

# Summary of the Plan to Recover Grizzly Bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with the support of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee and a Citizen Management Committee (CMC), is preparing to reintroduce the grizzly bear to its historic range in the Bitterroot Ecosystem of central Idaho and western Montana. Bears will not actually be relocated to this area for a year or more. We plan to accomplish grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot Ecosystem by reintroducing the species as a nonessential experimental population in central Idaho and a portion of western Montana in accordance with provisions in section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. Section 10(j) provides authority to implement special measures for reintroduction of threatened or endangered species to address local concerns. This designation will allow for flexible and responsive management to address local concerns about excessive government regulation on private lands, livestock depredations, negative impacts to big game and other wildlife populations, and lack of State government and local citizen involvement in the program. The CMC will manage the Bitterroot grizzly bear experimental population.

## Highlights of the Program

- A 5,785 square-mile Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Recovery Area will be designated to consist of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and the Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness.
- The designated Experimental Population Area will surround the Recovery Area and will encompass approximately 25,140 square miles.
- A 15-member Citizen Management Committee comprised of local citizens and agency representatives, will be tasked with management of the reintroduced grizzly bear population.
- A minimum of 25 grizzly bears will be reintroduced into the Recovery Area over a period of 5 years. The first bears will be reintroduced 1 - 2 years from now, at the earliest. These bears will come from areas in Canada and the United States that presently have healthy populations of grizzly bears living in habitats similar to those found in the Bitterroot Ecosystem.
- Reintroduced grizzly bears will be radio collared and monitored for research and to keep the public informed.
- Grizzly bear management will allow for resource extraction activities to continue.
- People can kill grizzly bears in self-defense or in defense of others. Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee nuisance grizzly bear management guidelines will be applied to problem bears.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service could issue a permit to allow a livestock owner to harass a grizzly bear attacking livestock. A livestock owner may be issued a permit to kill a grizzly bear killing or pursuing livestock on private lands.
- Because of the low reproductive rate of grizzly bears, estimates indicate that it will take a minimum of 50, and likely more than 110 years for the reintroduced population to reach the recovery goal of 280 bears for the Bitterroot ecosystem.
- The first year of implementation will be a “phase-in” year in which sanitation equipment will be installed in key areas, and information and education outreach programs will be initiated.
- A proactive public outreach and information and education program will be initiated to increase knowledge of grizzly bear biology and management, and awareness of the recovery program.
- CMC management decisions must lead to recovery of the grizzly bear in the Bitterroot Ecosystem while considering social and economic impacts.



# Management of the Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Population

- Q: Who will manage the grizzly bears reintroduced into the Bitterroot Ecosystem?**  
**A:** A 15-member Citizen Management Committee (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). The Montana and Idaho members will include one representative each from their respective state fish and game agency. There will also be one member representing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and one representing the USDA Forest Service. 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 Committee Management Committee will develop management plans and policies, as necessary, for the management of grizzly bears in the experimental population area. The CMC’s actions will rely on the best scientific and commercial data available to meet the grizzly bear recovery goals while minimizing social and economical impacts.
- 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 jointly carry out on-the-ground management of the grizzly bears with guidance 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 over a 60-day period. The Committee will be formed as soon as recommendations are made by the parties involved, the Secretary of the Interior appoints the members.
- Q: How will the Citizen Management Committee 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 Citizen Management Committee, 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 CMC 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 CMC will meet a minimum of two times per year. These meetings will be open to the public. Additionally, the CMC 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 CMC 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.

# Projected Implementation Timeline

- Q: When will implementation begin?**  
**A:** Grizzly bears will not be relocated to the area for a year or more. There are several steps that need to be accomplished first. We will begin by asking the Governors of Idaho and Montana to nominate members of the Citizen Management Committee. After the CMC is operating, we will discuss bear management and continue to conduct educational efforts to better inform citizens about living with and managing bears. We will also need to work with the USDA Forest Service to minimize bear attractants such as garbage, and install bear-proof garbage cans. The actual capture and movement of grizzly bears into the Bitterroot area will not begin until at least one year following the signature of the Record of Decision and final rule, which would be 2002 at the earliest.
- Q: How will the program be implemented in the first few years?**  
**A:** Implementation will be initiated in 3 stages:  
Stage 1: Formation of the Citizen Management Committee.  
Stage 2: Public outreach and education campaign, and sanitation improvements.  
The second stage will be simultaneous with CMC formation and will include 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. The sanitation program will include efforts by the USDA Forest Service, permittees, conservation organizations and others. The second stage will also include development and distribution of an enhanced outreach and education effort to inform people who recreate in the area how to minimize their chance of encountering bears.  
Stage 3: Reintroduction of grizzly bears.  
The third stage will be placement of bears, which will begin after the CMC has been established and the sanitation and information programs have begun.



# The Recovery Area



- Q: Where will grizzly bears be reintroduced?**  
**A:** We plan to reintroduce grizzly bears only into the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, unless it is later determined that reintroduction in the River of No Return Wilderness is appropriate. Specific remote relocation sites that have high quality bear habitat and low likelihood of human encounters will be identified and recommended by the management agencies.
- Q: How many bears will be released?**  
**A:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partner agencies in consultation with the CMC will release a minimum of 25 bears over a five-year period. Grizzly bears will be reintroduced to establish a small colony of bears from which a population can grow over time. In order to increase the probability of survival of the initial colony, we will consider increasing the number of bears in the first few years, as appropriate, and in coordination with the CMC.
- Q: What will be the ESA status of the reintroduced bears?**  
**A:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will designate this reintroduced population of grizzly bears as “non-essential experimental”.
- 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 the need 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 species “proposed for listing” rather than “threatened” for the purpose of ESA section 7 (Interagency Coordination).
- Q: What is the difference between the Recovery Area and the Experimental Population Area?**  
**A:** The 3.7 million acre 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 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. 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.
- Q: What will be the Endangered Species Act status of grizzly bears found outside the experimental area?**  
**A:** Grizzly bears outside the Experimental Population Area will be considered as threatened.