
THE SWAN VALLEY GRIZZLY BEAR CONSERVATION AGREEMENT: A CASE HISTORY OF COLLABORATIVE LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

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The Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (SVGBCA) was initiated in 1995 between the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, Flathead National Forest, Plum Creek Timber Company and the Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation to address grizzly bear habitat management concerns on ~ 370,000 ac of intermingled ownership located between the Mission Mountain and Bob Marshall Wilderness areas in northwestern Montana. The general objective of the SVGBCA is to implement a multi-landowner management plan that would contribute to the conservation of grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) while still allowing cooperating landowners to realize the economic benefits of their lands. The specific biological goals are to maintain connectivity between the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountain wildernesses and minimize the risk of death or injury to grizzly bears using suitable habitat within the valley. The general conservation approach is to designate linkage zones to

facilitate bear movement between wilderness areas, rotate forestry activities in the landscape to minimize disturbance, limit open road densities, and implement habitat management guidelines at the landscape and site-specific levels. Research and monitoring was initiated in 2002 with the inclusion of MDFWP in telemetry studies of grizzly bears using the SVGBCA. Detail on SVGBCA implementation and effectiveness monitoring is presented. Key findings are that connectivity objectives are being met regarding both east-west connections between the wilderness areas and north-south movements between important habitats outside the Swan Valley. Bears stayed in the Swan Valley generally, with little altitudinal migration. Grizzlies used all ownerships in the valley and habitat use varied between nocturnal and diurnal activity periods. High levels of mortality were documented in 2003 and 2004. Landownership changes within the 15-year-old SVGBCA resulting from the Montana Legacy Conservation Land Sale are discussed.