



Foothills Research Institute Photo

Found bear scat? ... yeah, there's an app for that

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If a grizzly bear defecates in the woods and somebody eventually collects it, does that make a difference?

The answer to that now is yes, according to the Foothills Research Institute (FRI), which is finalizing an app for smartphones in the latest evolution of citizen science to complement work currently being done by local researchers for a new grizzly bear population estimate.

Sean Kinney, communications and extension program lead for FRI, said the program will be touching base with area hunters, fishers, outdoorsmen and trappers to participate in the study.

"It's the first time this has been done anywhere, so we have a lot of eyes on us internationally watching to see how this goes," said Kinney,

adding that they will be contacting local groups like Fish and Game and the archery club directly, but that participation is open to anybody. "By being able to tap into citizen scientists it will give us a more broad sample and definitely provide a better picture of bear numbers in our region."

Participants will, basically, download a free app onto their smartphones and pick up vials at predetermined locations. Then, when they are out in the woods doing what they do, they are asked to collect any potential bear scat into the vials and then scan the vials with their phones, automatically cataloguing the date, place and time the sample was collected.

Participants also have the option of inputting notes regarding the sample collection. Then, when they return to civilization, participants drop the samples off at predetermined locations.

There will be an app ready for Android users by early August and then an app for IOS users a

short time after, with the idea of holding a public information session prior to the kickoff of sheep hunting season in late August.

Within the bear scat app is also a "sight a bear" function, which will allow participants to record the location of a grizzly bear sighting, again with the option to take a photo or transcribe notes.

"We will use this data to help refine our capture and collar activity and make the efforts more efficient," Kinney said, adding that collared bears provide researchers with all sorts of important data about their activity and movements.

The study area for the app is south of Hwy. 16 and north of Hwy. 11. Researchers are currently undertaking a new grizzly bear population study to follow up the baseline study completed in 2004.

Anyone looking to participate in the new citizen science program can contact Sean Kinney at (780) 865-8329 or skinney@foothills.ca.