

Moraine Lake Area Trails 2001: Access Update

This season, Restricted Access will continue to be evaluated as a bear management option in the Moraine Lake area to help protect both people and bears. Restricted Access means that hikers must travel in a group of six or more when a resident bear is in the Moraine Lake area. Minor refinements have been made for this season:

- ◆ A Bear Warning is now in effect for the duration of the season.
- ◆ If implemented, the status of Restricted Access will be reviewed when seasonally important bear food sources begin to decline in late summer.
- ◆ The Moraine Lake Highline trail will not be affected by Restricted Access area this year. Instead, a seasonal closure to all users on the upper-most section adjacent to the lake will come into effect when fruit-bearing shrubs ripen in mid to late summer.



Important Backcountry User Information

Climbers or scramblers accessing routes where the approach or descent is under Restricted Access must be in a group of six or more. Approaches and descents for climbs immediately adjacent to the Rockpile and Lakeshore trails *not likely* to be affected by Restricted Access, include:

- ◆ Access to the Tower of Babel via the Rockpile trail
- ◆ Access to the Neil Colgan Hut and surrounding peaks via the Lakeshore trail and connector trail to the Perren or Schiesser routes, and
- ◆ Other peaks between Mt. Babel and Wenkchemna Pass that are approached via the Lakeshore trail and the peaks further west via the Wenkchemna Moraine/Glacier.

Cyclists, the Moraine Lake Highline trail will no longer fall under Restricted Access. Based on an analysis of documented biker-bear / hiker-bear conflicts in North America and local bear habitat, and a subsequent review of management options for this trail, the upper section will be closed annually to all users during berry season in mid to late summer.

This allows grizzly bears to forage undisturbed and keeps people safer. Be prepared to turn around at the closure. The feasibility of a short connector trail from this point to the road will be reviewed this year. Check with Lake Louise Information Centre staff and trailhead signs for closure dates and important information.

Traditional Bear Warnings and Closures are still possible. Biking in a bear aware manner when the trail is open remains critical: *slow down, stay alert and scan ahead!*

Backcountry campers in Paradise Valley must practice stringent bear aware camping. Under Restricted Access, the campground will be closed for public safety, and **horse users** in the Paradise Valley must travel with two or more riders.

Why is Restricted Access being used?

In 1995, an adolescent grizzly bear began using the popular Moraine Lake area as part of its home range. This area includes Larch, Eiffel, Consolation and Paradise Valleys, and the Valley of the Ten Peaks.

As the result of frequent exposure to high numbers of people in the area, the young bear's wary behaviour changed and it became bold around people; it became human habituated. Following several serious human-bear encounters, Area

Closures lasting from five to ten weeks were required in 1996, 1997 and 1998 to protect both people and the bear.

In 1999 and 2000, Restricted Access was tested as a means to allow access, but in a way that maximizes public safety and minimizes further habituation of this bear. Restricted Access means that access is restricted to hiking groups of six or more when a bear is in the area. This group size was chosen since a group of six or more has never been attacked by a bear.

Is 'Restricted Access' working?

Overall, users of the Moraine Lake area continue to be very supportive of Restricted Access, seeing it as a means to allow access in a way that helps reduce bear-human conflict and the need for an Area Closure. In 1999 and 2000, there were fewer sightings of the grizzly bear and a decrease in human-bear conflicts.

Last year, the majority of backcountry visitors to the area did not feel their experience was affected by Restricted Access, while one quarter felt it affected them in a positive way. It appears that Restricted Access increased people's bear

awareness and use of safety precautions. More people knew about Restricted Access before getting to the trailhead than did in 1999. As well, compliance was greater and increased the longer Restricted Access was in place.

Nevertheless, we need to further increase compliance to minimize the risk of human-bear encounters. Parks Canada staff will continue to survey backcountry users to evaluate the social and operational effects of our bear management strategy.

What's ahead for this season?

❑ BEAR WARNING

We expect the Moraine Lake grizzly will again use habitat in the Moraine Lake area this season. To reinforce that a greater chance of encountering a bear exists in this area, a Bear Warning is now in effect for the duration of the hiking season. All backcountry users need to practice bear safety protocols at all times.

All bears are dangerous and deserve respect: never approach or feed a bear.

Under this Bear Warning we ask that hikers *voluntarily* travel in a large group, preferably of six or more. By hiking in a large group, there are more eyes to watch for bear sign and a greater collective ability to prevent a bear encounter. Through human scent and sound, a large hiking group is more likely to be perceived by a bear at a greater distance. This gives the bear a chance to move off and away from a trail, and may reinforce warier avoidance behaviour. Should an encounter still occur, it is **vital that the bear perceive a tight group** and not individuals or couples spread out along a trail. There is strength in numbers: your group should intimidate and give a bear pause.

❑ RESTRICTED ACCESS

Backcountry wardens will increase patrols of the area to monitor for the presence of the bear. Once the bear begins to forage in the area, Restricted Access will come into effect. It will remain in place until the berry crop begins to decline. At that point, the risk of bear-human encounters and the need for continued Restricted Access will be evaluated.

To help reduce the chance of a bear encounter, Restricted Access legally requires hikers to hike in a tight group of six or more in the following areas: Consolation Lakes, Larch Valley, Sentinel Pass, Wasatch Pass, Eiffel Lake, Wenkchemna Pass, Sheol and Paradise Valleys. The Lakeshore and Rockpile trails at Moraine Lake *do not* fall under Restricted Access.

❑ CLOSURE

Should the risk of human-bear conflict be evaluated and found higher than acceptable, an Area Closure will be implemented. Restricted Access is not a replacement for a Closure; if warranted, an Area Closure will preclude the use of Restricted Access.

Not just about one bear

Parks Canada's mandate is to maintain healthy, self-sustaining populations of native plant and animal species for the appreciation and understanding of future generations. Grizzly bears are a vital part of the Rocky Mountain ecosystem and their presence indicates a healthy ecosystem for many other species.

Our management goal is to prevent the Lake Louise area from becoming a drain on the local and regional bear population (a mortality sink), as it has in the past. We need to support a stable bear population that can persist well into the future. To do this, we need to reduce human-caused bear mortality in Banff National Park to less than one bear per year. On-going social and ecological research will help us monitor and adapt management actions to this end.

The grizzly bear population in the Central Rockies ecosystem, which includes Banff National Park, is stressed and vulnerable to decline due to increasing human activity both outside and within the mountain national parks. The population here has the lowest reproductive rate of all grizzly populations studied in North America. This is partly because habitat is scattered and patchy in quality on the eastern slopes of the Rockies. Banff National Park is half rock and ice; green space is precious.

To feed on high quality seasonal plant foods in the valley bottoms, and possibly to avoid dominant bears who favour more remote areas, some bears are forced to use habitat fragmented by human activity and development. These tend to be female bears who have cubs, and adolescent bears striking out on their own. They are challenged to use habitat and move through the landscape without bumping into people.

Frequent exposure to human activity and development causes a bear to lose its wary behaviour around people. This is a concern because it results in a bear becoming bolder and bolder around people and human developments such as campgrounds and townsites. This altered behaviour puts these bears at greater risk of dying a human-caused death: they are run over on our highways, or railway, or become public safety risks and are destroyed. Research has shown that habituated grizzly bears are three times more likely to die a human-caused death.

For a population to be self-sustaining, births must balance deaths. Until the early 1980s, both black and grizzly bears suffered high human-caused mortality in national parks related to poor garbage management practices. The park



population appears to be recovering from this high mortality, but cannot yet be considered secure. The estimated population of grizzly bears in Banff National Park is approximately 60. About 16 of these are adult females. The Lake Louise area is currently home to about one third of them; female offspring tend to establish home ranges adjacent to their mother's. The long-term survival of these bears and their cubs is very important to the health of the park and regional grizzly population.

Adult male grizzly bears also live in the Lake Louise area. The Moraine Lake grizzly has never been captured; it may be a male. Male grizzly bears have much larger home ranges than do females. Their ranges tend to overlap with or are adjacent to several female bear home ranges to allow access to mates. Home ranges are 'amoeba-like' geographic areas anchored by an individual bear's concentrated activity around seasonal food sources, den sites, and other life requisites -- and its ranking in the bear social world.

As a habituated bear, **the Moraine Lake grizzly is a bear at risk**. Actions to curtail habituation are required. If further serious conflict occurs between this bear and people, it may have to be destroyed. Human-caused mortality is cumulative and results in a high mortality rate for the population.

Relocating a bear may be used as a last resort, but is not a solution. Current research indicates relocated bears tend to wander as if lost and get into trouble elsewhere; have conflict with resident bears in the new area; or simply return to their familiar home range and continue down the slippery slope of habituation. Other bears occasionally use this area as well, and are likely to establish it as part of their home range should the Moraine Lake grizzly bear no longer occupy it.

The Moraine Lake grizzly bear still has a chance to remain in the ecosystem, but only if we change the way we use the area it has chosen for its home range. To increase public safety and to prevent further habituation of this bear, we need your support.

Restricted Access Safety Protocols

Travel in a tight group of six or more

- ♦ statistically, single hikers and small groups have a greater risk of a bear encounter. It is critical that group members stay **close together** at all times; everyone should be able to see and easily speak with each other.

Make noise

- ♦ use your voice to let bears know you are there and give them a chance to avoid you

Stay alert

- ♦ if you see a bear or fresh bear sign (tracks, diggings, scat, torn logs), *leave the area*

Keep your dog on leash

- ♦ dogs can harass and bring an agitated bear back to you

If you come across a dead animal

- ♦ leave the area immediately and report it to Park Wardens

Report all bear sightings

- ♦ Lake Louise Warden Office: 403.522.1220 or Visitor Centre: 403.522.3833

Consider carrying bear spray

- ♦ recognize its limitations and know how to use it

Read our pamphlets “*Keep the Wild in Wildlife*” and “*Bears and People*”

- ♦ they contain detailed wildlife safety information

Ways to stay informed

To get a current park trail report, bear safety publications, or more information about the Lake Louise area:

- visit or phone our Visitor Centres in Lake Louise (403.522.3833) or Banff (403.762.1550)
- visit our web site (see ‘recreation’): www.parkcanada.gc.ca/banff
- phone: 403.760.1305 (trail report recording)
- listen to Banff Park Radio 101.1 FM for trail reports on the half hour; also on audio at www.friendsofbanff.com

Vista: Lake Louise Bus Service

From June 26 to September 5, 2001, Vista will provide frequent bus service to both Moraine Lake and upper Lake Louise. If you have a place to park in the Lake Louise area (at your hotel, hostel, campsite or residence), please take advantage of this service to help reduce traffic and parking congestion at Moraine Lake and upper Lake Louise. Relax and enjoy the scenery with Vista! A valid national park pass gives you unlimited use. Detailed Vista information and a schedule can be obtained at the Lake Louise Visitor Centre and Campground, at any of the local accommodations, or from our web site. Vista: Lake Louise is a pilot project to explore and evaluate public transportation options.

Banff National Park Human Use Management Strategy

Parks Canada, in consultation with a human use advisory group, is in the process of developing a human use management strategy for Banff National Park. The 1997 Banff National Park Management Plan is currently undergoing its five-year review and provides the foundation for the human use management strategy. Public consultation will be an important part of this process.

Your comments about current management actions taking place in the Lake Louise area are most welcome.

Superintendent

Parks Canada: Lake Louise, Yoho and Kootenay
Box 213 Lake Louise, AB T0L 1E0