

**Grizzly Bear Recovery in the Bitterroot Ecosystem**  
**Final Rule and Record of Decision**  
**Questions and Answers - November 2000**

**Q. What is the purpose of this Record of Decision and final rule as it relates to grizzly bear recovery?**

**A.** The Record of Decision (ROD) determines and describes the alternative the Service has selected to accomplish its goal to help recover grizzly bears in the lower 48 states and, more specifically, in the Bitterroot Ecosystem. The final rule describes specifically how the Service and its partners will implement the selected alternative.

In accordance with the ROD and the rule, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), intends to restore the grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*), a threatened species, into east-central Idaho and a portion of western Montana. We are designating grizzly bears to be reintroduced into the area described in this rule as a nonessential experimental population pursuant to section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

**Q. When will bears be brought to the Bitterroot?**

**A.** Grizzly bears will not be reintroduced into the Bitterroot wilderness until 2002 at the earliest. Before reintroduction, a year will be required to form the Citizen Management Committee (CMC), provide information to the public about grizzly bears and the reintroduction, and take care of sanitation issues such as installing bear-proof garbage cans in the reintroduction areas.

**Q. Why reintroduce the grizzly bear to the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**

**A.** Between 1800 and 1975, grizzly bear populations in the lower 48 states decreased from estimates of more than 50,000 to less than 1,000, and were extirpated from most areas. The grizzly bear was listed as a threatened species in the lower 48 States under the Endangered Species Act in 1975. As such, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was mandated by Congress to conserve this listed species and the ecosystems upon which it depends. Grizzly bears presently occur in five ecosystems. The purpose of this reintroduction is to reestablish a viable grizzly bear population in a sixth ecosystem -- the Bitterroot ecosystem in east-central Idaho and adjacent areas of Montana. This is one of six grizzly recovery areas identified in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. Restoration of the grizzly bear within this portion of its historical range will contribute significantly to long-term conservation and recovery of the grizzly bear in the lower 48 states.

The Bitterroot Ecosystem is one of the largest contiguous blocks of federal land remaining in the lower 48 United States. Of all remaining unoccupied grizzly bear habitat in the lower 48 States, this area in the Bitterroot Mountains has the best potential for recovery of a healthy population of grizzly bears with minimal impact to humans. This is primarily due to the large wilderness area.

**Q. Who will manage the grizzly bears reintroduced into the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**

**A.** The 15-member CMC will be appointed by the Secretary of Interior based on recommendations of the Governors of Montana (5) and Idaho (7) and the Nez Perce Tribe (1). There will also be one member representing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and one representing the USDA Forest Service. The Montana and Idaho members will include one representative each from their respective state fish and game agency. Additionally, two scientific advisors will be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, as non-voting members, to attend all meetings of the CMC and to provide scientific expertise to the CMC.

**Q. What management responsibilities will the CMC have?**

**A.** The CMC will develop management plans and policies, as necessary, for the management of grizzly bears in the Experimental Population Area. All decisions of the CMC must lead to recovery of the grizzly bear in the Bitterroot Ecosystem, utilize the best scientific and commercial data available, and minimize social and economic impacts to the extent practicable within the context of the existing recovery goals for the species.

**Q. What agencies will be responsible for day-to-day management activities?**

**A.** The Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and/or the Nez Perce Tribe, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the USDA Forest Service, in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will exercise day-to-day management responsibility within the Experimental Population Area. The Fish and Wildlife Service and these cooperating agencies will share management responsibility as per agreements with, and in consideration of, recommendations from the CMC.

**Q. When will the Citizen Management Committee be formed?**

**A.** The Secretary of Interior will organize the CMC by requesting nominations of citizen members from the Governors of Idaho and Montana and the Nez Perce Tribe and nominations of agency members by represented agencies. Nominations must be made within 60 days following the request from the Secretary. The Committee will be formed as soon as recommendations are made by the parties involved, and the Secretary of the Interior appoints the members.

**Q. How will the CMC represent local concerns?**

**A.** Except for the representatives from Federal agencies, the CMC will be selected from communities within and adjacent to the Experimental Population Area. Members will consist of a diverse cross-section of interests.

**Q. What is the overall mission of the CMC, and how will it operate?**

**A.** Mission Statement: The mission of the CMC is to facilitate recovery of the grizzly bear in the Bitterroot Ecosystem by assisting in implementing the Bitterroot Chapter of the Recovery Plan. The Committee will make recommendations to land and wildlife management agencies that it

believes will lead to recovery of the grizzly bear. Decisions on, and implementation of, these recommendations are the responsibility of the land and wildlife management agencies.

Operating Guidelines: The Committee will meet a minimum of two times per year. These meetings will be open to the public. Additionally, the committee will provide reasonable public notice of meetings, produce and provide written minutes of meetings to interested persons, and involve the public in its decision-making process. This public participation process will allow members of the public and/or special interest groups to have input to Committee decisions and management actions.

**Q. How will the public know if the Citizen Management Committee is accomplishing its goals?**

**A.** The mission of the CMC will be to facilitate recovery of the grizzly bear in the Bitterroot ecosystem. If the Secretary of Interior determines that CMC actions are not leading to recovery, he or she has the authority to resume management responsibility. This action could occur only after a formal review and negotiation process between the Secretary of Interior and the CMC and involving the Governors of Idaho and Montana. This process would attempt to resolve any disputes and to provide scientifically-based corrective measures to the CMC.

**Q. Does the publication of these two documents mean that grizzlies are going to be reintroduced immediately?**

**A.** No, as stated in the Record of Decision and final rule, the first year will be spent selecting the members of the CMC, conducting efforts to decrease the availability of human-related foods to wildlife by increasing the availability of bear-proof garbage storage containers in campgrounds and facilities in and around the Recovery Area, and developing and distributing information to inform people who recreate in the area how to minimize their chances of encountering bears. This first year of implementation will be a joint effort of the CMC and management agencies and will serve to lessen social impacts and potential conflicts from reintroduction of grizzly bears to the Bitterroot Ecosystem. Grizzly bears will not be reintroduced until the second year following the signature of the Record of Decision, at the earliest.

**Q. What is the difference between the Recovery Area and the Experimental Population Area?**

**A.** The 3.7 million acre (5,785 square mile) Recovery Area will consist of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. This is the area where recovery will be emphasized. Grizzly bear management decisions in the Recovery Area will favor bear recovery so that the area can serve as core habitat for survival, reproduction, and dispersal of the recovering population.

The 16.1 million acre (25,140 square mile) Experimental Population Area, which includes most of east-central Idaho and part of western Montana, is the area within which the experimental population of grizzly bears will be managed. Much of the Experimental Population Area has high-quality bear habitat with low likelihood of conflicts between grizzly bears and humans. Grizzly bears moving outside the Recovery Area onto public land in the Experimental

Population Area will be accommodated through the management plans and policies developed by the CMC. Such bears will not be disturbed unless they demonstrate a real and imminent threat to human safety or livestock, in which case they will be relocated or destroyed. The Experimental Population Area includes the area bounded by U.S. Highway 93 from its junction with the Bitterroot River near Missoula, Montana, to Challis, Idaho; Idaho Highway 75 from Challis to Stanley, Idaho; Idaho Highway 21 from Stanley to Lowman, Idaho; Idaho Highway 17 from Lowman to Banks, Idaho; Idaho Highway 55 from Banks to New Meadows, Idaho; U.S. Highway 95 from New Meadows to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; and Interstate 90 from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to its junction with the Clark Fork River near St. Regis, Montana, and the Clark Fork River from its junction with Interstate 90 near St. Regis, to its confluence with the Bitterroot River near Missoula, Montana; and the Bitterroot River from its confluence with the Clark Fork River to its junction with U.S. Highway 93, near Missoula, Montana.

**Q. Where exactly will grizzly bears be reintroduced?**

- A.** We plan to reintroduce grizzly bears only into the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area, unless it is later determined that reintroduction in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness is appropriate. Specific relocation sites that have high quality bear habitat and low likelihood of human encounters will be identified and recommended by the management agencies.

**Q. Have arrangements for trapping and movement of the grizzly bears already been made?**

- A.** No, the first year that funding is available will be spent forming the CMC, providing sanitation needs in the experimental area, and providing information on the project to the public, specifically in the states of Montana and Idaho. As we work toward achieving our goals in public information and sanitation needs, biologists will be working at the same time to organize relocation efforts with appropriate sources. Actual movement of bears will not begin until the second year following the signing of the Record of Decision and the final rule, at the earliest.

**Q. Were grizzly bears ever common in the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**

- A.** Historically, the grizzly bear was a widespread inhabitant of the Bitterroot Mountains in central Idaho and western Montana. When Lewis and Clark traveled through the Bitterroot country in 1806, grizzly bears were abundant. They killed at least 7 grizzly bears including 1 female and 2 cubs while camped near present-day Kamiah, Idaho. Grizzly bears were common in central Idaho until the early 1900's. William Wright, a hunter and naturalist, wrote of killing dozens of grizzly bears over several years at the turn of the century in the Bitterroot Mountains. Conservative estimates indicate trappers and hunters killed 25 to 40 grizzly bears annually in the Bitterroot Mountains during the early 1900's. A major influx of hunters, trappers, and settlers at the turn of the century, and later sheepherders were responsible for direct mortality and elimination of grizzly bears from the Bitterroot Ecosystem.

**Q. Do grizzly bears reside in the Bitterroot Ecosystem today?**

- A.** The last verified death of a grizzly bear in the Bitterroot Ecosystem occurred in 1932 and the last tracks were observed in 1946. Although occasional unverified reports of grizzly sightings persist in the Bitterroot Ecosystem, no verified tracks or sightings have been documented in more than

50 years. Based on the best scientific evidence available, and the lack of verified evidence for more than 50 years, there appear to be no grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem at this time.

**Q. How does the Bitterroot Ecosystem fit into overall grizzly bear recovery efforts?**

- A.** Bear biologists have estimated that the habitat in the Bitterroot Ecosystem could eventually support approximately 280 grizzly bears. This will increase the current minimum number of grizzlies in the contiguous United States by 25-30%. Establishment of a third major population in the remote Bitterroot Ecosystem (the other two being in the Yellowstone and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems) will contribute significantly to long-term conservation and recovery of the grizzly bear.

**Q. Does the Bitterroot Ecosystem provide enough suitable habitat to support a recovered grizzly bear population?**

- A.** The Bitterroot Ecosystem is one of the largest contiguous blocks of federal land remaining in the lower 48 United States. The core of the ecosystem contains three wilderness areas which make up the largest block of wilderness habitat in the Rocky Mountains south of Canada. Of all remaining unoccupied grizzly bear habitat in the lower 48 States, this area in the Bitterroot Mountains has the best potential for grizzly bear recovery, primarily due to the large wilderness area. As such, the Bitterroot Ecosystem offers excellent potential to recover a healthy population of grizzly bears and to boost the long-term survival and recovery prospects for this species in the contiguous United States.

**Q. Does the habitat in the Bitterroot Ecosystem provide adequate food resources for grizzly recovery?**

- A.** Habitat quality has been studied extensively and research has concluded that area contains suitable habitat to support a grizzly bear population. At least seven different studies have been conducted within the Bitterroot Ecosystem that have direct applicability to the potential for grizzly bear recovery. Habitat quality varies throughout the Experimental Population Area, and likewise throughout the Recovery Area. However, studies indicate that a great variety of preferred grizzly bear foods are present in the ecosystem. A wide variety of all season foods are present including good quantities of several key berry species, forbs and grasses, as well as historically high levels of ungulates to provide carrion during the fall and spring months. Food habits of black bears are quite similar to those of grizzly bears. Healthy populations of black bears live within the Bitterroot Ecosystem, and annual hunter harvest totals about 1,000. A recovered population of 280 grizzly bears should be able to find sufficient high quality forage within and adjacent to the Recovery Area. Although bear densities may not recover to their historical levels during the peak of the salmon and whitebark pine era, the population should achieve densities similar to those found in other interior ecosystems where those food sources are not present. The key to recovery in the Bitterroot Ecosystem will likely be effective management including limitation of human-caused mortality rather than quantity or quality of habitat.

At one time grizzly bears were present in high densities throughout the Bitterroot Ecosystem. Salmon and whitebark pine, two important grizzly bear foods, were common during the peak of grizzly bear populations. Salmon have been virtually eliminated along the Clearwater drainage due to dams that have blocked their migration. Whitebark pine has been reduced to about 20%-



40% of its historical abundance in the Bitterroot Ecosystem, and now is most prevalent in the southern half of the ecosystem. Whitebark pine populations will probably be reduced to 5-10% of their historic numbers, unless management actions to restore this ecosystem component are successful. Grizzly bears relocated to the Bitterroot Ecosystem will likely come from areas where neither salmon nor whitebark pine are plentiful.

**Q. Where will grizzly bears be obtained?**

- A.** Approximately 25 grizzly bears will be trapped over 5 years from areas in Canada (in cooperation with Canadian authorities) and the United States that presently have populations of grizzly bears living in habitats that are similar to those found in the Bitterroot Ecosystem. Sources of grizzly bears for the Bitterroot Ecosystem could include existing populations in southeast British Columbia, the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem in northwest Montana, and the Yellowstone Ecosystem. The specific number of bears that could be obtained yearly from potential source populations is unknown at this time. Some undetermined level of mortality is expected among transplanted bears. Every effort will be taken to minimize this, but mortalities are expected to occur. Any transplanted bears that died or were removed as a result of human action could be replaced. Such replacements will be in addition to the original minimum of 25 bears.

**Q. Will source grizzly bear populations be negatively impacted by removal of grizzly bears for reintroduction into the Bitterroot?**

- A.** Bears will only be removed from source populations if there is no significant impact to population health or recovery. Potential source populations could include existing populations in the Northern Continental Divide and Yellowstone Ecosystems, and the Kootenay Region of southeast British Columbia. The origin of bears for placement will include areas more than 10 miles beyond existing recovery zone lines in the Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems, and interior Rocky Mountain, non-salmon eating bears from British Columbia. All requirements of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and the British Columbia grizzly bear management criteria will be met before removal of bears is pursued.

**Q. What is a nonessential experimental population?**

- A.** In 1982, Congress amended the Endangered Species Act to permit greater management flexibility for species that are reintroduced to their historic range. Such populations may be designated as "experimental" and managed within a delineated area according to special rules designed to balance needs of both people and listed species. The biological status of the grizzly and the need for management flexibility resulted in the Service designating the grizzly bears reintroduced into east-central Idaho as "nonessential experimental." The nonessential designation allows the Service to establish a more flexible and less restrictive special rule, rather than applying the general prohibitions of the Act that otherwise apply to threatened species. For instance, these grizzly bears may be treated as a species "proposed for listing" rather than "threatened" for the purpose of section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

**Q. How will the reintroduced grizzly bear population be managed?**

- A.** Grizzly bear management in the Recovery Area will emphasize recovery objectives and enable the area to serve as core habitat for survival, reproduction, and dispersal of the recovering population. Grizzly bears moving outside the Recovery Area into the surrounding Experimental Population Area will be accommodated through provisions in the final rule and ROD, with direction from the CMC. All grizzly bears found in the wild within the boundaries of the Experimental Population Area after the first releases will be considered nonessential experimental animals and will be counted as part of the recovery goal. Grizzly bears outside the Experimental Population Area will be considered threatened.

**Q. How long will it take to recover grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**

- A.** The tentative recovery goal is approximately 280 grizzly bears. Population projections indicate that bear populations will require a minimum of 110 years at a 2 percent growth rate or 50 years at a 4 percent growth rate to reach the tentative recovery goal of approximately 280 bears. A revised recovery goal may be recommended based on scientific advice, when more information is available.

**Q. What will be the risk to human safety from reintroduced bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**

- A.** The Service will take all possible actions to reduce the risk of human/bear conflicts. Only grizzly bears with no history of conflicts with people or livestock will be considered candidates for reintroduction. Suitable bears will be released at remote wilderness sites within the Bitterroot Ecosystem to reduce the likelihood of encounters with humans. All released bears will be fitted with radio collars and their movements will be monitored to keep the public informed of general bear locations and recovery efforts. A proactive information and education program and sanitation improvements will be initiated during the first year of implementation and will continue through the implementation phase.

Human-bear interactions in a national park are much more numerous than would be expected in the remote Bitterroot wilderness, and the statistics are not comparable. Anticipated injury rates will likely be similar to those that currently exist in areas outside of national parks where grizzly bears exist. In northwest Montana and north Idaho (outside of Glacier Park), only two bear inflicted injuries have occurred in the last 50 years. A hunter was killed by a grizzly after shooting and injuring it in the Bob Marshall Wilderness in 1956. Another hunter was slightly injured after shooting and wounding a grizzly in the Mission Valley in 1985. In the Yellowstone Ecosystem outside of the Park, there have been 17 injuries (including 3 mortalities) within the last 156 years, for an average of 1 human mortality every 53 years.

In the Bitterroot Ecosystem, bears will be placed in remote areas and will be far removed from any national parks and associated habituation problems. During the first several decades following reintroduction, chance of injury caused by grizzly bears will be exceedingly small due to the low density of bears in the area. The Bitterroot population is estimated to achieve recovery levels of approximately 280 bears in a minimum of 50 years, and likely more than 110 years. Using human injury rates from areas with similar circumstances (the Northern Continental

Divide and Yellowstone Ecosystems), and recognizing a net increase in human visitation, projections for human injury once bears are recovered 50-110+ years in the future, are less than one injury per year and less than one grizzly bear-induced human mortality every few decades.

**Q. Does the final rule allow people to kill grizzly bears in defense of property?**

- A.** Within the Experimental Population Area, a person will be allowed to kill a grizzly bear in self-defense or defense of others, provided that such taking is reported within 24 hours to appropriate authorities. Following issuance of a permit by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and appropriate state or tribal management agencies, the public will be allowed to harass, through non-injurious means, a grizzly bear attacking livestock (cattle, sheep, horses, mules). A livestock owner will be allowed to kill a grizzly bear killing or pursuing livestock on private lands if a permit has been obtained, the response protocol have been satisfied, and efforts by the wildlife agency personnel to capture the depredating bear have been unsuccessful.

**Q. If grizzly bears become a problem or nuisance, could they be controlled?**

- A.** Bears that frequent areas of high human use, act aggressively toward humans, or kill livestock will be dealt with according to the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Guidelines. This means they will be trapped and moved or destroyed by management agencies. Grizzly bears posing problems to camps, cabins, individuals, and stock may be relocated rapidly to remote areas or killed by authorized personnel of state, tribal, or federal agencies. For example, individual bears that wander into areas deemed unsuitable for bear residency (such as agricultural, residential, or recreational developments) could be removed. Other potential management options also may be used, such as aversive conditioning techniques that train individual bears to avoid humans and their property.

**Q. Is recreation compatible with grizzly bear survival?**

- A.** Yes, recreation is compatible with grizzly bears. As long as people use common sense in bear habitat, keep clean camps, and avoid surprising bears along trails, there is little impact on either people or bears from recreation. Most grizzly bears try to avoid people, so an encounter or even seeing a bear is unlikely. Hundreds of thousands of people hike, fish, hunt, camp and enjoy grizzly bear habitat every year with very few conflicts of any kind.

**Q. Could recreation be impacted by grizzly bears?**

- A.** There could be rare instances in which a grizzly bear is frequenting an area used by recreationists or other forest users where the safety of the people or the bear is at risk. In such cases, temporary closures of the area may be instituted until the safety risk is past. In the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, where approximately 400-500 grizzly bears currently exist, only two trails were closed on national forest lands because of grizzly bears in the last 10 years. One closure was a result of concerns for human safety when a bear was seen feeding on an elk carcass along a trail. During the peak of the visitor use season in Glacier National Park, fewer than 5% of trails are closed at any time as a result of safety concerns. Because of the difference between national park and national forest management, closures in the Bitterroot Ecosystem (which is mainly national forest land) will be extremely rare and probably similar to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. Trail and road closures are not expected solely for grizzly bears at this time.



Any trail, road, or area closure will be based on recommendations of the CMC, and their charge will be to minimize social and economic impacts from the management of the reintroduced population.

**Q. Will hunting opportunities be reduced due to grizzly bear predation on ungulates?**

- A.** Grizzly bears are omnivores, but feed primarily on vegetation. Studies indicate that a grizzly bear diet consists of about 90% vegetable and insect matter. Studies also indicate that because of their eating habits and short periods of predation (usually only during ungulate calving season), 280 grizzly bears may eat as many elk as would 20 adult cougars over a one year period -- approximately 500 ungulates per year across the Bitterroot Ecosystem. The loss of 500 ungulates to a recovered grizzly bear population would represent approximately 0.38% of estimated pre-harvest populations of ungulates in the Bitterroot area. It should not be necessary to adjust hunting seasons to compensate for grizzly bear predation on ungulates.

**Q. Will restrictions be placed on black bear hunting in the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**

- A.** Black bears are hunted in Montana and Idaho under state regulations. In Montana, use of dogs for hunting bears was prohibited in 1921 and baiting of bears was canceled in 1948. In central Idaho, baiting of black bears and pursuing black bears with hounds in wilderness areas could be evaluated by the CMC to ensure that these activities do not hinder grizzly bear recovery.

**Q. Will grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot Ecosystem affect current land-uses such as timber harvest and mining?**

- A.** Reintroduction of a nonessential experimental population of grizzly bears into the Bitterroot Ecosystem is not expected to impact land uses, including timber harvest and mineral extraction activities, as long as they meet the existing standards and guidelines of the USDA Forest Service Forest Plans.

**Q. Will grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem kill livestock and how many?**

- A.** Livestock grazing, although presently either not occurring or occurring at very low densities within the Recovery Area, is not expected to be impacted. However, grazing occurs within the southern portion of the Experimental Population Area. In 50 to 100 years, at recovered grizzly population levels and current livestock stocking rates, impacts to livestock are expected to be similar to levels occurring in portions of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Yellowstone Ecosystem. Projections indicate that at a grizzly bear population level of 280 bears in the Recovery Area, yearly livestock losses to depredation by bears could range from 4-8 cattle and 5-44 sheep. Management activities will try to preempt livestock problems.

**Q. How much will this reintroduction program cost?**

- A.** The annual cost for the 5-year reintroduction period is approximately \$433,632 per year. This includes the cost of capturing and transplanting bears, monitoring and management of the population, expenses of the Citizen Management Committee, and cost for sanitation, outreach, and law enforcement activities. The total cost for the initial 5-year reintroduction period is approximately \$2,168,160. Annual costs for monitoring and citizen management will be approximately \$193,000 for each year beyond the 5-year reintroduction period.