

Bitterroot Ecosystem Fact Sheet

Prepared 11/26/2007 By the Bitterroot Ecosystem Subcommittee of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee: Contact Chris Servheen (406 243 4903 or grizz@umontana.edu)

Background on the Bitterroot Grizzly Reintroduction EIS process:

- A comprehensive EIS was completed and a Record of Decision (ROD) was signed on November 13, 2000 to reintroduce 25 grizzly bears over 5 years into the Bitterroot Ecosystem. These reintroduced bears are to be designated an Experimental Population under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act.

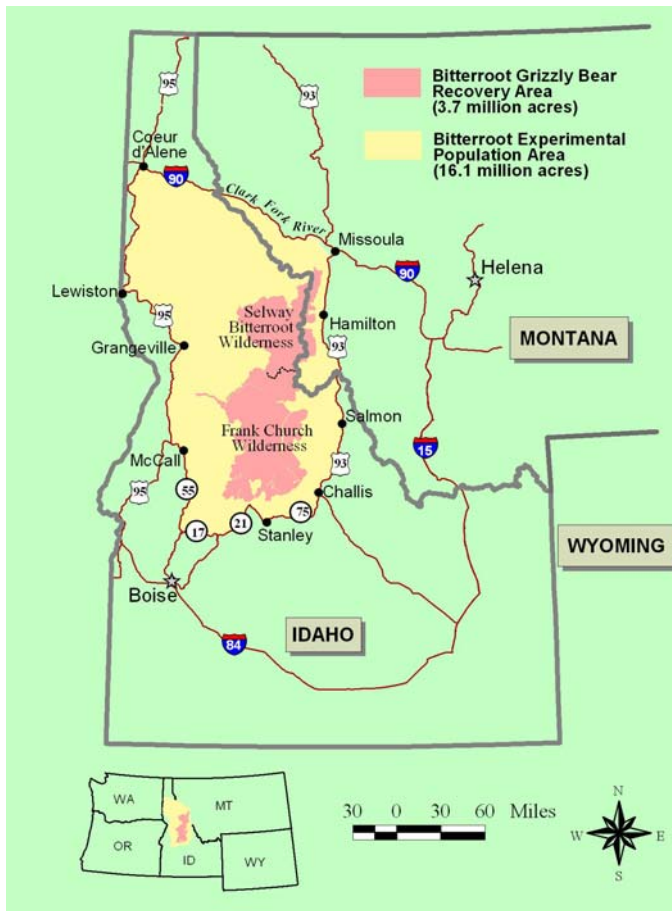


Figure 1. The boundaries of the Bitterroot Experimental Population area and the Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Recovery Area.

- The boundaries of the Experimental Population Area and the Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Recovery Area are shown in Figure 1. The Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Recovery Area is the designated wilderness areas and these will be the areas of recovery emphasis. All releases of reintroduced grizzly bears will take place within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area, unless it is

later determined that reintroduction into the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness is appropriate.

- As stated in the ROD: "After reintroduction, every grizzly bear found within the Experimental Population Area will be considered a member of the nonessential population."
- As of 2007 there have not been any reintroductions under the ROD, therefore any and all grizzly bears found within the Experimental Population Area are still legally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and fully protected under provisions of the Endangered Species Act.
- The lack of implementation of the ROD is due to a lack of funding to implement the ROD. The ROD and the legal basis for reintroduction still exist.
- There exist 4 populations of grizzly bears from which individual grizzlies potentially could move naturally to the Bitterroot Ecosystem (Yellowstone, the Northern Continental Divide that includes Glacier Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the Cabinet-Yaak in northwestern Montana, and the Selkirks in Northern Idaho).

The shooting of a grizzly bear in Kelly Creek in 2007:

- On September 3, 2007 a black bear hunter shot a grizzly bear over a bait station in the upper Kelly Creek drainage of Idaho within the Experimental Population Area. The hunter was a client of a licensed outfitter and the outfitter reported the kill of this grizzly bear to authorities. The bear was confirmed as a grizzly bear by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks authorities on September 7, 2007.
- The grizzly bear was a male estimated between 5 and 10 years of age. The DNA of this bear was analyzed to determine the origin of the bear and if it has been previously captured. The results of the DNA analysis determined that this bear originated in the Selkirk Mountains of North Idaho and that this bear has never been captured before. The minimum distance between the southern end of the Selkirk ecosystem and the location where this bear was shot was 140 air miles.
- Male grizzly bears, especially subadult males, are known to disperse further from the places where they were born than female grizzly bears.
- Prior to the shooting of this grizzly bear, there have not been any confirmed grizzly bears in the Experimental Population Area in more than 60 years.
- The route this bear took to get from the Selkirk ecosystem to the Bitterroot Experimental Area is unknown as the bear was not radio-collared and had not been previously captured. A reasonable route may have been north and east of Lake Pend Oreille, south along the Montana-Idaho border, across the upper St. Joe drainage in Idaho, and then into the North Fork of the Clearwater and Kelly Creek drainages. The bear crossed US Highway

95, US Highway 200, and I-90 to get from the Selkirk Ecosystem to the Kelly Creek area.

- We do not know how long this bear was in the Kelly Creek area prior to being shot.
- At various times other grizzly bears have been reported in the Bitterroot Experimental Area but conclusive evidence for their presence has not previously existed. The Kelly Creek bear illustrates that it is possible for a grizzly bear to reach the BE through natural dispersal. Other grizzlies have been verified to occur in close proximity to the Bitterroot Experimental Area in several different areas.

Implications of the grizzly bear verified in Kelly Creek to reintroduction:

- An experimental population under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act is for use when the reintroduced population is "...wholly separate geographically from non-experimental populations of the same species."
- The definition of a grizzly bear population, as used in the Final Grizzly Bear Reintroduction EIS, is: "A grizzly bear population is defined by verified evidence within the previous six years, consisting of photos within the area, verified tracks and/or sightings by reputable scientists or agency personnel, of at least two different female grizzly bears with young or one female seen with different litters in two different years in an area geographically distinct (separate) from other grizzly bear populations. Verifiable evidence of females with young, to be geographically distinct (separate), would have to occur greater than 10 miles (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1993, page 171) from the nearest non-experimental grizzly bear population recovery zone boundary." Under this definition, the presence of this male grizzly bear in the Kelly Creek drainage does not constitute a grizzly bear population.
- The presence of this male grizzly bear within the Experimental Population Area does not affect the implementation of an experimental population reintroduction as proposed in the ROD.
- We do not know if there are other grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Experimental Population Area as there are no other verified records or reports within this area. To reasonably assess if there are any other grizzly bears in the northern end of the Experimental Population Area, the Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to work cooperatively during 2008 with the USFS, IDFG, and MTFWP to survey the areas of best grizzly habitat in the North Fork of the Clearwater drainage, including Kelly Creek, and the upper St. Joe drainage, and adjacent areas in Montana. This survey will be accomplished with scent lures and barbed wire to collect hair for DNA analysis and the use of automatic cameras. The cost of this survey is approximately \$60,000 including DNA analysis of hair samples collected at lure sites.
- Upon completion of this survey in 2008, the USFWS in cooperation with the USFS, IDFG, and MTFWP will make a decision on whether there is a

population of grizzly bears in the north end of the Experimental Population Area. This decision will be based on the results of the survey effort and will be based on the best available information.

- Based on the results of the survey in 2008 the USFWS will make a finding on whether grizzly bears in the surveyed portion of the Bitterroot Ecosystem should be on the species list for consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Section 7 consultation requires all Federal agencies to consult on the effects of proposed actions (such as logging or road construction) on listed species. Because there have been no verified records of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Experimental Population Area prior to the shooting of the bear in Kelly Creek, the grizzly has not been on the species list for Section 7 consultations in this area.

Future key issues:

- It is important that all users of the north end of the Bitterroot Experimental Population Area be aware that grizzly bears may be present in this area. This means that agency staff people in both the USFS, the IDFG, and MTFWP working within the Clearwater National Forest, Nez Perce National Forest, the St. Joe Ranger district of the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, and the Missoula and Ninemile Districts of the Lolo National Forest be aware of the facts concerning grizzly bears and grizzly bear presence in this area and communicate this information to the public in a clear and correct manner.
- It is important to sign all public access points to USFS lands in these areas to alert the public to the following facts: 1) Users should know that grizzly bears may be present; 2) Hunters should know how to tell a grizzly from a black bear; 3) Back bear hunters should take extra care to be sure that they do not shoot a grizzly; and 4) All users should minimize human-bear conflicts (black bear and grizzly bear) through proper food, refuse, and feed storage and avoidance of surprise encounters. Key areas for signs and outreach materials are trailheads, campgrounds, Ranger District offices, Fish and Game Department regional offices, and Fish and Game regulation books.
- Promotion of public awareness that grizzly bears may be present will minimize future mistaken identity kills by black bear hunters and corresponding potential penalties for mistaken identity kills.
- Training sessions should be organized by each National Forest to familiarize permanent and seasonal employees with grizzly identification, proper collection of evidence of grizzly presence, the status of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem, and proper behavior in grizzly habitat. This training will increase awareness among agency employees and improve a coordinated and correct message to the public concerning grizzly bears in the BE and elsewhere.