

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
REMOVAL OF THE YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM POPULATION
OF GRIZZLY BEARS FROM THE LIST OF THREATENED AND
ENDANGERED SPECIES**

3/22/07

Q1. Why are grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) being taken off the Endangered Species list and what does this mean?

Robust population growth, coupled with State and Federal cooperation to manage mortality and habitat, widespread public support for grizzly bear recovery, and the development of adequate regulatory mechanisms has brought the Yellowstone grizzly bear population to the point where a change in status is appropriate.

Q2. Who will be responsible for managing Yellowstone grizzly bears after delisting?

The population will be managed by the states of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho and the NPS and USDA-FS and protected through other regulatory mechanisms including the Conservation Strategy, NPS management plans, USDA-FS management plan amendments, State grizzly bear management plans, and over 70 State and Federal laws, statutes, and regulations already in place. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) will be responsible for monitoring the maintenance of demographic standards and will report these monitoring results annually. Should there be deviations from the population or habitat standards in the Conservation Strategy, the IGBST has the lead on producing a biology and monitoring review that details why the standards have not been met, the impacts on population health of this deviation, and recommendations on how to achieve these standards. This management will be a cooperative effort involving all of these agencies through a committee called the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Coordinating Committee. This committee will implement the Yellowstone Conservation Strategy, which is the management document that defines and specifies management and monitoring post-delisting.

Q3. How will delisting the Yellowstone grizzly bear population affect the status of other grizzly bear populations in the lower 48 states?

This proposed action will not affect the status of other grizzly bear populations in the lower 48 states. They will retain their threatened status under the ESA.

Q4. The recovery plan identified a goal of 500 bears in the Yellowstone population. Is a population of 500 bears really a genetically viable population?

Recent scientific studies (Miller and Waits 2003) indicate that the population is not threatened by genetic inbreeding problems and that viability of the Yellowstone population will not be affected by genetic factors in the foreseeable future. If genetic diversity does decrease in the future, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks will transplant 1-2 bears every 10 years into the GYA population. The best available scientific data indicate that this will effectively combat any negative effects genetic isolation may have on the Yellowstone population.

Q5. Will genetic characteristics of Yellowstone grizzly bears be monitored after delisting?

Yes. Genetic material from mortalities and bears trapped for research will be collected and analyzed to determine if any bears from other ecosystems have entered the Yellowstone population. If no movement of bears from other areas is documented over the next 20 years, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks will transplant 1-2 bears into the Yellowstone area every 10 years to assure there will be no threat from a decline in genetic diversity.

Q5. What steps are being taken to assure the protection of grizzly bear habitat upon delisting?

The Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area includes habitat standards that ensure protection of sufficient habitat to support a viable grizzly bear population in the foreseeable future. These habitat standards will be implemented by Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, the 6 affected national forests, and the BLM. The overall goal for habitat management within the 9,200 square mile primary conservation area (former recovery zone) is to maintain or improve habitat conditions as of 1998. This means that the number of developed sites, livestock allotments, and total amounts of secure habitat will be maintained at or improved upon conditions present in 1998. In addition, several other habitat parameters will be monitored which include such things as distribution and abundance of major natural foods (army cutworm moths, winter-killed ungulate carcasses, cutthroat trout, and whitebark pine seeds).

Q6. Why/how was 1998 chosen as the habitat baseline?

The relationship between bears and habitat is extremely complex and difficult to quantify. Recognizing that grizzly bears are opportunistic omnivores and that a landscape's ability to support grizzly bears is a function of overall habitat productivity, the distribution and abundance of major food sources, the levels and type of human activities, grizzly bear social systems, bear densities and working with a random factor, there is no known way to deductively calculate minimum habitat values. The Service instead inductively selected 1998 levels because it was known that these habitat values had adequately supported an increasing (4-7% per year) Yellowstone grizzly bear population throughout the 1990s and that levels of secure habitat and the number and capacity of developed sites had changed little from 1988 to 1998.

Q7. What habitat issues will be monitored after delisting?

Several habitat parameters will be monitored after delisting. These include: 1) the amount of secure habitat in each bear management unit; 2) road densities; 3) the number and type of developed sites; 4) the number and capacity of livestock allotments; 5) habitat effectiveness values, as calculated by the Cumulative Effects Model; 6) the abundance of winter-killed ungulates; 7) the abundance of cutthroat trout and non-native lake trout; 8) whitebark pine cone production, presence of whitepine blister rust fungus, presence of mountain pine beetles, and presence of mature whitebark pines that may be genetically resistant to blister rust; and 9) grizzly bear use of army cutworm moths.

Q8. Are there threats to major natural foods that could affect Yellowstone grizzly bears?

Currently, both whitebark pine and Yellowstone cutthroat trout are facing threats that could affect their abundance and distribution. The most severe threats to whitebark pine include mountain pine beetles and whitepine blister rust. Climate change is producing conditions that favor increased attacks by pine beetles on whitebark pine and other tree species. It is expected that as climate change continues whitebark distribution will decline, particularly on the west side of the Yellowstone ecosystem. A general decline in the Yellowstone cutthroat trout population in Yellowstone Lake has been evident in recent decades, probably due to the combined effects of lake trout predation, whirling disease, and the negative effects of drought on cutthroat trout reproduction. There has been an accompanying decrease in grizzly bear fishing activity on streams that flow into the lake. The decline in cutthroat trout does not have a significant effect on the grizzly bear population because less than 10 percent of the Yellowstone grizzly bears eat cutthroat trout, and those that do use this resource for only a few weeks each year, and adult grizzlies that fish in spawning streams only consume, on average, between 8 and 55 trout per year. Furthermore, adult females, which are the most important determinants of population growth rates, generally depend on this food to a much lesser extent than adult males as most of the bears that eat fish are males.

In general, grizzly bears are opportunistic omnivores that will make behavioral adaptations regarding food acquisition. Diets of grizzly bears vary among individuals and years, reflecting their flexibility in finding adequate food resources as necessary. Annual whitebark pine cone production is naturally unpredictable so bears have alternate food sources during poor cone production years. Mattson et al. (1991) hypothesized that grizzly bears routinely sample new foods in small quantities so that they have alternative options in years when preferred foods are scarce. In other areas such as the NCDE Recovery Zone, where grizzly bears historically relied heavily on whitebark pine seeds, the population has continued to increase and thrive since the 1990s despite severe declines in whitebark pine communities in the last 50 years. However, the range of foods eaten by grizzly bears is different in NW Montana than in Yellowstone with berry consumption being much higher in NW Montana, while meat consumption is much higher in the Yellowstone ecosystem. These differences in the range of foods consumed by bears in these 2 areas makes direct comparisons of the impacts of the loss of whitebark pine uncertain. Also, grizzly bear use of cutthroat trout has varied dramatically in the last three decades, most likely corresponding to fluctuations in the trout population, but the Yellowstone grizzly bear population continues to increase and expand.

Q9. Will there be oil and gas development inside the Primary Conservation Area (PCA)?

Although 3 percent of Forest Service lands inside the PCA are open to surface occupancy for oil and gas development, standards agreed to in the Conservation Strategy for secure habitat and developed sites do not allow for any increase in road densities or the number of developed sites. This will preclude any development from occurring in these areas unless some existing use on public lands in the same habitat subunit is first eliminated. As existing uses and developments are few and almost all recreation-related (campgrounds or trailheads) or management-related

(USDA-FS ranger stations), oil and gas development is unlikely to take precedence over retaining such sites and facilities in the same subunit.

Q10. How much oil and gas development outside the PCA will occur once grizzly bears are delisted?

Less than 19 percent (1,240 sq. mi.) of suitable habitat outside the PCA on USDA-FS land is open for surface occupancy for oil and gas development. The primary impacts to grizzly bears associated with oil and gas development are increases in road densities and site disturbance, with subsequent increases in human access, grizzly bear/human encounters, and human-caused grizzly bear mortalities. Only a small portion of this total land area will contain active projects at any given time, if at all.

Q11. What will the Forest Service do to evaluate and mitigate the impacts of oil and gas development outside the PCA?

The USDA-FS classifies the grizzly bear as a “sensitive species,” which means that any action that could potentially negatively affect grizzly bears will require a biological assessment and public involvement in any decisions. This assessment evaluates the potential impacts to grizzly bears and describes mitigation requirements to address any impacts.

Q12. Will grizzly bear delisting in the GYA affect current public land uses such as timber harvest?

In suitable grizzly bear habitat outside the PCA, restrictions on human activities are somewhat reduced. However, USDA-FS, BLM, and State wildlife agencies will continue to carefully manage the habitat, monitor bear/human conflicts in these areas, and respond with management as necessary to reduce conflicts to account for the complex needs of both grizzly bears and humans.

Q13. Can people shoot grizzly bears that are threatening livestock after delisting?

No. Because all three States classify grizzlies in the GYA as game animals, state laws limit the ability of citizens to shoot or injure grizzlies. All violations of State law will be subject to State enforcement just as they would for any other game species (elk, black bear, cougar). This is similar to the current situation where a majority of prosecutions for illegal grizzly killing are under State laws and regulations. Should mortalities occur, they will count against the mortality limits set in the Conservation Strategy so these mortalities will be strictly controlled in order to stay below the mortality limits. Outside of the national parks, grizzly bear/livestock conflicts will be addressed by State wildlife managers as per the direction in the Conservation Strategy.

Q14. Will there be a hunting season for grizzly bears?

It is possible that the States of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana will create a limited hunting season for grizzly bears in the GYA. Such a hunting season would occur only after the best

available scientific data indicate that the Yellowstone grizzly bear population can sustain a pre-determined level of take and all mortalities from hunting would be counted against the mortality limits. Hunting of females with cubs would not be allowed. Because hunting mortalities must remain within the mortality limits of sustainable mortality as agreed to by the States, hunting will never threaten the Yellowstone grizzly population.

Q15. Will poachers be prosecuted after delisting?

Yes. Because all three affected States (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming) will classify the grizzly bear as a game species if delisting occurs, it will be illegal to kill a grizzly bear without first obtaining a proper license. The States will prosecute anyone caught poaching a grizzly bear just as they would for any other game species (elk, black bear, cougar). Today, although grizzly bears are still listed, the majority of prosecutions for illegal grizzly killing are under State laws and regulations.

Q16. Will mortalities increase if grizzly bears are no longer protected by the Endangered Species Act?

Because of revised methods for establishing sustainable mortality limits, careful monitoring of all sources of mortality, and cooperation between Federal and State agencies, a significant increase in grizzly bear mortalities after delisting is not expected.

Q17. Will nuisance bear mortalities be counted and monitored?

Absolutely. Monitoring of nuisance bear mortalities is a fundamental component of total mortality management. Mortalities from all sources, including management actions, will be applied against the total sustainable mortality limits.

Q18. Who will be responsible for managing problem bears?

Inside Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, problem grizzly bears will be handled by NPS biologists. Outside of the National Parks, problem bears will be managed by State wildlife agencies.

Q19. How will decisions about problem bears be made?

The Conservation Strategy and State plans describe protocols and guidelines for defining problem bears and making decisions about what management actions should be taken. Consultation among State wildlife agencies and Park Service biologists or Forest Service personnel will occur before decisions are made.

Q20. How will federal and state agencies work to minimize the number of grizzly bear/human conflicts?

Through continued information and education (IE) programs, the IE working group, which consists of personnel from the affected national forests, Grand Teton and Yellowstone National

Parks, the BLM, State wildlife agencies, and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, will work to reduce the human causes of most grizzly bear/human conflicts. In addition, the 6 affected national forests will append their forest management plans to include food storage orders in all suitable grizzly bear habitat and voluntary retirement of livestock allotments with recurring conflicts. There are also numerous non-government organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, and Sierra Club that work in the Yellowstone area to educate and inform people about how to coexist with grizzly bears. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) will annually compile, review, and spatially analyze grizzly bear/human conflicts and mortalities to look for trends and patterns so that IE programs can be more effective.

Q21. Will linkage zone management continue once Yellowstone grizzly bears are delisted?

Yes. Efforts to maintain movement opportunities between Yellowstone and grizzly populations to the north will continue.

Q22. How will private land development be limited after delisting?

There are no Federal statutory limits to private land development. Private land development is regulated by counties and states. There are no specific private land development regulations associated with grizzly bears. All mortalities and conflicts on private lands will be reported and addressed annually by the committee of agencies implementing the conservation strategy and management plans.

Q23. Will the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team continue operating after delisting? Will their Annual Reports continue to be made available to the public?

Yes. The IGBST will continue to be the primary entity responsible for data collection and analysis pertaining to Yellowstone area grizzly bears. The IGBST will be responsible for preparing scientific reports on any deviations from the population and habitat standards in the conservation strategy and presenting these reports and recommendations to the managers to fix the problem.

Q24. How will off-road vehicle use be managed inside the PCA?

All trails that allow ORV use are included in calculations of total road densities. These areas are not considered secure habitat. Habitat standards in the Conservation Strategy require no net decrease in secure habitat inside the PCA, thereby limiting the total area that ORV use may affect.

Q25. What population parameters will be monitored?

The overall population goal set forth in the Conservation Strategy is to maintain the Yellowstone grizzly bear population at or above 500 animals. The IGBST will continue to monitor the number of females with cubs and their distribution within the Greater Yellowstone Area, survival rates for all sex and age classes, all sources of mortality, cub production, distribution, and movements. This information will be used to calculate the total population estimate and exactly

how much mortality the bear population can withstand. The total population estimate will also be used to calculate the total allowable sustainable mortality the population can incur. The Study Team will monitor grizzly bear mortalities from all sources, including human-caused deaths, natural deaths, and undetermined causes to confirm that sustainable mortality limits are not exceeded. In their annual reports, the Study Team will analyze the spatial distribution of both mortalities and grizzly bear/human conflicts.

Q26. What is adaptive management and how will it be applied to Yellowstone grizzly bear management?

Adaptive management is a flexible management strategy in which managers monitor the results of management practices and habitat and population data and respond as necessary with management changes.

Q27. Can the standards in the Conservation Strategy be modified?

Yes, but only by using the best available science and involving the public in the decision process. This can be done by the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Coordinating Committee as a whole, not by individual agencies. Any change in the Conservation Strategy would be completed as per p. 63 of the Conservation Strategy. For example, the methods to estimate population size and sustainable mortality levels may change in the future as new scientific approaches become available or new data are analyzed that might require such a revision. The Study Team would produce a peer-reviewed report evaluating any new scientific data or methods and present this report, along with recommendations, to the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Coordinating Committee. Any such recommendations would then be open to public comment. After considering public comments, the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Coordinating Committee would decide whether to append the recommended revisions to the Conservation Strategy through a majority vote. No changes in the population management systems will be made unless these changes are based on the best available science and the changes have been subject to peer review and an open public process.

Q28. What is a biology and management review and what triggers it?

A Biology and Monitoring Review examines habitat management, population management, or monitoring efforts of participating agencies with an objective of identifying the source or cause of failing to meet a habitat or demographic goal. The Study Team will conduct the Biology and Monitoring Review and provide a report and management recommendations to the management committee to address the deviation. The Review will be completed and made available to the public.

Q29. What is a status review and what triggers it?

The Service can conduct a status review under the ESA at any time. The Service might consider such a review, independent of any outside group's suggestion, if the population showed signs of being threatened or endangered. A Biology and Monitoring Review might indicate such an issue. Additionally, we would conduct a 12-month status review if a petition to relist the

population is submitted that presents substantial data indicating that the Yellowstone grizzly bear population may be threatened by any of the five factors required for listing, as described in section 4(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act. The Service conducts such status reviews by carefully examining factors affecting the population and then determining if relisting is warranted, warranted but precluded by higher priority actions, or not warranted.

Q30. Under what circumstances could grizzly bears be relisted under the ESA?

The Strategy signatories have agreed that if there are deviations from any population goal or habitat standard, the Study Team will carry out a Biology and Monitoring Review. The Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Coordinating Committee will respond to the Review with actions to address deviations from habitat standards or, if the desired population and habitat standards specified in the Strategy cannot be met, then the Coordinating Committee will request or petition the Service for relisting.

Q31. How long will the Conservation Strategy remain in effect?

The Conservation Strategy is the ongoing management document once delisting takes place. It does not have a time limit and continues in place as coordinated management and specific standards for population and habitat need to be in place.

Q32. Will there be public meetings of management agencies post-delisting?

Yes. The Coordinating Committee, which will consist of representatives from the affected National Parks, National Forests, the BLM, the USGS Biological Resources Division, the three state wildlife agencies, the Shoshone-Bannock and Eastern Shoshone Tribes, and counties in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, will meet at least two times a year. Public notification of these meetings will be given, meetings will be open to the public, and the public will have the opportunity to comment at each meeting.

Q33. How will the new Forest Service planning regulations affect Yellowstone grizzly bears?

The Service has received written assurance from the Forest Service that, although the term “standard” will no longer be used when the affected national forests revise their forest plans, the on-the-ground effect will be the same and that any new forest plan revisions under the new planning regulations will not change the habitat standards adopted in the forest plan amendments.

Q34. How much money has been spent on recovering the Yellowstone population of grizzly bears?

State and federal agencies have spent approximately \$24 million over the last 26 years on Yellowstone grizzly bear recovery. This figure includes the research and monitoring efforts made by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team; habitat mapping work, sanitation work, and numerous resources invested by the U.S. Forest Service; advanced sanitation management by the

National Park Service; and bear management and public awareness campaigns by the state agencies.

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