

The Bitterroot Plan: Issues and Impacts

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

A: This program proposes no changes to existing land management practices or plans. Re-introduction of a nonessential experimental population of grizzly bears into the Bitterroot Ecosystem is not expected to impact current land uses such as timber harvest, livestock grazing and mining, as long as they meet the existing standards and guidelines of the USDA Forest Service Forest Plans.

The Citizen Management Committee (CMC) will review any potential impacts to land uses and assure that resource management activities will be maintained at levels consistent with grizzly bear recovery. The CMC will be responsible for recommending changes in land-use standards and guidelines to land and wild-life management agencies, as necessary, for grizzly bear management.

Q: Will grizzly bears kill livestock and how many?

A: Livestock grazing occurs predominantly in the southern portion of the Experimental Area. While management activities will be taken to preempt problems, there may be some conflicts between grizzly bears and livestock. If significant conflicts occur between grizzly bears and livesock, managers may capture or eliminate the bears involved.

Projections indicate that at a population level of 280 grizzly bears, (50 - 110+ years in future) yearly livestock losses to depredation by bears could range from 4-8 cattle and 5-44 sheep. Livestock losses would be minimal during the first few decades and until the grizzly bear population increases appreciably.

Q: Will there be a compensation program for livestock losses?

A: There will be no Federal compensation program for livestock losses, but compensation from existing private funding sources will be encouraged.

Q: Will livestock owners be allowed to protect their stock from grizzly bears?

A: Yes. Grizzly bears will be managed according to existing grizzly bear nuisance guidelines, except in the case of grizzly bears on private land which are killing livestock and can not be captured by management authorities. In such cases, landowners will be issued a permit by the appropriate authorities allowing them to harass, through non-injurious means, a grizzly bear attacking livestock. A livestock owner may be is-

sued a permit to kill a grizzly bear killing or pursuing livestock on private lands if it has not been possible to capture such a bear or deter depredations through agency efforts.

Q: Could recreation be impacted by grizzly bears?

A: Trail and road closures are not expected solely for grizzly bears. However, 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 400-500 grizzly bears currently exist, only one trail was closed on national forest lands because of grizzly bears in the last 10 years. Any trail, road, or area closure will be based on recommendations of the Citizen Management Committee.

Q: Will hunter opportunity 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, 280 grizzly bears may eat as many elk as would 20 adult cougars over a one year period. A population of 280 bears would be expected to prey upon 504 ungulates per year across the Bitterroot Ecosystem. The loss of 504 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: The States of Idaho and Montana establish regulations on hunting of black bears. In central Idaho, baiting of black bears and pursuing black bears with hounds in wilderness areas may be evaluated by the Citizen Management Committee to assure that these activities do not hinder grizzly bear recovery. The CMC may recommend restrictions on black bear hunters or other hunting opportunities to reduce the likelihood of mistaken identity kills or to address other potential conflicts, but the recommendations will have to be accepted and implemented by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

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: How much will this reintroduction program cost?

A: The annual cost for the 5-year reintroduction period is approximately \$433,600 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.

Q: Is there adequate habitat in the Bitterroot Ecosystem to support a population of grizzly bears?

A: The Bitterroot is one of the largest contiguous areas of federal land remaining in the lower 48 United States, and contains the largest block of designated wilderness in the Rocky Mountains south of Canada. The habitat quality of the Bitterroot has been studied extensively and all research has concluded the area contains suitable habitat to support a grizzly bear population. The most recent scientific analysis indicates the habitat in the Bitterroot Ecosystem is capable of supporting a population of 308-321 grizzly bears.

Although habitat quality varies throughout the ecosystem, scientific studies indicate that a wide variety of preferred grizzly bear foods are present. The remoteness of the area and the scarcity of roads provide important habitat security. While adequate habitat is necessary for grizzly bear recovery, the key to success of this grizzly bear recovery program will likely be effective management including limitation of human-caused mortality.

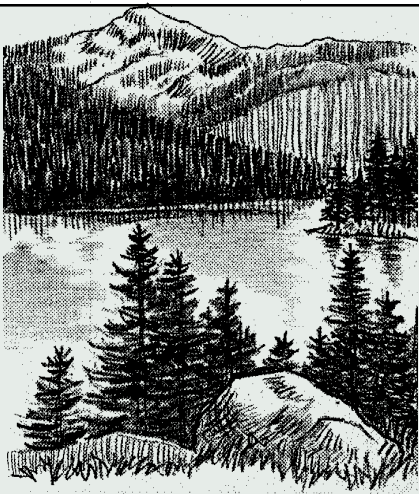
Grizzly Bear Recovery Program



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 can eventually support more than 300 grizzly bears. This will increase the current minimum number of grizzlies in the contiguous United States by 25-30%. The addition of a recovered Bitterroot population will reduce the probability of extinction for grizzly bears in the lower 48 States by 88-99%. Establishment of a third large population in the remote Bitterroot Ecosystem will contribute significantly to long-term conservation and recovery of the grizzly bear from threatened status in the conterminous 48 States.



Human Health and Safety

Q: What are the facts about human safety risks from grizzly bears?

A: The Service will take all possible actions to recude the risk of human-bear conflicts following Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines (see next question).

The potential of encounters between people and grizzly bears is extemely low based on past experience in areas where grizzly bears co-exist with humans. For example, in northwest Montana (outside of Glacier Park) and north Idaho, only two bear inflicted injuries have occurred in the last 50 years. In the Yellowstone Ecosystem outside of the Park, there have been 22 injuries due to grizzly bears (including 3 mortalities) within the last 159 years, for an average of 1 mortality every 53 years.

The number of human-bear conflicts within national parks tent to be higher than they are on public lands outside of parks. This is due to the greater densities of people and bears within national parks, and the associated problem of bears losing their fear of humans. The area where grizzly bears will be reintroduced is remote. Therefore, it is not appropriate to compare the potential for grizzly bear-inflicted injuries in the Bitterroot to national park statistics.

In the Bitterroot Ecosystem, during the first several decades following reintroduction, chance of injury caused by grizzly bears would be exceedingly small due to the low density of bears in the area. 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. Backcountry precautions, primarily keeping human foods away from bears, dramatically reduces human-grizzly bear incidents.

Q: What measures will be taken to reduce the risk of human injury?

A: • The Citizen Management Committee and federal, state, and tribal agencies will take all possible actions to reduce the risk of human/bear conflicts.

• Within the Experimental Population Area, a person can kill a grizzly bear in defense of their life or the lives of others.

• Only grizzly bears with no known history of conflicts with humans or livestock will be considered for reintroduction.

• Suitable bears will be released at remote wilderness sites to reduce the likelihood of encounters with humans.

• All released bears will be fitted with radio collars and their movements monitored to keep the public informed of general bear locations and recovery efforts.

• Bears that frequent areas of high human use, act aggressively toward humans, or kill livestock will be relocated or destroyed by management agencies.

• If a grizzly bear enters private lands in the Bitterroot Valley area of Montana, it will be captured and returned to the Recovery Area, or destroyed, or placed in captivity. Grizzly bears will be actively discouraged from this area.

• If a grizzly bear occupies inhabited human settlement areas on private land within the Experimental Population Area and presents a clear threat to human safety it may be relocated by management agencies.

• A proactive public information and education program will be initiated to inform the public about the recovery program, grizzly bear biology, and how to safely recreate in the Bitterroot. Sanitation improvements will be made to campgrounds and backcountry campsites.

GRIZZLY BEAR ECOSYSTEM	SIZE (square miles)	ESTIMATED POPULATION
Bitterroot Ecosystem	5,785	0
Yellowstone Ecosystem	9,500	400 - 600
Northern Continental Divide	9,600	400 - 500
Cabinet/Yaak	2,600	30 - 40
Selkirk	1,081	40 - 50
North Cascades	10,114	fewer than 15
TOTAL	38,680	885 - 1,205