

# Grizzly Bear Recovery & Endangered Species Act Protection

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Photo: Franz Camenzind

Grizzly bears are an essential piece of the American West, a wildlife icon that has been integral to the Yellowstone region for centuries. They embody true wilderness, with all its risks and rewards; there is no more beautiful or powerful symbol of our wild heritage than the “great bear.”

As a top predator, grizzlies play an important role in keeping the whole natural system healthy. Protecting the large wild areas they need to survive also protects habitat for many other species. And they are a vital piece of many local economies: each year visitors spend millions of dollars hoping to catch a glimpse of a grizzly bear in the wild.

Thanks to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) grizzly bears are making a comeback, but they are still vulnerable. Grizzly bears today still occupy less than 2% of their historic range in the lower 48. In the Greater Yellowstone Area, more bears

are dying due to dramatically-shifting food sources, less cubs and yearlings are surviving to adulthood, and other factors threaten the long-term health of the population. Because grizzly bears reproduce so slowly, even a small amount of mortality can have profound effects for decades to come. We need to take a precautionary approach, or we could – in a very short time – lose 40 years of progress on grizzly bear recovery in the Yellowstone region.

## Now is Not the Time to Remove Federal ESA Protection (“Delist”)

- **The growth rate of the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) grizzly bear population has been flat since the early 2000s and fewer cubs and yearlings are surviving.** The growth rate of the grizzly population has been flat since the early 2000s, apparently due at least in part to a decline in the survival of cubs and yearlings; more older bears and fewer cubs and young bears is not a good trend for maintaining a healthy population.
- **Grizzly bears in the Yellowstone region are still completely isolated from other grizzly bear populations, both geographically and demographically, as they have been for 100 years.** To maintain a healthy population over the long term and achieve true recovery, both male and female grizzly bears in the Yellowstone area need to be able to connect naturally with grizzlies from other populations. States are not likely to allow bears on the periphery of currently occupied habitat because that is where bears get into the most conflicts -- yet these are the very bears most likely to establish connections to other grizzly populations such as in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE).
- **Existing state management plans are inadequate to protect Yellowstone grizzly bears or to allow them to connect to other grizzly populations.** The GYA states (MT, WY, ID) have not committed to maintaining a stable to increasing grizzly bear population, and some state management plans (notably Wyoming’s, which is home to the majority of grizzly bears in the region) will not allow them to disperse into new biologically-suitable habitat. Current state management plans do not have adequate protections for bears or their habitat in place to allow them to connect to other grizzly populations. All three states plan to initiate a sport hunt for grizzly bears immediately following delisting.

- **There is significant uncertainty about the long-term implications of the recent loss of traditional major grizzly foods, such as whitebark pine seeds, on the population.** Because grizzly bears reproduce so slowly it takes a long time to discern trends, but we already know that more bears are dying as they increasingly use meat (livestock and hunter-killed carcasses) to replace traditional food sources, and come into more conflict with ranchers and hunters as a result.
- **Courts have ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) must consider the overall recovery of the species as it was originally listed under the ESA, and not delist isolated ‘segments’ of the species one at a time.** Grizzly bears throughout the lower 48 states, including the Greater Yellowstone population, were placed under the protection of the ESA in 1975 as a single entity due to their extremely low numbers. Today there are only two populations of any size in the lower 48 (GYA and NCDE) and they are isolated from each other. In the other four recovery areas, two have less than 50 bears and two have ten or fewer bears. Today, grizzlies occupy less than 2% of their historic habitat in the lower 48.
- **The FWS has not honored commitments to Native American tribes to involve them in the delisting discussion.** Several Presidential Executive Orders and laws require the U.S. government to formally consult with tribes on matters affecting them, but that has not happened to date on grizzly bear delisting. Thirty-five tribes in several states have passed formal resolutions opposing delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear, which they view as a powerful symbol of spiritual regeneration and renewal.



### Sierra Club Vision for Grizzly Bear Recovery

Sierra Club’s overall vision for recovery of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states is based upon having a thriving, connected, and well-distributed “metapopulation” of several thousand bears.

In the GYA, our vision for grizzly bear recovery is one in which:

- Grizzly bear numbers increase, and bears can and do move into new areas of biologically-suitable habitat.
- Natural connectivity between grizzly bear populations/recovery areas is achieved.
- Strong protections for grizzly bears and their habitat are enacted in linkage zones between recovery areas, and on the periphery of currently-occupied habitat, so that bears can safely move between areas and recolonize suitable historic habitat such as the Salmon-Selway Ecosystem.
- Additional, effective measures are enacted throughout the GYA to reduce conflicts between people and bears, and bears and livestock.
- Human-caused mortality of grizzly bears is significantly reduced, with a goal of reaching zero, and there is no sport hunting of grizzly bears.

### Help Protect Grizzly Bears

Become a Grizzly Guardian! [www.addup.org/campaigns/protect-the-grizzly-bear](http://www.addup.org/campaigns/protect-the-grizzly-bear)

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