



**Forest Plan Amendments  
For Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation  
For the Greater Yellowstone National Forests  
August 2004**

***Introduction***

On August 2, 2004, a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) was distributed for public and agency comments. The DEIS addresses how the six national forests in the Greater Yellowstone Area would manage grizzly bear habitat upon delisting, and proposes to amend the forest plans for those six forests.

***What is proposed in the Draft EIS?***

The Forest Service proposes to amend the forest plans for the Beaverhead, Bridger-Teton, Custer, Gallatin, Shoshone, and Targhee national forests to provide direction for management of grizzly bear habitat security, developed sites, and livestock grazing within the "Primary Conservation Area" for the grizzly bear (see attached map).

***Why is the Forest Service doing this?***

Efforts to recover the threatened Yellowstone grizzly bear population have led to an increasing population over the past 25 years. All demographic recovery goals were met in 1998. As a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends to remove the Yellowstone grizzly bear population from protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Last year, federal and state agencies responsible for grizzly bear management in the GYA reached agreement on how the grizzly bear population and habitat would be monitored and managed upon recovery and delisting. Habitat and population standards and monitoring protocols were documented in the *Final Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area* (Conservation Strategy). As a result, the Forest Service wants to update the management and monitoring of grizzly bear habitat to incorporate direction from the Conservation Strategy into Forest Plans.

The Forest Service needs to ensure adequate and consistent direction is in place for grizzly bear habitat protection when there is a change in the Yellowstone grizzly bear population's status under the Endangered Species Act. We also want to ensure the long-term recovery and conservation of Yellowstone grizzly bears.

***Key points***

1. Bear habitat is in good shape now—the Forest Service wants to keep it that way. There were between 500 and 600 grizzly bears in 2003. This is a successful result of several decades of interagency work with bear populations and habitat. These improved habitat conditions are an important reason why the grizzly bear reached and exceeded population recovery objectives.
2. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has the responsibility for removing a species from protection under the Endangered Species Act. When the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service delists the Yellowstone grizzly bear, the Forest Service needs to have bear habitat management standards in place in forest plans.
3. There are four alternatives in the draft EIS:
  - a. No action – Continue with the IGBC guidelines

- b. Proposed action and Preferred Alternative – Incorporate agreed upon standards from the Conservation Strategy and implement them in the area already considered important to the bears (the Primary Conservation Area or PCA). The Conservation Strategy was a 10 interagency effort that used best available science in its design.
  - c. Alternative 3 - Implement more restrictive standards in the PCA
  - d. Alternative 4 - Implement more restrictive standards in an area larger than the current PCA
4. For the Preferred Alternative, very little change is expected because this alternative would emphasize maintaining grizzly bear habitat in the same condition as in 1998.
  5. Upon delisting, the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming would manage grizzly bear populations according to the Conservation Strategy and their state management plans. The Forest Service would manage grizzly bear habitat, while the states would manage the grizzly bear population outside Yellowstone National Park.

**Details: the preferred alternative**

The preferred alternative includes a forest-wide goal, standards, and monitoring requirements. The forest-wide goal promotes the continued recovery of the Yellowstone grizzly bear population.

Forest-wide standards	Description
Secure habitat	<p>Maintain secure habitat at or above 1998 levels through management of motorized access routes. <i>Secure habitat is any area more than 500 meters from an open motorized access route or a gated motorized access route.</i></p> <p>Permanent changes to secure habitat require replacement habitat of equal quality in the same bear subunit.</p> <p>Temporary changes to secure habitat are allowed under specific rules...such as only one active project per subunit and active projects in a bear management unit cannot exceed 1% of the acreage in the largest subunit. <i>A project is defined as requiring new road construction or reconstruction or opening a restricted road in secure habitat.</i></p> <p><i>What does this 1% rule mean? Since a subunit averages around 180,000 acres, it means up to 4 ½ miles of road could be constructed that would temporarily reduce the secure habitat by 1800 acres. Within one year of project completion, all new roads would have to be permanently closed or decommissioned, and secure habitat restored.</i></p>
Developed sites	Maintain the number and capacity of developed sites at or below 1998 levels, with some exceptions. Mitigation is allowed using Application Rules. (Administrative sites for land management are excluded.)
Livestock	Do not create new livestock grazing allotments and do not increase permitted sheep numbers from the 1998 baseline, and phase out remaining sheep allotments as opportunities arise with willing permittees.

All standards apply only to the PCA, which is the same boundary as the grizzly bear recovery zone. Monitoring requirements in the preferred alternative include monitoring adherence to the above standards and monitoring changes in motorized access route density and habitat effectiveness.

**When will the amendments be implemented?**

The amendments will be implemented when the Record of Decision is signed. This will happen only when the Conservation Strategy is signed by all partner agencies, and the Final Rule delisting the Yellowstone grizzly bear population is published in the Federal Register. Until then, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines will stay in place.

**What are the effects of the preferred alternative?**

Alternative 2 is the preferred alternative and is the proposed action. Not much change is expected in management direction inside the PCA when compared with the no action alternative, which is current direction based on the 1986 Grizzly Bear Guidelines.

The preferred alternative would emphasize maintaining grizzly bear habitat in the same condition as in 1998 when all recovery goals for the bear were first met. The standards for the preferred alternative would apply only to the area inside the PCA.

**Secure habitat** would be maintained at the 1998 level; this would mean no additional permanent roading would occur without mitigation measures.

**Timber harvesting** could occur at present levels but large scale projects and/or smaller project that occur at the same time in the same area would likely not occur.

**Grazing** would continue at present levels, with a phaseout of the four remaining sheep allotments as opportunities arise with willing permittees.

**The number and capacity of developed recreation sites** would continue at or below present levels.

**Dispersed recreation** would not have any additional restrictions.

**Energy development** would be more restrictive than under present guidelines. Because there are no active leases inside the PCA and only 2.8% of the PCA allows surface occupancy, effects would be minimal. Future leases would have additional restrictions because of the limits on changes in secure habitat and developed sites.

**What are some of the effects of the other alternatives?**

Resource	Alt 1	Alt 2 (Proposed Action) for PCA	Alt 3 – for PCA	Alt 4 – for area larger than PCA
Long-term secure habitat within the PCA	2.5 million acres	2.8 million acres	3.0 million acres	3.0 million acres
Long-term secure habitat outside the PCA	3.1 million acres	3.1 million acres	3.1 million acres	5.0 million acres
Grizzly bear population	No change	Better long-term protection	Better short-term and long-term protection	Best long-term protection
Recreation – developed sites	No change	Capacity stays same as 1998 for 269 sites	No new sites or increased capacity for 269 sites; close sites with recurring human/bear conflicts	No new sites or increased capacity for 722 sites; close sites with recurring human/bear conflicts
Motorized routes	No change	Stays same as 1998	Closure of approx. 500 miles	Closure of approx. 1,900 miles
Snow machine areas overlap with den habitat	No change	No change	Closure of 600,000 acres (60%) in PCA	Closure of additional 1 million acres (28%)
Grazing	Sheep phaseout on 2 allotments	Sheep phaseout on 4 allotments	Close 4 sheep allotments	Close 79 sheep allotments
Oil and gas leasing	No change	Continue to allow surface occupancy on 2.8% of the PCA but with additional restrictions	Approximately 0.7 million additional acres not available for oil and gas leasing/exploration	Approximately 4.0 million additional acres not available for oil and gas leasing/exploration
Timber management	No change	No change likely, but limit on size and number of individual projects in an area	10% reduction in acres treated	33% reduction in acres treated

**Alternative 3** would reduce timber harvest by about half inside the PCA because of habitat restrictions; this means an overall 10 percent reduction for the GYA forests. No new recreation sites would occur and no oil and gas leasing would occur.

**Alternative 4** would also reduce timber harvest by about half where habitat standards are applied, and overall would reduce timber harvest by about one-third. Immediate phaseout of sheep would occur in both Alternatives 3 and 4, but effects would be much greater in Alternative 4 because of

the larger area to which this standard is applied. No new recreation sites would occur and no oil and gas leasing would occur in the larger area for Alternative 4.

**Alternatives 3 and 4, as well as Alternative 2** provide better long-term protection for the grizzly bear than the no action alternative, although the no action alternative provides better project level protection.

For **Alternative 1**, delisting would not occur because appropriate habitat standards would not be in place.

**Alternative 4** would provide the best protection of the grizzly bear but would have the most impacts on developed recreation, timber, grazing, and oil and gas.

**Where can I find the DEIS?**

At the following Internet Web site

[http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/igbc/Subcommittee/yes/YEamend/gb\\_internet.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/igbc/Subcommittee/yes/YEamend/gb_internet.htm)

If you want a hard copy or CD of the DEIS, you may contact Dave Cawrse at [dcawrse@fs.fed.us](mailto:dcawrse@fs.fed.us) or Susie Douglas at [spdouglas@fs.fed.us](mailto:spdouglas@fs.fed.us) or telephone 307.527.6241. Executive Summaries are also available.

**Where should comments be sent? What's the deadline?**

Email	<a href="mailto:r2grizzly@fs.fed.us">r2grizzly@fs.fed.us</a>
Hard copy mail	R2 Grizzly Bear FP Amendments c/o USFS Content Analysis Team P O Box 22810 Salt Lake City, UT 84122-2810
Fax	801.517.1021

The 90-day comment period is from August 13 to November 12, 2004.

**What are the next steps?**

The Forest Service will thoroughly analyze all the comments received. Any changes and edits in the alternatives and effects analysis will be incorporated into the "Final Environmental Impact Statement," which is planned for release in the summer of 2005.

A "Record of Decision" will be issued when the Final Rule delisting the Yellowstone grizzly bear population is published in the Federal Register.

**Where and when will the open houses be held?**

The following open houses have been scheduled:

September 8 in Cody, Wyoming at the EOC Room in the County Courthouse from 4 pm to 7 pm

September 9 in Alpine, Wyoming at the Alpine Civic Center from 4 pm to 7 pm

September 14 in Idaho Falls, Idaho at the Conference Room in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Headquarters, 1405 Hollipark Drive, from 4 pm to 7 pm

September 15 in Bozeman, Montana at the Holiday Inn, 5 East Baxter Lane, from 4 pm to 7 pm

September 16 in Billings, Montana at the Conference Room in the Custer National Forest Supervisor's Office, 1310 Main St., from 5 pm to 8 pm

The Forest Service is ready to go to any group's meeting and tell people about the DEIS. Please call Dave Cawrse at 307.527.6241 to make arrangements.

The six GYA national forests and the grizzly bear Primary Conservation Area (boundary for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3) and the Alternative 4 boundary

