



U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Park Service



Welcome

TO THE PUBLIC MEETING FOR THE
DRAFT GRIZZLY BEAR RESTORATION PLAN/EIS
NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM

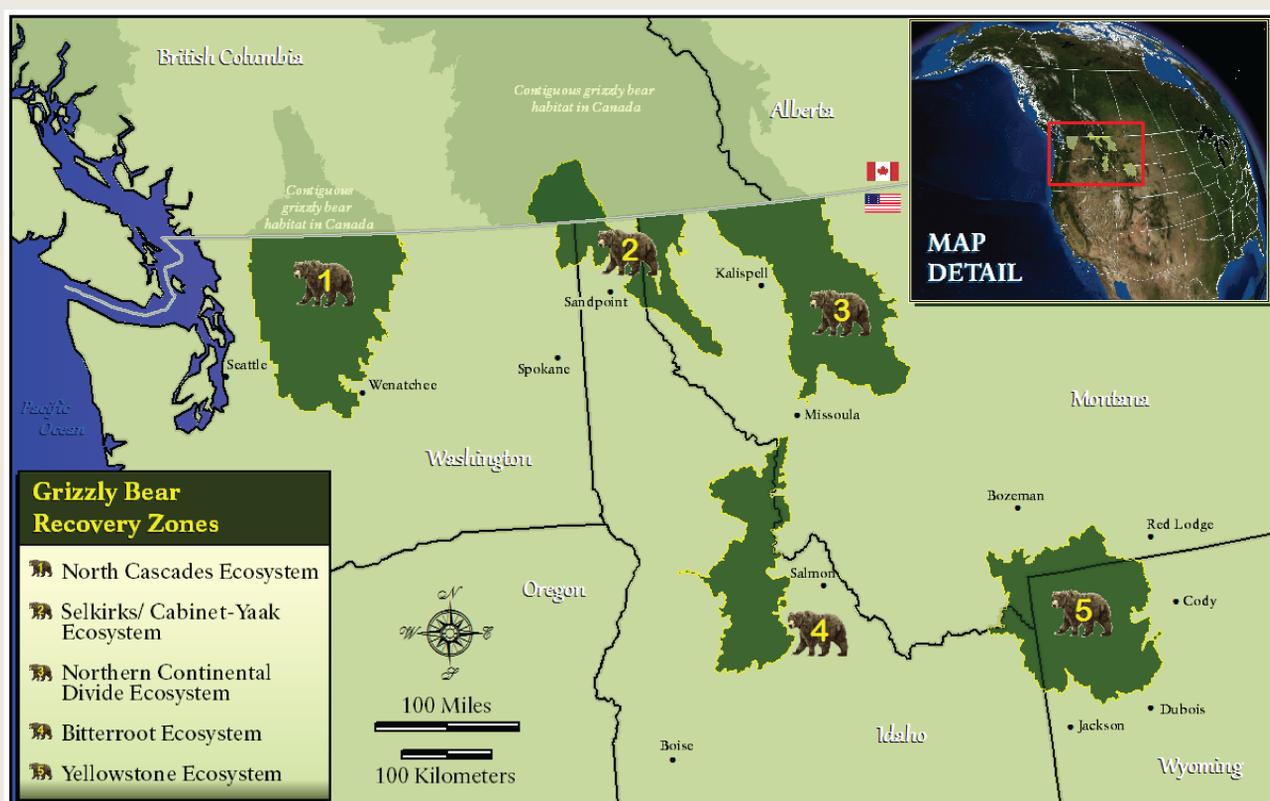
Please sign in



Photo by C. Brindle

**Draft Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan /
Environmental Impact Statement**
NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM

National Grizzly Recovery Efforts



NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM. The NCE is comparable in size to the state of Vermont, encompassing approximately 9,800 square miles, or 6.1 million acres, within the state of Washington. Adjoining the NCE grizzly bear recovery zone to the north are protected lands in British Columbia, Canada, including approximately 442,300 acres of provincial park land within the Canadian portion of the NCE.

GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM. The GYE is approximately 9,200 square miles. The estimated GYE grizzly bear population increased from as few as 136 in 1975 to a 2014 estimate of approximately 757 and the grizzly bears have gradually expanded their occupied habitat by more than 100%. In March, 2016, the FWS issued a proposed rule to remove the GYE population of grizzly bears from the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife.

NORTHERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE ECOSYSTEM. The NCDE includes the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana, and adjacent areas in Canada. It covers approximately 9,600 square miles. The grizzly bear population in this ecosystem numbers approximately 1,000 animals and continues to grow each year.

SELKIRK ECOSYSTEM. The SE includes approximately 2,200 square miles of northeastern Washington, northern Idaho and southern British Columbia, Canada. Approximately 1,200 square miles of this area is within the United States. The current grizzly bear population in the SE is estimated at approximately 80 grizzly bears and is approximately equally divided between the Canadian and U.S. portions of the ecosystem.

CABINET-YAAK ECOSYSTEM. The CYE encompasses areas in the Yaak River drainage and the Cabinet Mountains of northwestern Montana and northern Idaho totaling 2,600 square miles. Managers are augmenting the population from southeastern British Columbia. The current grizzly bear population in the CYE is estimated at approximately 48 to 50 animals.

BITTERROOT ECOSYSTEM. The BE covers approximately 5,600 square miles. Grizzly bears do not currently occupy the BE. The FWS prepared an EIS and signed a final rule and record of decision in November 2000 to reintroduce a nonessential experimental population of 25 grizzly bears to the BE. The rule was never finalized and therefore the record of decision is still in place to introduce a nonessential experimental population of 25 grizzly bears.

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Background

Research indicates the North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE) is capable of supporting a self-sustaining grizzly bear population. However, the last confirmed observation in the NCE was of a solitary bear in 1996. Given the low number of grizzly bears, very slow reproductive rate, and other recovery constraints, the NCE grizzly bear population is the most at-risk grizzly bear population in the United States today.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recently reaffirmed that the NCE grizzly bear warrants uplisting from Threatened to Endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

The main threat to grizzly bears in this recovery zone is the low number of bears, with resulting demographic and genetic risks. Natural recovery in the NCE is challenged by the absence of verified reproduction and isolation from any connected populations.



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of a proposed action and alternatives to that proposal, including a “no action,” or status quo, alternative, before making a decision on what action to take. The FWS and National Park Service (NPS) are co-lead agencies in this planning process. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) are cooperating agencies.

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Purpose & Need

PURPOSE OF THE EIS

The purpose of this EIS is to determine how to restore the grizzly bear to the NCE, a portion of its historical range.

NEED FOR ACTION

Because the NCE grizzly bears are at risk of local extinction, action is needed at this time to:

- Avoid the permanent loss of grizzly bears in the NCE.
- Contribute to the restoration of biodiversity of the ecosystem for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations of people.
- Enhance the probability of long-term survival of grizzly bears in the NCE and thereby contribute to overall grizzly bear recovery.
- Support the recovery of the grizzly bear to the point where it can be removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife species.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives are more specific statements of purpose that provide additional bases for comparing the effectiveness of alternatives in achieving the desired outcomes of an action. The objectives of this EIS are to:

- Restore a grizzly bear population as part of the natural and cultural heritage of the North Cascades.
- Provide Pacific Northwest residents and visitors with the opportunity to again experience grizzly bears in their native habitat.
- Seek to support tribal cultural and spiritual values, as well as environmental and natural resource objectives related to the grizzly bear.
- Expand outreach efforts to inform and involve the public, and build understanding about grizzly bear recovery.

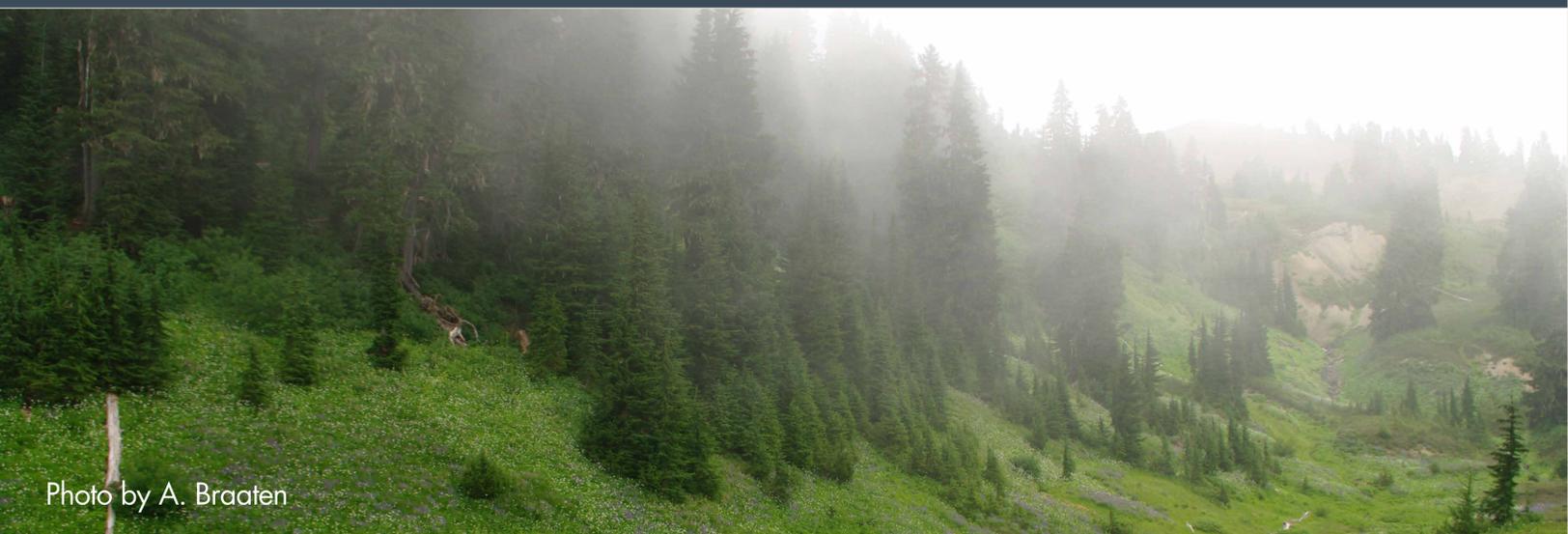


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Alternatives

Four alternatives, including the no action alternative, were analyzed in the draft EIS. At this time, there is not a preferred alternative. Input from the public is encouraged and all public comments received on the draft EIS will be evaluated and considered in the identification of the preferred alternative, which will be included in the final EIS.

Alternative A: Continuation of Existing Grizzly Bear Management (No Action)

Existing management practices would be followed and no new actions would be implemented.

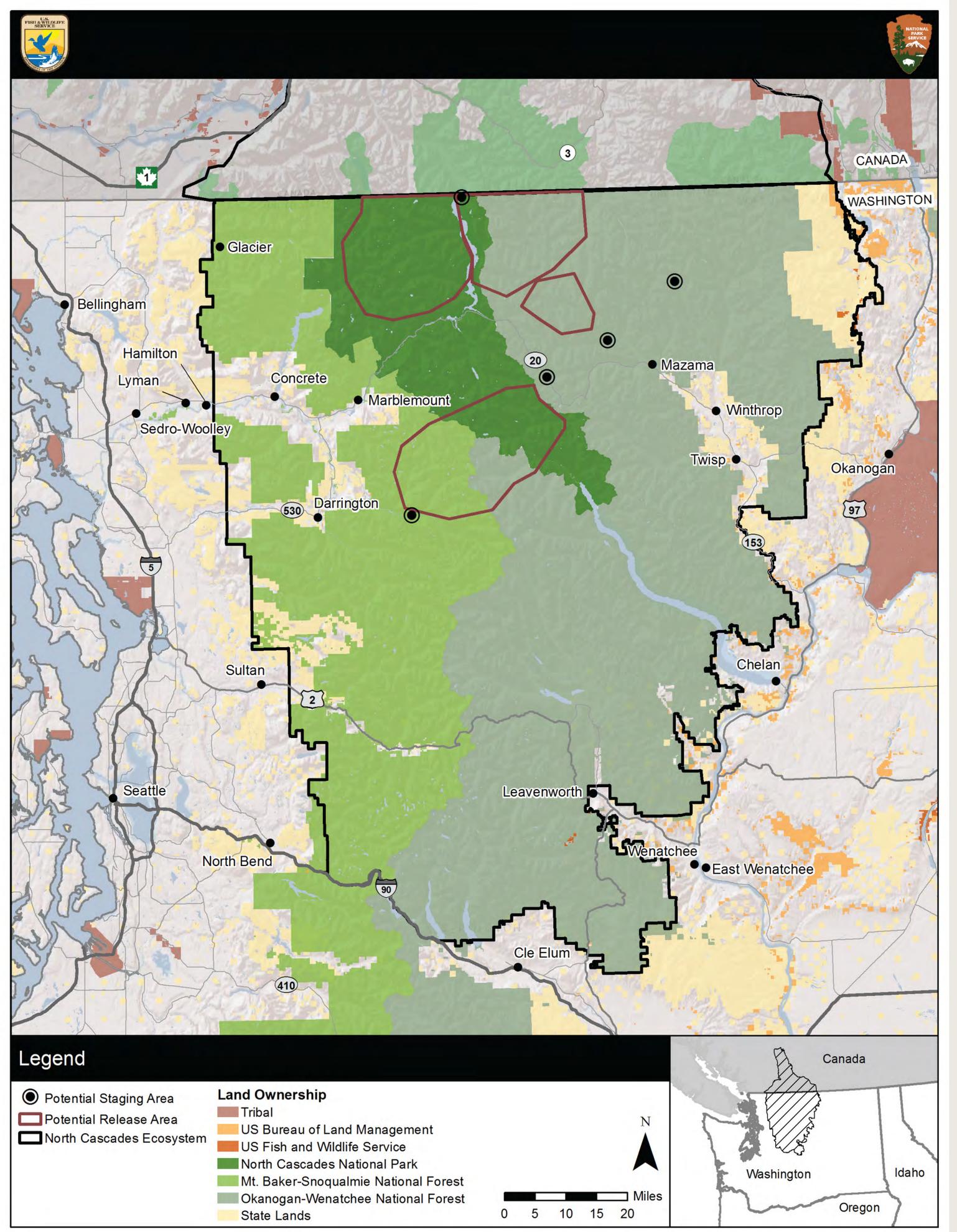
- Actions would be focused on improved sanitation, poaching control, motorized access management, outreach and educational programs to provide information about grizzly bears and grizzly bear recovery to the public, and research and monitoring to determine grizzly bear presence, distribution, habitat, and home ranges.
- Based on the Revised Code of Washington 77.12.035, alternative A is the only alternative being evaluated in detail that would allow for the full participation by the state of Washington.

Elements Common To All Action Alternatives

- A self-sustaining population target of 200 bears through the capture and release of grizzly bears into the NCE.
- A similar approach for the capture, transport, and release of grizzly bears; enhanced public education and outreach; guidelines for management actions to prevent or respond to human-grizzly bear conflicts; and for the replacement or additional releases of grizzly bears, access management, and habitat management.
- Grizzly bears would likely be supplied from areas in northwestern Montana or south-central British Columbia.
- Any released bears lost to mortality or emigration would be replaced.



North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone



Grizzly bears would be transported from capture locations to release staging areas by truck.

Grizzly bears would be transported by helicopter and released in remote areas on NPS and/or USFS lands.

Release sites would be chosen based on selected habitat criteria, connectivity, and the need to have grizzly bears in close proximity to one another to facilitate interaction and ultimately breeding.

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Alternatives

Alternative B: Ecosystem Evaluation Restoration

NPS and FWS would implement an ecosystem evaluation approach to grizzly bear restoration.

- Up to ten grizzly bears would be released at a single remote site on NPS or USFS lands in the NCE over two consecutive summers.
- The grizzly bears released during the first two years (years 1 and 2) would be monitored for an additional two years (years 3 and 4) for habitat use and instances of human conflict.
- In the fourth year, depending on the results of monitoring NPS and FWS may choose to repeat the initial release, where an additional ten bears would be released at a single site over two years followed by two additional years of monitoring. Alternatively, NPS and FWS could decide to transition to Alternative C.
- Alternative B would be expected to achieve the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within 60 to 100 years.

Alternative C: Incremental Restoration

NPS and FWS would release approximately five to seven grizzly bears into the NCE each year over roughly five to ten years, with a goal of establishing an initial population of 25 grizzly bears.

- Grizzly bears would be released at multiple remote sites on NPS and USFS lands, which would be located in close proximity to one another in order to facilitate interaction and breeding.
- Additional bears would likely be released into the ecosystem every few years in order to address mortality, population and demographic trends, genetic limitations, distribution, or to adjust the population's sex ratio to improve reproductive success.
- Alternative C would be expected to achieve the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within 60 to 100 years.



Alternatives

Alternative D: Expedited Restoration

NPS and FWS would seek to expedite grizzly bear restoration by releasing additional grizzly bears into the NCE over time until the restoration goal is reached.

- Grizzly bears would be released at multiple remote sites on NPS and USFS lands based on habitat criteria.
- No set limit for the number of grizzly bears released into the NCE. The number of suitable grizzly bears captured in a given year would be released— likely 5 to 7 bears.
- Capture and release efforts would continue each year as necessary until a combination of release efforts and reproduction results in a population of approximately 200 grizzly bears on the landscape.
- After the restoration goal is met, subsequent releases would be unlikely. Grizzly bears would be monitored for genetic diversity and if necessary additional grizzly bears may be added over time.
- Alternative D would be expected to achieve the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within roughly 25 years.

Endangered Species Act Section 10(j) Designation Rulemaking Option

Under the existing ESA listing for grizzly bears, human-grizzly bear conflicts are typically resolved by making bear attractants unavailable to bears (garbage, bird feeders, pet foods, etc.), or by relocation or removal of bears by Federal, State, or Tribal authorities if these measures may not be practical or are unsuccessful (livestock depredation, threats to human safety, etc). The FWS may designate an experimental population prior to reestablishing a threatened or endangered species in an unoccupied part of its former range. An experimental population designation allows for customized protective regulations under the ESA that are intended to reduce the regulatory impact of a reintroduction while still ensuring the reintroduction will contribute to the species' recovery. In the event the option to designate the NCE population of grizzly bears as an experimental population is selected, additional management flexibility may be provided to further mitigate human-grizzly bear conflicts and minimize impacts of grizzly bears within the boundary of the experimental population (or experimental population area).

Implementation of management actions could result in impacts to grizzly bears; including the removal of individuals from the population. Increased management flexibility provided through designation of an experimental population could help minimize impacts on various uses of private and public lands in areas either inside or outside the NCE. If FWS decides to designate an experimental population, protective regulations for the grizzly bear would be developed in collaboration with stakeholders through a separate rulemaking process that would be open to future public input.

Likely Source Populations

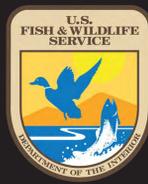
- Grizzly bears would be captured from source areas that have a healthy grizzly bear population.
- Removal of grizzly bears would not affect source population viability.
- The entities managing the source area must be willing to donate bears that meet the selection criteria and allow trapping of an adequate number.
- Source areas must be ecologically similar to the North Cascades Ecosystem: candidate bears do not rely on salmon for a significant portion of their diet
- No history of conflict with humans.

Likely Grizzly Bear Source Populations



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Alternatives Considered but Dismissed

During internal, agency, and public scoping, a wide range of alternatives were suggested for inclusion in the Draft EIS. The FWS and NPS reviewed all recommended alternatives during alternatives development. The following alternatives were dismissed from detailed consideration as they would not enhance the probability of long-term survival of grizzly bears in the NCE, address the key constraints of restoring a grizzly bear population in the NCE, achieve restoration goals, or be technically feasible. As a result, the dismissed alternatives would not meet the purpose and need for taking action.

- Washington Source Only Restoration
- Delayed Implementation of Washington Source Only Restoration
- Natural Recovery
- Ecosystem Restoration and Habitat Preservation Only
- Social Tolerance-Based Grizzly Bear Restoration
- Section 10(j) Population with Citizen Management
- Capture and Release of Healthy, Young Females Only



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Environmental Consequences

WILDERNESS CHARACTER

All action alternatives would result in lasting beneficial impacts on wilderness character by restoring a native species that has not had a viable population in the NCE in many years. The main adverse impacts to wilderness under each action alternative would result from helicopter flights over, and landings in, wilderness when releasing bears. These adverse impacts would be the smallest under alternative B, with approximately 40 trips (20 landings) and the largest under alternative D, with up to 672 trips (334 landings). Alternative C would result in up to 136 helicopter flights (63 landings).

VISITOR USE AND RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Recreational experience could also be impacted by helicopter flights. These impacts would be very short, lasting only minutes per occurrence and would increase in frequency from alternative B through alternative D based on the number and duration of releases as described above for Wilderness Character.

The potential for bear conflicts is expected to remain low under all alternatives because the number and density of grizzly bears on the landscape would remain small, limiting the probability that visitors would encounter them. Alternative D has the potential for more impacts on visitor use and recreational experience compared to the other alternatives because it would involve the release of more grizzly bears, and active capture and release operations would take place over a longer period of time. All action alternatives would provide lasting benefits regarding visitors' experience of nature through the restoration of a native species.

PUBLIC AND EMPLOYEE SAFETY

All action alternatives could result in adverse impacts on public safety as a result of the increased potential, albeit very low, for human-grizzly bear conflicts because of the increased number of grizzly bears in the ecosystem. The potential for conflicts to occur would be greater during the primary phase of alternative D than under alternatives B or C because of the longer duration of initial restoration efforts and the shorter time frame for achieving the restoration goal of 200 grizzly bears.

All action alternatives could result in adverse impacts on employee safety given the inherent risk of injury during restoration activities, related to helicopter operations and capture and release activities associated with grizzly bears. The potential for these impacts to occur would be the smallest under alternative B and the largest under alternative D based on the number of bears handled.



Environmental Consequences

GRIZZLY BEARS

There would be long-term beneficial impacts to grizzly bears under all action alternatives. Alternative B would likely increase the amount of time to achieve the restoration goal in the NCE. Grizzly bear populations could not be fully restored under alternative B without transitioning to alternative C or D. Alternative C would reach the restoration goal of 200 bears in the NCE within 60 – 100 years while Alternative D would reach the restoration goal in 25 years.

OTHER WILDLIFE AND FISH

Under all action alternatives, the release of grizzly bears into the NCE could result in short-term disturbance to denning mammals or nesting birds as a result of helicopter operations in close proximity to active dens or nests. All flights would be limited to five to seven days per year in mid- to late summer and fall. The fewest flights, and therefore fewest adverse impacts, would occur under alternative B and the most flights, and greatest adverse impacts, would occur under alternative D. There would be some incidence of grizzly predation on ungulates and fish, which would be low even when fully restored to 200 grizzly bears. Potential adverse impacts on black bear population dynamics from interspecific competition is expected to be limited to interactions between individual bears and would not be expected to affect black bears on a population level. The reestablishment of grizzly bears as part of the ecosystem would result in improved ecosystem health over the long term.



Photo by S. Senger



Environmental Consequences

SOCIOECONOMICS

All action alternatives would contribute both adverse and beneficial impacts. Tourism could be beneficially affected because grizzly bears may draw more tourists to the area; however, it could also be negatively affected because some areas may be temporarily and intermittently closed to tourists or some visitors may choose to avoid the NCE because of the presence of grizzly bears.

Agriculture and livestock grazing would be unlikely to be affected during the primary phase given the small number of bears that would be released under this alternative, relative distance that these operations are located from potential grizzly bear release sites, and the potential for depredation compensation. Once the grizzly population reaches the target goal of 200 individuals, there would be few, if any, adverse impacts to agriculture and livestock grazing, with the potential for up to 3 depredations annually.

Impacts on timber harvests and mining operations would be intermittent because of the small number of bears present relative to the total amount and location of these types of operations. During the primary phase, fewer impacts would be expected under alternative B, which includes the release of the least amount of bears (up to 10 bears). Impacts would be greatest under alternative D which releases the greatest number of bears over the shortest time period (approximately 168 bears over 25 years).

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Under all action alternatives, grizzly bear restoration would result in the restoration of an ethnographic resource largely absent from the NCE. Alternative B would result in benefits on ethnographic resources, but the rate of these benefits would take longer to fully achieve, based on the small number of bears released B. Alternative C would have long-term benefits on ethnographic resources by ensuring the continuation of the presence of the grizzly bear; however, it would take many years for the full benefits to be achieved. Alternative D would result in the restoration of an ethnographic resource within the lifetime of some tribal members—a faster rate than under other alternatives. Some adverse impacts on other ethnographic resources related to traditional hunting and gathering could occur because of brief access limitations during the proposed release of grizzly bears. However, efforts would be made to avoid areas of tribal use to the extent possible.

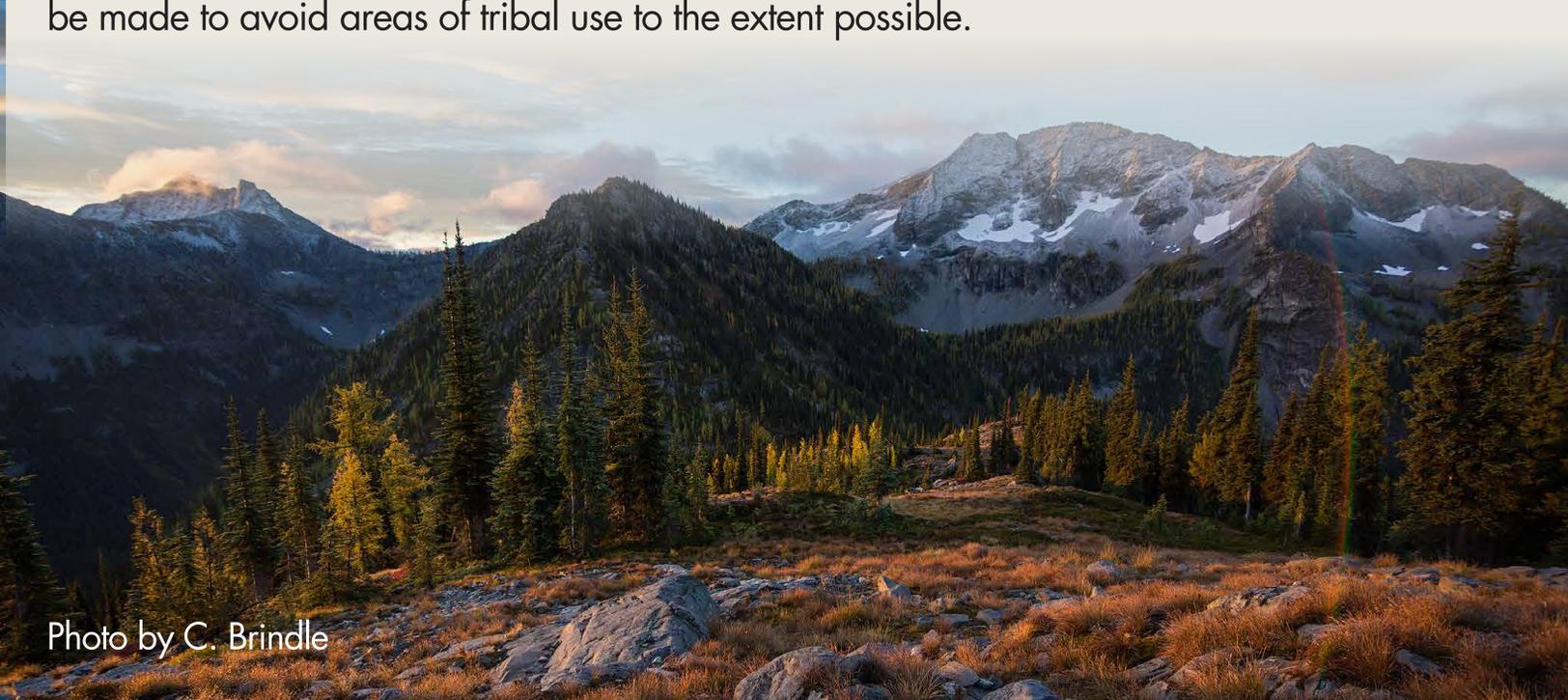


Photo by C. Brindle



Environmental Consequences

AREAS OUTSIDE THE NCE

Under the existing ESA listing for grizzly bears, federal, state and tribal managers could take actions to mitigate human-grizzly bear conflicts, including hazing and killing bears in certain situations. Private individuals can also kill bears in self-defense or defense of others under the existing ESA listing. In the event the option to designate the NCE population of grizzly bears as an experimental population is selected, additional management flexibility could be provided to federal, state and tribal managers and private landowners to further mitigate human-grizzly bear conflicts and minimize impacts of grizzly bears that move outside the NCE. Implementation of management actions could result in impacts to grizzly bears; including the removal of individuals from the population. Increased management flexibility provided through designation of an experimental population could help minimize impacts on visitor use, recreational use, public and employee safety, and socioeconomics in areas outside the NCE, while helping to ensure a restored grizzly bear population within the NCE.



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NEPA Process

NEPA PROCESS & SCHEDULE

NEPA regulations require federal agencies to involve the public when making decisions with the potential for significant environmental impacts.

These public meetings are a part of the public review process and provide a way for you to learn about what alternatives were analyzed, the potential environmental consequences of those alternatives, and provide feedback on the EIS.

Winter 2015	Public Scoping	
January - March 2017	Draft EIS Release and Public Comment Period	WE ARE HERE
Fall 2017	Final EIS Release	
Winter 2018	NPS/FWS Record of Decision	



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How to Comment

HOW TO COMMENT ON THE EIS

1 Submit comments electronically at:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis>

2 Mail or hand deliver comments to:
**Superintendent
North Cascades National Park Service
Complex
810 State Route 20
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284**

3 Submit written comments in-person at this meeting

All comments must be submitted by
March 14, 2017.

The goal of the public review period is to gather comments from individuals, groups, and agencies regarding the EIS' adequacy in addressing the purpose, need, and objectives, range of alternatives considered, environmental issues of concern and the sufficiency of the environmental impact analysis. Your comments will assist the FWS and NPS in revising and finalizing the EIS.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

We will review every comment submitted and prepare responses to substantive comments. Some responses may be reflected as edits to the text of the final EIS if needed to clarify existing information or add new information. The final EIS will contain summaries of the substantive comments and responses to those comments in an appendix.

Substantive comments are defined as those that do one or more of the following:

- Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of information in the EIS
- Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the analysis
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the EIS
- Cause changes or revisions to the restoration actions proposed in the alternatives.

When preparing your written comments, provide as much detail as possible and relate your comments back to the EIS. This will ensure that your comments are understood and your concerns are fully addressed in the responses.

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