

# North Cascades Grizzly Bear Restoration EIS

## Frequently Asked Questions

September 2023

### Timeline:

- 1975 – Grizzly bear listed as threatened species, lower 48 states under Endangered Species Act.
- 1980 – Grizzly bear listed as an endangered species by State of Washington.
- 1982 – National Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan approved by FWS; revised in 1993.
- 1983 – Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee established.
- 1991 – 9,800 square miles of North Cascades Ecosystem in Washington was identified as adequate habitat for grizzly bears. Grizzly bears are confirmed in locations from just north of Interstate 90 to the international border.
- 1991 – The decision was made by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee during its winter 1991 meeting to recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades.
- 1993 – Detailed habitat evaluation of the North Cascades Ecosystem published.
- 1997 – North Cascades chapter added to National Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.
- 2004 – A grizzly bear recovery plan completed for the British Columbia portion of North Cascades Ecosystem.
- 2014 – NPS/FWS began drafting Environmental Impact Statement on grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades ecosystem. The effort was discontinued in 2020.
- November 2022 – The NPS/FWS reinitiated the process for developing a Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan for the North Cascades Ecosystem.
- September 2023 – The NPS/FWS release a draft EIS outlining alternatives for restoring grizzly bears to the ecosystem. FWS also releases a proposed 10(j) rule that could support the restoration, should the agencies decide to pursue it.

### What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

- An EIS is a document that evaluates and discusses potential environmental impacts that would occur as a result of taking an action. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 requires federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major federal actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment.
- An agency must look at the impacts of its proposed action, as well as reasonable alternatives for accomplishing its objective, in this case restoring a self-sustaining grizzly bear population to the U.S. portion of the North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE). An analysis of what would happen as a result of taking no action is also required.
- An EIS must be prepared using the best available data. As part of the process, agencies identify and invite the participation of interested persons. This usually means the opportunity to comment on the scope of the EIS at the beginning of the process and again on the draft EIS, before a final EIS is issued. Typically, this includes public meetings during comment periods.

### **Wasn't there a previous EIS process on this issue?**

- Yes. A previous EIS process began in 2014. In 2020, the Department of Interior terminated the process after release of a draft EIS. The current EIS process was launched in November 2022.
- Comments provided during the previous EIS process, however, have informed the new EIS and the development of alternatives.

### **What happens during the EIS process?**

- The EIS process is completed in the following ordered steps: Notice of Intent (NOI), draft EIS, final EIS, and Record of Decision (ROD).
- The Notice of Intent is published in the Federal Register by the lead federal agency and signals the initiation of the process. The National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on November 14, 2022.
- Scoping, an open process involving the public and other federal, state, Tribal, and local agencies, commences immediately to identify the major and important issues for consideration during the process. The public scoping in this process took place in November and December 2022.
- The draft EIS provides a detailed description of the proposal, the purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, the affected environment, and presents analysis of the anticipated beneficial and adverse environmental effects of the alternatives.
- Following a formal comment period and analysis of public comments received from the public and other agencies, the final EIS will be developed. The final EIS will address the comments on the draft and identify, based on analysis and comments, the "preferred alternative".
- After the final EIS is complete and issued to the public, a 30-day waiting period will begin. Following the waiting period, a record of decision will be signed by the agency (or, in this case, joint agencies) thereby allowing the selected alternative to be implemented.

### **How is the public involved in this decision?**

- There are numerous opportunities for the public to comment and be involved in the process. This EIS process will invite formal public comment in the scoping and draft EIS phases.
- All comments about the alternatives and impacts presented in the EIS, as well as alternatives that may not be presented but the public thinks should be considered, will be considered during the EIS process.

### **What is the 'No Action' Alternative?**

- Under Alternative A (no action), existing management practices would be followed, and no new management actions would be implemented beyond those available at the outset of the grizzly bear restoration planning process. Options for grizzly bear restoration under the no action alternative would be limited. Management actions would be focused on continued sanitation efforts, poaching control, management of motorized access, outreach and educational programs to provide information about grizzly bears and grizzly bear

recovery to the public, and research and monitoring to determine grizzly bear population size, distribution, habitat, and home ranges.

### **What are the two action alternatives?**

- Both of the action alternatives (Alternatives B and C) seek to restore a self-sustaining population over time through the capture of grizzly bears from other populations, and release of them in the U.S. portion of the NCE; Both will also involve enhanced public outreach. However, the two alternatives differ in how a restored grizzly bear population would be managed.
- Alternative C would designate grizzly bears in the NCE as a 10(j) nonessential experimental population under the Endangered Species Act, which would give land managers and communities additional tools to manage the animals ([See a 10\(j\) fact sheet for more information](#))

### **What about an alternative that might include a 10(j) designation, with no active restoration?**

- The interagency planning team considered an alternative that would follow the no-action management strategies but include the designation of a 10(j) experimental population. However, the alternative was dismissed because it does not meet the stated “purpose and need” of the EIS process, which is the restoration of grizzly bears to the NCE. In addition, without an experimental population established under 10(j), there is no basis for adopting management rules under 10(j).

### **What is the North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE)?**

- The North Cascades is a large ecosystem in north-central Washington state and south-central British Columbia. The largest area of the ecosystem, about 9,800 square miles, lies in the United States. The British Columbia portion of the ecosystem is 3,800 square miles.

### **Is the North Cascades Ecosystem all public land?**

- 97% of the U.S. portion of the North Cascades ecosystem is public land and 3% is private.
- North Cascades National Park Service Complex = about 10 percent
- Okanogan-Wenatchee & Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests = 76 percent
- Other federal lands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Defense) = 2.6%
- State lands = 7.4%
- County and municipal = 1%

### **Do grizzly bears live in the North Cascades Ecosystem today?**

- Grizzly bears in the U.S. portion of the NCE are considered “functionally extirpated,” meaning they are essentially gone. The most recent confirmed observation of a grizzly bear in the U.S. portion of the ecosystem was in 1996. One grizzly bear has been confirmed during the past decade in the British Columbia portion of the ecosystem, within 20 miles of the U.S. portion of the NCE. This indicates the possibility of “dual

citizen” bears living on both sides of the border. Due to the remoteness of the ecosystem, it is highly unlikely that people have observed all the grizzly bears in the ecosystem.

**How will the EIS address the Washington state law that includes the statement that “Grizzly bears shall not be transplanted or introduced into the state.”?**

- The state law (RCW 77.12.035) applies to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and does not restrict federal grizzly bear recovery efforts in Washington. The law also directs WDFW to “...fully participate in all discussions and negotiations with federal and state agencies relating to grizzly bear management...” In this way, WDFW’s interests will be represented in the environmental analysis.

**What impact would restoration have on other big game populations?**

- As predators, grizzly bears have the potential to impact prey species in the NCE; however, grizzly bears are omnivores that primarily feed on vegetation. Studies indicate that a grizzly bear diet consists of about 90% vegetable and insect matter; however, they scavenge and occasionally prey on game animals.
- Research has documented the importance of local concentrations of ungulates as a source of protein for grizzly bears (IGBC 1997). In many locations, animal matter may not constitute a major annual diet item but may be seasonally vital to grizzly bears (Mattson, Blanchard, and Knight 1991; Gunther and Haroldson 1998).
- Some adult big game animals probably will be taken but big game are not expected to be a major food source, nor would the level of predation be expected to have an influence on population performance.

**Does the grizzly bear EIS address issues in common with the recovery and management of wolves in Washington?**

- The grizzly bear EIS will evaluate the interplay between grizzly bear and wolf recovery in relation to possible grizzly bear recovery alternatives. Wolves and grizzly bears are very different animals. Wolves are primarily carnivorous, hunt in highly social packs and are more likely to prey on domestic livestock. Grizzly bears in ecosystems similar to the North Cascades rely much more on vegetation, insects, and small mammals. Grizzly bears also tend to avoid areas of human activity.

**What impact could this have on ranchers and domestic livestock?**

- Grizzly bears are omnivores, but primarily feed on vegetation. Studies indicate that a grizzly bear diet consists of about 90% vegetable and insect matter; however, they scavenge and occasionally prey on game animals in addition to ground dwelling rodents that they actively dig out of dens or burrows.
- Grizzly bears also occasionally attack livestock; and in some cases, depredations can become chronic. We would expect the number of grizzly bear depredations to be low while the population of bears is small. However, depredations could increase as the population grows.
- The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) recommends a variety of non-lethal and preventative deterrent options for reducing and avoiding conflicts. Those

recommendations can be found by visiting: <https://igbconline.org/be-bear-aware/agriculture/>

- The designation of an 10(j) nonessential experimental population would provide managers with additional tools to reduce and manage potential conflicts.

### **How would grizzly bears impact adjacent developed areas?**

- Most human-grizzly bear conflicts are associated with concentrations of attractants, such as orchards, beehives, livestock boneyards, and cattle and sheep calving areas, within productive bear habitat. These impacts could be mitigated by providing grizzly bear education to farmers and ranchers, which includes education on the use of electric fencing and managed boneyards.
- Under all action alternatives, release areas would be located away from grazing allotments and all released grizzly bears would be radio-collared and monitored. If a bear frequents an allotment area, FWS and WDFW would work with the USFS and livestock owners to determine the best course of action to minimize opportunity for the bear to interact with livestock. In the event a grizzly bear depredates agriculture or livestock, appropriate IGBC guidelines would be followed.

### **How would grizzly restoration in the North Cascades affect the decision on whether to delist grizzly bears in other portions of the Lower 48?**

- This action is separate from FWS' reviews of the status of the species in other parts of its range. This potential restoration reflects the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's continued commitment to recover grizzly bears in the Lower 48 states. Establishing a population of bears in the North Cascades Recovery Zone would contribute positively toward the status of the species, which in turn would be factored into future assessments of the status of grizzly bears in the Lower 48 states.
- If FWS finds that grizzly bears in one or more distinct population segments (DPS) in the species' range no longer warrant protection as a listed species, the agency will address how that will impact bear populations in the remainder of their listed range.

### **What are the factors limiting natural recovery in the North Cascades Ecosystem?**

- Habitat and population connectivity between the nearest populations in British Columbia and the U.S. portion of NCE is increasingly fragmented and grizzly bears face as many, or more, challenges immediately north of the U.S. border as they do to the south. Recovering a sustainable population will likely require active restoration in the U.S. portion of the ecosystem as well as strong cooperative efforts to sustain connectivity with viable grizzly populations in Canada.
- If left to recover without additional human intervention, grizzly bears in the greater NCE could disappear because individual bears are increasingly isolated and have limited opportunity to breed. Indications are that this is already happening, as confirmed observations have become increasingly rare on both sides of the international border. Natural recovery, however, is one of the options being evaluated through the EIS, using the best available science and information.

### **What role do grizzly bears play in an ecosystem?**

- As a keystone species, grizzly bears play an outsized role in the ecosystem. They aerate the soil through digging, disperse seeds within and across elevations, and are culturally important to some Tribes and First Nations.

### **What authority do federal agencies have to lead this effort?**

- As the federal land management agency, the NPS is directly responsible for implementing the Organic Act for the North Cascades National Park Service Complex and FWS is responsible for implementing the Endangered Species Act. These laws, as well as numerous other laws and policies of the United States, direct the agencies to recover, protect, and preserve threatened and endangered species as a public trust, to ensure that future generations benefit from the same wildlife resources that we enjoy today.

### **Is the habitat in the recovery area viable for bear survival?**

- The North Cascades Grizzly Bear Ecosystem Evaluation, completed in 1991, indicated that the necessary habitat quality, quantity, and security were present to support grizzly bears. Land management practices since then have ensured these parameters are still intact and, in some areas, improved. A 2002 Habitat Assessment evaluated motorized access, the availability of undisturbed habitat areas and seasonal habitat values in the NCE, charting a course for optimizing habitat security and availability on federal lands over the long-term. A 2016 study modelling suitable habitat estimated the ecosystem could sustain a population of 250-300 grizzly bears. A 2023 study also concluded climate change is likely to increase the amount of high-quality of grizzly bear habitat in the North Cascades in the decades to come.
- Grizzly bears persisted as an important part of the North Cascades for many millennia. Their decline was not due to inadequate habitat, but to direct killing by people. Thousands of grizzly bears from within and around this ecosystem were killed by the mid-1800s.

### **Would this recovery effort require visitors to the recovery area to change their behavior?**

- Black bears already occupy the areas that grizzly bears may inhabit in the future, and much of the human behavior needed to avoid conflict with that species applies to recreation around grizzly bears as well. Learning how to safely recreate in black bear country goes a very long way to learning how to recreate where there are grizzly bears.
- The national park and national forests are already addressing the high-risk elements of potential human-grizzly bear conflict by increasing awareness of, and/or requiring, proper backcountry food storage and by installing bear resistant garbage disposal systems and food storage lockers in campgrounds in order to reduce human-black bear conflict.

### **Would trails and roads be closed to protect grizzly bears?**

- There are thousands of miles of trails traveled safely by millions of people in grizzly bear country in the other recovery areas, such as in the Rocky Mountains. Roads on federal lands within the North Cascades Ecosystem have been managed with grizzly bears in mind since the publication of the recovery plan chapter in 1997. Care has been taken to

maintain road systems in a way to ensure secure habitat for bears while meeting the needs of people. None of the alternatives require long-term closures.

**How long would it take before there is a recovered population in the NCE?**

- It is unknown at this time and will be evaluated during the EIS process. However, alternatives developed for a similar EIS process completed for a similarly sized ecosystem in Idaho estimated it would take 50 to 125 years from the time recovery efforts begin to the time a self-sustaining population would be established. Even if a small number of bears were moved into the ecosystem it would take many decades for a population to grow, and in all likelihood, people would see these bears only rarely during the first 10 to 20 years.

**What would be the impacts of grizzly bears on other predator populations in the recovery area?**

- Grizzly bears coexist with numerous carnivores in other parts of their range, and while some competition for food is certainly likely, the wildlife impacts of restoring grizzly bears after prolonged absence are largely unknown. It is expected that some black bears would be displaced or even killed by grizzly bears. Grizzly bears and black bears coexist as healthy populations in other recovery areas. Grizzly bears would likely steal food from cougars and wolves, as well as compete for carrion with wolverines and other medium to large carnivores. There is no expectation that predators would flee the area into adjacent human-occupied areas, but rather that species would adjust behaviorally within their range. Human-dominated landscapes are typically much more uncertain to wildlife than are wildlife species-dominated landscapes.

**Where can I learn more about efforts on grizzly bear restoration and recovery?**

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead agency on endangered species and their recovery.
- Information on grizzly bear recovery is available at:
  - [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)
  - [National Park Service](#)
  - [Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee](#)