



1983 – 2008

*Celebrating 25 Years
of Conservation Success*

Greater Yellowstone Coalition

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Grizzly deaths in Greater Yellowstone alarming

When two grizzly bear cubs were shot and left to die by a poacher near Yellowstone last month, it raised the number of grizzlies that have perished in the Great Yellowstone Ecosystem this year to at least 44 – and no doubt there are more.

Grizzly bear biologists are alarmed, and so is GYC. The deaths represent more than 7 percent of the entire grizzly bear population in the ecosystem, and the losses have occurred just one year after this magnificent symbol of Yellowstone's wildness was removed from Endangered Species Act protection. For a creature that was perilously close to extinction in Yellowstone a mere two decades ago, even an unnatural death is too many.

GYC is using myriad tools to ensure that these iconic creatures have a permanent place in the ecosystem. While seeking to have grizzly bears returned to protection under the Endangered Species Act, we are also excited about several new projects we have undertaken: Providing bear-proof bins for communities in bear country and opening a land bridge between Yellowstone and the wilds of central Idaho.

The axiom "a fed bear is a dead bear" is tragically accurate. Throughout the ecosystem, grizzly bears have met their demise after becoming acclimated to food in communities that didn't have proper garbage disposal. In Island Park, Idaho, countless grizzlies were saved last year because of a GYC-coordinated effort to place bear-proof bins around town.

One reason for these increasing conflicts between humans and grizzlies is escalating development and land fragmentation in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. For a century, grizzlies have clung to a precarious existence on this ecological island. Today, scientists believe diminishing habitat is the No. 1 threat to the future of the 600 grizzlies in the region. Fortunately, there is an answer – a migration corridor between Yellowstone and the vast wilderness areas of central Idaho.

People protecting the lands, waters, and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, now and for future generations.

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For GYC and other conservation groups, this checkerboard land bridge of public and private lands is uncharted territory. For grizzly bears, it could be the key to their survival as Yellowstone reaches its capacity for bears and grizzlies naturally start moving into areas where they haven't roamed for 100 years. It is especially vital as climate change continues to threaten the whitebark pine, whose nuts are a staple of the grizzly's diet.

These continuing threats are not addressed by the management plan for grizzlies once they are delisted, nor are they addressed in the proposed state grizzly management plans. For instance, Wyoming state officials are demanding permission to increase the number of grizzly bears that can be killed, once delisting occurs. In addition, Wyoming has declared suitable grizzly bear habitat in place such as the Wyoming Range off limits to bears. Similarly, Idaho's plan provides little tolerance for grizzly bears in suitable habitat that is outside of the Primary Conservation Area.

Furthermore, the plan for managing bears, once delisted, fails to protect areas that many bears use today. One-third of currently occupied grizzly habitat would be open to logging, road building, and oil and gas development. These activities could drive bears out of habitats, which they currently use.

Managing grizzly bears after delisting will require money, primarily for monitoring them. (Radio collars aren't cheap!) According to the plan, it will cost roughly \$3-4 million dollars per year to manage bears effectively. But no one knows if that money is available or where it will come from in the future. The states' do not have that kind of money in their budget, even though they would assume the primary role upon delisting. A fair, reliable, and long-term funding source should be secured before bears are removed from Endangered Species Act protection.

If monitoring should show a decline in grizzly population sometime in the future, we need to have a plan ready to respond, before it's too late. While the USFWS plan does call for monitoring bear populations and their food sources, it lacks a timely, mandatory response if bear populations do plummet.

The grizzly bear can never again be viewed as a "normal" species, capable of recovering and flourishing alongside humans, as do other recovered species, such as bald eagles. Unmoderated human activity has, and will continue to reduce the lands grizzlies can use. Human activities will increase in GYE, and for that reason, conflicts between grizzlies and humans must be minimized. Any management plan, regardless of whether bears are delisted, must address the risks to bears posed by human/grizzly interactions.

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