

# Bear researcher in 'dream job' attacked by grizzly

May 22 2018, by Matthew Brown

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A government wildlife worker who recently landed her dream job researching grizzly bears in a Montana mountain range is recovering from a bear attack that left her with a fractured skull and other serious injuries.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seasonal field assistant Amber Kornak was attacked on May 17 while working alone near a stream in the Cabinet Mountains, agency spokeswoman Jennifer Strickland said.

While being mauled, the 28-year-old Kornak managed to reach a canister of Mace-like bear spray and ended the attack, inadvertently spraying herself in the process.

She then walked to her work vehicle and drove to find help, according to Strickland.

Working with grizzlies had been a longstanding career goal for Kornak, who is recovering at a hospital in Kalispell following surgery for the skull injury and from severe cuts to her head, neck and back, said Jenna Hemer, a friend who spoke with Kornak following the attack.

"She's obviously passionate about all wildlife, but her dream and her primary focus was to work with grizzly bears," Hemer said. "Last I spoke with her was yesterday and she's making great strides but it's going to be a long recovery."

Kornak was working at the time of the attack on a genetic study that requires collecting grizzly hair samples. The hairs can be found on trees or other objects that grizzlies rub against, and are used to analyze the animals' DNA.

Officials speculated that noise from nearby Poorman Creek may have allowed the animal to close in on Kornak without her noticing.

She was apparently following the right protocols for working in grizzly bear country, including carrying bear spray and a satellite communication device that she used to call 911 just after the mauling, Strickland said.

There is no formal rule about government workers travelling alone in bear country, Strickland said. But experts say traveling in groups of three or more dramatically decreases the chance of an attack.

The Cabinet Mountains are home to an estimated 50 grizzlies, protected across the region as a threatened species under federal law. The range also has black bears, typically a less aggressive species.

Officials have not said which type was responsible for the attack that remains under investigation by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

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