

North Fork Bear News

June 2011 - Save our North Fork Bears

Female grizzly bear's survival is up to us

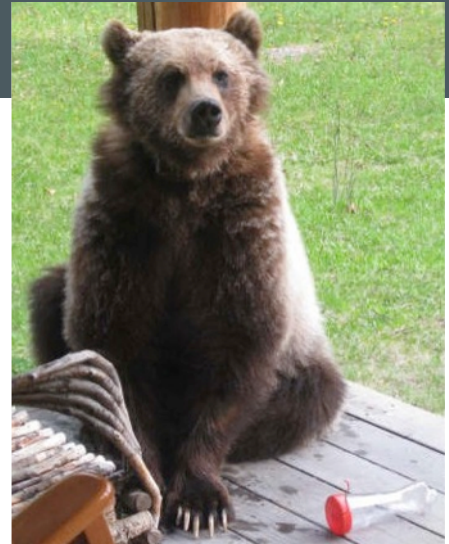
Dear Fellow North Forkers:

A few of us have resurrected the North Fork Bear News in response to Tim Manley's warning at the winter Interlocal meeting that he may have to remove Patti Bear this summer if she gets another food reward. We don't want to see that happen, and we're confident the rest of the North Fork community doesn't want to see it happen either. So we've decided to get the word out, and we invite you to do the same.

It's been a long time since the North Fork has lost a bear because of human food rewards, and we have a good reputation for keeping our camps clean and our bears safe. Patti Bear's story isn't over yet – Manley says she can still learn to stay out of trouble and he's made it clear that the last thing he wants to do is kill a bear. But now more than ever, her survival

is up to us.

Preventing Patti or any other bear from getting a food reward is simple, and most of us know the drill: don't leave food or garbage out where bears can get to it. But if it's so simple and we know the drill, why is a grizzly bear's life on the line because of human food rewards?



Patti Bear & hummingbird feeder

It's a question each of us needs to ask ourselves if we are serious about the welfare of bears on the North Fork. And it's not a stretch to say that the welfare of our neighbors and their property is at stake, too. Most of us know what a food conditioned grizzly bear can do to a cabin, or to a person.

Putting up electric fencing, cleaning up dog food or garbage, or removing dead ground squirrels from the yard can be inconvenient, and everyone enjoys seeing birds at a birdfeeder. The question ultimately becomes whether a bear's life is worth a little extra cleanup or giving up our birdfeeders. We think it is. With a little extra effort on all our parts, Patti Bear can stay wild, free, and alive.

– NFBN

Food rewards may lead to removal of Patti Bear - At the winter Interlocal meeting last February, Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, let North Forkers know that he may have to remove the female grizzly known as Patti Bear if she continues to come too close to cabins in search of food. If she breaks into a building or harms someone, Manley will have no choice but to euthanize her or send her to a zoo. If Patti is to survive, she needs to learn to steer clear of people's yards, and people need to make sure food is not where she can get to it.

Last summer, unsecured food attractants drew Patti too close to residences. It is unknown whether she was the bear that crossed the line and broke into a garage or, in a separate incident, killed some chickens. But Patti's behavior suggested that it could have been her.

Keeping food attractants unavailable to bears will help Patti survive the summer. Hazing her out of the yard by yelling or banging pots and pans can also help teach her not to seek food near human establishments. "If Patti isn't getting into food and is moving out of people's yards when they make some noise, as we've seen her do this spring, then we won't need to take any action toward removing her," Manley said.

Don't shoot at the bears! It may be tempting to shoot at a bear to scare it off. But a gunshot, no matter how loud it seems to you, is too far away to make any real impression on the bear. And there is always the chance that you'll hit the bear, which isn't good for anyone. Banging pots and pans together is the best way to go about the business of scaring off a bear – if you think it won't work, check out this video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C11vvwsvJzM>

A tale of two siblings

Patti Bear and her sister Betsy made their debut as North Fork management bears in the fall of 2008. Only two years old and on their own without their mother for the first time, the siblings were often seen together during the summer as they roamed the valley bottoms where vegetation grows a plenty and the living is easiest for bears – especially for a couple of youngsters who are still sorting out how, exactly, to go about being a bear. But where the living is easiest for bears is also where it's easiest for people, and Patti and Betsy were often seen in residents' yards and along the roadside. They appeared very comfortable around human developments, which meant it was only a matter of time before they would find human sources of food.

In hopes of teaching them to steer clear of trouble, Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, set about trying to capture and radio-collar the two young grizzlies so that he could monitor their whereabouts and haze them to safer environs when they came too close to buildings. "If a bear is not severely food conditioned but is only habituated to buildings, we can usually get them turned around and teach them to stay out of people's yards," Manley said.

In November, 2008, Manley captured Patti and Betsy at a private residence north of Whale Creek and fitted them with radio-collars. He released them onsite during a "hard release", moving them off with cracker shells, car horns, barking bear dogs, and yelling bystanders to reinforce one of the most

important lessons of their lives – that a bear has no business in people's yards. For the next few weeks, Manley and his crew monitored Patti and Betsy's radio signals and, with help from several North Fork residents, moved them on their way when they came too close for their own good. He soon discovered that the siblings were getting food from bird feeders and were forming a dangerous association between people and food, which meant that turning them around would be more difficult.

In 2009, Patti and Betsy were often seen together, which is somewhat unusual for three year old grizzlies. In May, Manley recaptured Betsy at a private residence after she dropped her collar. Patti was there, too, waiting for her sister to come out of the culvert trap. Manley released Betsy onsite and fired cracker shells at both bears to motivate them to leave. He received few reports of problems with the two bears during the summer, but later learned that there had likely been several unreported instances when they had gotten into bird feeders and other sources of food.

In 2010, the pair separated. Betsy dropped her radio collar again in July and her whereabouts have since been unknown. But Patti spent the summer ranging between Trail Creek and Polebridge, where she was often seen along the road or in people's yards. In June, Manley captured her and released her off site without barking dogs or cracker rounds in hopes that the unpleasantness of a capture and a culvert trap would be reminder enough. But Patti continued to venture where she shouldn't after being attracted by bird feeders, chickens, dog food, garden compost, horse grain, and dead ground squirrels. Local residents found it increasingly difficult to haze her away by yelling or banging pots and pans, and her behavior indicated that she had been getting more food rewards. "She must have been getting enough food around houses to make it worth her while to keep visiting," Manley said.

In October, after Patti skirted ever closer to becoming a fed and dead bear, Manley captured her again and treated her to another, very hard release. "We hit her hard and she couldn't get out of there fast enough," he said. "When I saw her later at another residence, she moved off before the owner even knew she was there. She was moving away much better after the hard release."

This spring, Patti Bear emerged from her den sometime in late April and is readily leaving people's yards whenever landowners make some noise to shoo her off. Give it a try.

Love is in the Air

The word is out: Patti Bear has been keeping company with a great big hairy male! (Well, she's a little bit hairy, too...) If love has its way, Patti could emerge from her den next spring with a cub or two. Preventing Patti from getting food rewards and teaching her to keep her distance from residences will be even more important this year so that, if she does become a mother bear, she doesn't pass bad habits on to her cubs.

Precautions that can prevent bear problems

A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR

A “fed bear is a dead bear” because it poses a serious threat to personal safety and property. Each of us is responsible for keeping a clean camp to ensure we do not encourage problem behavior among bears.

- √ Keep pet food, garbage, human food and all odorous food like items secure in a sturdy building away from doors and windows, in a bear-proof container, or elevated in an Alaska-style cache. Contact Tim Manley about secure storage; Manley has information about a variety of bear-proof food and garbage containers that are on the market.
- √ Haul garbage to the dump as often as possible.
- √ Feed pets inside. If this is not feasible, do not leave uneaten pet food outside, especially overnight.
- √ Avoid feeding birds, especially in the summer and fall. Bird species that live here do not require feeding by humans. But if you must, place only a small amount of seed into the feeder each day so that it will be completely consumed before dark.
- √ Bring hummingbird feeders in at night or while you’re away. Better yet, try replacing them with a hanging basket of flowers. Hummers love fuchsias and million bells!
- √ Keep coolers, refrigerators or freezers inside.
- √ Do not leave food or garbage in your vehicle.
- √ Clean and securely store barbeque grills.
- √ Avoid planting clover. It is non-native and is a favorite food among bears.
- √ Avoid feeding deer grain. Supplemental feeding also interferes with a deer’s ability to digest natural foods, and deer will attract mountain lions to your home and your neighbors’ homes. In addition, it’s against the law!
- √ “Critter gitters” are easy-to-use, motion-sensor alarms that are great for hanging on the front porch, around gardens, or anywhere you don’t want a bear

snooping. Effective in keeping bears away from rotten carcasses, they are available from Amtek; call (800) 762-7618 or visit

<http://www.amtekpet.com>. Manley has extra critter gitters to lend to people in immediate need.

√ If you keep a vegetable garden, especially with carrots, consider placing an electric fence around the perimeter, or hang “critter-gitters” where they can detect movement in all areas of the garden. Manley recommends the Gallagher B75 12-volt electric fence or the Gallagher M80 AC system, with a 4-foot-high fence of polywire. Pull carrots by Sept. 15.

√ Compost piles are not recommended.

√ Avoid using bone meal on gardens. Bears have been known to destroy carefully tended flower beds treated with bone meal.

√ If you have chickens, consider putting an electric fence around the chicken coop.

√ Do not leave fish entrails alongside streams or trails. Pack them out.

√ Hang game in a very secure building or Alaska-style cache. If you must hang meat outside, hang it at least 10’ off the ground & 4’ away from trees.

√ In the event that a bear is in your yard and does not appear to be just passing through, make noise by banging pots and pans together and yelling to try to encourage it to leave. **Do not approach the bear.**

√ Anyone in bear country should own one or two canisters of pepper spray. Be sure it contains capsaicin and related capsaicinoids, and watch the expiration date.

What if Patti Bear is just eating grass in my yard? It may seem harmless enough to just let Patti Bear graze in the yard – what’s the harm if she’s eating natural food, right? And besides, the bear watching and photo opportunities are unbeatable!

The problem is that is every time Patti is allowed to hang out and graze in the yard, she becomes more and more comfortable around buildings and people. So after grazing for awhile in a yard where there are no human food attractants, she may decide it’s okay to venture into another yard where there happens to be a bird feeder or unsecured garbage or pet food. Patti’s association between people and food is then strengthened, and she will go from place to place purposefully looking for more food.

Some of us may not want to haze Patti out of our grassy yards because we don’t want to move her away from what seems to be a valuable food source. But her survival doesn’t depend on our yards. “Bears like people’s yards because the grass is green and fertilized,” says Tim Manley. “But they don’t need this – they can get grass elsewhere.”

Discouraging Patti Bear from grazing in the yard will do far more to ensure her survival than allowing her to eat the lawn.

Other North Fork management bears?

Currently, Patti Bear has the distinction of being the North Fork's only "management" grizzly bear, meaning she is the only one being monitored because of food conditioning and excessive human habituation. Her sibling Betsy dropped her radio collar and is no longer being tracked. But since Betsy and Patti share the same history, Betsy could also show up in people's yards and be at risk of getting a food reward. Keeping food attractants secure and discouraging bears from hanging around buildings will help prevent other North Fork bears from developing habits that could get them into trouble and turn them into management bears.

Who to call about that bear? Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks: office: 892-0802; cell: 250-1265; email: tmanley@mt.gov

Prevention is possible, but early reporting is critical!

Need a grizzly-tested, bear resistant container? Visit the Living with Wildlife Foundation's website at www.lwwf.org to find out about local vendors.

Bear Fair to be held at the Polebridge Merc

The U.S. Forest Service in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Glacier National Park, and others is sponsoring a community bear fair on July 9th from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Polebridge Mercantile. The event will feature educational talks, booths, and displays (including a culvert trap to check out in case you've been curious...); great food (of course!); and an opportunity to learn more about bears and how to keep them safe. There will even be pots of flowers to give away to those who renounce their hummingbird feeders, and a fuchsia raffle for a couple of lucky winners. Come join the fun!

The North Fork Bear News is published as a cooperative effort of North Fork residents; Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; the North Fork Preservation Association; NFNews.com and private donors.

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