



Bears of Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve

A summary of bear management in 2020 and 2021

Introduction

Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve (GBNPP) is home to both black (*Ursus americanus*) and brown bears (*Ursus arctos*). Bears not only provide important ecosystem benefits to GBNPP, but they also offer highly sought-after viewing opportunities for park visitors. GBNPP wildlife staff have monitored bear activity in the frontcountry and backcountry of GBNPP since 2006. Monitoring involves responding to bear sightings and hazing bears from people or buildings in the frontcountry (Bartlett Cove developed area), while also educating visitors on how to stay safe in bear country, recording incidents (a human-bear interaction involving conflict) and encounters (benign interactions) throughout GBNPP, and advising a multi-divisional GBNPP bear committee in making bear management decisions. For more information on the bear management program and research in GBNPP, see Lewis et al. (2020).



Highlights

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 had low visitation and backcountry use. One human-bear incident and one defense of life and property bear kill were reported during the 2020 season.
- Backcountry use rose in 2021 from 2020 as did the number of human-bear incidents. Bears seemed especially interested in kayaks with five incidents involving bears investigating or damaging kayaks.

2020

Frontcountry

2020 was a quiet year for bears and people in Glacier Bay. With health and travel concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation was low, and the Glacier Bay Lodge (GBL) remained closed for the season. A few black bears were observed in Bartlett Cove throughout the summer, mostly traveling through the area eating vegetation. At least one black bear sow with two cubs of the year was observed multiple times (Photo 1). Later in the summer, a sow with one cub was spotted, but it is unknown if this was the same sow who had lost a cub or a different pair. On a few occasions, bear management staff hazed bears to redirect them to travel along the beach rather than along roads or parking lots, but that was the extent of hazing that took place in the Bartlett Cove frontcountry during 2020.

Backcountry

In past years (2011-2019), an average of 5.67 incidents and 9.44 encounters were reported in the GBNPP backcountry per year, but in 2020, only one incident and one encounter were reported (Fig. 1). On a camping trip near the Ibach cabin in Reid Inlet on June 14, 2020, two VIS staff encountered a brown bear at close range that was not easily deterred. The bear was feeding on vegetation and ignored all attempts to haze it as it. The VIS staff threw rocks at the bear, which were ignored. Eventually the bear moved out of the area and the encounter ended without incident.

Late in the summer, during the coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) spawning season on the Bartlett River, an incident occurred between a brown bear sow with a yearling cub and a group of anglers. When first observed, the sow and cub appeared to be fishing ~1/4 mile

downstream from the anglers. The bears began to approach a group of four anglers. The anglers began to move away from the approaching bears, which appeared to cause the bears to gain speed towards the people. All 10 anglers in the area stopped fishing, gathered their gear, and grouped together. The bears then took a 15-20 ft charge (Photo 2) to about 20-30 ft away before stopping and eventually turning around and returning downstream and sniffing the bank where fish had been gutted 15 minutes prior. Bear management staff issued an advisory and posted flyers at Bartlett River trailheads alerting anglers about this incident. No other reports of this sow and cub were received.

2020 saw low backcountry and vessel use due to the pandemic (Fig. 2) so biologists took advantage of this unique opportunity to observe how wildlife in Glacier Bay might behave differently in response to lower visitation levels. GBNPP staff deployed 10 motion sensor and time-lapse triggered cameras in the frontcountry and backcountry to compare terrestrial wildlife activity in 2020 to 2017-2018, when a similar study was

conducted. Data analysis is ongoing, but anecdotal observations of bears along the shores of Glacier Bay in 2020 suggest that they appeared to be more skittish than in past years when boats passed or approached shore. It is plausible that the lower number of vessels in 2020 led to decreased habituation to boat noise, which may have caused bears to flee more frequently.

National Preserve – Dry Bay

On September 2, 2020 an incident occurred in Dry Bay which resulted in the death of a sow brown bear in Defense of Life and Property (DLP). A long-time Dry Bay bear hunting guide was on a hunt with two clients when they encountered a sow and two spring cubs that were fishing in the river. When the sow noticed the hunters, she charged. The guide instructed the clients to shoot the bear when he felt that the bear was not going to stop. The clients fired three shots, eventually stopping and killing the charging bear. The cubs fled the scene and were not seen again. GBNPP drafted a letter to the hunting guide recommending that all guides and clients carry bear spray and leave areas if family groups of bears are present to avoid having to shoot a defensive mother in defense of life and property.



Photo 2. A sow brown bear quickly approaching anglers on the Bartlett River on August 29, 2020 (photo courtesy of Kyle Bishop)

2021

Frontcountry

While the global pandemic continued into the summer of 2021, visitor use increased compared to 2020 and GBL was operational, though with limited capacity. A few bears were seen in the Bartlett Cove frontcountry throughout the summer, and most bears were observed eating vegetation along roadsides or travelling through the area. Bear management staff responded to a few bear calls, but minimal hazing was needed. Patrols were conducted through the GBL trash and housing areas throughout the summer to check for bear attractants (e.g., food, trash), and GBL and GBNPP staff were instructed to report bear sightings to the ARCC. Overall, GLB staff did a great job containing or removing all attractants. All of the bears seen in Bartlett Cove were black bears except for one brown bear

that was observed grazing on the side of the park road (~4km from park headquarters).

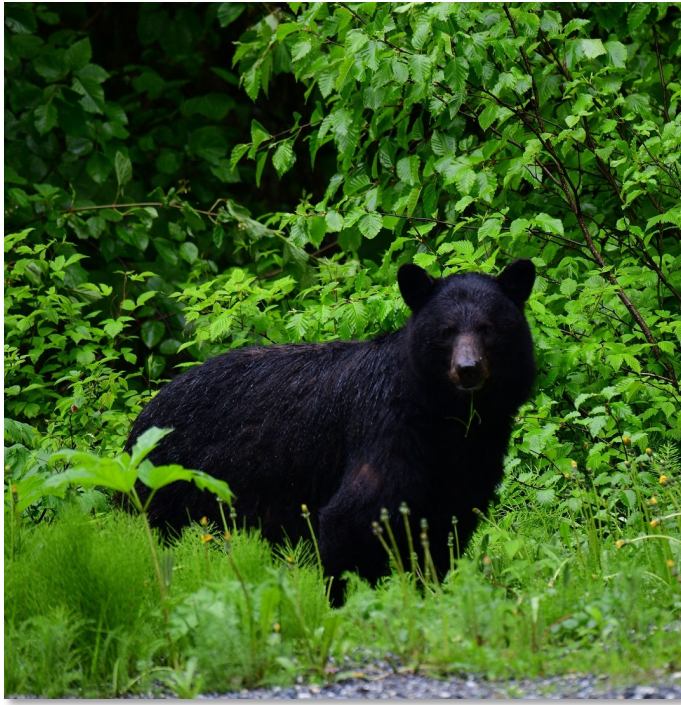


Photo 3. A black bear grazing on vegetation beside the headquarters parking lot on June 15, 2021. (NPS/Tania Lewis)

Backcountry

With the GBL daily tour /camper drop-off boat back up and running in 2021, backcountry travel increased back to near pre-pandemic levels (Fig. 2). In turn, the number of backcountry bear encounters ($n = 2$) and incidents ($n = 7$) increased (Fig. 3). The bears in the backcountry in 2021 seemed particularly interested in kayaks. There were five incidents over the summer involving bears interacting with kayaks that were on shore, and in two of those incidents, the kayaks were damaged. The first incident occurred in May, when six VIS staff took an orientation camping trip into the West Arm. While camped at Scidmore Cut, a brown bear emerged on the beach while the campers were eating and approached their tents and kayaks. VIS staff attempted to stop the bear by yelling but were unable to deter the bear as it investigated a tent and the kayaks. The bear left and then returned to interact with the kayaks again, this time damaging a life vest and water bladder. VIS staff decided to get an early pickup the next morning because of the persistent bear.

In June, two campers were asleep in their tent on the beach at the east entrance to Reid Inlet when they awoke in the night to the noise of a bear on their kayaks stored ~100ft away. When they checked

their kayaks in the morning, they found a 6" tear and additional bite marks in the side of one boat. The campers were able to tape the holes and to get to their pickup location.

Just over a week later, a separate group of campers were camped on the same beach in Reid Inlet when they awoke to hear a bear bumping their kayaks. No damage was caused to the kayaks, but a water bladder that was stored with their bear cans was bitten and torn. At the end of July, a camper in a group on the Gilbert Peninsula woke in the night to a bear pawing a dry bag full of clothes right outside their tent. The camper made some noise, and the bear ran off. When the group got up in the morning, they found that one of their kayaks had been damaged by a bear and some bear cans moved around. Finally, in September, a group of kayakers were portaging gear through Scidmore Cut. As they were moving their gear, a brown bear emerged and wrestled with their kayaks, ignoring all attempts to scare it off. Eventually the bear moved off, and the campers packed their kayaks and left. During each instance where gear was damaged, bear management staff sent out an advisory for VIS staff to remind campers to keep their gear, including kayaks, under their control.



Photo 4. A sow and brown bear cub on Gloomy Knob (NPS/Tania Lewis)

In addition to bears' interest in kayaks over the summer, there were several instances of persistent bears that campers found difficult to deter. In June, a group of campers encountered a brown bear in Stump Cove who investigated them and their gear. The bear did not respond to campers yelling and would not leave the area. Campers stood their ground while packing their kayaks to leave. In Reid Inlet, a brown bear swatted some bear cans and began grazing on vegetation and moving towards campers. Campers tried to deter the bear by making noise but had no success. The bear was not aggressive but was not wary of humans at all. Similarly, a group of campers encountered a brown bear near their tent in Hunter Cove. The bear was at close range and was not deterred by noise, causing the campers to pack their gear and leave the area.

Three carcasses were reported in the backcountry as bear attractants near the beginning of the summer. A bear carcass was reported near the mouth of Rendu Inlet which was fed on by wolves (*Canis lupus*). A guided group of kayakers reported a bear feeding on what appeared to be a moose calf (*Alces alces*) carcass at the mouth of McBride Inlet. Additionally, there was a report of a bear feeding on a bear carcass in Reid Inlet. Bear management staff went to Reid

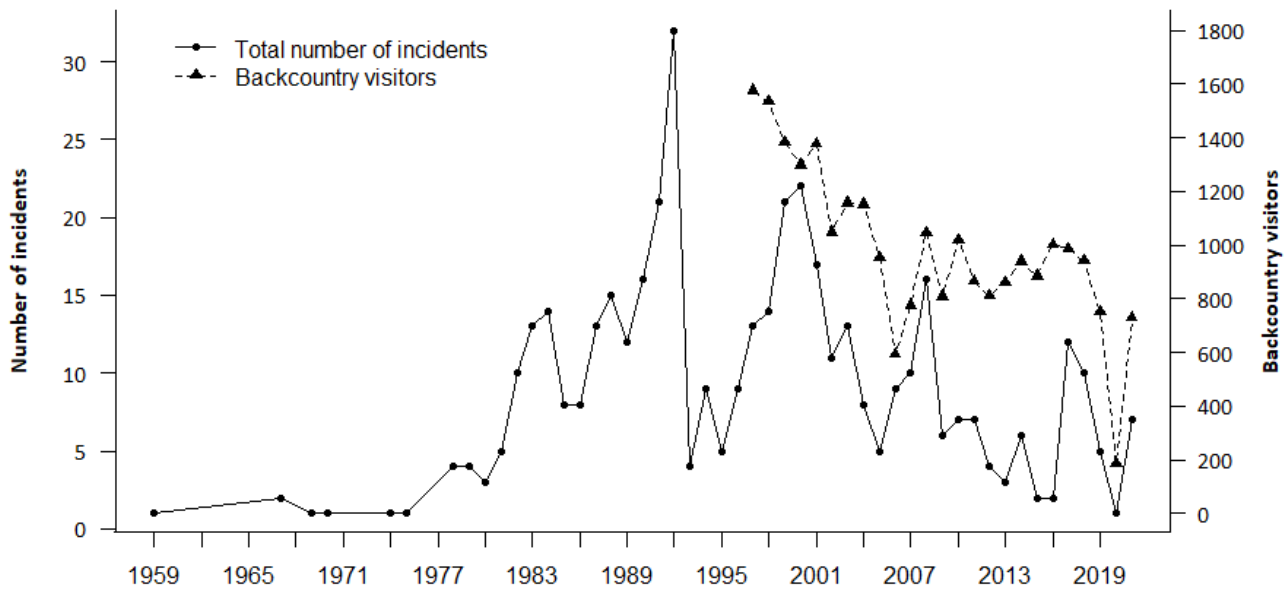
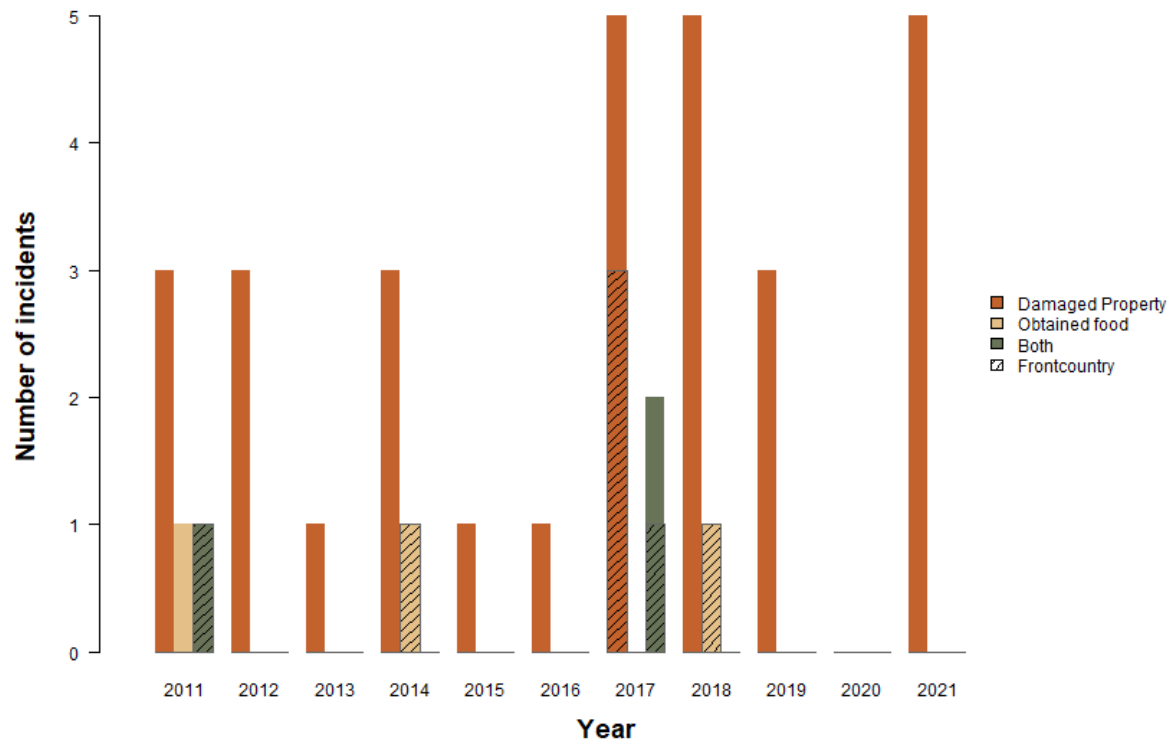
Inlet to investigate and did not find a carcass, but instead found a mating pair of brown bears.

Gustavus

During the summer of 2021, at least two subadult brown bears were observed regularly around Gustavus, especially on the golf course and beach areas. These bears were occasionally observed together and separately. They are likely the same bears who have been observed with their mother for the past few summers in Gustavus. The bears appeared to be habituated to humans and became attracted to the fish carcasses and compost that had been dumped at the Gustavus boat harbor and dock. A few other brown bears and many black bears were also observed in Gustavus throughout the summer.

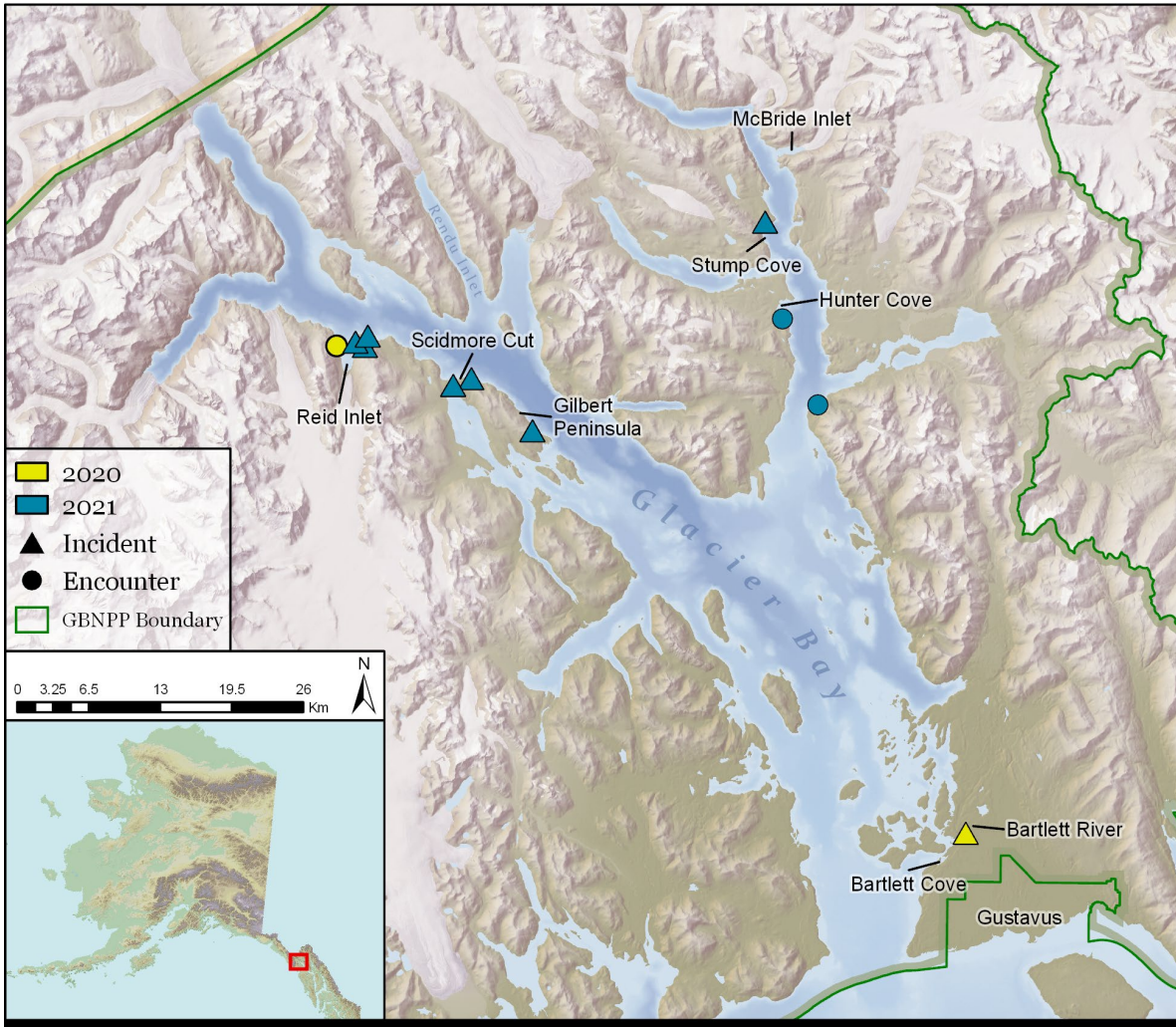
National Preserve – Dry Bay

In July and August, anglers reported multiple instances of brown bears and wolves obtaining fish out from set gillnets on the East Alsek River. GBNPP Law Enforcement rangers conducted aversive conditioning on the bears using hazing cracker rounds and all-terrain vehicles. The aversive conditioning appeared to be successful, as the bears did not return to the gillnets after multiple days of conditioning.



Bear Incidents and Encounters in Glacier Bay 2020-2021

Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Literature Cited

Lewis, T.M., A.E. Stanek and K.B. Young. 2020. Bears in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve: Management, monitoring and research 2010-2017. Natural Resource Report NPS/GLBA/NRR—2018/2134. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.

More Information

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Acknowledgements

We thank GBNPP staff and members of the public for reporting bear sightings throughout the summer. Thanks to GBNPP law enforcement rangers for assisting with hazing and aversive control and to the ARCC staff for dispatch.

Suggested Citation

Young, K.B. and T.M. Lewis. 2021. Bears of Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve: A summary of bear management in 2020 and 2021. National Park Service Resource Brief, Gustavus, Alaska.