

Grizzly Bears on the Payette National Forest

USDA Payette National Forest, Idaho



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The Payette National Forest is known for its wide variety of wildlife. One of the most impressive animals to walk the forests, the Grizzly Bear, was once a resident of these forest. The Grizzly is a large carnivorous mammal closely related to pandas, raccoons, and dogs. They are also called Silver Tip's, referring to the bears white-tipped fur. They are distinguished from other carnivore families by having heavy bodies, a short tail and short, rounded ears, plantigrade feet (both heel and sole touching the ground, as in humans), and a hind foot with five toes. They also lack the shearing teeth common to most carnivores; the crushing molars of bears are believed to be an adaptation for a plant diet. Although classified as carnivores, the grizzly eats grasses, herbs, berries, and nuts as well as living or dead animals.

The Grizzly Bear has a life span of 15 to more than 30 years in the wild. They possess a keen sense of smell, and although detailed knowledge of their vision and hearing abilities awaits further study, they are probably comparable to those of dogs. Recent studies suggest that black, brown, grizzly and polar bears are true hibernators, going without food or elimination of metabolic wastes for three to five months (and as long as seven months in northern Alaska). Compared to rodent hibernators, however, the temperature of bears remains higher, although the heart rate drops from 45 to only 10 beats per minute. In warm winter periods, a hibernating bear may revive and leave its den for a while.

The Grizzly was known to roam the Payette National Forest region when the first Euro-American settlers came to the area. In a discussion of the variety of animals found in the Salmon River Mountains. How long the Grizzly's lasted in the area is uncertain. During a 1992 interview with 86 years old Emory Rowland of McCall, Idaho, he remembered when his uncle hunted Grizzlies. His uncle would use a muzzle loader to kill grizzly bears and would go over the hill from Rosebury into the area of Buckhorn Creek and the South Fork of the Salmon River, hunting mainly in the winter when the bears would be hibernating. Emory reminisced that his uncle would run up to the bear den and fire the single shot into the bear, then retreat,

reload and run up to the bear and shoot it a second time. Emory called the grizzly bears, "Silver Tips," and said he believed the last grizzly was killed in 1916.

Two well known grizzly bear hunters were Henry and Warren Smith. They are said to have killed over 40 grizzly bears in central Idaho since 1890. James Hockaday (1968) wrote that Warren Smith killed seven grizzly bears in the Chamberlain Basin between 1900 to 1910. The last four grizzly bears that Warren and Henry Smith killed were a mother and 3 cubs that were mounted into rugs by Brad Carey.

Glen Thompson, a prospector in the area during the 1920's, spent a lot of his time wandering through the Salmon River Mountains. In early November of 1929, he and Henry Smith followed and studied a large Grizzly bear for three days in Porphyry and Wolf Fang Creeks. However, Thompson and Smith did not kill this Grizzly. Henry Smith felt it may have been the last one in this part of Idaho. In his memoirs (Thompson 1971) he states, "to my knowledge this was the last Grizzly ever seen in the Payette National Forest area."

Hockaday, James

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