

2013 P.I.C.A Grant Summary
"A Health Assessment of Black Bears in Mississippi"
Christine Hoskinson

On July 14th, 2013 I traveled to Beulah, Mississippi to begin my 2013 P.I.C.A. grant project. My goal was to determine the health status of a small population of black bears in Bolivar County, Mississippi. I would be working with students from Mississippi State who conduct field work for the MS Black Bear Project on behalf of the MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

My first week on site (July 14th- July 21st) was an exciting and interesting learning experience. Nick Fowler and Brent Bowman, both MS State students, immersed me in the fine art of "bear trapping" and sought to teach me the tricks of the trade. I learned how to set snare traps and the importance of the location of them. Setting snare traps sounds simple enough but the thought that goes into the location and technique of setting it is much more complex. I also learned where and how to set culvert traps and bait stations.

During my first week, we were fortunate enough to catch four bears (this is a lot!). The first capture was a yearling male that they had trapped previously that summer in a culvert trap. This time we caught him in a snare. Although, he had already been worked up that summer, we had to dart him to safely remove him from the trap. While he was anesthetized, Nick explained their protocol for bear work ups and I was able to obtain my first blood sample. Our second capture was a mature female recapture, meaning she had been trapped and collared in a previous year. She received a complete workup which included TPR readings, PE, biomorphic measurements, check of collar and ear tags, and blood collection.

Our third and fourth captures were on the same day and they were both un-collared bears. This is rare and exciting! The first bear was a mature female who had a previously obtained injury to her right front elbow. It looked like an old fracture that had mostly healed but there was a wound with an old rope in it that we removed. Other than being slightly thin, she was in good condition and the immobilization went smoothly. The second bear was a young adult female in good condition. Her immobilization was also uneventful.

Not only was I fortunate enough to participate in four bear captures, I was also immersed in the culture and history of the Mississippi River Delta. I met and spoke with many land owners whose cooperation and interest is vital to the success of the bear project. I also, unfortunately, experienced a severe case of poison ivy that we believe I contracted after touching the fur of the first bear we caught, which in 90 plus weather, did not make working in the field any easier.

My second week (July 28th-Aug 4th) was much less proliferative in bears. Although we had occasions of bears on camera and at bait stations we did not capture any bears that week. I was fortunate enough to accompany Nick and Brent on a telemetry flight. This entails attaching the radio telemetry antennas to a small single prop plane, then going up to listen to the different radio frequencies of collars on the bears and try to determine their location, marking it on a GPS

device. I also participated in establishing a camera survey. This was another method being used to try and estimate the bear population of the area.

Overall, the experience was rewarding and educational. The blood samples that were collected still need to be processed and analyzed before a comprehensive health assessment is available. I will hopefully be able to return to MS this winter and participate in den checks. We will potentially collect additional blood samples at this time or during the 2014 summer trapping season. This project has facilitated a working relationship with MS State which could benefit both organizations in the future.