

NEWS LOCAL

Gizzly Bear scat project set to begin

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Area residents will be gathering bear scat as part of the Hinton Foothills Research Institute's Bear Scat Project.

Hunters, trappers, and other area residents will be looking for more than animals this hunting season.

Several Albertans, including Edson and area residents, will be participating in the Hinton based Foothills Research Institute's Bear Scat Challenge. The challenge requires individuals to collect bear scat, which will then be analyzed for a myriad of factors including genealogy telling them if the bear is already in the organization's data base and helps inform researchers about the bear's home range, along with the bear's species and sex.

The pilot project started out with an overseas flavour, said Sean Kenney, Foothills Institute communications and extension program lead.

“The program is based on a lot of work that’s been done in Scandinavia.

Meetings for persons interested in the project were held in Edson, Hinton, Drayton Valley and Rocky Mountain House, areas that touch on Bear Management Area Three where the study will be conducted.

Program participants will be given scat kits, which will contain vials, gloves and sticks. A small sample of scat on a stick is enough for researchers to analyze, said Kinney.

Participants can download an app for their smart phone, which should be available within the week. The kits will be available at Fish and Wildlife offices in the region.

The bear scat project is eliciting large amounts of discussion on social media and via word of mouth, Kinney said.

“There’s a fair bit of chatter going on about it.”

The last population survey for grizzly bears in Bear Management Area Three was conducted in 2004.

The app allows a participant to identify the area they are in and allows them to download the scat sample to research officials. The app works even in cases where cell phone coverage is not available.

If an individual does not have a cell phone, project officials can outfit them with a small GPS logger. The GPS device is good for individuals who spend extended time in the outdoors, like trappers and sheep hunters. The GPS method means project participants will have to log some information manually.

Scat collection will take place until snow covers the ground and scat can no longer be located, said Kenney. This is also the time when bears go into hibernation.

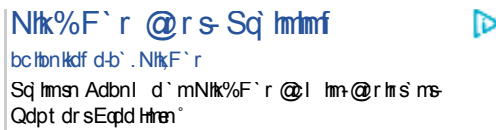
“Scat will be collected until you can’t find it anymore.”

Discerning grizzly bear scat from black bear scat can sometimes be tricky.

“It’s not easy. It depends on what the bears are eating and the time of year,” Kenney said.

The Foothills Research Institute will be working with labs in B.C. and in Norway.

For more information in the Grizzly Bear Scat and Citizen Science Pilot Project check out www.grizzlyscatapp.ca



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