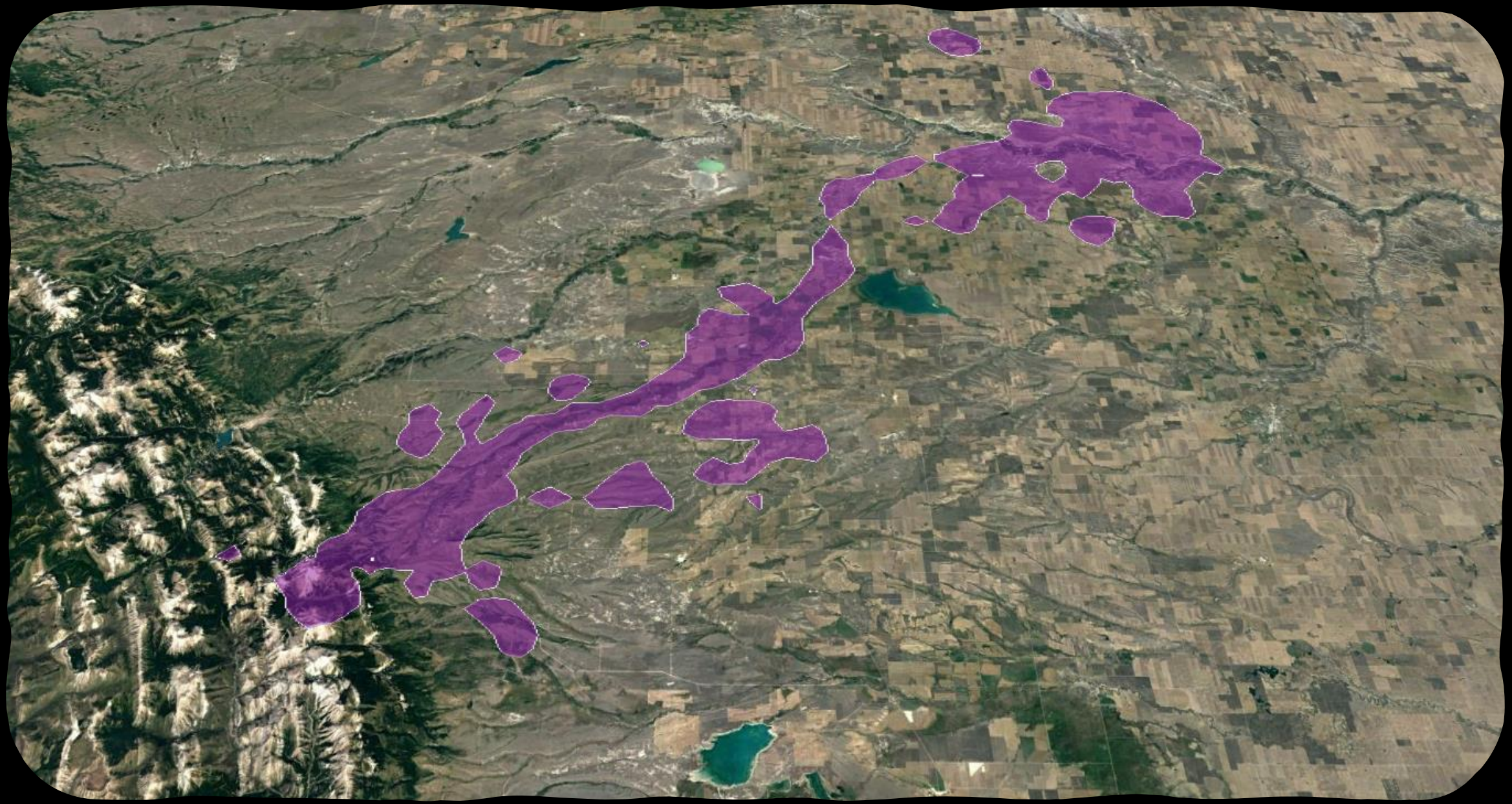
Jack Morawczynski
Grizzly Bear
Management Technician
Cell: (406) 308-9914

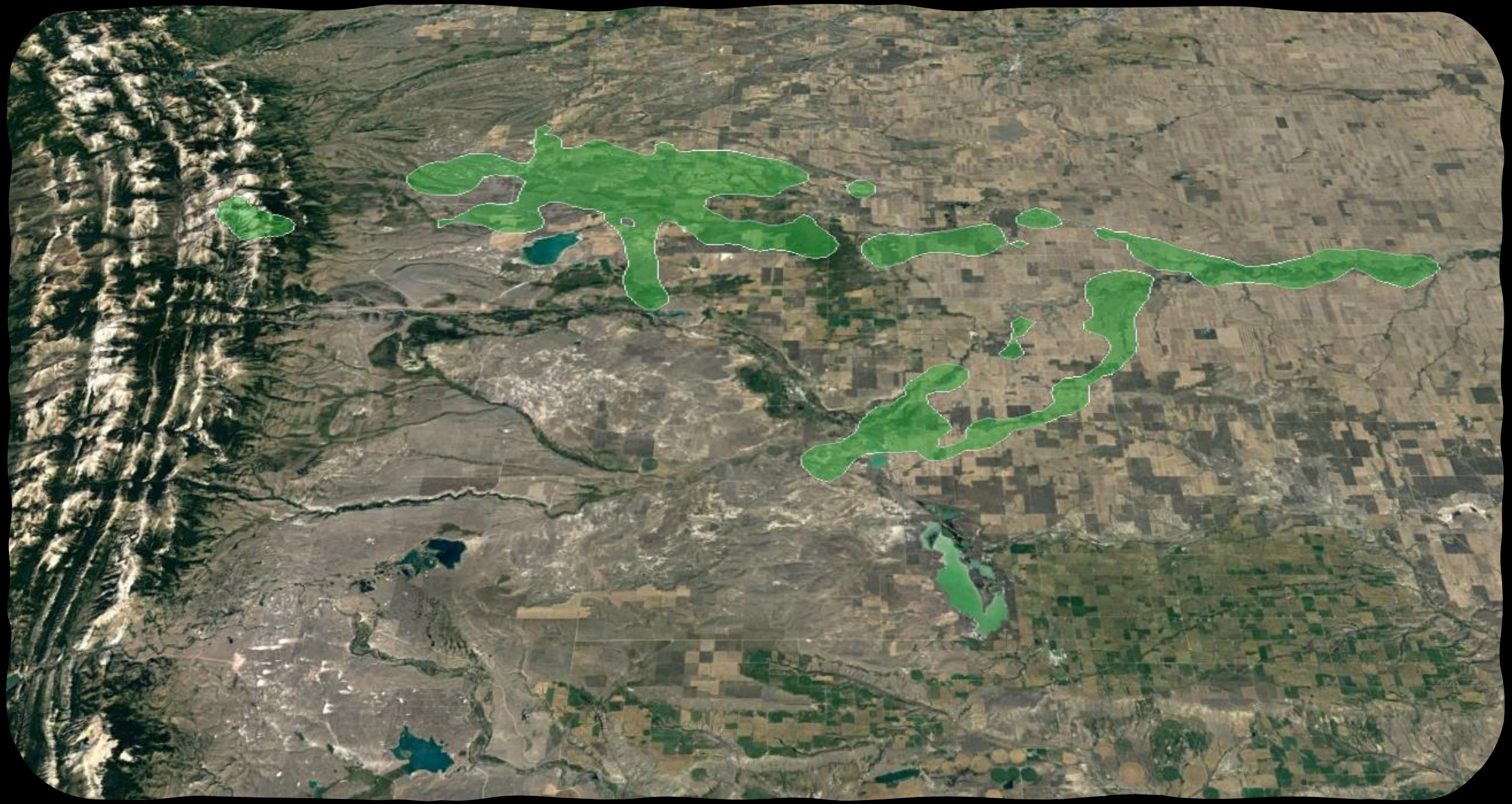
GRIZZLY BEARS IN MONTANA



Riparian corridors act as highways for grizzly bears allowing expedited range expansion
Two Medicine River
Alkali Lake
Liberty
Tiber Reservoir
Lake Frances
Pondera
Pondera
49
44
Bynum Reservoir
Teton River
Teton
Teton
Chouteau
South Fork Flathead River
Pishkun Reservoir
Pishkun Reservoir
Freezeout Lake
Benton Lake
Big Lake
Kingsbury Lake
Sun River
Gibson Reservoir
Willow Creek Reservoir
Sun River
Great Falls
83
21
80
Swan River
Lewis and Clark
15
68
Cascade
Arrow Creek
Seeley Lake
Placid Lake

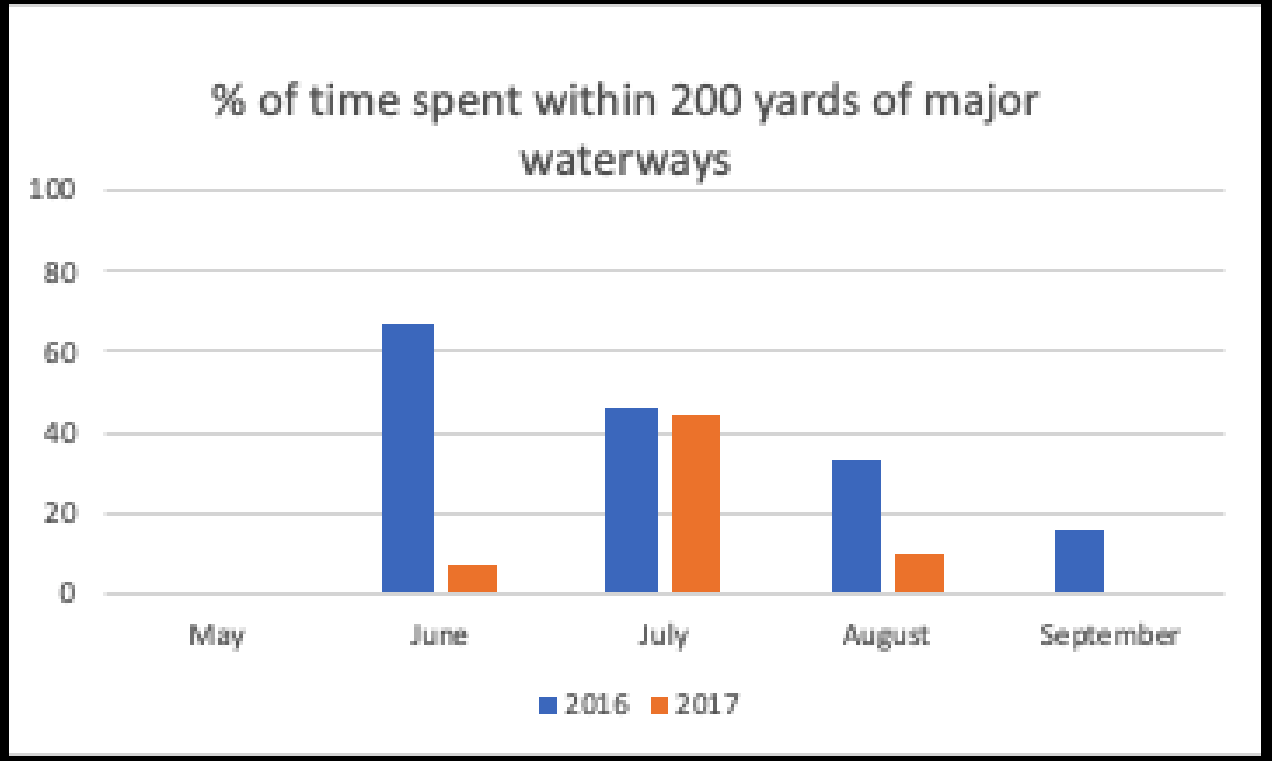

ad National Forest





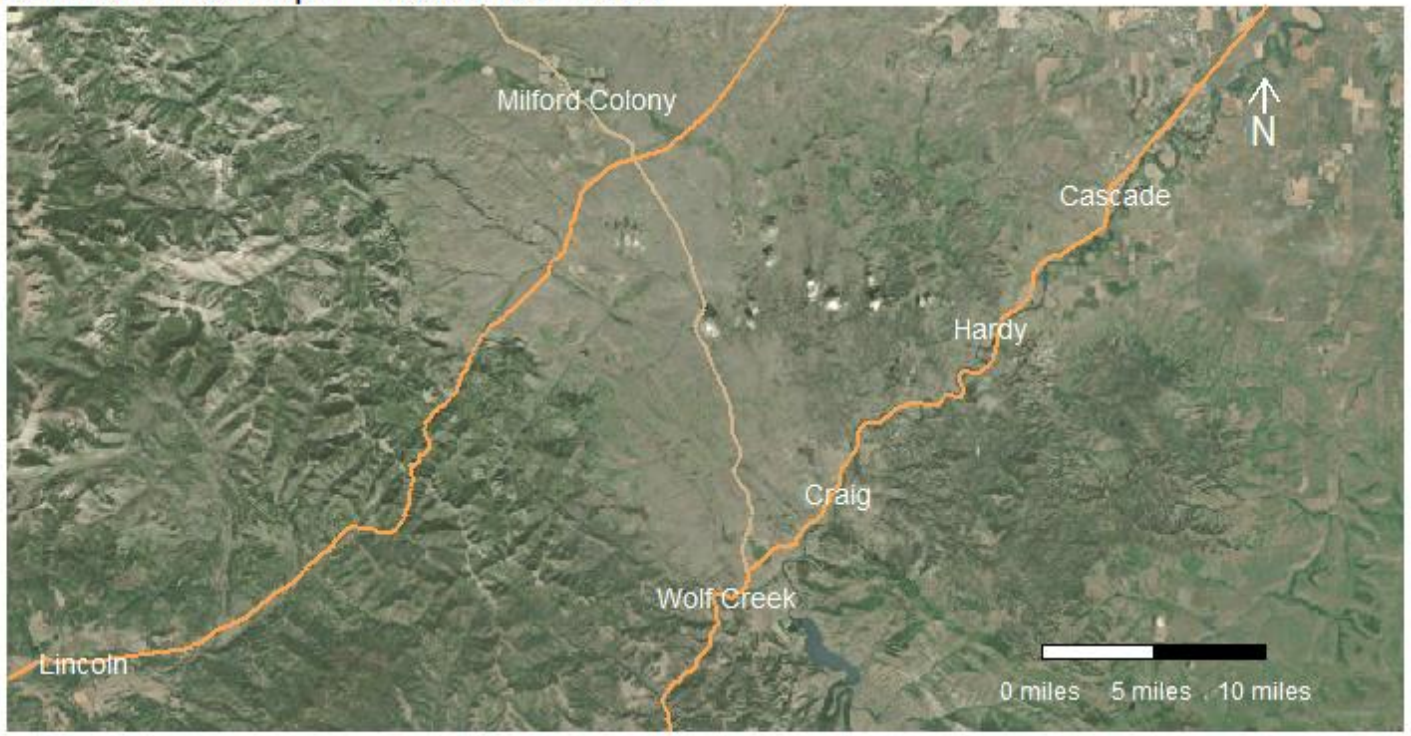
Home range of green bear:

Month	2016	2017
5		0
6	0.67	0.07
7	0.46	0.44
8	0.33	0.1
9	0.16	
6 - 8	0.53	0.2



4-year-old management male: Movements through the seasons

Locations from April - November 2023



Why do bears love waterways so much?

Bear Behavior and Safety

Universal Message

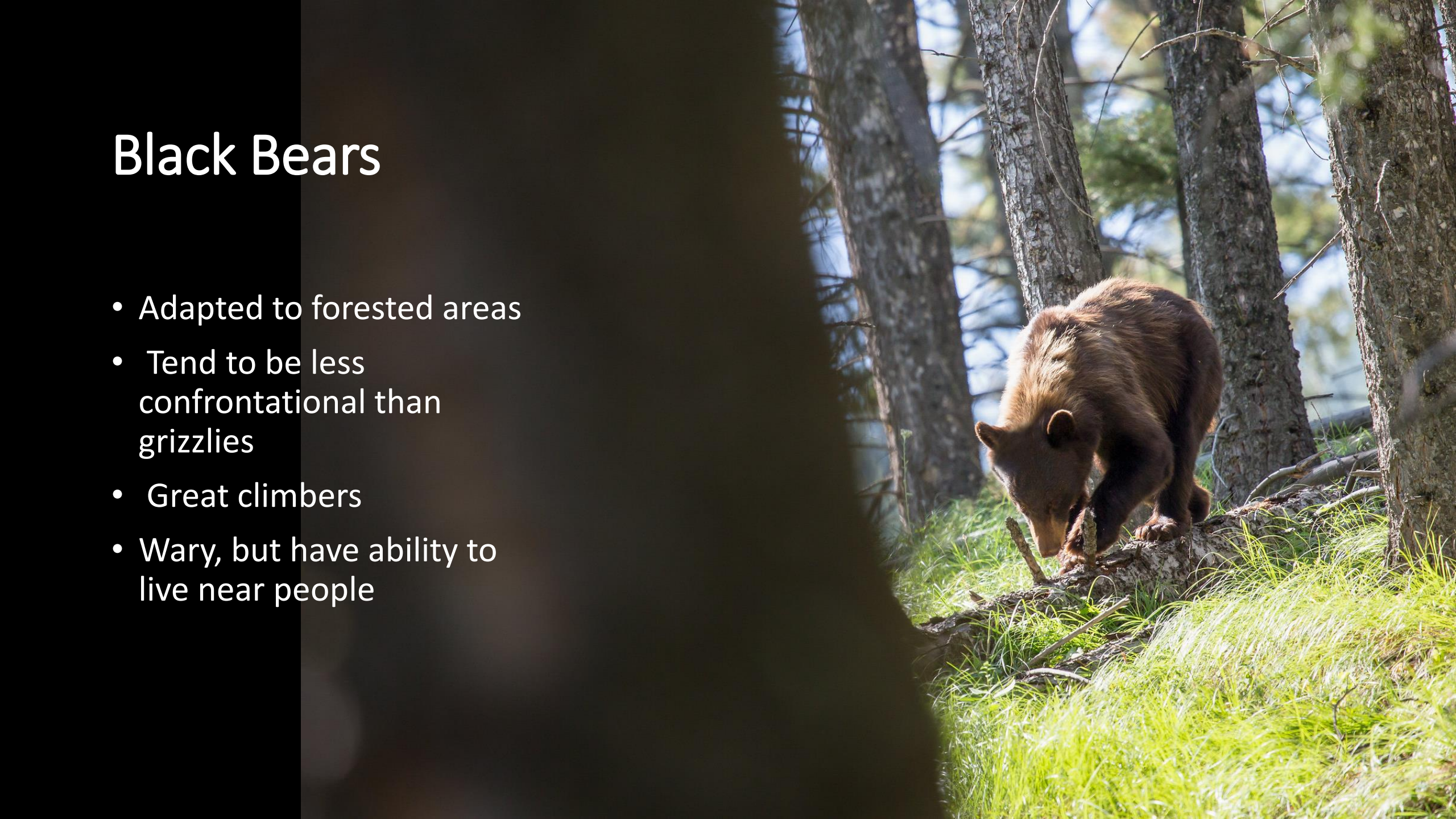
- Bears could be found anywhere in MT. Common west of Billings
- Always be considering bear presence and remain vigilant
- Avoiding conflict is easier than dealing with conflict
- In an encounter, respond to bear behavior and body language, rather than species
- Your behavior matters
- Knowledge, awareness, and respect are key to safe encounters. Educate yourself as much as possible on bear behavior, ecology, and biology
- Bears are not inherently dangerous or unstoppable
- Always carry multiple defense options, know how to use them well, and practice often

Be aware of bear sign:

- Tracks
- Digging
- Torn up logs
- Carcasses
- Daybeds
- Overturned rocks
- Scat
- Rub trees

Black Bears

- Adapted to forested areas
- Tend to be less confrontational than grizzlies
- Great climbers
- Wary, but have ability to live near people



Grizzly Bears

- Adapted to open areas
- More likely to confront threats
- Powerful digging ability
- Less likely to be seen in populated areas

Grizzlies can climb too!

GRIZZLY BEAR VS BLACK BEAR

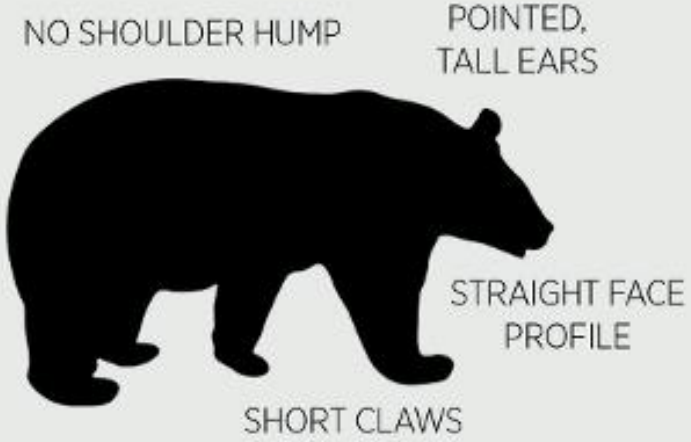
TRACKS

FRONT HIND

- LONGER CLAWS
- TOES CLOSER TOGETHER

FRONT CLAW

2" - 4" LONG



TRACKS

FRONT HIND

- SHORTER CLAWS
- TOES MORE SEPERATED

FRONT CLAW

1.5" LONG

LOOK FOR A COMBINATION OF CHARACTERISTICS

COLOR AND SIZE CAN BE MISLEADING

MONTANA **FWP**

Primary Identifiers

- Paws (tracks)
- Claws
- Face and ear shape
- Color patterns (not coat color)
- Hump

Poor Identifiers:
Size
Color

Two Main Reasons Bears Become Aggressive

- Defensive
- Predatory

Defensive-Protecting Resource

- Resource types:

-personal bubble-surprise

-food

-young or breeding partners

The presence of a carcass could mean a bear is nearby and may defend it's claim

The bear perceives you as a threat!

-Your job is to remove the threat

Defensive

- Can largely be avoided by using human voice while hiking/walking and keeping wind at your back
- Do not run, fight back, or challenge
- Be submissive, avert face and eyes, talk calmly to bear
- Speak softly and be non-threatening
- Calmly back away while softly talking to the bear if it is stationary
- Stand your ground if bear is approaching
- Have bear spray ready and use it if the bear is within range

If the bear makes contact

- keep spraying, keep backpack on, lie face down, spread legs, cover neck, be quiet and don’t resist
- Black bear surprise attack could turn predatory. Your response should adapt to bear behavior
- Be certain bear is long gone before moving

Defensive/Agitated Bear Signs

- Head hung and swaying
- Ears back
- Huffing, woofing, moans, blowing
- Jaw clacking
- Prehensile lips extended
- Swatting paws
- Hopping on front legs
- Bluff charge (head up/slower speed)

Predatory

- Extremely rare
- Often younger inexperienced or older animals in desperation
- Often a product of habituation to humans and their food sources
- Behavior can turn predatory through time and experience
- Less common with grizzlies than black bears

If the bear makes contact

fight back!

Potentially predatory signals and trend:
-No stress sign, curious, focused intent, ears forward, head up, not scared of human, dominance testing
nervous → relaxed→ confident →dangerous

General Responses to Behavior

1

Stress behavior: diffuse the threat, remain calm, speak softly and calmly, back away slowly, have bear spray or deterrent ready

*If attacked, do not fight back, play dead

2

Predatory behavior: make yourself large, stand your ground, make loud noise, use bear spray, rocks and sticks to change behavior

*If attacked, fight back using nearby objects if possible

Do’s and Don'ts

- Make human noise early and often
- Remain vigilant
- In an encounter-remain calm and determine body language/behavior-respond accordingly
- Never run
- Carry bear spray (2 lines of defense)

Conflict Prevention on the Farm: Grain

- Place tarps under loaders when transferring grain to prevent spills.
- Dispose of old grain through sanitation services, burning, or dumping away from people, buildings and livestock.
- Grain bin doors can be made more secure by adding hasps, adding bolt/carabiner to the latch- Welded bear resistant doors may be available provided by MFWP.
- Electric fencing can be placed around grain bins or electric mats in front of doors. Contact MFWP for assistance.

Complaint response

(A single complaint often populates several fields)

Complaint type	Number
Near people	20
Beehives	~20
Harvested grain	13
Property damage	12- plus all beehives
Poultry	12 turkeys killed in 2 events. 1 poultry feed/no birds. 1 BB/chicken coop
Cattle	7 confirmed with FWP
Goat	3 confirmed with FWP
Hunter carcass loss	4
Livestock feed	3
Encounter	2
Garbage	1
Fruit trees	1
Garden	1
Birdseed	1

HUNTER
ASSAULT
DETERRENT

Bushnell
048°F
10–10–2021 04:36:51

Bushnell
045°F
10–11–2021 11:35:08