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To the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Proposed Rule: [Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants: Removing the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Population of Grizzly Bears from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife](#)

Please accept the comments of The Cougar Fund concerning the potential delisting of the grizzly bear from the greater Yellowstone ecosystem.

The Cougar Fund is a national 501c3 organization dedicated to educating the public about mountain lions and *other large carnivores*, and how native predators provide ecological services and enhance the biodiversity of the environment.

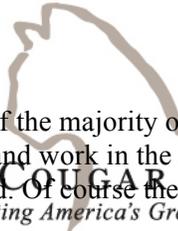
We have grave concerns about the status of the grizzly bear at this time. Our comments will be presented under the categories of Social, Biological, Political, Legal and Administrative considerations.

Social

When the grizzly bear was initially listed under the protections of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the species essentially passed into the care of the Department of Interior (DOI) as 'guardians' for the interests of the American people, in the task of recovering the grizzly bear population to a place of sustainability and stability.

The thirty plus years of recovery have been marked by increased interest in, and support for the grizzly bear by a broad diversity of citizens and foreign visitors who have come to associate the grizzly as not only a symbol of the wild, but also a sign of American commitment to maintaining enhanced biodiversity in the natural world. Few facilities speak to the greatness of the USA's protection of natural resources as the public lands system. The grizzly bear recovery has been a testament to the integrity of public lands management, which is paid for by all who live and work in this country. The social implication of disenfranchising the American people with a monopolistic devolution to unsupervised state management is a gloomy end to a program that has been the source of national pride.

In and of itself, state management is not the problem facing grizzly bears. There are many dedicated, knowledgeable and highly qualified scientists employed by state wildlife management agencies, but they are not the driving force of management decisions. The public trust afforded the states agencies has been reduced to a unilateral and politically driven system that puts the interests of minority stakeholders such as ranchers and hunters above the needs of the animals themselves



and also of the majority of public interests. This is not to say that those who live and work in the actual presence of bears should not be considered. Of course their livelihoods and public safety

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considerations are integral to traditional economies, but there are ways to protect and sustain those interests without an oligarchic approach to grizzly bear management in the future.

Greater protection is required for the grizzly bear than the precipitous transfer to the insular administrative duties of a handful of politically appointed wildlife commissioners in the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. Whereas current protections have been in the interests of the bear itself for the nation, states management will relegate the bear's importance to only a few special interest stakeholders.

Social tolerance is also of great concern as the delisting process evolves. There is much local animosity in areas where the grizzly bear can and should be able to exist. The states have already done much to increase awareness and promote non-lethal methods of conflict prevention, revolving around modification of human behavior such a food, trash securement, and livestock protection. These have largely been successful due to the impending violation of Incidental Take Statements (ITS). The ecosystem wide replacement of target numbers will limit local restrictions and may cause greater pressure on small populations of bears in high conflict areas, especially those public lands on which the economically beneficial privilege of livestock grazing is extended.

The act of recreational hunting must also be included in the social ramifications of returning grizzly bear management to the values and opportunities underlying state policy. Even in historically rural and traditional western states there is a significant downturn in hunting and hunting revenues. The constituency that chooses to kill large carnivores for recreation is a numerical minority, but their ability to procure political support and extreme second amendment-related interest gives them a loud voice. Well-funded and politically influential organizations that are anxious to kill grizzly bears for trophies are able to appear far larger than the minority they represent. We would like to put forward the idea that since recovery has been made possible by the existence of adequate public lands to protect the core population of grizzly bears, (which have now dispersed into a very small area of state jurisdiction,) that the general public who 'own' the public land should have a say in the future of the bears that originated there. At the very least, the entire Primary Conservation Area (PCA) must be designated as a NO hunting zone.

The social consequences of state grizzly bear management also encompass the industries that thrive on the destination emphasis of travel and visitation. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is a focus of interest for millions of tourists that generate billions of dollars to the host states. The benefit of this type of 'eco' based travel is significant, not only from the ability to promote educational information and platforms for learning about the natural world, but also the financial capital that can help to balance out revenue losses from depressed resource extraction industries. Embracing the potential of live animals to inspire the publics attitude towards environmental protection, can lead to greater awareness and subsequent responsibility in a world fractured by encroachment, fragmentation and pollution. Of primary and emergent necessity is the identification of means by



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which the tourist industry can harness contributions that go directly to state managers, to relieve the financial burden of exclusive responsibility for grizzly bears in a post-delisting world.

Biological

There is certainly cause for celebration that federally led teams of scientists have brought the grizzly bear back from the brink of regional extinction, from around 136 bears to numbers greater than 700 estimated today. Our biological concerns lie not with the bear itself but with the infrastructure that fulfills the needs that will sustain the bear in perpetuity. Many ecological and environmental changes have taken place over the last thirty years that should lead us to question, not the current status of the bears, but the ability of a changing world to support them going forward. The grizzly bear is an extremely slow reproducing mammal, which requires large amounts of space, food, connectivity and freedom from encroachment by human development. Although protection of habitat is addressed by federal managers, the quality of the habitat is more difficult to sustain due to global crises such as climate change, resulting in the loss of prime food sources. While grizzly bears, as omnivores, will likely find and utilize alternate nutritional options, this raises the question of behavioral changes that might increase interface with human interests, certainly the biggest threat to grizzly bears at this time.

Biological concerns are also raised with the potentially less restrictive removal of bears under states management. The numbers allowed before oversight occurs, point to a system of simple accounting, albeit, with acknowledgement of the particular importance of female and cub losses. However, this simple accounting method does not accommodate the importance of individual bears in their intrinsic social structure. We would recommend that the current study team, under federal leadership, continue to research grizzly bear social structure and the implication of the effect that losses of individual bears have on the stability and sustainability of the population.

From a biological perspective states can reasonably be expected to confirm their commitment to genetic diversity of the grizzly bear population by identifying and protecting connectivity corridors as well as seeking to secure greater areas of suitable habitat through acquisition, allotment-retirement support, and conservation easements. Such newly identified and acquired habitat will be set aside unconditionally to allow for measured growth to ensure genetic stability.

Political

The grizzly bear and its survival have become a harbinger for controversy and the wielding of political influence. While USFWS may feel comfortable that they have been able to use sound science to justify the move to delist, there has been a dark undercurrent of insidious pressure by members of congressional delegations, gubernatorial involvement and overt state government initiatives to mitigate swift, and perhaps unsupported efforts to delist.



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Governor Matt Mead of Wyoming has been intrinsically linked with premature demands to DOI to proceed with delisting, even before the scientists had confirmed their apparent fulfillment of the recovery criteria. Decision makers in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana display unilateral partisan support for the hunting and ranching hierarchies in their individual states. National perspectives about the value of protecting the grizzly bear as an icon, (in much the same way the eagle is recovered but not exploited for minority interests,) are not only ignored, but also often marginalized. There have been active and politically expedient efforts by the Wyoming Representative, the two Wyoming Senators, and the Governor, to undermine and redesign the ESA, therefore rendering it ineffective for the intended purpose, but no longer a hurdle for runaway commercial land uses.

The political effort to delist and undermine the spirit of the ESA, is mirrored in the attitudinal posturing of those citizens that equate large wild carnivores such as the wolf and grizzly bear with the over-reach of federal government powers. To this section of society, most evident in the West, the bear and wolf ARE the 'feds' upon which are heaped the same contempt as the government itself.

It is highly recommended the USFWS identify and resist the political forces that are invested in an agenda that is not in the best interests of the protected species themselves, but in a social narrative that rejects any kind of governmental oversight of wildlife management.

Legal and Administrative

While there may be acknowledgement that the superficial, but perhaps outdated criteria of recovery have been met, there are still many legal and administrative considerations that have not been adequately completed.

The process of delisting has been chaotic, uncoordinated and lacking defined procedure. The Rule and proposed Conservation Strategy appeared in tandem, but the States Management Plans and Commission-promulgated regulations, have been emerging in fits and starts with no unified access to all the documentation required to submit an informed comment. The Memorandum of Understanding between the States remains in draft form and the Conservation Strategy itself has not been agreed to by the multiple entities involved. The National Park Service, as partners and guardians of the core population have expressed grave concern for the fate of bears that cross the imaginary boundaries (to a bear) around Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. The lack of confidence by your member agencies in the DOI concerning the long-term viability of bears under states management should be a red flag to you.

The American people need to know that all professionals are on board with the final disposition of responsibility for grizzly bears. The poorly rolled out delisting procedure has done much to damage confidence in the system, and with lack of confidence comes greater worry on behalf the bears.



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Summary

We strongly urge you to expect greater commitment from the states with regards to a moratorium on trophy hunting of grizzly bears; habitat protection; conflict prevention; sustainable food source identification; revenue capture from wildlife enthusiasts and visitors who simply want to see and not kill our native wildlife; total protection within the entire PCA; consensus among all the partners signing on to the Conservation Strategy; production of a Final MOU between the states; and further research into demography and the effects of mortality on the social structure of grizzly bear populations.

We do thank you for the work that has been accomplished so far, but feel that there is not adequate evidence to support that it is in the bears' best interests to transition to states management at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

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