IDAHO FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

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Idaho Fish and Game Commission
Position Statement on Grizzly Bears

The Commission supports the delisting of grizzly bears throughout Idaho. Grizzly bear populations have increased in occupied core areas in Idaho (i.e., Yellowstone, Selkirks, and Cabinet-Yaak) to the point where bears are dispersing to other areas where they are prone to conflict with humans.

Delisting is consistent with scientific information regarding the health of grizzly bear populations. Established state and interagency regulatory mechanisms, such as law enforcement and management provided by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the long-established coordination provided through the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, are adequate for the protection and management of grizzly bears in Idaho. Additional protections under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are unnecessary.

Prolonging ESA protection for grizzly populations in Idaho is counter to effective management to support sustainable grizzly populations and to build and maintain local support for bears. Heightened federal requirements under the ESA, combined with inadequate federal funding, results in greater public relation challenges and less efficient agency actions when addressing bear-human conflicts. Grizzly bear populations are benefitted through timely and appropriate relocation or removal of bears, interagency cooperation, and public education delivered by state agencies.

Yellowstone Grizzly Bears

The Commission advocates the prompt delisting of Yellowstone grizzly bears. The Yellowstone grizzly population is clearly recovered.

Northern Idaho Grizzly Bears

The northern ecosystems, including the Selkirk, and the Cabinet-Yaak, along with the North Continental Divide (located entirely in Montana), also qualify for delisting. These "ecosystems" are in fact extremities of a larger, connected population in Canada, and there is documented movement of bears between these areas and to areas outside the core habitats as the population has grown.

Based on scientific and regulatory information, divergence from the 1993 USFWS recovery goals in support of delisting for the northern ecosystems is appropriate and consistent with federal law. Indeed, redefining recovery in these areas is key to sustaining the public support identified as essential to actually achieving ESA objectives for the persistence of grizzly bears for the foreseeable future.

Areas Grizzly Bears Do Not Occupy

USFWS does not consider the Bitterroot area and other parts of Idaho to be occupied by grizzly bears, and these areas should also be delisted. USFWS identified the Bitterroot area as a "possible sixth population" in its 1993 recovery plan, but acknowledged that grizzly bears have been extirpated from the area since at least 1946. The Commission and the State of Idaho have repeatedly opposed any introductions of grizzly bears into the Bitterroot area under the ESA. The perception and reality of unkept commitments and protracted litigation related to the federal government's introduction of gray wolves as an experimental, nonessential "10j" population make ESA reintroduction of any grizzly bears outside occupied core habitats areas untenable in Idaho.

Conclusion

The Commission will continue to act to ensure sustainable grizzly bear populations for the foreseeable future in the occupied core habitats USFWS has identified in Idaho: the Selkirks, Cabinet-Yaak and Yellowstone. Key to the success of this effort is effective and efficient management of bear-human conflict. The Commission advocates for the prompt federal delisting and transition to state management for grizzly bears throughout Idaho as both legally compliant with the ESA as well as the best vehicle for achieving the ESA's objective

Approved and Adopted by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission on May 16, 2013

Robert Barowsky
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