Winter Solstice

A rainy summer with only two active bears along the river during the day. Speedy returned without her cub from last year. A new bear, Sketchy, was the only other bear seen during the day. So named, as it got into a bucket of white paint and had patches of paint on various portions of her. With the warm weather, not all bears seem to have gone into hibernation. Bear tracks were seen along the Chilkoot Road in early December.

The Foundation held the first Celebration of Bears in August. The event included a library reading with children Friday morning, a dinner, native dancers and presentations Friday night, and activities for kids plus demonstrations on Saturday. The Foundation had a booth at the Southeast State Fair in late July. This summer, the Foundation again worked with Parks in getting volunteers to help monitor along the Chilkoot River.

The Alaska State Parks finalized their conceptual design for platforms and other improvements to be installed along the Chilkoot River Corridor. In addition, Parks hired a new park ranger, Tom Kain, this fall.

The Chilkoot River weir counts of 105,000 sockeye salmon exceeded the upper end of the escapement goal range (38,000 to 86,000 fish). Prior to the weir being removed September 8, 2014, the coho count was 134 and chum salmon count 126. The Chilkoot River pink salmon run was late and about 40 percent of average.
Tourist’s Corner

Stefan Bieri, Oftringen AG, Switzerland: It was our first travel to Alaska. Haines, with the Chilkoot River, will stay in our memories as an unique place of Alaska and Speedy was the highlight of the day.

Jesse Cruz, Clayton, CA: Linda and I truly enjoyed our visit to the Chilkoot Reserve. We enjoyed the wildlife, Bald Eagles and especially the Brown Bear fishing for salmon.

Bear Den Education at the Haines Public Library

On January 9, 2015, Julie Folta gave a presentation on bear dens and winter “survival” to both Kindergarten and the children’s reading hour with Holly Davis. She also showed the types of food that bears eat.

PFD Charitable Contributions Program

Giving has never been so easy!

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When you apply for your Permanent Fund Dividend, you will have a new opportunity to give to your favorite Alaska nonprofit organizations. The PFD Charitable Contributions Program began with our 2009 dividend. It provides a safe, secure and easy way to make a donation, and is available to all Alaskans who file on-line.

When you go online to apply for your dividend, you will see the option called “The Gift of Giving.” Click on Alaska Chilkoot Bear Foundation. Chose the amount you would like to donate.

You can find more information about the program, including frequently asked questions at http://www.pickclickgive.org.
The Chilkoot River Corridor is a remarkable place of beauty filled with abundant wildlife, the most conspicuous being numerous brown bears. It is also easily accessible, just 10 miles from Haines and 5 from the ferry terminal. When you put those two things together with the added draw to fisher people angling for 3 different species of salmon that return to the river each year, you get a place that has the potential of being loved, viewed, fished and photographed to death.

My wife and I have lived near and enjoyed the river corridor for 30 years. It is home and as with anyone’s home, we want to keep it a special place for ourselves, everyone that comes to visit, and the extraordinary wildlife. Being a member of the original Chilkoot River Corridor planning group, a diverse group of community and agency members that met to address concerns of over use and safety along the corridor, it was a natural progression to become a board member of ACBF which is dedicated to helping the Chilkoot survive for generations to come. We, the board of ACBF, are an all volunteer group that plugs away slowly helping to find solutions that will keep this a place of beauty filled with wildlife, fish and bears for a long time to come. I am grateful to be involved in that process.

Tim McDonough
The Bears of Summer

Bear dens provide protection and security during the winter months. Brown bears can excavate a den but often use rock caves and hollow trees. Dens are dug in dry, stable soil where winter temperatures will remain above freezing. Usually the den site terrain is sloping. As snow falls it covers and helps to insulate the den. Generally the den is just large enough to accommodate the bear and cubs that a sow might have. The entrance to the den leads to a tunnel that slopes downward to the actual sleeping chamber. This sloping tunnel allows stale air to escape.

Bears breed in spring (May to early-June) and cubs are born in the den the following winter (January or February). The sow holds the fertilized egg until after entering the den. The egg is then implanted into the uterus only if there is enough fat from the sow’s diet to allow for her and her cub’s survival. This is known as delayed implantation. This prevents the sow from utilizing energy on cubs that would not likely survive.

The litter size ranges from one to four, but two is most common. At birth, cubs weigh 340 to 680 grams (11 ounces to 1 pound 6 ounces). In general, cubs nurse four times a day for five minutes. After nursing, the sow will lick the cub’s bellies and bottom to induce urination. The sow will then lick the urination to keep the den clean.
In Memoriam

Speedy’s cub of 2013 did not survive the winter.
It is not known how it died.

It is believed that White Claws did not survive the winter. She was the oldest bear along the river (well over 30 years old). Her presence along the river will be missed.

Bear Research

Bear Collars: The collar from Speedy was retrieved from her den in the spring. BMJ was still wearing her collar on the night of October 2. We were able to dart her but she did not become immobile. We'll see if the collar comes off or attempt to recapture her next summer. An update on the findings from the collars will be in the next newsletter.

DNA Studies: Rachel Wheat, a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, spent the summer collecting brown bear scat and saliva samples around Chilkoot Lake for DNA analyses. From a total of nearly 400 samples, she hopes to identify the number of individual bears using the Upper Chilkoot River, Chilkoot Lake, and the lower Chilkoot River Corridor, and determine the ratio of males to female bears in the area. She will combine this population information with data on bear activity patterns from over 10,000 bear photos collected using motion-detecting trail cameras to identify how bears are using the Chilkoot and if and how human activity might be influencing bear behavior.

Chilkoot River Brown Bear Monitoring: In July 2014, Shannon Donahue (Great Bear Foundation) began a project that uses wildlife cameras that are triggered by motion and by infrared sensors, coupled with human observers, to monitor brown bears’ habitat use and fishing success on the Chilkoot River Corridor, in relation to human activity and salmon abundance. The cameras are equipped with night vision, so bear activity can be monitored at night as well as during daylight. This is important because the heavy human use during daylight hours may influence bear presence, and the night vision offers insights into what happens on the Chilkoot River Corridor when humans are away.

The project builds on previous research by Anthony Crupi, with the goal of creating a long-term database to track trends in brown bears’ foraging activity that will help to inform the management of the Chilkoot River, its wildlife, and use by humans. The 2014 field season ran from July 15 through the end of September, with Great Bear Foundation staff and volunteers performing in situ field observations each day for a randomly selected three hour time block. Observers performed “scans” every thirty minutes, recording the number of bears and humans in and out of the river at the time of the scan, and the behavior of both humans and bears. Simultaneously, over the three hour time period, the observer recorded bear presence, fishing attempts, and the number of fish caught or scavenged by each bear. The data from these in situ observations will be compared against camera data, to determine how effective the cameras are at monitoring bear activity.

Remember

There are electric fences and critter gitters for loan from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Office in Haines.

Mark Your 2015 Calendars

August 21-22: Celebration of Bears Fair
Going into Hibernation Reminder

Please RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP to the Alaska Chilkoot Bear Foundation.

Ball Caps: $20 (Sage, Blue, Khaki, Maroon, Grey, and Stone)
Long Sleeve Shirts: $20 (Navy Blue, Khaki, Black)
Short Sleeve Shirts: $18 (Navy Blue, Khaki)
Stickers: $2.00 (Black, Navy Blue, Khaki)

NEW: Metal Bear Cutouts
$40 (Plus Shipping Outside of Haines)

Order online or send an e-mail to: acbf@bearfoundation.org

Bear Tracts is published by ACBF, a volunteer run non-profit organization. We rely on your support and membership to help protect the Chilkoot River watershed for generations to come.

Partnerships for Harmony in Nature