

Craighead Challenges Yellowstone Bear Policy

4--JACKSON HOLE NEWS, Thursday, October 1, 1970



Marked "semi-domesticated" grizzly feeding in the wild. Photo by F. Craighead

By FRANK C. CRAIGHEAD, JR.

The National Park Service with the aid of special appropriated funds has been making an all out effort to maintain naturalness in Yellowstone Park by eliminating the earth-filled garbage dumps (some have existed for over 80 years) while simultaneously developing a management plan for the grizzly bear consistent with the changed conditions. As commendable as these efforts are, the present bear control policy is not "working beautifully" as stated by Park officials Jackson Hole News, perhaps because it is based on several false assumptions.

To begin with there are not two separate populations of grizzlies; wild ones, and semi-domesticated ones "hooked" on garbage that come to dumps and enter campgrounds. Practically all of the Yellowstone grizzlies feed at open-pit garbage dumps sometime during their lives. Thus, a "wild population" cannot be made by killing the so-called semi-domesticated grizzlies until only wild bears remain.

It has also been erroneously assumed that the earth-filled dumps can be abruptly closed before Park campgrounds and garbage disposal sites outside the Park are sanitized. The assumption is that grizzlies suddenly deprived of garbage will turn immediately to natural food rather than to easily available food in campgrounds within the Park and to garbage disposal areas outside.

The recommendations of Dr. John J. Craighead and myself in 1967 after eight years of studying the grizzly in Yellowstone (1967 -- Management of Bears in Yellowstone National Park) were that, though it would be desirable to eliminate these dumps, they should be phased out very slowly. Otherwise, with the abrupt removal of this food supply and consequent altering of foraging habits developed over the years, grizzlies would move into campgrounds. Here they would cause trouble with resulting injuries to humans and consequent stepped-up "control."

This is exactly what has been occurring over the last three years with the change in grizzly bear management. The grizzly is generally considered troublesome or dangerous if it enters a campground and is trapped and released two or more times. Such a bear is then a candidate for a death sentence or is sent to a zoo.

The present Park management of grizzlies is encouraging more and more of them to enter campgrounds. According to Park Service figures, the grizzly bear control kill averaged about three per year for about forty years. Since the instigation of new Park Service management practices, the average number of grizzlies dispatched each year by control methods (killing, or removing to zoos) has averaged 12 animals per year.

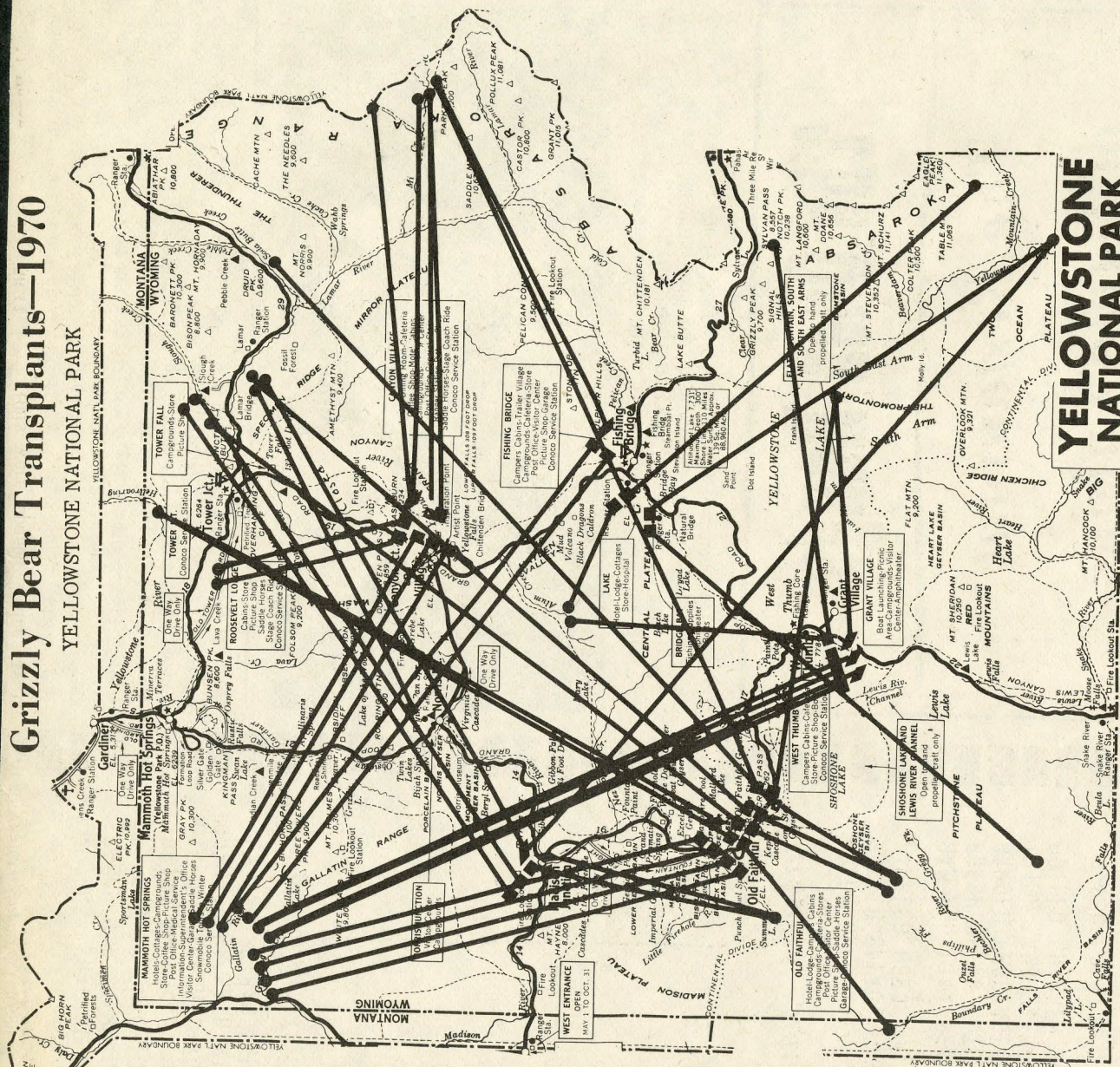
In 1970 with the abrupt closing of the Rabbit Creek dump 20 grizzlies or approximately 1/10 of the Yellowstone grizzly bear population has been eliminated through control measures. This management program has been in effect for three years in spite of research evidence from marked and radio-instrumented bears showing that all or most grizzlies within and from far beyond the Park sooner or later visit the earth-filled dumps for varying periods of time. It is obvious that if a policy of abruptly closing dumps thus forcing grizzlies into campgrounds and then eliminating the two-time offenders is continued the Yellowstone grizzly population will be reduced to a point of near extermination in a short time.

How low the population can be reduced and still maintain itself is not known. However only about 15 mature sows out of a population of 200 grizzlies give birth to cubs each year. If the present management is continued, survival of the species in Yellowstone and adjacent areas could be seriously threatened. We might just be around after the grizzly is gone.

NOW might be the time to listen to "Some people's good intentions . . ."

Grizzly Bear Transplants—1970

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK



Grizzly Story

Continued from page 1

letter which I received only yesterday, between May and September of this year 20 grizzly and eight black bears were killed or sent to zoos as a part of the bear management program in Yellowstone.

"In view of the concern that has been expressed over the bear management program in Yellowstone, I ask unanimous consent that the complete text of the article be printed in the Record."

My colleague from Wyoming (Mr. McGee) has asked that I place in the "Record" a news report on this article, which was written by Naturalist Frank Craighead and published in the Casper Star-Tribune.

"Mr. President, my colleague has asked that I point out that this is no small matter, in that millions of Americans use and appreciate our national parks every year. Their safety and, indeed, their right to enjoy the wonders of nature, including the bears and other animals are important matters."

There being no objection, the articles were ordered to be printed in the "Record."

the Jackson Hole Guide

P.O. Box 619
Jackson, Wyoming 83001



March 12, 1970

Dr. Frank C. Craighead Jr.
Box 156
Moose, Wyo.

Dear Frank,

At your request, I am happy to confirm that your bylined story on the grizzly bears in the Nov. 6, 1969, issue of the Jackson Hole Guide was printed because I felt the information it contained needed to be made public.

You had asked that it not be printed, but in my editorial judgement, I felt the public's need was too great for the story to be left in the files.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas A. Hough,
Editor

Summer 1969

S T A T E M E N T

In recent months the news media have carried conflicting information and statements concerning, "the grizzly bear situation" and much "expert" advice has been appearing in national magazines. Both the press and the public are confused as illustrated by such statements as, "Is there or is there isn't a garbage pit in Yellowstone National Park where bears can still forage for food"? Some of the concern has taken a humorous vein - "Have you heard about "Old Faithful", the Yellowstone Grizzly? He bites a camper every night". These and similar statements reflect a deteriorating situation for the grizzly bear, in fact so much so that I have become increasingly concerned over the survival of the grizzly and am apprehensive about the safety and welfare of Park visitors. For this reason, I feel obliged to answer a question I am repeatedly asked. "What's happening to the grizzlies - Just what is the grizzly bear situation in Yellowstone"? The following analysis is based on eleven years of intensive grizzly bear research in Yellowstone National Park.

Right now, the grizzly bear in the 48 contiguous states is probably as much an endangered species as he has ever been. This deplorable situation stems largely from poor management practices in Glacier and in Yellowstone National Parks which have increased bear-man contacts resulting in injury or death to humans. Examples of these are the 1967 killings in Glacier National Park and the recent maulings in Yellowstone National Park. Park officials have

and continue to misunderstand the grizzly bear problem. They have equated the situation at Glacier with that in Yellowstone and have tailored statements to the press to fit this misconception. The two situations are different, though the basic problem is poor management and particularly ill conceived procedures related to food sources for the grizzly. In Glacier, difficulties have arisen due to actual feeding of bears either through garbage or hand-outs that have conditioned the bears to feeding by humans. This association of food with man has caused some bears to lose their fear and respect for humans, eventually producing incidents resulting in death. This is not the case in Yellowstone, but apparently the Yellowstone administration is of the opinion that the same situation exists. A Park administrator told the press that, "There were no garbage dumps in operation in the Park and that garbage was being disposed of by incinerators". However, this is just the wrong management in Yellowstone National Park where food sources such as the earth-filled dumps have for years congregated the grizzlies and tended to zone them from humans in the campgrounds. Abruptly removing this food source has forced the grizzlies to disperse in order to forage. In seeking food, they have been enticed to the campgrounds. Here the chance of grizzly encounters has increased and accidents have occurred.

In a 1967 report to the Park Service, "Management of Bears in Yellowstone National Park", Dr. John J. Craighead, and I recommended that if incinerators were used to replace the earth-filled dumps, the latter should be phased out slowly, and that if this were not done, the bears would in all likelihood move into

the campgrounds and cause problems and bear-man incidents. This has occurred. Management to remedy this situation has only aggravated the whole problem. The offending bears have not always been those that have been captured or shot and often no attempt has been made to immobilize the troublemakers with tranquilizers and thus remove them. In most cases the bears have not actually been belligerent animals. Incidents have been encounters rather than attacks and the bears have mauled individuals in the process of either protecting themselves or foraging for food. When a grizzly gets within about 100 feet of man he appears to feel threatened and his instinct is to attack rather than flee. Grizzlies do not fear man, but they generally prefer to avoid him whenever possible.

The solution to the problem in Yellowstone is to continue to put out food in some form, garbage or otherwise, that will attract and hold bears in areas away from campgrounds. This has been experimentally tried and works. This solution to the problem was officially turned down by the Park Service and as a result they have had considerably more serious bear problems and maulings in the past two years than in any one of the proceeding eight years. In our Management Report, we recommended, "Because phasing out of refuse dumps will disperse the grizzlies by destroying an attractive if not essential food source, the transition from pits to incinerators must proceed gradually, enabling the grizzlies to develop new feeding habits as well as altered social behavior and movement patterns. If the transition is slow, and follows a recommended procedure, it is possible that no severe changes in population

level, distribution or behavior will result. If, on the contrary, the phasing-out operation is abrupt, and a carefully planned procedure is not followed, the result most certainly will be increased grizzly incidents in campgrounds, accelerated dispersal of bears to areas outside the park, and greater concentrations of grizzlies at the public dumps in Gardiner and West Yellowstone, where food will still be available but where adequate protection will not. The net result could be tragic personal injury, costly damages, and a drastic reduction in number of grizzlies".

An official Park Service reply to this particular suggestion represents present Park Service policy in regard to grizzlies and is quoted, "The recommended phasing-out of the Trout Creek dump represents an impossible research design for evaluating a practice which must either be eliminated or continued. I am apprehensive that phasing-out would at some point hold animals on limited food supplies (as in Glacier), actually encourage incidents and lead to a restoration of garbage feeding before the no garbage feeding situation was tested".

This policy is not working out in practice and to make matters worse and more confused, misinformation has repeatedly been given to the press. There has been no official agreement as to whether food is being supplied to the grizzlies or how much. The number of bears that have been killed has not been accurately reported. It has been stated that the objective is to immobilize grizzlies in campgrounds when the instructions are actually to shoot to kill any grizzly seen. Bears that have been shot and wounded, then later killed, have been falsely described as bears that have been

wounded in fights with other bears. This tends to throw the entire blame of bear attacks on the grizzly rather than on the poorly conceived bear-management now being conducted in Yellowstone National Park.

In a letter to Sports Illustrated, Dr. John J. Craighead expressed our joint opinion on grizzly bear management in Yellowstone National Park: "To manage grizzlies and people will require some drastic changes in National Park Service management procedures and a willingness to accept new ideas. It will require sufficient funds so that rangers may keep as close a watch on grizzlies as on people and fires and traffic. It will require an expanded ranger and interpretive service, and objective research by qualified personnel.

Zoning areas for grizzlies and others for visitors will be necessary. Ultimately visitor use must be regulated if the parks are to be maintained as natural areas. Equally important, the public will have to accept a calculated risk. We must be willing to meet the challenge of co-existence. The grizzly is dangerous--though it is not normally a man-eater--but it is a minor hazard to life and limb in national parks compared to traffic, boating, swimming, and climbing".

Dr. Frank C. Craighead, Jr.

FCC,Jr/p
July 1969

Jackson Hole Guide
Nov. 6, 1969

Increasing Concern Over Grizzly Bear Survival

By Dr. Frank C. Craighead Jr.

In recent months the news media have carried conflicting information and statements concerning, "the grizzly bear situation" and much "expert" advice has been appearing in national magazines.

Both the press and the public are confused as illustrated by such statements as, "Is there or isn't there a garbage pit in Yellowstone National Park where bears can still forage for food?"

Some of the concern has taken a humorous vein - "Have you heard about 'Old Faithful', the Yellowstone Grizzly? He bites a camper every night." Far more serious are statements just mentioned indicating a complete lack of understanding of grizzly bear ecology.

These and similar statements reflect a deteriorating situation for the grizzly bear, in fact so much so that I have become increasingly concerned over the survival of the grizzly and am apprehensive about the safety and welfare of Park visitors.

For this reason, I feel obliged to answer a question I am repeatedly asked. "What's happening to the grizzlies - Just what is the grizzly bear situation in Yellowstone?" The following analysis is based on eleven years of intensive grizzly bear research in Yellowstone National Park.

Right now, the grizzly bear

in the 48 contiguous states is probably as much an endangered species as he has ever been. This deplorable situation stems largely from poor management practices in Glacier and in Yellowstone National Parks which have increased bear-man contacts resulting in injury or death to humans. Examples of these are the 1967 killings in Glacier National Park and the recent maulings in Yellowstone National Park. Some Park officials have and continue to misunderstand the grizzly bear problem. They have equated the situation at Glacier with that in Yellowstone.

The two situations are different, though the basic problem is poor management and particularly ill-conceived procedures related to food sources for the grizzly. In Glacier, difficulties have arisen due to actual feeding of bears either through garbage or hand-outs that have conditioned the bears to feeding by humans.

This association of food with man has caused some bears to lose their fear and respect for humans, eventually producing incidents resulting in death. This is not the case in Yellowstone, but apparently the Yellowstone administration is of the opinion that the same situation exists. A Park administrator told the press that, "There were no garbage dumps in operation in the

Park and that garbage was being disposed of by incinerators." However, this is just the wrong management in Yellowstone National Park where food sources such as the earth-filled dumps have for years congregated the grizzlies and tended to zone them from humans in the campgrounds.

Elimination of the unsightly Park Service garbage dumps is a desirable long range goal, but abruptly removing this food source has forced the grizzlies to disperse in order to forage. In seeking food, they have been enticed to the campgrounds. Here the chance of grizzly encounters has increased and accidents have occurred.

In a 1967 report to the Park Service, "Management of Bears in Yellowstone National Park," Dr. John J. Craighead, and I recommended that if incinerators were used to replace the earth-filled dumps, the latter should be phased out slowly, and that if this were not done, the bears would in all likelihood move into the campgrounds and cause problems and bear-man incidents. This has occurred.

Management to remedy this situation has only aggravated the whole problem. The offending bears have not always been those that have been captured or shot and often no attempt has been made to immobilize the troublemakers with tranquilizers and thus remove

them. In most cases the bears have not actually been belligerent animals. Incidents have been encounters rather than attacks and the bears have mauled individuals in the process of either protecting themselves or foraging for food.

When a grizzly gets within about 100 feet of man he appears to feel threatened and his instinct is to attack rather than flee. Grizzlies do not fear man, but they generally prefer to avoid him whenever possible.

The solution to the problem in Yellowstone is to continue to put out food in some form, garbage or otherwise, that will attract and hold bears in areas away from campgrounds. This has been experimentally tried and works.

This solution to the problem was officially turned down by the Park Service. With current management they have had considerably more serious bear problems and maulings in the past two years than in the preceding eight years. In our management report, we recommended, "Because phasing out of refuse dumps will disperse the grizzlies by destroying an attractive if not essential food source, the transition from pits to incinerators must proceed gradually, enabling the grizzlies to develop new feeding habits as well as altered social behavior and movement patterns. If the transition is slow, and follows a recommended procedure, it is possible that no severe changes in population level, distribution or behavior will result. If, on the contrary, the phasing-out operation is abrupt, and a carefully planned procedure is not followed, the result most certainly will be increased grizzly incidents in campgrounds, accelerated dispersal of bears to areas outside the park, and greater concentrations of grizzlies at the public dumps in Gardiner and West Yellowstone, where food will still be available but where adequate protection will not. The net result could be tragic personal injury, costly damages, and a drastic reduction in number of grizzlies."

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