



# GUARD THE GRIZZLY BEAR

campaign



## Delisting the Yellowstone Grizzly

The few hundred remaining grizzlies of Yellowstone are imperiled by a new threat: premature removal from Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection - known as "delisting." The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) plans to delist the Yellowstone grizzly, possibly as early as 2003, but at the latest, by 2005. While progress has been made to recover the threatened grizzly since it was listed 27 years ago, many bear experts believe delisting is biologically unsound, would reverse recent gains, and would further imperil the fragile Yellowstone bear population.

### CONSIDER THESE FACTS:

As a result of past development, grizzly bear habitat in Greater Yellowstone is in worse shape now than in 1975 when the grizzly was first listed. Trends for the future are not much better:

#### Oil and Gas

- One half million acres of prime public lands are threatened by industrial-scale oil and gas development, which would extirpate bears from key areas important to recovery.
- The Shoshone Forest has proposed to allow drilling in a key piece of habitat, which if accomplished, would displace at least 18 grizzlies.
- The Bridger-Teton Forest has not yet decided about whether to allow leasing and development on 370,000 acres of prime habitat for grizzlies and other wildlife (The draft EIS, completed under the Clinton administration, chose an alternative that would have withdrawn these lands from leasing, but the final decision has not been made). Full-field oil and gas development would eliminate bears from the area, and separate grizzlies in the Teton Wilderness and lands adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, from bears in the Wind River mountains further south.

#### Motorized Recreation

- Escalating use of public lands by all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), combined with federal agencies' failure to enforce road closures, continue to reduce the habitat available for this wilderness-dependent species.

#### Sprawl

- Private lands comprising important bear habitat are being developed at a run-away pace,



Photo courtesy of NPS

severely limiting grizzly use at key times of the year, further isolating Yellowstone bears from other bear populations, and increasing the potential for grizzly bear mortality.

#### Logging and Road-building

- In the last 25 years, grizzlies have been largely exterminated from two grizzly management units on the Targhee National Forest and portions of the Gallatin, as a result of excessive clear-cutting and road building. On the Gallatin Forest, no program has been developed to repair past damage and improve habitat conditions, by closing and/or obliterating roads.

### KEY NATURAL GRIZZLY BEAR FOODS ARE THREATENED BY EXOTIC SPECIES, DISEASE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

#### Whitebark Pine Seeds

- Whitebark pine, whose seeds are a vital grizzly food, is threatened by an introduced disease and global warming. Whitebark pine is anticipated to be functionally eliminated in the Greater Yellowstone over the next several decades. The abundance of whitebark pine is closely connected to grizzly reproductive success and mortality rates; if the declines expected across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem are realized, bear mortalities will likely increase.

#### Yellowstone Cutthroat trout

- In Yellowstone Lake, introduced Lake trout threaten to eat and displace the native

Yellowstone cutthroat (an important food source for at least 80 individual bears), potentially reducing this native cutthroat by as much as 70% in perhaps twenty years. Spawning in the deep waters of Yellowstone Lake, Lake trout are not available to grizzly bears and other wildlife, unlike native cutthroat trout which spawn in the lake's shallow tributaries.

- Whirling disease, known to kill native trout, was recently detected in Yellowstone Lake, one of the Yellowstone cutthroat's last strongholds.

### Bison

- The slaughter of Yellowstone's bison herds (more than 3,000 killed since the 1980's, including over 1000 since 1997), has reduced this essential food source. In Yellowstone, scientists have documented decreased grizzly reproduction and increased mortality associated with lower bison numbers. The state of Montana's current practice of eradicating most bison -- not just those infected with brucellosis -- if they stray outside Yellowstone Park, threatens to further reduce bison numbers and their availability as a food source for bears.

### Army cutworm moths

- An important food source for bears in the eastern and southern portion of the ecosystem, army cutworm moths are particularly vulnerable to pesticides in their winter habitat and to the effects of global warming. Over 90% of the alpine habitat that moths seek in the summer months is expected to disappear in the upcoming decades.

### **FWS 1993 GRIZZLY RECOVERY PLAN HAS NOT YET BEEN REVISED TO SET NECESSARY HABITAT TARGETS FOR GRIZZLY RECOVERY.**

Federal law mandates that prior to delisting, FWS must have a legally sufficient recovery plan. The 1993 plan was found deficient by a Federal District Court in 1995. The problems identified in the ruling, including the lack of habitat goals, have still not been corrected.

In order to delist, FWS must address the factors that led to the original listing of the population. FWS has neither addressed these listing factors nor demonstrated that historic problems have been solved.

### **HUNTING GRIZZLIES WOULD EXACERBATE CURRENT PROBLEMS THAT RESULT IN EXCESSIVE KILLING.**

Since 1990, 121 bears are known to have been killed in Greater Yellowstone. Using FWS' formula of doubling the known numbers of deaths to account for unreported mortalities, 242 bears were probably killed during this time. Big game hunters and killing of habituated bears continue to be the top two causes. Adding a grizzly hunt - a goal of those promoting delisting - could reverse any recent population gains, and further depress the population.

### **Delisting now means risking extinction.**

- Scientific studies on extinction of mammals elsewhere suggest that a goal of 2000-3000 grizzly bears must be achieved to ensure a recovered population; currently there exists less than half this number in the lower-48 states, in 5 isolated island populations.
- To achieve this goal, grizzlies need to be connected to other populations in the U.S. and Canada in order to maintain long-term population viability. The Yellowstone grizzlies have been functionally cut off from other grizzly populations for over 80 years; if this continues, and mortality rates change, long-term viability may be jeopardized. Furthermore, ecological connections with habitat in Canada are being severed by logging, roading, oil and gas activities, off road vehicle use, and other developments in Alberta and British Columbia.
- Scientists have proven that for a long-lived species such as the grizzly, there is typically a lag-time between habitat destruction and when the consequences manifest themselves as a decline in population numbers.
- Grizzly bears are the "canary in the coal mine" for this region's environmental health. They serve as the barometer of the health of Northern Rockies ecosystems - what hurts grizzly bear habitat also harms elk, native fish, and a host of other valuable wildlife species and ecological processes. For example, elk have similar habitat needs to grizzlies, so habitat protections for bears - only ensured under the Endangered Species Act - also maintain healthy elk and other game and fish populations.

In sum, premature delisting could trigger a cascade of effects, possibly resulting in the extinction of the Yellowstone grizzly.

---

The Sierra Club's Campaign to Guard the Grizzly is aimed at protecting the threatened species and its habitat in the lower 48 United States and Canada. The Sierra Club, which was founded more than a century ago by John Muir, is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.