

Two **grizzly bears**, including the first female in a decade, have been captured in the Bitterroot Valley before they could get into conflict with human food sources.

"We caught them at an old apple orchard in the area," Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Bear Manager Jamie Jonkel said on Tuesday. "That's what they were keyed into. We got them before they elevated any higher, like breaking into chicken coops or attacking a goat. That's why we wanted to get them out of there and collared."

The 230-pound male and 172-pound female appeared to be 2-year-old siblings that had been observed traveling together much of the summer. FWP biologists relocated them in a remote part of the Sapphire Mountains at the edge of the Welcome Creek Wilderness Area.

Jonkel said the state Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved the relocation site specifically for bears captured in non-conflict situations. That includes preemptive relocations like this incident, or grizzlies unintentionally caught in a wolf or black-bear trap that haven't otherwise been in trouble with people.

The grizzlies were first observed in the Potomac area northeast of Missoula. They were probably born in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, where about a thousand grizzlies inhabit the remote mountains between Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.

Jonkel said the two siblings started working their way south to forests around Turah and Bonner in August. They crossed Interstate 90 most likely through Milltown State Park, and then were spotted by a remote research camera on the MPG Ranch east of Florence.

"They crossed Highway 93 10-plus times," Jonkel said, "and that highway is very dangerous. People saw them at one verified crossing site, in the middle of a designated wildlife connectivity zone between Florence and Lolo."

Although the 5,800-square-mile Bitterroot Ecosystem on the Montana-Idaho border has been a designated grizzly recovery zone for decades, it still has no confirmed resident **grizzly bears** or an authorized release site for relocated bears. State officials approved the Sapphire site this spring in anticipation of increased grizzly exploration in the Bitterroot vicinity.

"As more and more grizzlies show up south of I-90, we're going to have to have continuing effort with agencies to find additional spots," Jonkel said. The female in this group is the first confirmed sow in the Bitterroot area since a grizzly known as Ethyl, which in 2012 made a newsworthy ramble from the Bob Marshall west to Kellogg, Idaho, and back through Lolo without getting in trouble or captured.

Black and **grizzly bears** can be found throughout much of the western half of Montana, so it is important to review bear safety tips and keep the areas around your home free from bear attractants to prevent issues for bears and people.

Around home, be sure to keep garbage indoors until the day of collection; remove bird feeders when bears are out and active; consider using electric fencing around chickens, garden areas and compost piles; and move other attractants such as pet food, dirty barbecue grills and ripe fruit indoors or into a secure building.

FWP and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service specialists work to help landowners and communities avoid bear conflicts. If you see a bear or sign near your residence that may result in a conflict, call your local bear specialist at the contact number found on FWP's website: fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/bear/contact. For more information on living, working and recreating in Montana's bear country, visit the FWP Bear Aware webpage at fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/bear/be-bear-aware.