
MONITORING HUCKLEBERRY IN NORTHWEST MONTANA TO INVESTIGATE RESPONSE TO VEGETATIVE TREATMENTS

Matthew Bowser,* Coordinator, Yaak Valley Forest Council, Troy, Montana 59935

Peter Leusch, Coordinator, Yaak Valley Forest Council, Troy, Montana 59935

Mike Giesey, Silviculturist, USDA Forest Service, Troy, Montana 59935

Renate Bush, Regional Inventory Specialist, USDA Forest Service, Missoula, Montana 59801

Wayne Kasworm, Wildlife Biologist, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, Libby, Montana 59923

The remote and ecologically rich forests of northwest Montana are home to an endangered population of grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*). Within the Cabinet/Yaak ecosystem, recent research suggests an average population estimate of 45 bears. While grizzly bear core-areas and security requirements have been identified in the Cabinet/Yaak ecosystem, figuring out how to best manage the lush vegetation that provides foraging opportunities within that defined habitat has yet to occur. Large portions of this designated habitat are in need of ecological restoration. Since a high percentage of the Cabinet/Yaak grizzly bear's diet is supplied through berries, grasses, and forbs, it is crucial to develop the knowledge today that can transform portions of the forest back into the edible landscapes that were once historically abundant. Because huckleberries (*Vaccinium* spp.) comprise a substantial amount of the annual diet volume for Cabinet/Yaak grizzly bears, land managers are beginning to design projects with the intention of increasing the amount of huckleberry foraging opportunities on the forest. Strong anecdotal evidence suggests that huckleberry prefers minimal overstory, yet few studies have been undertaken that document the plant's response to management. Addressed is a partnership that has formed between the Yaak Valley Forest Council, USDA Forest Service, and the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor and document the effects the vegetative treatments have on huckleberry abundance.