



GRIZZLY BEARS OF MONTANA

How would living in a range of habitats help grizzly bears?

Grizzly bears are adaptable (flexible) and can eat many different types of food, such as plants, animals, and mushrooms. By being curious and exploring different habitats like rivers, meadows, forests, and even rocky mountain tops, grizzlies can access many different resources. Some animals, like Canada lynx, are not so flexible, and instead have very specific habitat needs. Lynx can only live in certain kinds of snowy northern forests and only eat certain kinds of food, like snowshoe hares. Grizzly bears' ability to be adaptable and live in many places, and eat many foods, helps them survive.

Can you draw a food web for a grizzly bear?

A grizzly bear food web would show that a bear eats a wide variety of plants (berries, flowers, grasses), animals (elk, rodents, ants), and fungus (see FWP's Grizzly Bear Foods Guide for detailed information). Grizzlies are omnivores, meaning they eat both meat and plants, like people.

But what eats a grizzly? Nothing directly hunts grizzly bears (not even people because they are listed under the Endangered Species Act), though cubs are sometimes killed by adult male bears. Scavengers, like vultures and eagles, will feed on a bear carcass. Decomposers, such as fungi, bacteria, and insects will eat a dead bear and turn its body – and the nutrients it contains – into soil.

Why didn't they study bear scat from winter?

Bears don't produce scat in winter because they are hibernating and not eating. Hibernation allows bears to slow down all their body processes, like digestion, to save energy. And, because bears aren't eating or drinking, they don't need to pee or poop. Bears form a fecal plug in their lower intestine that is made up of hardened scat, hair, and bedding material, like grasses. Their body gets rid of the plug in spring, which is a sign that the bear – and their digestive system – is waking back up.

How could you count how many bears live in an area?

Bears are hard to count compared to animals like elk, because bears are mostly solitary (alone) and are hard to see if they are not in the open. Herd animals, like elk, bunch up in the winter and are easier to see and count because they live in more open places, like fields and meadows. Biologists count the number of bears using special collars that send the bears' location to satellites or radio transmitters. Biologists can also survey, or scan, an area from an airplane or helicopter to look for bears. Some studies use DNA (genetic information) from bear hair left behind at "rub trees" to tell how many bears are using the area. They use this information from individual bears and then use computer models to help decide the total number of bears in an area.