

North Cascades National Park
Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas
Sedro Woolley, Washington 98284

HISTORICAL AND RECENT
GRIZZLY BEAR SIGHTINGS IN THE
NORTH CASCADES

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Prepared by:

Jonathan Björklund
Biological Technician

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INTRODUCTION

Population densities of grizzly bears and many North American animals have declined dramatically with the advent of civilization. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently examining the status and optimum management of species classified as endangered or threatened, of which the grizzly is among the latter. The degree to which distribution and numbers have diverged from historical levels is one indicator of the health and stability of the grizzly species. Thus insight into the present situation requires knowledge of past distribution and density.

Estimates of historical distribution and density in the North Cascades region of Washington are speculative and variable. Observations cited in obscure historical journals and documents may frequently go unrecorded in biological literature. Consequently an extensive review of these sources was made.

This paper summarizes available historical (prior to 1950) and recent (1950 - 1980) information on grizzlies observed in the North Cascades. Fig. 1 shows the general location of these sightings. The research biologist at North Cascades National Park headquarters has an accompanying map showing more precise locations. The reliability of observers and accuracy of accounts is not analyzed at this time.

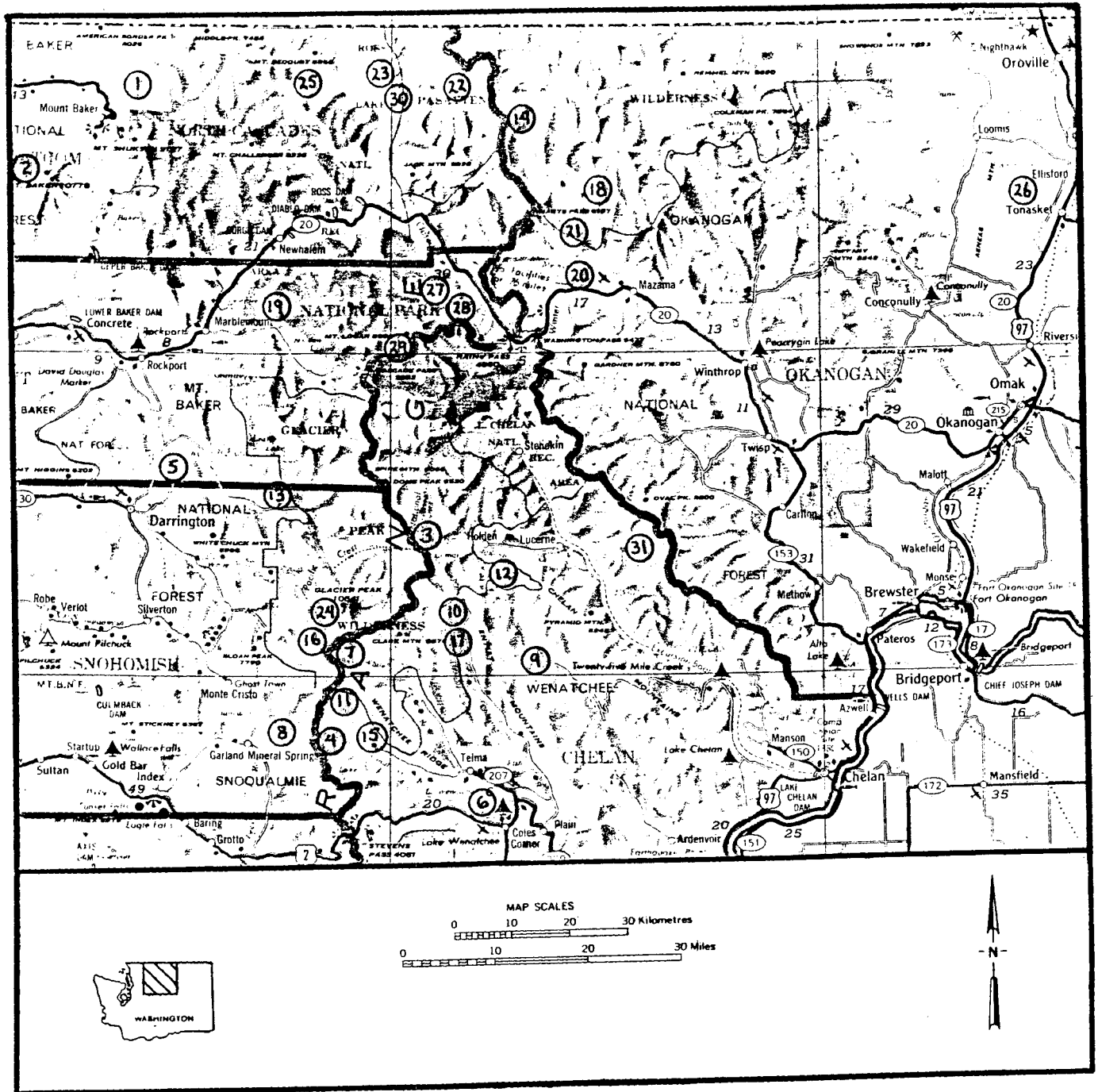


Fig. 1. Historical (prior to 1950; in blue) and recent (1950 to 1980; in red) records of grizzly bears in the North Cascades. Numerals correspond with summaries and references in text. No distinction is made between confirmed and unconfirmed observations.

RESULTS

Historical Records (prior to 1950)

- 1) In 1896 Hamilton C. Wells located the "Silver Tip" claim on Ruth Creek, adopting the name from an oversized grizzly who lived nearby (T40N R9E) (Becky 1969, p. 102).
- 2) In 1868 Thomas Stratton and Edmund Coleman observed grizzly tracks near the summit of Mt. Baker (T38N R8E) (Majors 1978, p. 145).
- 3) In 1887 Albert Rogers sighted a grizzly bear at Lyman Lake, in the Railroad Creek drainage (T31N R16E) (Majors 1975, p. 44).
- 4) In 1887 Albert Rogers sighted a grizzly bear and two cubs near Saddle Gap, in the Little Wenatchee River drainage (T28N R13E) (Majors 1975, p. 86).
- 5) In the late 1800's the Sauk Indians related that grizzly bears would come down to Sauk Prairie during especially bad winters (T33N R10E) (Majors 1975, P. 33).
- 6) In about 1895 a grizzly bear killed a cow at Lake Wenatchee (T27N R15E) (Majors 1975, p. 99).
- 7) In 1899 a grizzly bear was sighted at Indian Pass, between the Sauk and White River drainages (T29N R13E) (Majors 1975, p. 89).
- 8) In about 1900 a grizzly bear was sighted at Curry Gap, in the North Fork Skykomish River drainage (T29N R12E) (Majors 1975, p. 89).

- 9) In 1910 a large grizzly bear ran 300 sheep off a cliff and killed the sheepherder on the Entiat River (T28N R18E) (Majors 1975, p. 99).
- 10) In 1913 a grizzly bear was shot near the present Phelps Creek Campground, near the Chiwawa River (T30N R16E) (Majors 1975, p. 45).
- 11) In about 1915 a grizzly bear was sighted near Kodak Peak, above the Little Wenatchee River (T29N R13E) (Majors 1975, p. 89).
- 12) Prior to 1920 grizzlies were reported on the upper Entiat River (T31N R17E) (Majors 1975, p. 45).
- 13) In about 1920 a grizzly bear was sighted on Green Mountain, in the Suiattle River drainage (T32N R12E) (Majors 1975, p. 33).
- 14) In 1923 a 1,350 pound grizzly bear was shot on Holman Creek, in the Pasayten River drainage (T39N R17E) (Majors 1975, p. 42).
- 15) In about 1940 a grizzly bear was reported on the Little Wenatchee River (T28N R15E) (Majors 1975, p. 99).
- 16) Indians said grizzly bears were common in White Chuck Meadows (T30N R13E) (Majors 1975, p. 34).
- 17) The type specimen for the Chelan bear (*Ursus chelan*), since reclassified as the grizzly bear (*U. arctos*), was found near Trinity on the Chiwawa River (T30N R16E) (Merriam 1918).

Recent Records (1950 - 1980)

- 18) In 1967 or 1968 Tom Graves and Dale Tonsin (spelling uncertain) observed two grizzlies along the Pasayten River, and on Robinson Creek the next day (T38N R18E) (Björklund 1978, p. 7).
- 19) In 1969 the Washington State Game Department received a report of a grizzly bear near Monogram Lake (T36N R12E) (Björklund 1978, p. 6).
- 20) In 1972 Harry Wills observed a possible grizzly 0.8 km west of Early Winters Creek on State Highway 20 (T36N R19E) (Björklund 1978, p. 6).
- 21) In 1972 Ralph Naas, Dorothy Naas, Chuck Avents, Jerry Davis, and Lewis Mehler observed a possible grizzly track near Windy Pass in the Pasayten Wilderness Area (T38N R17E) (Björklund 1978, p. 7).
- 22) In 1978 Tom Graves sighted a possible grizzly bear near Elbow Basin in the Pasayten Wilderness Area (T40N R15E) (Björklund 1978, p. 7).
- 23) In 1978 Clifford Thresher sighted a possible grizzly near Desolation Mountain lookout (T40N R14E) (Björklund 1978, p. 8).
- 24) In 1950 a forest ranger was seriously mauled by a grizzly bear near Glacier Peak (T30N R13E) (Majors 1975, p. 34).

- 25) In 1950 three grizzly bears were sighted along Little Beaver Creek (T40N R12E) (Majors 1975, p. 31).
- 26) In 1952 a grizzly bear was shot near Tonasket (T37N R27E) (Majors 1975, p. 50).
- 27) In the mid-1950's Maurice Splain sighted a grizzly bear in Fisher Basin (T36N R15E) (Mullen 1977).
- 28) In 1964 Rocky Wilson killed a grizzly bear in Fisher Basin. This is the most recent confirmed record in the North Cascades (T36N R15E) (Mullen 1977).
- 29) In 1969 Lowell Warner reported a grizzly bear was observed in the upper Thunder Creek area (T35N R14E) (News Release. North Cascades National Park).
- 30) In 1980 Janet Huddleston sighted a possible grizzly bear along Lightning Creek about 5 km east of Ross Lake (T40N R14E) (Wildlife Observation Files. North Cascades National Park).
- 31) In 1980 Thomas Reese sighted a possible grizzly bear on the Summit Trail at Prince Creek (T31N R20E) (Wildlife Observation Files. North Cascades National Park).

In addition to grizzly observations at specific locations, several authors cite general evidence of grizzlies in the North Cascades. The U. S. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (1964) noted that grizzly bears were native to the North Cascades, grizzlies

reportedly killed sheepherders in the early days, and that they have only been reported occasionally since the 1930's. In an anthropological account Collins (1974) mentioned that the Upper Skagit Tribe hunted grizzly bear. She also related folklore and religious rites involving the grizzly. Taber and Sweeney (1976) suspect that a small number of grizzlies reside in the North Cascades and noted that the habitat and management are more favorable now than during the grizzlies' demise. Hall and Kelson (1959), Cahalane (1947), Herrero (1972), and Seton (1937) also note the presence of grizzlies in the North Cascades.

DISCUSSION

The observations indicate that grizzlies were originally distributed throughout the North Cascades of Washington. It is impossible to ascertain actual past densities (number of individuals per unit area) and concentrations since intensity, numbers, and reliability of observers have varied spatially and temporally. Nevertheless, the presence of cubs (observation number 4) and other factors strongly suggest the former presence of a viable breeding population.

The North Cascades almost certainly lack a breeding population at the present time, though transients may move in on rare occasions. The apparent trend for recent observations to concentrate in the north (Fig. 1) may reflect movements from southern British Columbia.

A soon to be published book (Majors, pers. comm.) on grizzlies by Harry Majors, who specializes in regional history, may provide

further insight into grizzly bear distribution. Records maintained by the Okanogan and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests could also be checked.

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