

Updates

Carnivores and Communities in the Waterton Biosphere Reserve

The Waterton Biosphere Reserve Carnivore Working Group (CWG) hosted a Carnivores and Community Program Tour September 22, in Twin Butte (south of Pincher Creek). Despite it being the rainiest day of the month, a large group showed up to tour the area and learn about how local livestock producers deal with “problem” carnivores – mostly bears and wolves that interfere with their daily production and livelihood.

Due to the weather we didn't see much of the stunning and rich landscapes of the southwestern corner of Alberta. But the enthusiasm and knowledge of group attendees made up for the deluge of rain. Grizzly bear researcher Andrea Morehouse and black bear researcher Annie Loosen presented an update on their recent studies in the Waterton-Parkland area, and Provincial Carnivore Specialist Paul Frame updated the group on Alberta's draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.

Two buses took the tour to visit ranches

that have installed deterrent and protection projects like electric fencing (to keep out both carnivores and ungulates like elk), electric chicken coops, and repurposed Sea-Cans. Throughout the day we heard stories from landowners who face the greatest threats and inconveniences from sharing the landscape with carnivores. Some expressed fear as they reported walking their children or grandchildren along driveways with fresh grizzly scat or at having unexpected staring contests with bears through the living room window. One rancher has had 10 confirmed livestock killed by grizzly bears and 3 livestock killed by wolves this year. Those totals don't include other livestock that have gone missing on his property. He spoke of his frustration at never having seen a bear at work. I learned that grizzlies often bury the remains after they have a meal, making it difficult for people to prove that it was a grizzly kill! Yet others shared hope by recalling the success they've seen since installation of the projects.

The Waterton Biosphere Reserve representative emphasized that there is no one solu-

tion to these problems. Every ranch is different, every parcel of land is different, and each person has their own financial and logistical needs to address. These problems are also best addressed on a community scale. If one producer sets up projects to deter carnivores a neighbour may now be more at-risk of having problems. Like any Biosphere Reserve, the collaboration is grassroots and aims for good outcomes for both the people and the ecosystem they live in. I was impressed with the dedication of local producers to continue living with grizzly bears in the region. AWA has consistently advocated for the protection of Alberta's grizzly bear populations and recognizes the hard realities and dilemmas of living in areas of high human-bear conflict. The Carnivore and Communities Working Group deserves much recognition and thanks: whether people are motivated to participate at first by frustration, tolerance, or love for the animals, the efforts of this community is making a difference for the wildlife.

- Andrea Johancsik