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8. **ENDANGERED SPECIES: Management plan released for Yellowstone grizzly bears**

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week released several key documents in its ongoing effort to delist the grizzly bear as an endangered species in the Yellowstone ecosystem. Besides revised methodologies for estimating and monitoring sustainable populations, the agency issued a final conservation strategy that includes three state management plans that will guide the recovery effort in the future.



Recovery of threatened grizzly bears has been successful enough to warrant delisting in the greater Yellowstone area. Photo by Chris Servheen, courtesy of FWS.

"We've been working on recovery in the Yellowstone ecosystem for 26 years," explained Chris Servheen, FWS's national grizzly bear recovery coordinator. "We started out with 150 to 200 bears and now the population is more than 500, and increasing by 4 to 7 percent per year."

The three affected states, Wyoming, Montana and Idaho have each approved a post-listing management plan, Servheen said. The cost will be about \$3.2 million per year for a program that will continue "intensive monitoring" of the bears to maintain sustainable mortality levels and birth rates. About 10 percent of the Yellowstone bears will continue to carry radio collars as one way to keep an eye on vital rates, he said.

One measure is keeping the number of cub-bearing females to at least 48 per year. If the figure falls below that, the agencies will adapt their policies. Overall mortality for females and dependent cubs should be kept at 9 percent under the revised criteria and mortality for mature males would be maintained at 15 percent per year, which would result in maintaining the current population. Serious population declines could result in relisting.

There were also newly approved methods for calculating mortality from all causes. According to the documents, from 1982 through 2002, one-in-five bear deaths were from unknown causes.

The habitat plan includes consideration of four important food sources for the bears, including white bark pine nuts. It notes that in years when the pine nuts are abundant, there are fewer bear-human contacts, but when the pine nuts are scarce, interactions and human-caused deaths increase.

Grizzlies have been listed as a threatened species in the lower 48 states since 1967. While there are a number of sites where FWS is maintaining a program for recovery, the area surrounding Yellowstone National Park has proven most amenable to stabilizing the populations enough to warrant relaxation of protections.

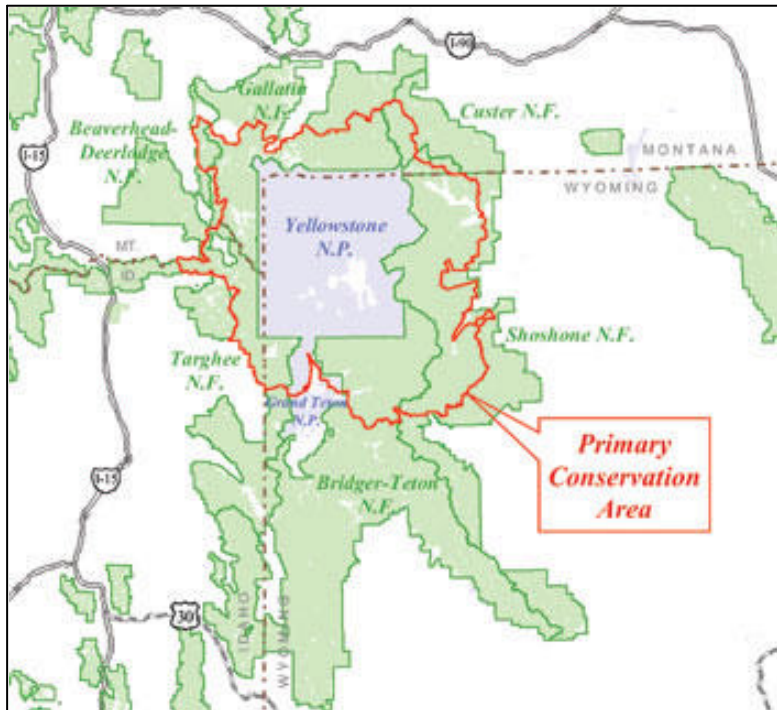
The revisions to the Yellowstone management plan resulted from a federal district court ruling that told the agency to take another look at four issues, including population measurement, impacts of isolation, impacts by livestock and monitoring for disease.

Even after delisting, Servheen said, "People won't be able to illegally kill bears. They can be killed in self-defense." Federal agency may also remove bears that are identified predators of livestock or those overly habituated to human contact.

Of the other regions inhabited by grizzlies, the largest population is in the northern Continental Divide, in the Glacier National Park region, Servheen said. While there are probably nearly 500 bears there, "We don't have in place the same monitoring systems" as in Yellowstone, he said. He said delisting there "is probably next down the road."

According to FWS's latest figures, there about 40 to 50 grizzly bears in the Selkirk Mountains in northern Idaho and northeast Washington, another 30 to 40 in the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem in northern Idaho and western Montana, and less than 20 in the North Cascades. There are no known grizzly bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem at this time. In Alaska, where they are called brown bears, they are estimated to number more than 30,000. There are about 22,000 grizzly bears in Canada.

[Click here](#) for the final conservation plan for the greater Yellowstone area.



This map indicates the area of grizzly bear habitat subject to a new conservation plan. Courtesy of FWS.

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