

PRESS STATEMENT

Conservationists, Timber Industry Propose Grizzly Recovery Plan

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Missoula, Mont., July 20 -- A coalition of timber industry organizations and conservation groups have reached agreement on principles to guide the reintroduction of grizzly bears into the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area of Montana and Idaho. The agreement came after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) asked for comments on a proposed Environmental Impact Statement on bear reintroduction.

In a letter submitted to the USFWS, the Intermountain Forest Industry, the National Wildlife Federation, the Resource Organization on Timber Supply and Defenders of Wildlife called for reintroducing grizzly bears under the federal Endangered Species Act as an experimental population. By using this provision of the ESA, the coalition has proposed delegating authority for managing grizzlies to a citizens committee which would direct the reintroduction and recovery program.

"Our proposal would directly involve people from towns like Orofino and Hamilton in grizzly management and will show that we can recover endangered species without threatening the economic and social vitality of rural communities," said Seth Diamond, wildlife program manager for IFIA. "Grizzly bears and people can coexist; it's simply a matter of tapping into the knowledge and common sense of local communities to develop plans that prevent a bears versus jobs scenario."

"By using the flexibility of the Endangered Species Act, and by working with the timber industry, we can move grizzly bears back into some of the best habitat in North America," said Tom France, an attorney with the National Wildlife Federation. "We can also be innovative and learn if this type of cooperative approach can work in other situations involving wildlife management controversies."

The USFWS will release a draft Environmental Impact Statement this fall, and hopes to make a decision on the reintroduction proposal by next spring.

The Intermountain Forest Industry Association represents sawmills and corporate timberland owners in Idaho, Montana and other western States. R.O.O.T.S. represents loggers, sawmill workers and sawmills in central Idaho. The National Wildlife Federation is the nation's largest conservation education organization and works on a wide range of conservation and natural resource issues in the northern Rockies. Defenders of Wildlife is a national conservation organization that focuses on protecting and restoring native species and their habitats.