
COMMON THEMES IN RECENT HUMAN FATALITIES DUE TO GRIZZLY BEAR ATTACKS

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There have been 8 fatal grizzly bear attacks on humans in the lower 48 states since 2001. Of these, 6 occurred in the Yellowstone Ecosystem, and 2 occurred in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. An additional encounter occurred in the Cabinet/Yaak ecosystem where a hunter shot and wounded a grizzly bear and then entered thick brush in pursuit of the wounded bear. The bear then attacked him and his hunting partner accidentally shot and killed him while trying to shoot the bear. Of the 8 fatal attacks, 4 occurred in National Forests, 3 in Yellowstone Park, and 1 on Montana state game range lands. Human behaviors at the time of the attacks involved hunting, camping at night, hiking, and mountain biking. Seven of the eight attacks occurred during daylight. Five of the fatalities involved lone individuals and 4 of these were lone hikers. Bear spray was not carried or used by any of the people killed in these attacks. Consistent messaging by management agencies about how to be safe in bear country has not been successful in convincing the public to adopt safety practices. Further efforts are necessary to educate users in grizzly habitat of the risks involved with certain behaviors and the cost of ignoring agency safety messages. The likelihood of fatal encounters could be significantly reduced by the adoption of common safety practices such as not hiking or hunting alone, not running when encountering a bear, the use of bear spray, and understanding the increased danger involved when surprising a bear due to fast travel in grizzly county by trail running or mountain biking.