



USDA Forest Service Update

August 2011

Subject: Grizzly Bear Conservation and Recovery

Issue: The U.S. Forest Service 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.

Key Points: Current activities in each recovery zone are summarized below.

Yellowstone Population – The Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for amendments to the Bridger-Teton, Caribou-Targhee, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Gallatin, Custer, and Shoshone National Forest Plans were released in April, 2006. The Yellowstone grizzly Distinct Population Segment was delisted effective April, 2007, but as a result of litigation, the Final Rule was set aside by the Federal District Court in Montana on September 21, 2009. Two similar Court cases relative to the Final Rule remain pending in the District of Idaho.

On August 9, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) appealed the Federal District Court's decision to overturn the delisting of the Yellowstone population to the Ninth Circuit Court. A ruling on the appeal is expected in late 2011 or early 2012.

The decision on the Forest Plan amendments takes effect only for a delisted population. However, the approved Conservation Strategy continues to emphasize coordination and cooperative working relationships in applying the best available science to grizzly bear management. The Conservation Strategy is the product of over a decade of collaboration between the six National Forests, two National Parks, FWS, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Tribal governments, County governments, and the States of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana.

Northern Continental Divide Population - The grizzly population in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) continues to expand its range outside the identified recovery zone. The Forest Service cooperated with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to complete a DNA population census for the eight million acre NCDE in 2004. With a minimum population size of 765 grizzly bears at that time, the NCDE currently appears to hold the largest population in the lower 48 states. The Forest Service is working with USGS, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, FWS, and others to establish sustainable long-term population monitoring.

Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk Populations - These small populations have been determined by USFWS to warrant uplisting to endangered status. Hair samples have been collected and a full genetic analysis is being conducted. Road access management direction in these two ecosystems was recently litigated, and the Forest Service prevailed on all counts in District Court. Augmentation of grizzly bears into the Cabinet Mountains from the NCDE population is continuing when available and appropriate. Additional funding to implement priority 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. Photos taken in October, 2010 have confirmed the first verified sighting of a grizzly bear in the North Cascades ecosystem since 1996. 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 FWS 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 due to mistaken identification by an Idaho black bear hunter in 2007 in the northern portion of the ecosystem. DNA analysis revealed that the bear came from the Selkirk population. Agencies and NGOs are active in public education and are making major progress in sanitation in the ecosystem.

Background: The grizzly bear was listed as a threatened species 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 senior State and Federal agency leaders 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 manages the largest acreage of grizzly bear habitat. Cooperators in grizzly bear management include the National Park Service, BLM, FWS, 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.

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