



## ***Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks***

**DATE:** July 11, 2013

**TO:** Chip Weber, Flathead National Forest Supervisor

**FROM:** Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist R-1

**SUBJECT:** Mountain Biking in the Whitefish Range

Hi Chip,

As Grizzly Bear Management Specialist for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, I wanted to write you this letter regarding mountain biking in portions of the Whitefish Range.

It was recently brought to my attention there is an interest by mountain bikers to have current and future access to trails throughout the Whitefish Range. While I fully support and encourage outdoor recreation, including mountain biking, I am concerned about the use of some of the trails in the Whitefish Range. This concern is with respect to potential conflicts between mountain bikers and grizzly bears within certain areas, especially those areas from Red Meadow Creek north to the Canadian border. My concern lies primarily with mountain bikers having serious negative encounters with grizzly bears which could result in serious bodily injury or even death to the mountain bikers.

In recent years, technology has created mountain bikes that are able to be ridden on a wide variety of trails and terrain. This has caused an increase in negative encounters between mountain bikers and grizzly bears, often resulting in a very bad situation for the mountain bikers. While there is always the potential for conflicts between recreationists and grizzly bears, mountain bikers provide a unique situation. Mountain bikers typically travel quietly, at fast speeds, with their attention on the immediate trail in front of them, rarely able to scan the trail and surrounding area for bears. This type of activity in prime grizzly bear habitat is a recipe for disaster. There have been a few cases in Canada and Alaska where mountain bikers have ran into grizzly bears and the bikers were seriously mauled.

The Whitefish Range north of Red Meadow contains some of the best grizzly bear habitat on the Flathead National Forest, especially during the summer months when huckleberries are ripe. That is also the time when the snow has melted from the high elevation trails and presents the most opportunity for conflict between mountain bikers and grizzly bears.

I have discussed the use of mountain bikes with other grizzly bear biologists in Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. None of the biologists I spoke with felt that mountain biking in areas with a high number of grizzly bears is a good idea.

I'm sure there are areas that are suitable for mountain bikes within the Whitefish Range, but I think areas which are known to be prime grizzly bear habitat should be avoided. The lower density of grizzly bears in the southern portion of the Whitefish Range and the adjacent Tally Lake District may provide a lot of options for mountain bikers. The area from Red Meadow north would not be a good place for mountain biking on narrow, winding, mountain trails.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Tim Manley  
Grizzly Bear Management Specialist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 N. Meridian  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
406-250-1265  
tmanley@mt.gov