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The photo newspaper of Columbia Falls, Glacier National Park and surrounding communities

Mountain goat study results in changes to rivers plan

By CHRIS PETERSON
Hungry Horse News

Glacier National Park has been examining the movements of mountain goats and whether recreational use of the Middle Fork of the Flathead River is having an impact on them.

The park over the past two years has now GPS collared 20 goats in the area near the Goat Lick off U.S. Highway 2, where the iconic creatures are drawn to the mineral-rich cliffs along the river, noted Mark Biel, natural resources program manager for Glacier.

Biel was part of a “Glacier Conversations” talk hosted by the Glacier National Park Conservancy last week. The Conservancy, in part, has funded the study.

The area is unique because it’s high use habitat for goats and for rafters alike. While current rafting regulations require that floaters not get out of their rafts to photograph or observe the goats, some people do, and they also often have dogs as well.

Disturbing the goats at the lick can cause problems for the animals, as nannies are often nursing kids and they need to replenish vital minerals they’ve lost during the winter from eating cured and dried vegetation for months.

Coupled with child-birth, the animals are



A mountain goat leaps a creek at the goat lick in this file photo.

salt and mineral deficient, so they’re attracted to the soil minerals exposed by the constantly eroding river banks. In some cases, humans have been displacing the goats for four to six hours at a time.

Biel and graduate student Eric Boyd, a Columbia Falls native, are heading up the study with support from a host of volunteers and other

agencies.

By tracking the goats they’ve learned that they use a much longer length of the river corridor than previously thought — a stretch from the Staircase Rapids to Split Rock.

The study has already resulted in management actions. The Comprehensive River Management plan, which is expected to be finalized

soon, will prohibit rafters from stopping in the longer section between the above-mentioned landmarks, Biel Noted.

The study has also resulted in more insights into goat behavior, as it’s the one population that roams from Glacier to the Flathead National Forest and the Great Bear Wilderness.

Many of the goats, it turns out, have sum-

mer range near Great Northern Mountain and travel long distances in largely wooded areas to reach the mountain that towers over the Hungry Horse Reservoir.

It’s just one of several wildlife studies funded in whole or in part by the Conservancy over the years. Previous studies have looked at wolverines, harlequin ducks, fishers and in 2027,

Glacier will study its beaver population. It also hopes to work with the Blackfeet Tribe to establish bison populations in Glacier.

The tribe previously released bison near the park’s border near Chief Mountain, but they didn’t stay.

Biel said the goat study wouldn’t have been possible without Conservancy support.

BPA officials say no ‘human conveyance’ goes over its lines

By CHRIS PETERSON
Hungry Horse News

If Pursuit is successful in securing the permits and building a tram up Columbia Mountain, it might be the only structure of its type that transports humans over Bonneville Power Administration transmission lines, a BPA spokesman noted last week.

In addition to any Forest Service permits the company could need, it will also need permits from the BPA to cross over the high voltage transmission lines that run from the Hungry Horse Dam along the base of the mountain.

While it’s fairly common for power lines to cross each other at safe distances across the BPA power grid, the administration did not have “any other scenario where we have public convey-

ance above our transmission lines,” noted BPA spokesman Kevin Wingert.

Unlike the transmission line that goes to one’s house, BPA lines have no insulation and instead are insulated by the air and distance. Structures need to be at least 50 feet from BPA’s poles, structures or guy wires, whether it be vegetation, roads, fences, utilities, pipelines, or any other improvements. There also needs to be at least 25 feet of clearance from the top of any vegetation and the lowest point of BPA’s wires.

In this case, the BPA maintains the right of way under the Hungry Horse Dam lines to just shrubs and grasses. Trees are cleared and cut down on a regular basis,

Since the lines can contain hundreds of thousands of volts of electricity, the

agency has a host of conditions for any structure located near the lines or utilities running under the lines.

According to literature provided by the administration, no buildings or structures are generally allowed under the lines.

“Structures including buildings, building extensions and additions (homes, businesses, garages, barns) are generally prohibited in BPA’s right-of-way because they interfere with BPA’s operation of its transmission system,” the agency notes in its safety literature.

Even underground utilities need to be properly installed and grounded, it notes.

“Proper positioning of underground utilities is required to prevent an unusual condition that may cause electricity to arc from the high-voltage wire

to the tower and then to ground. This could produce a dangerous voltage on underground piping or cable system,” the BPA notes.

While farmers have been growing crops under BPA lines for years, it still urges great caution near lines and notes that anything extending more than 14 feet above the ground has the potential to be dangerous.

The agency even highly discourages metal fencing under its lines, for example.

BPA provides about one-third of the electricity used in the Pacific Northwest and operates more than 15,000 circuit miles of transmission lines.

As designed, Pursuit’s tram

See BPA on A3



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