

## ***Questions & Answers***

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### ***about the Grizzly Bear in the Yellowstone Area***



**1. How many grizzly bears are there in the United States?**

When Lewis & Clark explored the West, there were an estimated 50,000 bears roaming the area that is now the continental United States. But when pioneers moved in, grizzlies moved out. Today there are only a total of about 1,200-1400 grizzlies in the Lower 48 States. These bears, are listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act and thus protected by federal law.

**2. What is the purpose of the Endangered Species Act?**

The purpose of the Act is to restore endangered and threatened animals and plants to the point where they are again viable, self-sustaining components of their ecosystems.

**3. How long have grizzly bears been a threatened species?**

All grizzly bears in the Lower 48 states were listed as threatened in 1975, when populations were thought to still inhabit six areas in the states of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming, identified in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan as the North Cascades, Selkirk, Cabinet-Yaak, Northern Continental Divide, Bitterroot, and Yellowstone ecosystems. Today, we know that grizzlies disappeared in the Bitterroot in the late 1940s and were not present there in 1975.

**4. How are each of the grizzly populations doing?**

There are an estimated minimum of 550-600 grizzlies in the Yellowstone population, the largest in the five inhabited ecosystems, and growing. Yellowstone grizzlies, which are reoccupying habitat where they had been absent for more than 40 years, are well on their way to recovery. Next to the Yellowstone ecosystem, grizzlies in the Northern Continental Divide are faring the best with 400 + bears. The populations in the other three inhabited ecosystems -- Cabinet-Yaak, North Cascades, and Selkirk ecosystems -- are smaller and more threatened. The Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk ecosystems have 30-40 bears each, while the North Cascade ecosystem is believed to only have 2-3 bears on the U.S. side. These populations are on the Service’s candidate list to be listed as “endangered,” a more serious designation than the current “threatened” status.

**5. To what degree has the Yellowstone grizzly bear population improved since the time it was listed as a threatened species?**

It is estimated that there were perhaps 200 or fewer grizzly bears in the Yellowstone area at its low point in 1973-75, around the time the species was listed as threatened. Today, there are a minimum of 550-600 grizzlies in the Yellowstone area. The number of adult breeding females has jumped from less than 30 in 1983 (the first year this sub-population was estimated) to over 100 today. With the growing grizzly population and its expanding need to establish home ranges, the bears have begun reoccupying areas in their historic range where they had been absent for more than 40 years.

**6. What has contributed to increased population of the Yellowstone grizzly bear?**

Public support has helped improve sanitation practices and other human activity in grizzly habitat to reduce human-bear conflicts and reduce human-caused bear mortalities in a variety of ways. Better management of grizzly habitat by state and federal agencies, as well as private land owners; along with publicly and privately funded research to obtain additional biological data have also facilitated recovery of the species.

**7. What are the major threats to the recovering Yellowstone population of grizzly bears?**

Habitat loss due to possible loss of some major foods, private land development, certain types of resource development that disturb grizzlies, and human-caused mortality are the major threats to the grizzly bear in the Yellowstone area. The management of grizzly bears and their habitat affects human lives both socially and economically. The recovery of grizzly bears in the Yellowstone area has relied heavily on social acceptance of grizzlies and agency efforts to manage bears. As the Yellowstone area is comprised of a diverse land ownership pattern and managed by agencies with dissimilar responsibilities for habitat and species management, it is necessary after recovery to continue a coordinated grizzly bear management and monitoring program that crosses jurisdictional and geographic boundaries.

**8. What is being done to counter threats to the Yellowstone grizzly bears?**

Management of grizzly bears in the Yellowstone area uses the best way to assure a healthy population of grizzly bears – close monitoring of the population and habitat, and responding when necessary with management actions that fit the situation. This includes an ongoing program to inform the public how to live, work, and recreate in bear country,

such as proper food storage and management of bird feeders in bear country, when and how to use pepper spray instead of firearms, how to avoid human-bear conflicts, and management of road densities and other methods of access to minimize impacts to grizzlies and their habitat.

**9. Why don't we know the exact number of grizzlies living in each area?**

Grizzly bears are solitary and live in densely vegetated and remote areas. The Service is continually updating methods to estimate populations and will always use the best available science as it becomes available

**10. How do you know that grizzly bear populations are expanding? If populations are moving into other geographic areas, shouldn't these areas be added to the Recovery Zone?**

Multiple scientific reports show grizzly bear population increase and expansion in the Yellowstone area. The Recovery Zone -- also called the Primary Conservation Area (PCA) -- does not include all habitat occupied by grizzlies, just the core habitat which is necessary to support a recovered bear population. It is recognized that grizzly bears will occur outside the PCA and that the mere presence of bears outside this zone is not a sufficient reason to change its boundaries. If an expansion of the Recovery Zone is to be considered, the additional area must be of significant biological value to bears currently residing within the zone. These values must be demonstrated by habitat mapping and bear movement data.

**11. Are total numbers of grizzly bears the only criteria on which recovery is determined?**

No. A recovered grizzly bear population is one having a reasonable probability of existence into the foreseeable future; the factors for which it was originally listed under the Endangered Species Act must have been successfully addressed. These factors include the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range; overuse for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; disease or predation; the lack or inadequacy of regulations; and other natural or manmade factors affecting the population's continued existence. For example, besides the increased population of grizzlies in the Yellowstone ecosystem, major improvements have been made to this grizzly bear habitat, storage of attractants to bears and public education during the past 20 years, and the range of grizzly bears in this area has expanded during this time.

**12. How is grizzly bear recovery data obtained?**

Biologists from state and federal agencies are carefully monitoring and studying the grizzly bear throughout its range. In addition, they talk with landowners and other private organizations who live and work in grizzly bear habitat and obtain data as to frequency of sightings, conflicts, and miscellaneous information that is helpful in determining current trends in certain areas.

**13. As human development increases on private lands and recreational use increases on public land, will more grizzly bears die?**

If increasing human-bear conflicts in human high-density areas are not mitigated through public education and cooperation, more bears could die as a result.

**14. Do grizzly bears have natural enemies? If so, what are they?**

Other grizzly bears and humans are the major natural competitors to grizzly bears .

**15. How long will it be before the Grizzly Bear is removed from the Threatened & Endangered Species List?**

Only the Yellowstone population of grizzlies -- not any of the other five populations in the lower 48 States -- is close to recovery. In the case of Yellowstone, there are still several steps that must be accomplished to complete implementation of the recovery plan, before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would consider proposing "delisting."

The most important step is finalizing the interagency Conservation Strategy, which is a comprehensive agreement among the states and federal agencies about how this population will be monitored and managed after delisting. The Conservation Strategy was completed in March 2003.

There are several other actions that must be taken by the States and federal land management agencies in grizzly country before Recovery Plan implementation can be considered completed. For example, there are six National Forests and two national parks with grizzly habitat that must revise their Management Plans or management direction to meet the requirements of the Conservation Strategy. The Service cannot finalize delisting of the species until these actions are completed.

Whenever the Service publishes a delisting proposal, public comments are accepted and considered; it is usually about a 1-year process from a formal proposal to the final decision about whether or not to delist.

**16. If the Grizzly is delisted in Yellowstone, will it still be protected in the other areas?**

Yes. The other populations would remain federally protected under the Endangered

Species Act (ESA) and recovery activities would continue. The eventual goal of all recovery plans is to establish healthy populations that are no longer in need of federal protection.

**17. Will hunting and other killing of bears be allowed in the Yellowstone area if that population is delisted in the future?**

After removal from federal protection, grizzly bear management would be the responsibility of the state and federal agencies and would be conducted as outlined in the final Conservation Strategy. Management of “problem” bears (those threatening humans or in some special instances livestock) currently includes some lethal control; such a control option would continue under the Conservation Strategy. Limited hunting could be considered by the Yellowstone Grizzly Management Committee, the group in charge of implementing the Conservation Strategy, if monitoring and research data indicate a healthy, self-sustaining population is maintained and that any mortality from hunting was within the strict mortality limits specified in the Conservation Strategy.

**18. What would happen after delisting if the Yellowstone population started to decline?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with the help of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC), developed the Conservation Strategy with enough protective measures and safeguards to ensure a self-sustaining population; thus, the likelihood of the population sustaining an unhealthy decline after delisting is very low. However, the Service has the authority at any time to initiate a status review and consider whether the species should be relisted under the ESA. Citizens may also petition at any time to have this status review and relisting conducted. In dire circumstances, immediate action in the form of “emergency listing” is also available under the law, so federal protection could always be reinstated in the future if needed.

**19. Who was involved in authoring and reviewing the Conservation Strategy?**

Members of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee were cooperatively involved in creating the Strategy. This committee included representatives from USDA-Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey and the states of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. Many other scientists outside of federal and state governments were consulted and/or contributed to information used in the Strategy.

**20. What is the role/responsibility of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee, States, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife**

### **Service in the final approval of the Conservation Strategy?**

Members of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee include representatives from the same federal and state agencies that have been developing the Conservation Strategy. Signatories to the agreement to implement the Conservation Strategy will include representatives from each of these agencies.

#### **21. Doesn't publication of the Conservation Strategy mean grizzlies will be delisted?**

No, the Conservation Strategy does not remove protection under the Endangered Species Act for the grizzly bear. The purpose of the Conservation Strategy is to describe and summarize the population and habitat management that will apply to the grizzly bear and its habitat in the Yellowstone area after the species is recovered and delisted under the authority of the Endangered Species Act. Monitoring, research, and management by those state and federal land and wildlife management agencies which will oversee the grizzly bear and its habitat after delisting will ensure the sustained recovery of the bear.

#### **22. But aren't the Conservation Strategy and delisting part of the same process?**

While both actions are part of the ongoing recovery plan, they are not a combined action and the Conservation Strategy does not automatically lead to delisting. The Conservation Strategy must be developed and approved for the Yellowstone Ecosystem population of grizzly bears *before* any proposal for delisting this population would be considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There are several additional Recovery Plan tasks remaining before the Service would consider proposing delisting.

#### **23. Isn't this process politically driven and not based on biology?**

No. Recovery and conservation of the Yellowstone ecosystem population of grizzly bears is based on the best biological and scientific information currently available. Scientific methods described in the Conservation Strategy were developed to address, maintain, and continue recovery of the Yellowstone grizzly bears after delisting.

#### **24. Why does there need to be a Conservation Strategy for use after delisting if grizzly bears in Yellowstone would no longer be a threatened species?**

The Conservation Strategy was developed to be the management plan and monitoring plan for the Yellowstone population and its habitat after recovery and delisting. Before a species is considered "recovered" and taken off the endangered species list, the Service must demonstrate that adequate regulatory mechanisms will exist to reasonably assure continued recovered status. The Conservation Strategy details what regulatory

mechanisms will exist and provides guidelines for management agencies to monitor grizzlies and habitat in their areas.

**25. What conservation actions are outlined specifically in the Conservation Strategy?**

The document contains the best currently available scientific methods to manage and maintain a recovered grizzly bear population in the Yellowstone ecosystem. The Conservation Strategy outlines:

- A defined Primary Conservation Area (PCA), which is the same 9,209-square-mile area identified as the Recovery Zone in the Recovery Plan, divided into 18 smaller “Bear Management Units” (BMUs); and the area within 10 miles beyond the PCA boundary, where occupancy of grizzly bears is anticipated and acceptable.
- List of agencies that will implement this document (federal and state management agencies) with updates every 5 years or as necessary and public input during this updating process. Estimated costs of implementation are included.
- Population management objectives that call for annual calculations of populations and meeting specific targets, such as:
  - Monitoring female grizzly bears with cubs-of-the-year and requiring that at least 15 females with cubs be maintained on a running 6-year average.
  - Using the number of sightings and resightings of individual females with cubs inside the Primary Conservation Area (PCA) and the area within 10 miles beyond the PCA boundary to conservatively estimate the total number of bears with cubs in the population each year.
  - Monitoring the distribution of females with young and having a target of at least 16 of 18 bear management units occupied for a period of time.
  - Monitoring known human-caused mortalities of grizzly bears.
  - Monitoring known human-caused mortalities of female grizzlies.
- Population trend will also be monitored on a regular basis.
- Management actions to reduce mortalities and to enforce strict limits on female grizzly mortalities within the entire ecosystem.
- Habitat recovery criteria and management objectives, which include monitoring and managing the effect of roads and secure habitat .

- Management actions that eliminate the likelihood of detrimental impact to the bears due to increases in the number of developed sites, etc. on public lands.
- Inside the Primary Conservation Area (PCA), no new livestock allotments are to be created. No increase in permitted sheep allotments. Existing sheep allotments are to be phased out as the opportunity arises.
- General habitat monitoring parameters used to judge the maintenance of sufficient habitat for a recovered grizzly population. These monitoring parameters include:
  - Availability of four major foods (cutthroat trout; army cutworm moths; ungulate carcass numbers; and whitebark pine cone production, with incidence of white pine blister rust monitored ).
  - Availability of quality habitat to bears and its accessibility to grizzlies via a cumulative effects model.
  - Number and nature of human/bear conflicts (including bear-livestock conflicts) and control actions.
  - Development on private lands.
  - Number of elk hunters

-A system to measure and report all of the above-mentioned parameters and a protocol to respond to population and habitat criteria that are below target levels. Two levels of review would be possible: 1) a management review, conducted by a team appointed by the Yellowstone Grizzly Management Committee, in response to indicators of declines in population and habitat target levels; and 2) a petition for relisting received or initiated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or conducted at the request of the Yellowstone Grizzly Management Committee, the Service itself, or a petitioner asking the Service to relist the grizzly.

- Ongoing public information and education program.
- A list of all existing legal authorities available to the federal and state agencies to implement this Strategy and maintain a recovered population of grizzly bears.
- Nuisance-bear management protocol and how to put it into action.
- Responsibilities for the major monitoring and research activities to be conducted under this Strategy.

**26. What role do governments play in the Conservation Strategy?**

As the key participants in the Conservation Strategy, federal and state agencies are involved through their own management plans, which are the vehicles to implement the Conservation Strategy provisions on the ground. These agencies will also maintain a formal management committee called the Yellowstone Grizzly Coordinating Committee that will meet at least twice a year and use their resources to implement this Conservation Strategy. The Strategy will be updated by the management agencies every 5 years, or as necessary, allowing for public input in this updating process.

**27. Will states receive federal funds to assist in the management of the grizzly bear under the Conservation Strategy?**

While there are currently no plans to divert additional federal funds to the states for management, the Service is committed to working with the states to manage the bears. While the Conservation Strategy is in place, any federal agencies participating in helping to ensure the recovery of the Yellowstone ecosystem population of grizzly bears will be using federal funds.

**28. Are forest plans important for good grizzly bear management?**

Not all management issues that involve grizzly bears occur on Forest Service lands. However, forest plans have addressed recovery and habitat issues critical to grizzly bears, and they are vital to the continued and successful recovery of the grizzly bear population in the Yellowstone ecosystem. National Forests in the Yellowstone ecosystem have made numerous grizzly bear habitat improvements during the past 20 years. Forest plans will need to be amended to include the criteria of the Conservation Strategy in order to help protect the bears.

**29. Why is the Conservation Strategy not subject to National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)?**

Federal agencies that implement the Conservation Strategy will comply with NEPA, as appropriate.

**30. Is there a way to evaluate individual projects so as to not lead to a gradual decline of habitat?**

Yes. A mathematical model known as Cumulative Effects Model is applied to a project to determine and evaluate the impact of the project. Such a model has been used to evaluate projects on National Forests and in National Parks.

- 31. Isn't the only way to mitigate increased development on private land, including oil and gas leasing, timber harvesting and home building, to provide every possible level of protection on public lands for the long term?**

Not necessarily. While the Conservation Strategy is designed to provide high levels of protection on public lands, ways to provide protections for bears on private lands include conservation easements, habitat conservation plans, information/education of private landowners on how to live in bear country, or the purchase of private land important to grizzlies from willing sellers.

- 32. Yellowstone Ecosystem biologists agree that roads and other human activities impact grizzly bears. How are these addressed in the Conservation Strategy?**

Roads are carefully managed under the Conservation Strategy. To improve or maintain grizzly bear habitat, standards have been set in the Conservation Strategy. Agencies will monitor and evaluate conditions annually and manage for those standards.

- 33. Agencies have made a credible effort in reducing human/bear incidents through management actions. Oftentimes, these incidents may be related to decreased natural food availability, especially pine nuts. This is not predictable; how can you help when human-caused mortality results from this situation?**

During these times bears roam farther for food and may get into trouble that they wouldn't normally get in during a "good food year." Humans can't change the year's production of pine nuts or the weather, but in years when the bears tend to roam more, informing the public about appropriate sanitation orders and proper food storage will help prevent bears from having to be moved or eliminated because of bad habits started during these times. Information on critical things such as food storage can save bears. The habitat monitoring program will allow for an "early alert" if a food crop comes up short.

- 34. Are natural disasters – such as whitebark pines being wiped out by global warming and blister rust disease – accounted for in the Conservation Strategy?**

Declines in important grizzly foods, such as whitebark pine nuts, would be measured with the monitoring systems under the Conservation Strategy. An annual monitoring and evaluation system is built into the Conservation Strategy to make it a dynamic document able to quickly respond to changes in the bears or their habitat as necessary. If the grizzly population or habitat should decline suddenly, because of this or any other natural disaster, and the Service determines that the protections of the Endangered Species Act are needed to prevent it from becoming endangered or extinct, the species can be relisted.

- 35. The Conservation Strategy requires management of the same amount of habitat as existed in 1975 when the bear was listed. How is this possible, since grizzlies occupy only 2% of their original habitat?**

The habitat occupied by grizzlies in 1975, when it was listed as a threatened species, is included with the six ecosystems in the Grizzly Recovery Plan. The Yellowstone area is one of these six ecosystems. The Conservation Strategy for Yellowstone uses a protective approach with careful limits on human activity and bear mortality within the 9,209-square-mile Primary Conservation Area. This area is the nucleus from which bears will occupy all available surrounding habitat. Currently, grizzly bears occupy considerably more suitable habitat in the Yellowstone area than they did in 1975, both inside and outside the recovery zone.

- 36. The Conservation Strategy calls for the maintenance of a status quo. How do we know this will preserve the grizzly bear population in the long run or that today's grizzly population levels are as healthy as they can be?**

Using the best scientific information currently available, wildlife biologists have determined that the Yellowstone population of grizzly bears is well on its way to recovery. Careful monitoring of the population and habitat issues will continue under the Conservation Strategy. Adaptive management methods described in the Conservation Strategy were developed to help maintain recovery in the future. State grizzly bear management plans will ultimately determine the top level of grizzly bear populations and use of suitable habitat in the three states that cover the Yellowstone ecosystem.

- 37. How can public agencies dictate or require after delisting that there will be no net loss of habitat on lands within the Yellowstone Ecosystem? How will the legal requirements of mining and the agency regulation of commodity and recreation use be met in the future? What about unforeseen events such as catastrophic fire, white pine blister rust, etc. ?**

The land management plans for the Federal land management agencies will have to be changed to include these habitat specifics. The Conservation Strategy will assure a no-net-loss approach to habitat inside the PCA. In addition, careful monitoring of important population and habitat characteristics will be done each year. If necessary, management actions will be implemented to address issues that threaten the bears.

- 38. How will future threats to grizzly bear habitat in the Yellowstone ecosystem be addressed?**

The Conservation Strategy will be updated on a regular basis to address additional threats and concerns that arise, based on the best available science. The agencies that signed the

Conservation Strategy are committed to be responsive to the needs of the grizzly by dynamic management actions based on the results of detailed annual monitoring of the Yellowstone grizzly population and its habitat. Specific targets must be measured and maintained for both population and habitat requirements. There is a protocol in the Strategy that provides a mechanism to reassess problems and to respond with specific actions to either remedy the problem or relist under the Endangered Species Act the grizzly bear in the Yellowstone area.

**39. If the grizzly bear is taken off the Endangered Species List, would states be able to open up grizzly habitat to mining, logging, and other development?**

Management of federal lands in most of the Yellowstone Ecosystem is the responsibility of the Forest Service and National Park Service. The states are not able to change the management of these areas. This Conservation Strategy includes safeguards for habitat protection to ensure the bear's recovery.

**40. What kind of protection, if any, does the grizzly bear have in addition to the Conservation Strategy?**

There are a number of federal laws, regulations, and policies that require federal land management agencies to conserve grizzly bears and other species. In addition, state laws in each of the states of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho include provisions for grizzly management. Those authorities are listed in the Conservation Strategy.

**41. Many illegal bear mortalities go unknown each year. How do you account for that in the conservation strategy?**

The Service continues to look into ways to improve our estimates of unknown mortality and will use the best methods available.

**42. How can we be sure that the population will not start to decline without the protection of the ESA?**

We can never be 100% sure about the future. However, by using the best science available, careful and detailed monitoring of grizzly bears and habitat parameters can reasonably assure a sustained population; that is why a conservation strategy was developed. The Conservation Strategy will guide state and federal agencies and others in actions that will contribute to the continued recovery of the grizzly bear. If it appears that the population is declining, there are actions outlined in the Conservation Strategy that will provide for further protections.

**43. What can a private citizen do to help the Yellowstone grizzly bear?**

Become informed. If you live or visit grizzly bear country, you can learn ways to avoid human-bear conflicts, such as keeping food away from the bears. These are usually very simple things that many people would not even think about -- such as watching for signs of grizzlies and avoiding them -- but they are very often critical to the survival of the bear. Public knowledge can make great strides in ensuring continued grizzly bear recovery.

**44. Where can I get more information on grizzlies?**

Visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mountain-Prairie website at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly/> or the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/igbc/>. There is also information on the U.S. Geological Survey's website about the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team at <http://www.mesc.usgs.gov/research/5003253.asp>.

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