

North Cascades Grizzly Bear Restoration EIS

Frequently Asked Questions

March 2024

Timeline:

- **1975** – Grizzly bear listed as threatened species in the 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 Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee agreed during its winter 1991 meeting to support the recovery of grizzly bears in the North Cascades.
- **1993** – Detailed habitat evaluation of the North Cascades Ecosystem published.
- **1996** – The last confirmed sighting of a grizzly bear in the U.S. portion of the North Cascades ecosystem.
- **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 a process for developing a Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan for the North Cascades Ecosystem.
- **September 2023** – The NPS/FWS release a draft EIS evaluating 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.
- **March 2024** – The NPS/FWS release a final EIS evaluating alternatives for restoring grizzly bears to the ecosystem.

Why would the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) propose restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades?

- For thousands of years, grizzly bears served as a keystone species in the North Cascades, but populations declined primarily due to direct killing by humans.
- Today, entities on the Canadian side of the border are also considering efforts to restore grizzly bears in the Canadian portion of the ecosystem.
- Reintroducing grizzly bears to the North Cascades using an experimental population would both support grizzly bear recovery, while giving local wildlife managers and local communities more flexibility to manage bears, including additional tools for deterrence, relocation, or removal of animals involved in conflict. The added flexibility provided by an experimental population designation would ensure grizzly bear restoration does not result in the restriction of other land uses and resource development activities or compromise public safety.

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.

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 process and the development of alternatives.

What happens during the EIS process?

- The EIS process is completed in the following ordered steps:

1. Notice of Intent (NOI) and scoping
 2. Draft EIS
 3. Final EIS
 4. 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. In this process, the NPS and FWS 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 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 is developed. The final EIS addresses comments on the draft and identifies, 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 can 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 have been numerous opportunities for the public to be involved and comment in the process. This EIS process invited formal public comment during the scoping and draft EIS phases.
 - A 30-day public comment period during the scoping phase began on November 14, 2022. Four virtual public meetings took place during this period and more than 6,000 comments were received during scoping.
 - A 45-day public comment period on the draft EIS began on September 29, 2023. Four in-person meetings around the ecosystem and one virtual public meeting took place during this period. More than 12,000 comments were received on the draft EIS.

What alternatives did the EIS evaluate?

- The EIS evaluated a 'no action' alternative and two action alternatives:

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. 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. Under both action alternatives, agencies would aim to release 3 to 7 grizzly bears per year, for 5 to 10 years, to achieve an initial population of 25 bears. Both would 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](#)). Alternative C is identified by agencies as the preferred alternative.

Where can we view the public comments on the draft EIS?

- A report that analyzes public comment and a full list of comments received on the draft EIS will both be available [on the project website](#).

A comment response table is also available as an appendix in the final EIS.

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 section 10(j).

Is there a timeline for the translocation of bears to the ecosystem?

- No. There are no plans or timelines for the translocation of any grizzly bears to the NCE, as the agencies have not yet selected an alternative or decided on a path forward.

What is the status of a 10(j) rule from FWS?

- The 10(j) rulemaking process, which would designate grizzly bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem as an experimental population, is a separate process by FWS. FWS released a proposed 10(j) rule in September 2023, concurrent with the release of the draft EIS. The FWS also received public comments received on its proposed 10(j) rule.

If agencies select alternative C, the FWS would publish a final 10(j) rule.

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.

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...” WDFW has participated as a cooperating agency in the EIS, helping to ensure WDFW’s interests are addressed 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.
- 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.

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 US Forest Service 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, the response would depend on which action alternative was selected, as conflict management would be addressed under the current 4(d) regulation for grizzly bears (Alternative B), or, the 10(j) management rule (Alternative C).

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. A no action alternative, 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, keep other wildlife populations in balance, 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?

- While short-term closures may be necessary for certain wildlife management activities, none of the alternatives require long-term closures. 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.

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

- It is estimated that under the action alternatives, which propose translocating an initial population of 25 bears, it could take 60-100 years to reach a population of 200 bears. 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.

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.

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

- [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)
- [National Park Service](#)
- [Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee](#)