

Bitterroot National Forest Communication Plan for the Relocation of Grizzly Bears

September 22, 2022

Grizzly Bears are listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act. A special rule (50 CFR 17.40) allows state, tribal, and federal agencies to manage (e.g., relocate, euthanize, haze) grizzly bears in accordance with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines (1986). This document outlines the roles and responsibilities, contacts, and release sites for relocation of grizzly bears between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Objectives of the communication plan are to:

1. Provide for management and recovery of grizzly bears within the Bitterroot National Forest in areas where grizzly bears “may be present” in Montana in accordance with the Grizzly Bear Special Rule (50 CFR 17.40), the Endangered Species Act and the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan,
2. Outline the process for the USFS and USFWS regarding Grizzly Bear release sites,
3. Provide for human safety when relocating bears, and
4. Minimize future potential for human-grizzly conflicts.

Roles and Responsibilities

A new Montana law (Senate Bill 337), signed in 2021, limits MFWP involvement in grizzly bear relocations outside of recovery zones. Beginning in 2022, the USFWS will establish a field presence to relocate grizzly bears as documented in an MOA between the USFWS and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) (appendix A).

The USFWS, in collaboration with MFWP, Tribes, and Wildlife Services will determine appropriate management actions for conflict bears. When the decision has been made that the USFWS will relocate a grizzly bear, the USFWS will contact the USFS to request permission to relocate and discuss potential release sites. To ensure a trapped bear is released as soon as possible, it is important that USFS contacts are available to reach a decision as quickly as possible.

Bear Handling and Relocation Procedures

Bears relocated onto the Bitterroot National Forest will normally be handled by MFWP or USFWS according to their MOA (appendix A) and occasionally by Tribal personnel. These relocation sites are intended for use for captures outside of recovery zones. Individuals will not

be moved to a different ecosystem (i.e., augmentation in the Cabinet Mountains) or new areas (i.e., reintroduction).

In order to address general public safety and the safety of on-site personnel, operational procedures developed by the MFWP/USFWS for bear releases will be adhered to. Emphasis should be given to the following guidelines:

1. The minimum required number of people and vehicles will be on site at the time of release.
2. All persons on site at the time of the release will be in a secure position.
3. The District Ranger or Forest Supervisor (or designated acting) may choose to temporarily restrict public use of an area for public safety, through the appropriate Forest Service process.
4. If a bear is released in close proximity (less than 1 mile) to another adjacent land management agency's land, the appropriate adjacent land management agency personnel will be notified by USFWS.
5. For relocations onto the National Forest lands, the District Ranger, designated "Acting", or the Supervisor's office (as described above) will be contacted so that a suitable release site can be mutually agreed upon considering both human safety and the well-being of the bear.
6. District Rangers or designated acting may propose a different release site other than those within this document for safety reasons, especially if human use at the previously-identified release site is high due to a special uses event or other reasons.

Follow-up monitoring information (bear location and movement pattern) will be provided by MFWP/USFWS if soon after release the bear is discovered to frequent sites where human safety may be of concern. This includes Forest Service campgrounds, administrative sites, and heavily used trails. This information will be provided as available to the District Wildlife Biologist, who will distribute this information to the affected Districts, Forest Wildlife Biologist, and adjacent landowners as appropriate.

Communication Plan

The USFWS Grizzly Bear Recovery Program Staff (Recovery Coordinator, Conflict Coordinator, or Bear Specialists) will first contact the District Ranger and Wildlife Biologist at the district where a bear is proposed for release or their "Acting". If neither can be reached, personnel at the Supervisor's Office will be contacted and they will contact District Staff to discuss potential release sites. If a site near District or Forest boundaries (less than 1 mile) is under consideration, personnel from both areas will be included

The District Ranger should attempt to notify employees of a planned release immediately after a location has been identified with the USFWS. This entails ensuring:

- Communication with their district's Staff to discuss work locations and any safety concerns,
- Contacting the Forest Safety Officer (including the adjacent forest if nearby).
- Notification of other Forest Service personnel as needed (e.g., Forest Supervisor, Staff Officers, and Forest Wildlife Biologist).

Updates

This agreement will be updated as needed to reflect changes to contacts and/or changes to release site locations or information. This agreement should be revisited each year between the USFWS and USFS to review the year's relocations and update any process needs.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Matt Anderson, Supervisor, Bitterroot National Forest

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Hilary Cooley, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator, USFWS

Contacts

Bitterroot National Forest Contacts

Office	Contact	Position	Email	Phone

Other contacts involved in grizzly bear relocations on the Bitterroot, Beaverhead- Deerlodge, Helena-Lewis and Clark, and Lolo National Forests

Contact	Position	Email	Phone
Hilary Cooley	Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator	hilary_cooley@fws.gov	c: (b) (6), o: 406-293-4903
Benjamin Jimenez	Grizzly Bear Conflict Coordinator	Benjamin_jimenez@fws.gov	c: 406-214-0497
Rory Trimbo	Grizzly Bear Specialist, Kalispell	rory_trimbo@fws.gov	c: 406-833-0344
Amber Kornak	Grizzly Bear Specialist, Helena	Amber_kornak@fws.gov	c: 406-214-0785
Morgan Vance	Grizzly Bear Specialist, Roamer	morgan_vance@fws.gov	c: 406-833-0325
Becca Lyon	Grizzly Bear Specialist, Wyoming	Rebecca_lyon@fws.gov	c: 406-833-0329
Erik Wenum	Wildlife Management Specialist, Flathead	erik.wenum@mt.gov	c: 406-250-0062
Justine Vallieres	Wildlife Management Specialist, Flathead	Justine.Vallieres@mt.gov	c: 406-250-1265
Kim Annis	Wildlife Management Specialist, Libby	KAnnis@mt.gov	c: 406-291-1320, o: 406-293-4162 x 207
Jamie Jonkel	Wildlife Management Specialist, Missoula	jajonkel@mt.gov	c:, o: 406-542-5508
Chad White	Wildlife Management Specialist, Choteau	Charles.White@mt.gov	c: 406-466-5100, o: 406-788-4755
Wesley Sarmento	Wildlife Management Specialist, Conrad	Wesley.Sarmento@mt.gov	c: 406-450-1097
Jeremiah Smith	Wildlife Management Specialist, Livingston	jfsmith@mt.gov	c: (b) (6)
Kylie Kembel	Wildlife Management Specialist, Red Lodge	Kylie.Kembel@mt.gov	406-850-1131

Bruce Montgomery	Wildlife Management Specialist, Bitterroot	Bruce.montgomery@mt.gov	406-422-6184
Eli Hampson	Wildlife Management Specialist, Missoula	eli.hampson@mt.gov	406-210-3213
Brad Balis	Wildlife Management Specialist, Anaconda	Brad.balis@mt.gov	406-465-9343

Table 1. 2022 Active Management Grizzly Bear Release Sites. All are on USFS land and all are accessed via roads.

Bitterroot NF					
Name	Township Range Section	District and Forest *	Concerns and Constraints	Access Description	Zone

Appendix A: MOA between MFWP and USFWS regarding grizzly bear management in relation to Montana SB337