



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## NEWS RELEASE

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### PUBLIC TO REVIEW STRATEGY FOR MANAGING A RECOVERED POPULATION OF GRIZZLY BEARS IN THE YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM

Today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service invites the public to review a future strategy to guide state and federal land and wildlife management agencies as they ensure sustained recovery of the grizzly bear for generations to come in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

The Service's recovery plan for grizzly bears in the Yellowstone ecosystem requires a conservation strategy to guide state and federal agencies in managing and maintaining a grizzly bear population after the bears reach recovery and no longer need the protection of the Endangered Species Act. This strategy will be put in place when the grizzly is recovered and removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants.

Open houses will be held to provide information, answer questions and gather comments on the newly released Conservation Strategy on March 21 from 4:00 - 9:00 p.m. in Cody, Wyoming, at the Holiday Inn; on March 23 from 4:00 - 9:00 p.m. in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, at the Ranch Inn; March 28 from 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. in Bozeman, Montana and April 6 from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. in Idaho Falls, Idaho at the Inn at Cavanaugh's. Public comments on the strategy should be received by the Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University Hall, Room 309, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana 59812 by May 30, 2000.

Grizzly bear numbers in the Yellowstone ecosystem have increased from less than 200 in the years 1973- 1975 to a current estimated number of 400-600, and the population is continuing to increase. More than 200 cubs were known to be born in the Yellowstone area from 1996-1998. Grizzlies are reoccupying many areas outside the Recovery Zone, as designated in the Service's 1993 Revised Recovery Plan, where they have been absent for more than 40 years.

Representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, Department of Interior's National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's northwest and mountain-prairie regions and the states of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho worked together to develop a Conservation Strategy to monitor and maintain the grizzly population and its habitat in the Yellowstone ecosystem. The strategy uses the best currently available scientific methods to maintain the grizzly bear in the Yellowstone ecosystem, and will apply within a designated 9,209- square- mile Primary Conservation Area (PCA). The PCA is divided into 18 bear management units, which are used for habitat analysis. The area within 10 miles of the PCA boundary will also be used for population monitoring.

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Annual habitat and population monitoring, coordinated by the Yellowstone Grizzly Management Committee, will measure key indicators for meeting of habitat and population. To maintain these population thresholds and the future health of grizzlies in the Yellowstone ecosystem, the total effect of mortalities, genetic diversity, habitat and food availability and more will be monitored closely after recovery. The four major foods of grizzlies in the Yellowstone area — cutthroat trout, army cutworm moths, ungulate carcasses and white bark pine cones — will be monitored to ensure their condition and availability.

In addition, under the Conservation Strategy, bear-livestock depredations inside and surrounding the Primary Conservation Area will be monitored to make sure that these conflicts are resolved according to the protocol established in the strategy.

Development of private lands inside the PCA can lead to an increase in human-bear conflicts. Informing and educating private landowners about living in bear country will be key to managing a recovered bear population. Disposal of garbage, food storage and other activities that may attract grizzlies must be specifically managed. Options like voluntary conservation easements and habitat conservation plans are other ways for private landowners to help.

As hunter-related bear deaths are one of the main causes for bear mortalities in the Yellowstone ecosystem, the number of elk hunters and number of hunter-related bear deaths inside and surrounding the primary conservation area will be checked so that as situations change, management actions can be put in place that offer possible solutions to any problems.

If, for any reason, population or habitat criteria falls below target levels, a status review can be requested, and, if necessary, the grizzly can be placed back under the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

Also under public review recently were habitat criteria that will be needed to maintain a recovered grizzly bear population in the Yellowstone ecosystem. After these criteria are finalized by the Service, they will be appended to the Service's Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and included in the final Conservation Strategy. Draft habitat criteria are included in the draft strategy.

Copies of the Conservation Strategy are being mailed during the next two weeks. A copy of the strategy or a summary of this document can also be obtained on the Service's website <http://www.r6.fws.gov/endspp> or copies will be available at local libraries in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

The objective of any recovery program under the Endangered Species Act is to recover and delist the threatened or endangered species. Prior to delisting of any species, the population and demographic targets must be met and the Service must demonstrate that adequate laws and regulatory mechanisms will be in place to be reasonably assured that recovery status continues after the Endangered Species Act no longer applies. The Conservation Strategy does not delist the Yellowstone grizzly bear nor does it propose any such delisting; rather, the Strategy contains mechanisms for the bear and its habitat to remain healthy and recovered in the future.