

NEWS RELEASE

**USDA Forest Service
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401**



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Idaho Falls Open House

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSES WAYS TO MANAGE GRIZZLY BEAR HABITAT WHEN THE GRIZZLY BEAR IS DELISTED

Idaho Falls, ID—The Caribou-Targhee National Forest will host an open house regarding the draft amendment for amending Forest Plans if the grizzly bear is delisted on September 14 in Idaho Falls, Idaho at the Conference Room in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Headquarters, 1405 Hollipark Drive, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

The Forest Service has proposed some options for future management of grizzly bear habitat in the six national forests around Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, should the grizzly bear be taken off the threatened species list.

The agency has released a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) that looks at four options, with comments needed by November 12, 2004.

“If the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delists the bear, the Forest Service will need to have habitat management standards in place in the forest plans for six forests to ensure the recovered population is sustained. That’s what this DEIS is all about,” stated Jerry Reese, Forest Supervisor of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

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The six national forests are the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Custer, and Gallatin, in Montana; the Caribou-Targhee, in Idaho and Wyoming; and the Bridger-Teton and Shoshone National Forests, in Wyoming.

Together with Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, they comprise the “Greater Yellowstone Area.” “How we managed bear habitat over the last decade in the Greater Yellowstone has helped lead to the ‘recovery’ of the bear,” Reese said. “As an example, rules on food storage have limited the number of bears that have had to be destroyed because they became habituated to human foods. Food storage rules have also been fundamental in providing for human safety throughout this recovery effort. These habitat conditions, coupled with prudent management of nuisance bears by State Game and Fish agencies and the National Park Service, and assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have allowed the bear to reach ‘recovery.’”

In 2003, there were an estimated 500 to 600 grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Area, this double or triple the population since the bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Recovery Plan defines several population recovery objectives, which have been met since 1998.

In 2003, the states of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, along with the National Park Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed a “conservation strategy” for managing the grizzly bear into the future.

“Elements of the strategy are included in the DEIS,” said Reese. “The strategy includes maintaining habitat conditions as they were in 1998.”

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The four alternatives in the DEIS are:

1. No action, meaning current guidelines would remain in place and the bear would not be removed from the endangered species list.
2. Maintain the habitat conditions that allowed the bear to recover by incorporating the habitat standards from the grizzly bear conservation strategy into the six forest plans. This would include limits on expanding current activities and on new activities like campgrounds and roads. These standards would apply in the “Primary Conservation Area” (PCA), which is the same as the current recovery zone, the 3.5 million-acre core area considered the area necessary for maintaining the “recovered” grizzly bear population.
3. Incorporate more restrictive habitat standards for the PCA into the six forest plans.
4. Incorporate more restrictive habitat standards inside the PCA and a larger area that includes additional National Forest System lands within the Greater Yellowstone Area. The additional area outside the PCA is either currently occupied by grizzly bears or contains potential habitat and secure areas that could be used by bears in the future.

“The second alternative is our preferred alternative. The last two alternatives respond to some of the public comment that wanted greater protection or habitat standards extended to a larger area,” said Reese.

“Alternative 2, and Alternatives 3 or 4, would ensure that adequate habitat management standards are in place when the Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to remove the grizzly bear from protection under the Endangered Species Act,” he said. “When delisted, grizzly bear populations would be managed according to the conservation strategy and the state grizzly bear management plans for Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. We’re looking forward to hearing more about people’s thoughts on these alternatives so that we can be ready when the bear is delisted.”

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Five public open houses are planned in September. They will be located at the following areas:

- September 8 in Cody, Wyoming at the EOC Room in the County Courthouse from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.;
- September 9 in Alpine, Wyoming at the Alpine Civic Center from 4 p.m. 7 p.m.;
- September 14 in Idaho Falls, Idaho at the Conference Room in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Headquarters, 1405 Hollipark Drive, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.;
- September 15 in Bozeman, Montana at the Holiday Inn, 5 East Baxter Lane, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.;
- and September 16 in Billings, Montana at the Conference Room in the Custer National Forest Supervisor's Office, 1310 Main St., from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Additionally, Forest Service officials are available to explain the DEIS to groups. "We'll come to your community or organization's meeting," Reese said. Call public affairs offices at any of the six national forests to make arrangements. The phone number for the Caribou-Targhee National Forests is 208-524-7500.

The DEIS is available from the Internet at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/igbc/Subcommittee/yes/YEamend/gb_internet.htm.

Printed copies and compact discs with the DEIS are available from Caribou-Targhee National Forests, 1405 Hollipark Drive, Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401, or the Shoshone National Forest, 808 Meadow Lane Avenue, Cody, WY 82414, (307) 527.6241.

Comments should be sent by regular mail to R2 Grizzly Bear FP Amendments, c/o USFS Content Analysis Team, P O Box 22810, Salt Lake City, UT 84122-2810. Comments may be Faxed to 801.517.1021 or sent by email to r2grizzly@fs.fed.us.