

GRIZZLY BEAR USE OF OILFIELDS AROUND PRUDHOE BAY, ALASKA

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Grizzly bear movements, habitat use, and interactions with oil exploration and production facilities and personnel are being investigated in an 18,000 km² area around the oilfields at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska. Since 1991, 23 radio-collared bears have been observed from the extensive road system within the oilfields, or from biweekly radiotelemetry flights.

Eighteen of the radio-collared bears have been observed in the oilfields at some time, and 12 of these have spent considerable time there. Anthropogenic foods, primarily garbage, are available at a large landfill, and at kitchen bins ("dumpsters") located at more than 20 permanent camps housing up to 300 workers each. Family groups tended to feed at the landfill, which is relatively isolated from intensive human use. Subadults, and occasionally family groups, tended to use the kitchen dumpsters, which are located in areas of intensive human use.

Although there were considerable differences among individuals, bears used human facilities for travelling, playing, resting, and foraging. Short-range encounters (e.g., < few meters) with humans occurred as bears walked around or under buildings, were surprised in dumpsters, or passed by vehicles. No injuries to bears or humans were reported or observed. Types of encounters and factors influencing the lack of injuries are discussed.

Even the most garbage-conditioned bears spend considerable time foraging for natural foods, including travelling up to 60 km away. Major rivers were primary travel corridors and feeding areas. Although a number of food items were exploited, ground squirrels appear to be a major item within and away from the oilfields.

The denning season extended from early October to late April or early May for adult males and single adult females, and to late May for females with cubs. Denning ecology will be discussed.

ABSTRACTS

Tenth International Conference
on
Bear Research and Management



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Fairbanks, Alaska
July 16-20, 1995