

USDA Forest Service Update

September 2008



SUBJECT: Grizzly Bear Conservation and Recovery

SUMMARY: The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) continues to work with many partners to recover the grizzly bear, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The grizzly bear occurs in and around six recovery zones in the lower 48 states. Current activities in each recovery zone are summarized below. The Yellowstone Ecosystem population has recovered and was delisted in April, 2007.

BACKGROUND: The grizzly bear occupies about two percent of its historic range in the continental U.S. The USFWS listed the species as threatened in 1975. A Recovery Plan was approved in 1982 and revised in 1993. Management oversight of grizzly bear recovery is performed by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, a group of high-level managers from State and Federal agencies that was chartered by the under-Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture in 1983. Grizzly bears occur in four States (ID, MT, WA, and WY) and four Forest Service Regions (1, 2, 4, and 6). The Forest Service is the largest land manager within grizzly bear habitat as measured by acres managed. Cooperators in grizzly bear management include the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Bureau of Indian Affairs, four State Fish and Game agencies, the Provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, Parks Canada, numerous Indian Tribes, County Governments, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations.

Yellowstone Population – The Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for amendments to the Bridger-Teton, Targhee, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Gallatin, Custer, and Shoshone National Forest plans was released April 2006. Since the Yellowstone grizzly DPS is delisted, the amendments implement the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy adopted by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, which replaces the Yellowstone portion of the existing Recovery Plan. The final rule for delisting was released on March 29, 2007.

- The Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy includes the following elements: (1) Population Standards and Monitoring, (2) Habitat Standards and Monitoring, (3) Management and Monitoring of Grizzly Bear/Human Conflicts, (4) Information and Education, (5) Implementation and Evaluation, and (6) Biology and Monitoring Review.
- The Conservation Strategy is the product of over a decade of collaboration between the six National Forests, two National Parks, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Tribal governments, County Governments, and the States of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. The Conservation Strategy includes the State Grizzly Bear Management Plans for Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. Yellowstone and Teton National Parks have modified their regulations to be consistent with the Strategy.

Northern Continental Divide Population - The grizzly population in the Northern Continental Divide (NCDE) ecosystem appears healthy and is expanding its range outside the recovery zone in all directions. The Forest Service is cooperating with USGS to complete a DNA population census for the 8 million acre NCDE, including the recovery zone and occupied habitat outside the recovery zone. USFS is cooperating with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and USFWS on a long-term monitoring project to identify grizzly bear population trends in the area.

Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk Range Recovery Zones - These small populations have been determined by USFWS to warrant uplisting to endangered status. Population estimates appear to be slightly up in the Selkirks and slightly down in the Cabinet-Yaak, but inconclusive in both instances due to broad confidence intervals. New DNA research indicates the Selkirk population may be isolated from other Canadian populations. A few bears occupy habitats between the Cabinet-Yaak and NCDE. Road access management direction in these two ecosystems was recently litigated, and the Forest Service prevailed on all counts in District Court. Additional funding to implement recovery actions is a critical need in these two ecosystems.

North Cascades Population - The North Cascades population is also warranted for uplisting to endangered status. Few bears exist in the North Cascades. Conservation efforts in the U.S. are concentrating on public information and education and cleaning up sites that could be attractants to bears.

Bitterroot Ecosystem- The USFWS completed an EIS and made the decision to reintroduce grizzly bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem in 2000. The Department of Interior put the decision on hold, and no action has been taken to implement it. A grizzly bear was shot by an Idaho black bear hunter in 2007 in the northern portion of the ecosystem due to mistaken identification. DNA analysis revealed that the bear came from the Selkirk ecosystem. Agencies and NGOs are active in public education and making major progress in cleaning up sanitation problems in the ecosystem.

To view a compilation of various Forest Service grizzly bear accomplishments, go online at: <http://wwwnotes.fs.fed.us:81/wo/wfrp/WFWPartnerships.nsf/report?openpage&id=84>

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