



FISH & WILDLIFE NEWS

Front Grizzly Bear Tragedy and Reward

In MWF's Montana Wildlife (Aug/Sept 2007) newsletter we proudly wrote about one of the largest grizzly bear ever captured and released by bear managers in Montana. Known as No. 4273 and 'Maximus', the 9 ½ year-old animal stood more than 7 ½ feet tall and weighed around 800 pounds. His survival along the Front was one demonstration of how valuable and healthy the habitats along the Rocky Mountain Front are.

We write "was" because in mid August, within days following a local annual celebration known as Dupuyer Grizzly Day, MWF was informed that the enormous male had been indiscriminately and illegally killed and left to rot in a rancher's field. A rancher cutting hay discovered the decaying animal along Fish Creek near Swift Dam Road west of Dupuyer, MT. and informed authorities. The bear had no history of being a problem for livestock or people!

While it is illegal under the Endangered Species Act to kill grizzly bears, a threatened species, unless it's in self-defense, the senseless, random shooting goes beyond a violation of law – it appears to have been a perverse violation of human respect for Montana's wildlife.

The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and FWP authorities are investigating the killing. The USFWS has joined with Montana FWP and the Defenders of Wildlife to collectively offer a \$6,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of the person responsible for the shooting death.

Anyone with information on the bear's death should call 406-223-3873 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) or FWP Game Warden, Kqyn Kuka at 750-3574, or FWP, TIP-MONT at 1-800-TIP-MONT, 1-800-847-6668.

Duck and Goose Hunting Outlook

Montana duck and goose hunters can look forward to some good hunting beginning Oct. 3 in the Central and Pacific flyways.

Seasons and bag limits will be similar to last year, with a few minor changes. The season on canvasbacks in the Pacific Flyway will reopen with a daily bag limit of one (1). Population surveys of 10 species in May, including canvasbacks, showed numbers that were up 13 percent compared to the past year, and 25 percent above the long-term average.

The Central Flyway will also have a full season on canvasbacks and pintails, rather than the partial season of recent years. The pintail daily bag limit will increase in the Pacific Flyway from one (1) to two (2) birds. Pintails and lesser scaup survey estimates were both up, but remained below the long-term average.

Mallard numbers were up 10 percent from last year and 13 percent above the long-term average. For some other species of interest to Montana hunters, gadwalls were 73 percent above the long-term average, and blue-winged teal were 60 percent above the long-term average.

Ponds identified in the May survey for Prairie Canada and the U.S. breeding areas increased by 45 percent over last year. The number of ponds was 31 percent above the long-term average. Some of the drier areas were in parts of Alberta and western Saskatchewan.

Ducks returning to Montana this spring found generally improved wetland conditions, especially in the northeastern and eastern parts of the state. Some areas had the best spring water conditions in years.

Canada geese continue to do well, especially with the improved water conditions in much of Montana. For "light geese" (Snow and Ross's), in the Pacific Flyway in Montana, overall production and the fall flight should be about average.

For more details, go to a new Web site, <http://www.flyways.us> to find the Fish and Wildlife Service's 2009 Waterfowl Status Report, as well as a status video and other reports.

Migratory bird hunting regulations, including season dates and bag limits, are available on FWP's Web site at fwp.mt.gov on the Hunting page under Regulations. Print copies are available at FWP offices and license providers.

Tips For First-Time Canada Goose Hunters

Trevor Selch, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Fisheries Pollution Control Biologist and avid goose hunter offers the following tips for first-time goose hunters.

There are a few basics a beginning goose hunter will want to keep in mind, remembering there is no sure thing when goose hunting, even for the experienced hunter.

- 1) Try and find a friend with goose hunting experience in your area. Experience is priceless and will save you a lot of time.
- 2) Scout, scout, scout! Finding where geese roost and feed is 90 percent of the game! Geese roost overnight on water and may feed twice a day. They tend to leave the roost mid morning and head for a field to feed, return to roost mid-day, and then back to the field before dusk. On a very cold day they may not fly out to feed until early afternoon.
- 3) Find out who owns the land. The majority of fields will be on private land, so be certain you ask for permission to hunt. If you plan to hunt on water, find the closest public access points.
- 4) Obtain at least a dozen decoys. Decoys can vary from full-body, to shells, or even silhouettes. If the geese are naïve, you won't need a lot of fancy decoys. By combining decoys with a couple of friends, you can put out a respectable spread without spending a huge amount of money.
- 5) BB or BBB steel shot work well. A 12 gauge (or even 10 gauge) is ideal. You need to hit the front half of the body or the head and neck. Try to not shoot at geese at over 40 yards.
- 6) Find out where the wind is coming from. Geese will approach your spread into the wind. Pattern decoys the widest at the front of the spread where the geese will approach and narrow it behind, where you want them to land. Position yourself with the wind at your back.
- 7) Camouflage yourself in the decoy spread. If you do not have a layout blind for field goose hunting, wear camouflage that matches the field you are in, or buy an inexpensive piece of burlap to cover yourself. If you are hunting over water, find good shoreline vegetation to hide in.
- 8) Buy a goose call and learn how to use it. An instructional tape is often included or can be purchased separately. Practice, practice, practice! Keep in mind that poor calling or inexperience on when to call can often flare incoming birds and in this case it is sometimes better to not call at all.

If you don't own decoys or blinds, the most inexpensive way to hunt geese is to find a location between their roosting and feeding areas where they will be flying low to the ground as they pass.

Lastly, be respectful of your fellow hunters. Avoid shooting at geese that are heading toward another hunter's decoy spread. Shooting at geese out of range will "educate" them and make hunting more difficult for you and for others.

2009 Block Management Information

For the 2009 hunting season, hunters will have access to nearly nine million acres of land statewide through the Block Management Program administered by Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The program provides hunters with public hunting access to private and public land free of charge, while assisting landowners in managing hunting activities. This year 1,270 private landowners are participating in the program.

By researching their options, hunters are likely to find a block management opportunity that will meet their needs.

Hunting Access Guides can be obtained at the FWP office in the region where the BMA is located, or by ordering one through the FWP website at fwp.mt.gov on the Hunting page under Hunter Access. The Hunting Access Guides and associated maps identifying lands under block management are also available and can be downloaded from this Web site.

In FWP Regions 6 and 7, maps of the properties enrolled can be obtained only from the BMA site or from a landowner when permission to hunt the BMA is obtained.

The FWP Web site at fwp.mt.gov on the Hunting page under "Hunter Access" has details on public and private hunting access.

To contact FWP regional offices for more information on regional hunting opportunities on BMAs call:

Northwest— FWP Region 1 in Kalispell:
406-752-5501

West-central—FWP Region 2 in Missoula:
406-542-5530
South-central—FWP Region 3 in Bozeman:
406-994-3288
Central—FWP Region 4 in Great Falls:
406-454-5862
East-central—FWP Region 5 in Billings:
406-247-2974
Northeast—FWP Region 6 in Glasgow:
406-228-3700
Southeast—FWP Region 7 in Miles City:
406-234-0930

TIP-MONT Works

Montana hunters have the opportunity to take part in some of the finest hunting found anywhere.

Yet, each autumn, some individuals unwittingly or knowingly violate the state's game laws. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks officials and MWF urge hunters - take the time to thoroughly review Montana's hunting rules and regulations.

Montana's TIP-MONT "crimestopper" program offers a toll free number that is used to report natural resource crimes, hunting and fishing violations, or vandalism on all public lands and in Montana State Parks.

The caller may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$1,000 if the information leads to an arrest. Any violation afield can be reported at 1-800-TIP-MONT, 1-800-847-6668. Some common game violations are:

- ♦ failure to obtain permission from landowners before hunting on private property,
- ♦ wasting any part of a game animal suitable for food,
- ♦ failure to properly validate a license/tag or to securely fasten the tag in a visible manner to a game animal immediately after it is taken and before it is moved or transported from the kill site.

Just Because You Can Doesn't Mean You Should

Montana's abundant opportunities to hunt, fish and ride Off-Highway Vehicles requires every user to willingly act responsibly to ensure others enjoy the same privileges that they do.

When recreating in Montana it is important to know where you are and what rules apply.

- ♦ Stay on legally designated roads and trails.
- ♦ Be sure of land ownership and what activities are permitted
- ♦ Prevent habitat damage and the spread of noxious weeds.
- ♦ Always get permission to access private land—it is the law.
- ♦ Contact the Bureau of Land Management at 406-896-5004 for maps and to learn more about Montana's public lands.
- ♦ Contact the U.S. Forest Service for forest maps at 406-329-3024.
- ♦ Call Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks with questions regarding OHV rules and regulations at 406-444-4585.

Report OHV violations by calling 1-800-TIP-MONT, 1-800-847-6668.

"Identifying land ownership is an essential part of preparing for the hunt in Montana nowadays," says Alan Charles, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks coordinator of landowner/sportsman relations. "Hunters have to do their homework, know where they are, and confirm ownership and property boundaries with local people."

Hunters are required by law to obtain landowner permission before hunting on private land. For immediate access to Montana landownership maps, go to the Hunt Planner offered on the FWP Web site at fwp.mt.gov and select Montana Land Ownership Maps under the Resources list.