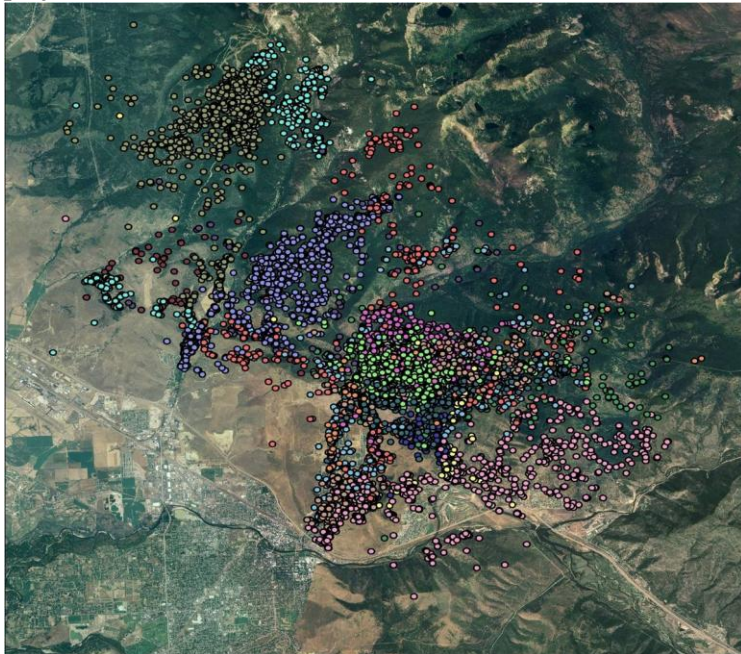


## North Hills Black Bear Research Project Update 17 September 2010

Successful wildlife management is rooted in sound biological knowledge. In the case of human-black bear interactions, which continue to increase in Montana and across North America, the biological mechanisms driving human-bear conflicts have been largely unexplained. This research project set out to expand our understanding of urban black bears and explain patterns in human-black bear conflicts.

We currently have 7 black bears marked with GPS collars that reside in and around the north hills of Missoula. These include 3 female black bears that use Grant creek, 2 females that use Rattlesnake creek, and 2 males that use Rattlesnake and Marshall creeks. The radiocollars are collecting GPS locations every 3 hours, but are programmed to drop off of the bears 10 October 2010. Data collection for the project will end at that time.



Since October 2008, we have successfully collected behavioral and movement data on 16 individual bears: 10 females and 6 males. Our initial observation has revealed a bear population that is not 100% reliant on human foods. For example, during July and August, most bears actively avoid the urban area. This result is understandable as the upper elevations of the north hills contain green vegetation and ripe berries such as huckleberries.

Beginning in late August and early September however, the foraging behavior of black bears begins to shift. Although our initial data analysis suggests that many berry species are still

available in natural areas in September, fruit trees within the urban area are ripening and bears seem to capitalize on this opportunity. These results suggest that Missoula bears have become more interested in the availability of human foods and less interested in natural forage during certain times of the year.

We have visited over 150 feeding sites within the yards of Missoula residents, and the majority of urban feeding is on fruit trees (especially in fall), although garbage and bird feeders are also a significant food source. Once the bears become used to feeding within the urban area and apples begin to disappear, bears tend to shift to garbage and other available human foods located within Missoula.

This project would not have been successful without the support and guidance of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and all landowners who have helped and participated in the study. The information collected in this study will be used to develop ways to minimize human-black bear conflicts here and in other areas throughout North America.

If you have any questions, concerns, or just want to know more about black bears in Missoula, please feel free to contact Jerod Merkle (UM graduate student): [jerod.merkle@umontana.edu](mailto:jerod.merkle@umontana.edu). Other resources for information on Missoula bears can be found at: <http://www.missoulabears.org>.