



Bringing the Adventure and Science Communities Together



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ASC and the Sierra Club's Military Families and Veterans Initiative Search for Evidence of Grizzly Bears in the Tobacco Root Mountains of Montana

October 12th, 2012 - Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation (ASC), has successfully concluded their second annual bear tracking initiative. Bringing nearly 50 military veterans and community members from as far as California and New York to Montana's Tobacco Root Mountains on a search for grizzly bears, the group successfully collected more than two-dozen samples that will be sent to the lab for DNA testing. Grizzly bears have been under serious pressure in the last few years. Changes in climate and habitat have reduced important food sources and the bears have begun to look for new locations with enough resources to survive long winters. ASC chose this location for their second bear tracking initiative because there has been anecdotal evidence of grizzlies in the Tobacco Root Mountains of Montana - an area where grizzlies used to live, but have not been documented since the 1930s. Local wildlife biologists are interested to know if grizzlies are back. ASC's outings expose participants to a whole new side of wilderness exploration which will give their future outdoor endeavors a greater purpose. "Our expeditions change the way people see the outdoors. After our outings, they are able to find the subtleties that indicate how animals have moved through the world around them," explains ASC's founder Gregg Treinish.

During weekend outings, participants camped and scoured the ground, trees, and deadfall for scat, hair, scratches, and chew marks that might indicate the presence of one of the iconic bears. Rebecca Skeldon, coordinator of the Bear Aware Program for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, spoke with participants about bear research and stressed how valuable the data collected will be to effectively manage the area. "The work that

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ASC and their volunteers performed on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest provides more boots on the ground to help with our effort to confirm the presence of grizzly bears in new areas of their range,” says Skeldon. “Programs like this one create citizen scientists who observe the world critically, taking field notes and avoiding assumptions without evidence,” she adds. Brandi Adamski is a military veteran who decided she had to make the trek from Ohio after hearing about the program at a Sierra Club event. After three days of learning to slow down in the woods and focus on details that she normally would breeze by, Adamski began to feel an important sense of accomplishment, “Once I finally began finding scat and hairs and rub trees the trip transformed into something more meaningful. I think if you aren't aware of why it's important, finding evidence might still be thrilling but lack this awesome sense of purpose, which ASC's outings provide.” Tim Williams, another veteran who participated in the tracking weekends was excited by the opportunity these trips extend to veterans, especially for creating an important support system, “These experiences can be helpful because we veterans can see certain struggles our peers are going through. We may have been through similar experiences ourselves and are in a position to directly support our brothers and sisters in a non-invasive environment.” Williams felt the trips also created a comforting and positive environment for veterans and non veterans to interact and make connections they may never have been able to otherwise.

The decision to partner with the Military Veterans and Families Initiative for the second bear tracking initiative came from a desire to provide military veterans with the chance to explore areas they worked so hard to protect. Stacy Bare, the director of Mission Outdoors, acknowledges the value this unique program can create, “This ASC program provides our veterans with the recognition that they fought for this land and for the grizzly bear as much as anything else in their country. We want our veterans to recognize there is still much value in the service they provide. This country still needs and wants their skills, leadership, and experience.” Including veterans added an important dynamic for each weekend trip as groups of people with very different backgrounds worked together to identify potential evidence of grizzlies and collect data.

Over three weekends ASC volunteers were able to collect more than two dozen scat and hair samples to be analyzed in a lab. Whether or not the DNA evidence is actually grizzly, the three groups of adventure scientists were able to participate in important scientific research that will impact the management of the Tobacco Roots in the coming years. The skills they acquired will also stay with them their whole lives, and veteran or not, they will always be able to journey into the wilderness with purpose. If the samples do turn out to be that of grizzly bears, it

would provide managers with the necessary information to protect the Tobacco Roots from ongoing development that could threaten bears in the range. For more information on ASC and their bear tracking programs please visit <http://www.adventureandscience.org/trackbears.html>.

About Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation

Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation was founded in January of 2011 with the understanding that many people traveling in the outdoors genuinely want to do more for the places they visit but often struggle with how to help. ASC exists to bridge this gap by pairing adventure athletes already traveling to some of the earth's most difficult-to-reach places with the scientists who need information from these areas. ASC also has the goal of creating unique and innovative learning experiences about science while also saving the scientific and conservation communities millions of dollars in data collection costs. For more information visit www.adventureandscience.org

About the Sierra Club Mission Outdoors

Mission Outdoors is Sierra Club's initiative to provide access to outdoor experiences to people of all ages and backgrounds. Through direct programming, advocacy and education, Mission Outdoors aims to give all Americans a meaningful outdoor experience. Read more at <http://www.sierraclub.org/missionoutdoors>

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