

Quinault Bear Study Aids Management

The black bear figures prominently in Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) culture. In the past, QIN members would travel from the Olympic Peninsula to as far as The Dalles, Oregon, to trade items at a large spring gathering of many tribes. QIN members traded black bear meat, hides, as well as tools and art created from the bear which were prized by other tribes, according to Justine James, QIN tribal member and cultural specialist.

To this day, the bear retains a special place in QIN culture and life. In fact, the nation's school sports teams are called the Chitwins, the Quinault name for bear.

With thousands of acres of good bear habitat on the nation's lands, the numbers of bears have flourished to the point where they have begun to cause a problem. The bears cause damage estimated at more than \$1 million each year to commercial trees owned by QIN and individual tribal landowners.

Black bears are omnivores, meaning they will eat almost anything ranging from plants to small rodents as well as young elk and deer. In early spring when food supplies are most limited, one of the bear's favorite foods is the inner bark layer of young conifer trees. While satisfying a need for carbohydrates, the damage caused by the bear to get at the bark often kills the tree. In areas of high bear populations, tree damage can become severe.

The QIN has started a multi-year study of bears on its lands to better assess numbers and habits. For the study, bears are trapped in culvert traps, or are stalked and darted with a tranquilizer. One of eight volunteer veterinarians then surgically inserts a transmitter in their body cavity. The 4-inch-long, torpedo-shaped radio allows wildlife biologists to track the bear's movements. "This will allow us to determine home ranges and feeding patterns. We also want to see if bears and elk are present at the same time on the prairies during elk calving season. We have concerns that the black bears



Leroy Black, Quinault, holds an intravenous drip for veterinarian Karen Hook while she inserts a radio transmitter in a black bear's stomach cavity with assistance from Scott Harris, tribal wildlife technician. *Photo: D. Preston*

may be preying on elk calves," said Grover Oakerman, QIN wildlife biologist. The ongoing study is funded by the QIN.

courage the guides to hunt in those places." Hunting is under way this spring; another hunt is planned for this fall. — *D. Preston*

The nation has taken several steps to try to minimize the bear damage to trees including providing feeding stations containing a kibble made especially for bears. The stations have helped, but only in limited areas because of the numbers of bears and the size of the reservation.

To further reduce bear damage the QIN has authorized pre-approved QIN members to guide a limited number of non-Indian bear hunters on the reservation. "This is a very controlled hunt," said Oakerman. "The non-tribal member bear hunters will be screened and must hunt with a designated QIN guide. We are trying to reduce bear damage in very specific areas by removing bears from high damage sites. We provide maps showing where bear damage occurs and en-

Biologists Track Quinault Elk Herds

To better manage the elk population on tribal lands, the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) has embarked on a new phase of an ongoing study that will provide more detailed data about elk herd populations, their overall health and habitat needs.

As part of the study, an 8-inch, bullet-shaped radio transmitter is inserted in a captured elk's stomach by way of the mouth while the animal is sedated. Blood is drawn for health analysis and a tooth removed to determine the animal's age.

More than 40 elk in different herds are being equipped with transmitters as part of the project. "This effort gives the QIN a more complete picture of elk population size, herd numbers, harvest rates, natural mortality rates, migration timing, home ranges and identification of critical habitats such as calving areas," said Grover Oakerman, QIN wildlife biologist.

The ongoing study is funded by a \$75,000 Bureau of Indian Affairs grant and QIN. Along with 13 QIN volunteers and staff, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife provided 11 experienced volunteers that are members of the Kitsap Bow Hunters. In addition, biologists from the Makah Tribe and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission have assisted with the project. — *D. Preston*