



North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement



© Steve Rochetta

Background

The greater North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE) constitutes a large block of contiguous habitat that spans the international border between the United States and Canada. The U.S. portion of the NCE spans the crest of the Cascade Range and comprises one of the most intact wildlands in the contiguous U.S. The NCE includes the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, including the Stephen Mather Wilderness, and the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. A map of the NCE is provided and depicts the distribution of the various U.S. federal lands that comprise much of the area within the NCE grizzly bear recovery zone.

Research indicates this wilderness landscape is capable of supporting a self-sustaining grizzly bear population. The overall population status of the grizzly bear in the greater

NCE is unknown; however, it is highly unlikely that the NCE contains a viable grizzly bear population. There have been only four confirmed detections of grizzly bears in the greater NCE in the past 10 years, all of which occurred in British Columbia and may comprise only two individuals. Given the low number of grizzly bears, very slow reproductive rate and other recovery constraints, the grizzly bear in the NCE was found by the FWS to be warranted for uplisting to endangered status, but was precluded by higher-priority listings.

The draft EIS evaluates the effects of alternatives for grizzly bear restoration, including potential impacts on wildlife and fish (including grizzly bears), wilderness character, visitor use and recreational experience, public and employee safety, socioeconomics, and ethnographic resources.

What is the Purpose and Need?

The purpose of this Plan/EIS is to determine how to restore the grizzly bear to the North Cascades ecosystem (NCE), a portion of its historic range. 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
- Enhance the probability of long-term survival and conservation of grizzly bears within the lower 48 States and thereby contribute to overall grizzly bear recovery
- Support the removal of the grizzly bear from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife Species

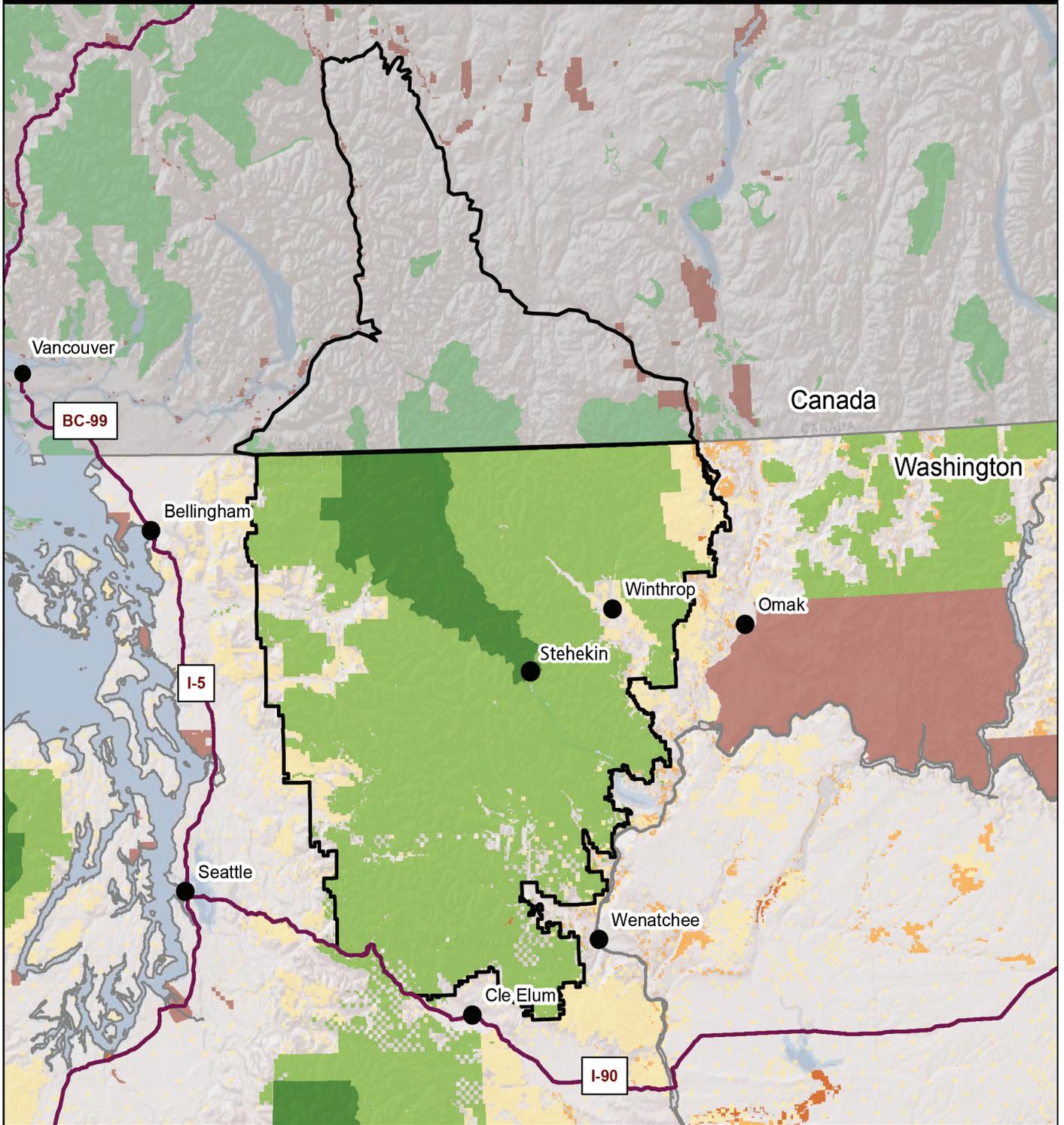
Objectives

The objectives of this Plan/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



North Cascades Ecosystem



Legend

- Cities
- Major Interstates and Highways
- ▭ North Cascades Ecosystem
- Water
- Protected Areas (British Columbia)
- Canada

Land Ownership

- Tribal
- US Bureau of Land Management
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- US National Park Service
- State Lands

N
▲

0 10 20 30 Miles



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to explore a range of alternatives and analyze impacts that any reasonable alternatives could have on the human environment. The alternatives under consideration must also include a “no-action” alternative. Action alternatives carried forward for detailed analysis must meet the purpose of and need for taking action. The draft EIS analyzes four alternatives.

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

Under alternative A (no action), existing management practices would be followed and no new management actions would be implemented. Options for grizzly bear restoration under the no-action alternative would be limited. Management 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

All of the action alternatives would seek to restore a self-sustaining population of 200 bears through the capture and release of grizzly bears into the NCE. Each of the action alternatives would involve a similar approach to the capture, transport, and release of grizzly bears; enhanced public education and outreach; guidelines for management actions to respond to human-grizzly bear conflicts; and a similar approach 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.

Alternative B—Ecosystem Evaluation Restoration

Under alternative B, NPS and FWS would implement an ecosystem evaluation approach to grizzly bear restoration, wherein a total of up to ten grizzly bears would be released at a single remote site on NPS or U.S. Forest Service (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, a decision would be made regarding how restoration would proceed during subsequent years. Depending on the results of monitoring information, 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 C—Incremental Restoration

Under alternative C, 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 among grizzly bears released into the ecosystem. After the initial population of 25 grizzly bears has been reached, 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 result in the achievement of the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within 60 to 100 years.

Alternative D—Expedited Restoration

Under alternative D, the 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. This alternative would not limit the primary restoration phase to 25 animals and would not set a limit for the number of grizzly bears released into the NCE. Rather, 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. Similar to alternative C, grizzly bears would be released at multiple remote sites on NPS and USFS lands based on habitat criteria. Upon achievement of the restoration goal under alternative D, subsequent releases would be unlikely. Alternative D would be expected to result in the achievement of the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within roughly 25 years.

Endangered Species Act Section 10(j) Designation Rulemaking Option

Grizzly bears released into the NCE would be managed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) under all action alternatives. However, an option would be available under any of the action alternatives in accordance with a special rulemaking to designate grizzly bears in the U.S. portion of the NCE as a 10(j) experimental population under section 10 of the ESA. An experimental population is a group of reintroduced plants or animals that is geographically isolated from other populations of the species that is typically determined to be “essential” or “nonessential” to the survival of the species as a whole but contributes to their recovery. Section 10(j) provides for the reintroduction of experimental populations under special regulations and may include protective regulations established under authority of section 4(d) of the ESA.

Preferred alternative

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.

How to Comment

The draft EIS will be open for additional public comment through October 24, 2019. Comments may be submitted in the following ways:

1. Electronically at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis>
2. Mail or hand deliver to:
Superintendent
North Cascades National Park Service Complex
810 State Route 20
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284
3. Provided orally or written at the public meeting

Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or in any other manner than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

Comment Process at the Public Meeting

- A lottery system will determine the selection of and order of speakers.
- Pick up a numbered ticket at the Comment Table if you would like to offer oral public comment tonight.
- Oral comments will be facilitated from 5:30-8:30 pm, with a 10-minute break at 7 pm. The meeting will end promptly at 8:30 pm.
- Oral comments will be documented by a court reporter.
- A list of ticket numbers for the next several speakers in line will be projected onscreen. If your number appears in numbered boxes 1-5, move to the designated area next to the facilitator. The facilitator will call you to the microphone and keep track of the time. There will be a timer visible to the speaker.
- Each speaker will have up to two minutes to provide comment.
- Questions asked during the oral comment session will not be answered tonight. They will be addressed by the agencies in the analysis, as appropriate.
- If you don't have time to wait for the lottery, or prefer not to speak in front of an audience, you may provide oral comment to a second court reporter located in the Annex. Out of consideration for your neighbors, do not provide oral comment both in this room and in the Annex.
- If you would like to leave a written comment tonight, visit the comment table in the Annex and fill out a printed comment card.