

Historic & Contemporary Evidence for Grizzly Bear and Gray Wolf in Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve

In the early part of the Twentieth Century the two large carnivores, the grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) and the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), were known to occupy the lands now included in the monument and preserve. Both were probably extirpated in the local area prior to 1935.

Grizzly Bear

Specimens of grizzly bear have been collected from both the monument and the preserve. A summary of each follows:

One grizzly was collected by Luther J. Goldman in June of 1923 on Bear Park. Bear Park is an 1100 acre kipuka in the southeast portion of the Craters of the Moon Lava Field. Little information is available for this specimen other than that it was a male collected on June 5, 1923 and the skull is in the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History.

A second specimen in the Smithsonian was collected on June 5, 1921 by G.W. Bryson. According to the museum record it was a male bear collected in the South End of Laidlaw Park. The skull and pelt are currently in the collection of the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History.

Grizzly bones in the NPS museum collections at Craters of the Moon include bones collected in Bear Bonz Cave. Location is listed as Township= 4S, Range= 25E. This township is within the monument and preserve and is mostly on the southern portion of the Craters of the Moon Lava Field.

Additional grizzly bones were collected during an archeological survey in 1995 from a cave on the Grassy Flow near the visitor center. These bones are of unknown age and are currently in the NPS collection at Craters of the Moon.

Additional references to grizzlies exist. Luther Goldman relays reports of Grizzly bears in his Field Report for 1922 (Goldman 1922). These include reference to "frequently reported depredation by grizzly bears. These reports come from the country north of Minidoka. . . From Laidlaw Park . . . east of Carey." He also writes in this report "Some time ago I sent in the skull of a grizzly killed near Minidoka." (Goldman 1922). He also states that "In 1917 Mr. Carlos McIntosh, one of my hunters, killed a bear in the lava fields north of Minidoka. . . The animal was rather small and a dirty brindle color. I believe it was a grizzly, judging from the toe-nails and color.

Phillip Blossom states that a grizzly bear was reported seen on the lava of Craters of the Moon in 1915 (Blossom 1936).

One additional reference to bears and grizzlies comes from Stearns report of 1928. He states in his report that:

“The lava caves are favorite places for bear to hibernate, but the number that visit the area has rapidly decreased in the last decade. Mr. Era Martin reports that killed several grizzly and black bears in the area some time ago....During the investigation numerous bear dens were found in such caves as Sunbear Cave and Moss Cave. In these two caves shallow saucer-shaped bear beds were found in the ash on the floors. The wild parsnip on the cinder cones in the lower part of the Monument is their favorite food, and at the time of his early visits to the area the writer saw acres of these parsnips that had been pulled and dug by rooting bear.”

These varied reports suggest that grizzly bears were widespread in the area now encompassed by Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve. The bears may have even been common sites in Laidlaw Park and near the flow edges as recent as 1920 and survived in monument area as recent as the late 1920s.

Gray Wolf

Even less is known about the historical status of the gray wolf than for grizzly bears. A few records do exist for the preserve.

Four voucher specimens of wolves from Preserve lands are known. These were all collected by Luther Goldman and are currently housed in the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History. The location is given only as Bear Park 35 miles NE of Minidoka, ID. All of these were collected in June of 1923.

Historical records indicate that wolves were present and possibly even common in the area prior to 1900 (White et al. 1982). Following the reintroduction efforts in central Idaho in 1995, wolves have been moving into the area north and west of Craters. Radio tagged animals have been observed within 20 miles of the Preserve (Mack et al. 2002). Wolves have also been verified in at least 3 areas within 5 miles of the Preserve since 2001 (Rick Williams, personal communication 2003). Additionally, a single large black canine was observed in the Preserve in February 2004. Based on the track size and stride this animal was a highly probable wolf. The sighting was entered into the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's wolf sightings database as a probable wolf.

In early 2003 the alpha female from the Wildhorse Pack (in the Copper Basin area of the Challis National Forest) died. “Following B66's death the remaining pack members made extensive movements beyond the boundaries of their usual home range. They traveled as far south as Carey, Idaho;” (Mack and Hoylan 2003). The Wildhorse pack then disbanded with some animals dispersing to Western Idaho and the remaining animals were found using two areas in 2003 and early 2004. The Copper Basin group was using the historic range of the Wildhorse Pack while the Carey/ Craters of the Moon group was using the Pioneer Mountains northeast of Carey and just north of the Monument and

Preserve (Mack and Hoylan 2004). Mack and Hoylan (2004) list both of these groups as suspected packs with pairing unverified as of May 2004. Animals from either of these groups may account for reports of large canines Craters of the Moon since 2002.

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