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# **UAF** researchers spy on grizzly bear south of Fairbanks

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Tim Mowry/tmowry@newsminer.com | 9 comments



Photo courtesy of Knut Kielland

# Spring grizzly

Tracks are seen from where a bear jumped the bank down on the Tanana River earlier this month

FAIRBANKS — University of Alaska Fairbanks wildlife researchers got a bit of a surprise when they went to check on some traps they're using to catch lynx and coyotes for a snowshoe hare study in the Bonanza Creek area, just south of Fairbanks, two weeks ago.

A grizzly bear had come in and tripped two of their traps, which are rigged with alarms to alert researchers when they catch an animal.

"It came around a couple of times," said UAF researcher Knut Kielland, who managed to get a fuzzy image of the bear on a trail camera he set up.

The bear tripped one of the traps April 4, and technician Karl Olson went to check on it. He came back and told Kielland it looked like a bear had tripped the trap, based on the tracks he saw. He snapped a picture of the bear's tracks in the woods and on the Tanana River and reset the trap, figuring the bear had left the area.

Two days later, however, another trap alarm was tripped, and this time Kielland went to check on it with his dog team. He was mushing down the trail with five dogs when he spotted bear tracks leading down the trail.

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"At first, I thought it was a black bear, because the tracks weren't very big," Kielland said.

But upon closer inspection, Kielland positively identified it as a grizzly. At that point, Kielland, who was using snares with a stop on them to live-trap coyotes and lynx, pulled his traps.

"I didn't want to catch a bear," he said.

That's also when Kielland put up a trail camera at the trap site. When he returned five days later, the camera was knocked down but it did contain a picture of what appears to be a brown bear walking away from the trap that was taken April 8.

"It's a little surprising but nothing extraordinary," Kielland said, noting that it's been a cold spring. "It might have been hibernating up in the hills or in the Rosie Creek burn."

Kielland's is the first — and so far only — bear sighting that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Fairbanks has received in what has been a cold, snowy spring.

With the weather warming up and snow starting to melt, more bears should be waking up soon, ADFG spokeswoman Cathie Harms said.

"The cold weather has kind of slowed things down, but it would be pretty surprising if we don't start seeing more bears soon," she said.

For people living outside town, it wouldn't be a bad idea to take bird feeders down and pick up around the yard with snow beginning to melt, Harms said.

"Getting rid of things that would attract bears to your yard is not a bad idea," she said. "Bird seed, garbage, dog food, livestock food, compost, dirty barbecue grills.

"Anything that smells edible they will go after," Harms said. "There are a lot of things bears will eat that people don't think of as food."

Contact staff writer Tim Mowry at 459-7587.

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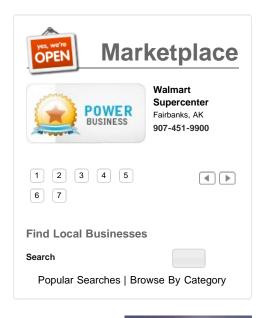
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