



## GRIZZLY BEAR NUMBERS GROW AND THE MANAGEMENT DEBATE CONTINUES

Posted By: colter August 9, 2019



There's a lot of focus on grizzly bears this year, especially with the recent announcement by the Fish and Wildlife Service reinstating the Yellowstone Grizzly to the Endangered Species List.

Those people that live near the Rocky Mountain Front and Yellowstone Park, know well that the grizzly population is increasing and the bears are expanding their range. That causes a greater impact on those communities and specifically livestock producers.

Dealing with predators is nothing new for ranchers around the region. But increasing numbers of an apex predator do cause more challenges and a concern for public safety. Recently, on the Northern News Network's Voices of Montana talk show, host Tom Schultz spoke with two individuals who are heavily involved in the grizzly debate.

George Edwards, the Executive Director of the Montana Livestock Loss Board says that grizzly depredations are trending higher. Looking over the last 3 years of claims from livestock killed by grizzlies from January to July, George said, "In 2017, we paid for 30 head due to grizzly bears. In 2018, that increased to 34 head and so far in 2019 we're at 43 head."

Depredations are increasing and the bears are moving out of their typical areas. "The grizzly bears have expanded drastically," Edwards says. "They'll show up in Stanford, they'll show up in the Sweet Grass Hills. There was a kill less than a month ago in Pondera County where 40 sheep were killed in just one night. They're out on the prairies and all over the place." Those 40 head of sheep are not included in the paid claims so far in 2019.

In an attempt to address the management of grizzly bears, Montana Governor Steve Bullock established a Grizzly Bear Advisory Council this year. 18 people were appointed to the council with members from the agriculture industry, sportsmen and environmental groups included. The goal of the group is to help set a long-term vision for bear management and conservation in Montana.

Trina Jo Bradley, a rancher from Valier, is one of four Montana Stockgrowers Association members on the council and she says the best way to manage bears for the futures includes removing them from the endangered species list.

Removing grizzlies from the list, Bradley says, is the biggest hurdle they have. "Thanks to the Equal Access to Justice Act, we just keep getting lawsuit after lawsuit against the federal

government because these environmental groups don't want bears to be delisted. They want them to stay on the list, mostly because they're opposed to hunting seasons."

However, Bradley says if the management of the grizzly bear is returned to the state, a hunting season wouldn't necessarily be needed. "We just have to have harsher penalties for the bears that get in trouble, that are killing livestock and endangering people and hanging out in towns. The problem bears just need to be removed."

Trina Jo says that she's hopeful that the council will be able to provide some valuable recommendations. "We have one year," she says, "to put together some plans to move forward and I'm hopeful that in that year we can do some really great stuff and come together to make some progress."

To hear the full discussion on grizzly bears [click here](#).