It was a busy summer on the Chilkoot with two active bears along the river during the day and up to ten bears feeding at night. Speedy was back with two new cubs who provided great photo opportunities and fun bear viewing. Bear-to-bear interactions seemed more prevalent this year with one bear killed along the Chilkoot River and another near Tanani Point. A bear named Tripod was the most aggressive and ended up in people’s yards in town and at the boat harbor going through boats. Unfortunately, Tripod didn’t make it through the season as he had become habituated to people and food and was a danger to people.

In August the Foundation held the second Celebration of Bears. The event included a library reading with children, a dinner with Native dancers, and a presentation by Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve Wildlife Biologist, Tania Lewis. Her presentation described the effects of glaciation on food resources, distribution, and population genetics of brown and black bears. The two day celebration also included movies and activities for kids and electric fence demonstrations.

We had booths at both Haines Earth Day and the Southeast Alaska State Fair. The Foundation again worked with Alaska State Parks to put volunteers along the Chilkoot River and help monitor and control human/bear activity. ACBF President Pam Randles gave a “bear report” on KHNS (the local radio station) every other Thursday. She also gave a presentation on the bears of the Chilkoot at the Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Festival. To further understanding of bears in the valley, we gave research grants to Rachel Wheat and Shannon Donahue. (see pg. 5 for more detail)

Travis Russell was hired as the new Alaska State Park ranger. The Alaska Departments of Transportation, Fish and Game, Forestry and State Parks entered into an agreement for the management along the Chilkoot Lake road. Hopefully this will reduce bear/human conflicts.
We believe that the best way to preserve the gifts of the Chilkoot and to resolve issues is to work cooperatively with the diverse interests that have a stake in the Chilkoot.

Chilkoot River Bears Presentation at the Alaska Bald Eagle Festival

In November, 2015, Pam Randles gave a presentation on the bears of the Chilkoot and basic bear biology and behavior.

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When you go online to apply for your dividend, you will see the option called “The Gift of Giving.” Click on Alaska Chilkoot Bear Foundation. Chose the amount you would like to donate.

You can find more information about the program, including frequently asked questions at http://www.pickclickgive.org.
Tourist’s Corner

Sam Edmonds, Prince George, British Columbia: Road-tripping from Prince George, BC to Fairbanks Alaska and back, I was afforded a lot of opportunities to witness bears in 2015 but seeing grizzlies in such a pristine environment as the Chilkoot river was hands-down my favorite experience.

Charlie Davenport, Hermitage, Tennessee: We visited Chilkoot relatively early in a 49 night, 12,205 road trip from Nashville, TN to Denali, and back. When people ask about our trip, these pictures (among the 50-100 I took that day in the Chilkoot area) are the first I show. Just breathtaking to be that close to such amazing animals.

Romy Jansen, Calgary, Alberta: I have come to Haines for over 20 years. I love coming yearly and never get enough of the spectacle.

The Bear Facts

When bears wake from hibernation they are not hungry, as you might expect. It takes about 3 weeks for their digestive system to get in gear and operate normally which means they gradually return to eating available food. When bears leave their dens in late March to mid-May, food is scarce and snow lingers at higher elevations. The bears are lean and in need of nutrition. Brown bear sows teach their cubs what to eat and where to find it. They usually spend April in the high country, firing up their sleepy metabolisms with grasses and flowers found growing in avalanche chutes and steep sub-alpine meadows with sunny west and southern aspects. In May, most bears move into the lower elevations to feed along streams and rivers where they find emerging grasses and sedges. Those willing to risk human presence will forage clover and dandelions which green up early along road sides and disturbed areas.

Grizzly bears are specially adapted to survive the changing seasons. During the warmer months they eat a massive amount of food to build body fat reserves which carries them through the lean winter times. They may eat 40 kg (90 lbs.) of food and gain more than a kilogram (2.2 lbs) of body weight daily. Their diet varies, depending on what foods are available in each season, but as omnivores they consume nuts, fruits, leaves, roots, fungi, insects, fish, and rodents.
**The Bears of Summer**

Bears are generally solitary creatures, but they predictably congregate around high quality food sources. Bears establish a hierarchy which allows them to interact with each other without violence (usually). It is based on a system of social interactions communicated through body posturing, scent, and vocalizations. In the hierarchy, subordinate bears typically yield space and/or resources to more dominant bears. In general large and mature males are most dominant, followed by females with cubs, other adult males and females, and subadults. A bear’s place in the hierarchy is based on its health, age, size, and disposition. It isn’t always size that makes one bear dominant over another, it’s the attitude of the dominant bear, or “alpha,” who is always in charge. Bears communicate their dominance by intimidating their opponent. It is all about posturing. They may be friends and still fight but they are either just playing with one another or are mad. The hierarchy is fluid and the rank of a bear can change from year to year or even season to season.

Through the establishment of a fluid hierarchy, bears have evolved a social adaptation that allows them to avoid fighting in most instances. Bears do not fight with each other unless it’s absolutely necessary. With their tremendous strength, large claws, and teeth, injuries are easily inflicted which threatens the bears survival and thus fights are avoided in most cases.
Bear Research

Bear Collars: Third time is a charm. After 3 late night recapture adventures, the collar from the old matriarch, BMJ (443), was at last recovered. For nearly 3 years this 27 year old brown bear collected more than 21,000 GPS locations providing critical data on habitat use. Every 30 minutes a fix was collected on her location, activity rate, and external temperature. Mapping the details of her movements will help define important seasonal habitats and assist management efforts along the Chilkoot River. Look for a detailed summary of ADF&G’s bear collaring program in the next issue of Bear Tracks.

DNA Studies by Rachel Wheat, PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz: Ms. Wheat gathered DNA samples using scat and saliva samples. Twenty-five individual bears were identified, fifteen females and ten males. From the scat diameters, it was believed nine of the twenty-five were cubs, six male and three female. It was also known from direct observation that one of the other males is a subadult. The population was estimated at twenty-seven bears, with 95% confidence intervals of 25-31.

As part of the research camera traps were set up around the valley. She found that in areas of the valley more highly impacted by human activity, bears are more active at night, and the farther up the lake you get from the campground/parking area, the more daytime bear activity takes place. On the upper river bear activity is more evenly spread throughout the 24-hour day, with peaks in activity in the midmorning. This pattern is reversed for habituated bears, exemplified by activity on the lower river, where bears are almost strictly nocturnal, with activity peaking in the middle of the night.

Chilkoot River Brown Bear Monitoring: The Great Bear Foundation began monitoring brown bear and human activity on the Chilkoot River Corridor in 2014, using remote-sensor video cameras and in situ observations. (Reported in the 2014/2015 Bear Tracts) A generous grant from the Alaska Chilkoot Bear Foundation allowed us to expand the project in 2016, purchasing additional cameras for better coverage of the corridor, and helping to fund our fieldwork and data processing.

The goal of the project is to establish a long-term database of bear and human activity on the Chilkoot River Corridor, so we can monitor trends in bear activity and get a better idea of what levels and types of human activity bears will tolerate on the Chilkoot River Corridor. As we process the data, we will make it available to Alaska State Parks, Alaska Chilkoot Bear Foundation, and the public for use in managing the river corridor and better understanding the dynamics among bears, humans, and salmon on multiple-use salmon streams. A summary of the data will be reported in the next Bear Tracts.

Remember

There are electric fences and critter gitters for loan from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Office in Haines.
Bear Tracts is published by ACBF, a volunteer run non-profit organization. We rely on your support and membership to help protect the Chilkoot River watershed for generations to come.

Going into Hibernation Reminder
Please RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP to the Alaska Chilkoot Bear Foundation.

Ball Caps: $20 (Sage, Blue, Khaki, Maroon, Grey, and Stone)
Long Sleeve Shirts: $20 (Navy Blue, Khaki, Black)
Short Sleeve Shirts: $18 (Navy Blue, Khaki)
Stickers: $2.00 (Black, Navy Blue, Khaki)

NEW: Metal Bear Cutouts
$40 (Plus Shipping Outside of Haines)

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