Is the Steep Creek Bear Habituated to People?

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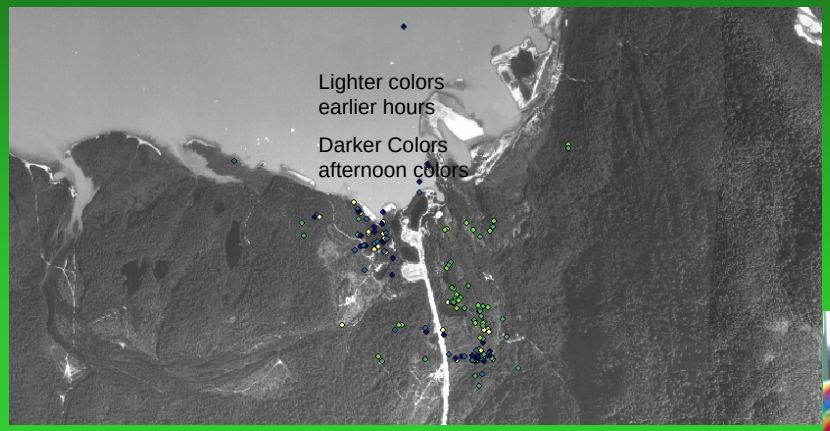
Introduction

When Fish and Game collared the Steep Creek Bear they stated that they believe that she was a habituated animal. We are now using the GPS collar on the bear and Arc Map to help us determine if the bear is habituated. Fish and Games fist collared her August 31, 2006. Every Thursday, since August 31, students from Floyd Dryden and DZ have been gathering waypoints and I have been using them to make a map with Arc Map.

Here is the Steep Creek bear. Looking for salmon in Steep Creek.



Materials and methods

The Fish and Wild Life used a collar like the one shown in Figure 2. Then every other Thursday since August 31, 2006 students, from Floyd Dryden have been gathering waypoints from the bear every other Thursday until November 15th, the collar will go dormant during hibernation and then will start up again April 1st. When students go to Mendenhall Visitor Center they first use a VHF signal to get close enough to the bear. When they use the VHF signal they bring out a thing that looks like something you put on top of your TV. When you are in the area around the bear it will beep. When you turn this device towards the bear it will beep louder. Hence leading you closer to the bear. The only problem with this device is that the signal can beep of a rock cliff and you could go somewhere else. Once you are close enough you take a lap top and then download waypoints and put them on a portable computer. The collar down loads waypoints every four hours.

The glacier visitors center had 43,898 visitors in the month of September, mostly from cruise ship passengers. The cruise ship tourist season ends on September 25th, and the visitor center then closes during the week and only opens on weekends. During the month of September the bear would be around humans any time that it was on lower steep creek during the day. The visitors center has constructed platforms above the lower Steep Creek area where visitors can walk around and view wildlife. In October the bear would see humans infrequently near the creek. If the Steep Creek bear is not habituated to people, then it should avoid the lower Steep Creek area by the visitors center during the month of September, especially during the day.

I sorted the waypoints for the months of September and October 2006 and plotted them using ArcMap 9. I also sorted the waypoints for early daytime hours and late hours.

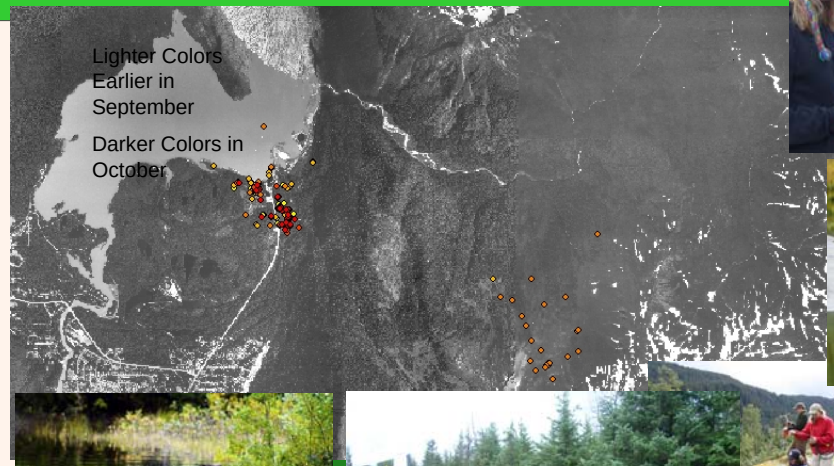


Fig. 2. This is a bear collar used to gather waypoints.

Results

As seen in the maps the bear spends a lot of time in the streams. The Steep Creek Bear was by the streams and the Visitor Center between August 1,2006 and September 13,2006. We think the bear was fishing for salmon. Then between September 14,2006 and September 15, 2006 the bear went up to Thunder Mountain, we think the bear is looking for berries because the salmon were not running in the Steep Creek stream. Then the bear went back down to the Steep Creek, between September 16, 2006 to the last waypoint I have mapped September 31,2006.

Conclusions

The Steep Creek bear appears to be well habituated. The bear is not avoiding a highly crowded area during times when tourist are present. The bear still goes to the stream when the stream has salmon in it, the only time the bear has left the Mendenhall Visitor Center area is when there is no salmon in the streams and the bear went to get berries in the mountains. There has also no reports of the bear being aggressive towards people. The bear has never been reported in eating garbage either.

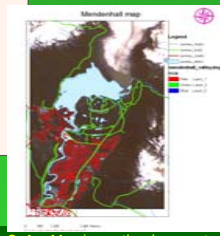


Fig. 3. Arc Map is another key part in mapping where a bear has been. The map shown is the Mendenhall Valley where the steep creek bear lives.

Literature cited

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