North Cascades Ecosystem
Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement

Background

Situated in the core of the North Cascades ecosystem (NCE), the North Cascades National Park Complex is surrounded by more than 2.6 million contiguous acres of federally designated wilderness, including protected lands and de facto wilderness in British Columbia, Canada. The NCE constitutes a large block of contiguous habitat that spans the international border but is isolated from grizzly bear populations in other parts of the United States and Canada.

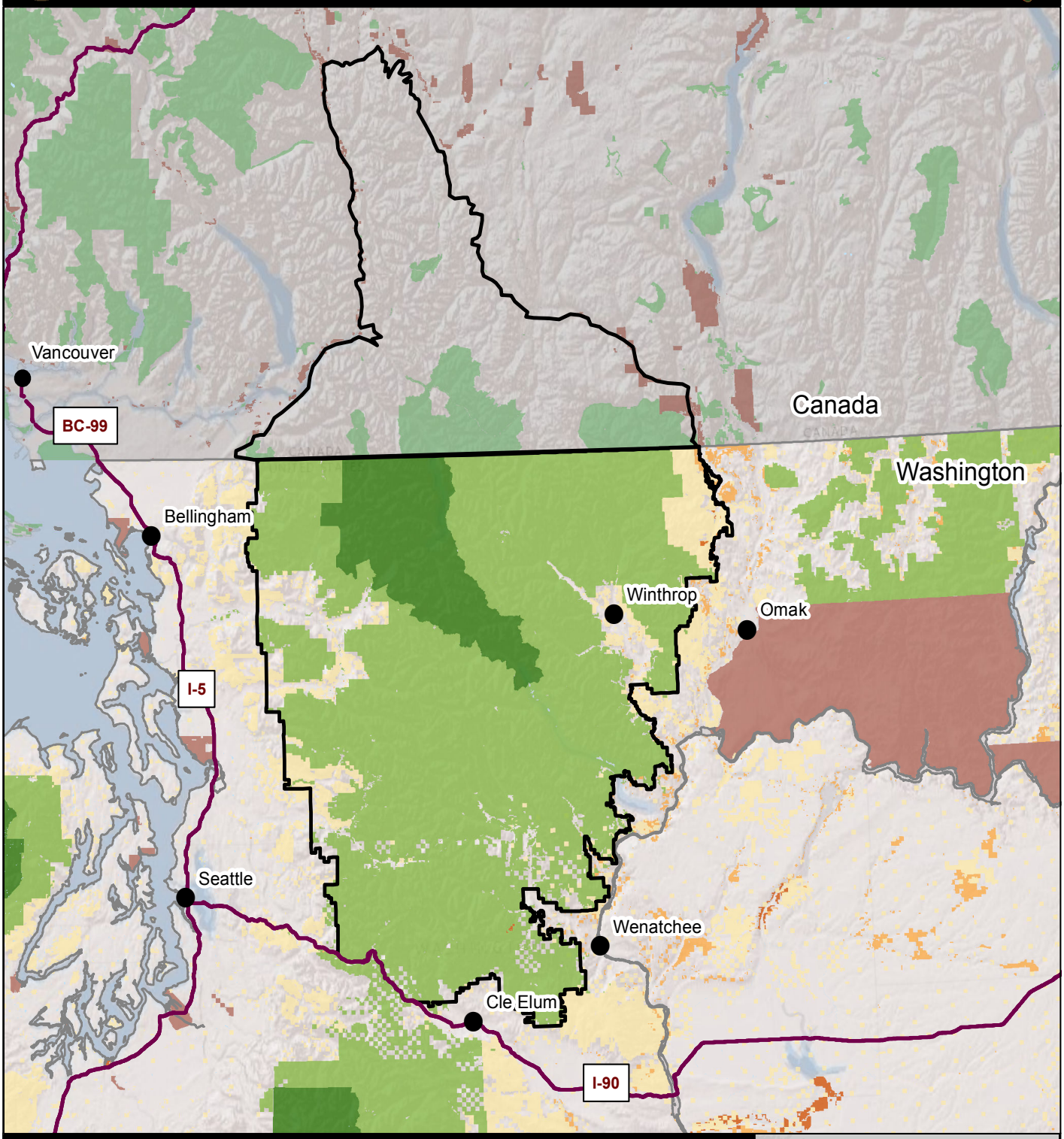
Grizzly bears have coexisted with people in the North Cascades ecosystem from when the first people arrived in North America. This changed during the 19th century with the boom in the fur trade. Nearly 3,800 grizzly bear hides were shipped out of area forts during one 25-year period. However, it is unknown how many more grizzly bears were killed by miners and others living and working on the land. As significant mining activity decreased, areas of grizzly bear habitat remained and in many instances returned to a wilder state. What did not survive was a grizzly bear population capable of returning to its former numbers.

Research indicates this wilderness landscape is capable of supporting a self-sustaining grizzly bear population. However, there has only been one observation of a solitary bear during the past 10 years. Given the low number of grizzly bears, very slow reproductive rate and other recovery constraints, the NCE grizzly bear population is the most at-risk grizzly bear population in the United States today.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently reaffirmed (78 Fed. Reg. 70104 [Nov. 22, 2013]) that the NCE grizzly bear warrants uplisting from Threatened to Endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The main threat to grizzly bears in this recovery zone is a small population size, with resulting demographic and genetic risks. Natural recovery in the NCE is challenged by the absence of verified reproduction and isolation from any contiguous populations in Canada and the United States.

In accordance with the NCE Recovery Plan chapter, the National Park Service and the USFWS are initiating a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning process as joint lead agencies for grizzly bear restoration in the United States portion of the NCE. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service will serve as cooperating agencies.

North Cascades Ecosystem



Legend

- Cities
- Major Interstates and Highways
- North Cascades Ecosystem
- Water
- Protected Areas (British Columbia)
- Canada

Land Ownership

- Tribal
- US Bureau of Land Management
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- US National Park Service
- State Lands

N

0 10 20 30 Miles

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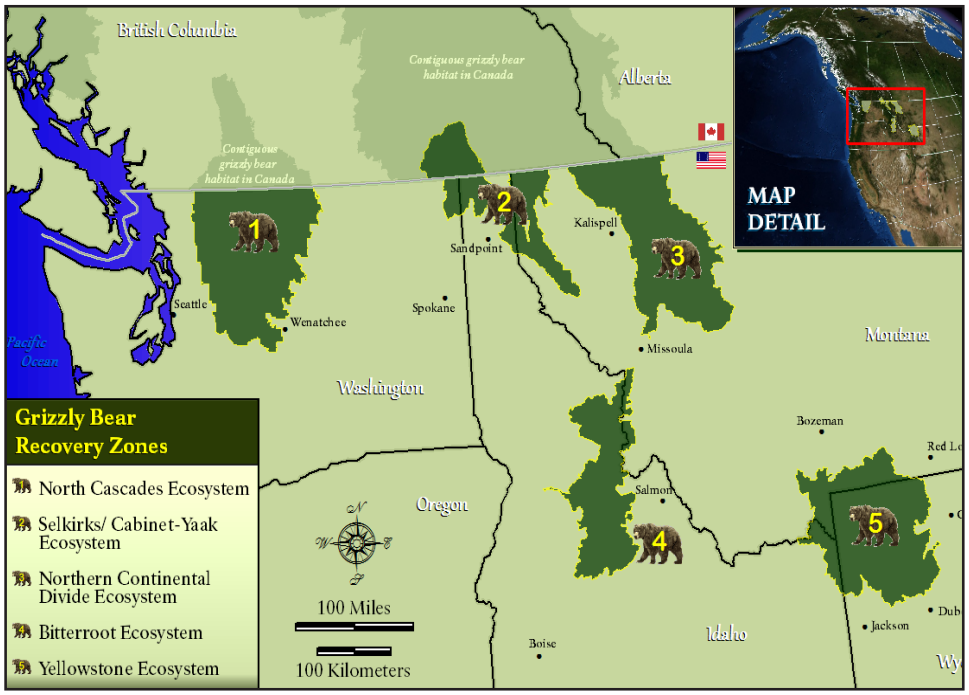
Grizzly Bears in the United States

Grizzly bears (Ursus arctos horribilis) once existed throughout western North America and into northern Mexico (Servheen 1990). The Lewis and Clark Expedition encountered their first grizzly bears not long after departing from St. Louis, Missouri in 1805 (Schullery 2002). During the 19th century an estimated population of 50,000 was reduced to possibly fewer than 1,000 grizzly bears in just a few decades. Today only 5 isolated populations survive in the contiguous United States (USFWS 1982/1993).

Because of the continuing decline in population, the grizzly bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act on July 28, 1975. Direct killing, habitat destruction, habitat modification, and range curtailment were identified by the USFWS as major contributing factors that led to the population decline. (US Fish and Wildlife Service 1982/1993).

In the United States, the remaining populations are managed within five recovery zones: NCE, Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE), Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), Selkirk/ Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem (S/CYE) and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) was formed in 1983 to help ensure the recovery of viable grizzly bear populations in the contiguous states through interagency coordination of policy, planning, management and research. The IGBC consists of representatives from the National Park Service, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, the US Geological Survey and representatives of the state wildlife agencies of Washington, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana.



A nationwide Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was finalized by the USFWS in 1982 and updated in 1993. Recovery plans delineate reasonable actions that are believed to be required to recover and/ or protect the species. (IGBC 1982/1993). In 1997 a chapter specific to the NCE was added to the national plan. The priority actions recommended in the NCE chapter were to: develop a strategy for implementing the recovery chapter (through improved sanitation and access management); develop an ongoing educational program to provide information about grizzly bears and grizzly bear recovery to the public; conduct a research and monitoring effort to determine grizzly bear population size and distribution, habitat and home ranges; and initiate an EIS to evaluate a range of alternatives for how to recover the population in the NCE.

Current recovery efforts in the United States are focused on limiting human-caused mortality through conflict reduction and access management; habitat protection; on-going research; and education. At the state and federal level, food storage and waste disposal facilities, along with comprehensive education programs have reduced the most common sources of bear-human conflict.

What is the Purpose

The purpose of this Plan/EIS is to determine how to restore the grizzly bear to the North Cascades ecosystem (NCE), a portion of its historic range.

What is the Need

Since the NCE grizzly bears are at risk of local extinction, action is needed at this time to:

- Avoid the permanent loss of grizzly bears in the NCE
- Contribute to the restoration of biodiversity of the ecosystem for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations
- Enhance the probability of long-term survival and conservation of grizzly bears within the lower 48 States and thereby contribute to overall grizzly bear recovery
- Support the removal of the grizzly bear from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife Species

Objectives

The objectives of this Plan/EIS are to:

- Restore a grizzly bear population as part of the natural and cultural heritage of the North Cascades.
- Provide Pacific Northwest residents and visitors with the opportunity to again experience grizzly bears in their native habitat
- Seek to support Tribal cultural and spiritual values, as well as environmental and natural resource objectives related to the grizzly bear
- Expand outreach efforts to inform and involve the public, and build understanding about grizzly bear recovery

The Planning Process

As part of the planning process, various approaches for the restoration of a grizzly bear population to the NCE will be evaluated. Preliminary alternatives to be considered in the Plan/EIS include the no action alternative (status quo), as well as active restoration alternatives including moving grizzly bears from other United States and/or Canadian populations into the NCE as either a threatened or experimental population under the ESA.

The Plan/EIS will evaluate the effects of a range of alternatives including potential impacts to: rare or unusual vegetation, wildlife and habitat, soundscapes, wilderness, visitor use and experience, socioeconomics, human safety, and other resources.

Timeline

1975	Grizzly bear listed as threatened species, lower 48 states under Endangered Species Act.
1980	Grizzly bear listed as an endangered species by State of Washington.
1982	National Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan approved by USFWS; revised in 1993.
1983	Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee established.
1991	9,800 square miles of North Cascades ecosystem in Washington State identified as adequate habitat for grizzly bears. Grizzly bears are confirmed in locations from just north of Interstate 90 to the international border.
1991	The decision was made by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee during their winter 1991 meeting to recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades.
1993	Detailed habitat evaluation of the North Cascades ecosystem published.
1997	North Cascades chapter added to National Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.
2004	A grizzly bear recovery plan was completed for the British Columbia portion of North Cascades ecosystem.
2014	NPS/USFWS begin Environmental Impact Statement on grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades ecosystem.

What happens during the EIS process?

The EIS process is completed in the following ordered steps: Notice of Intent (NOI), draft EIS, final EIS, and record of decision (ROD).

- The Notice of Intent is published in the Federal Register by the lead federal agency and signals the initiation of the process.
- Scoping, an open process involving the public and other federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, commences immediately to identify the major and important issues for consideration during the process.
- Public involvement and agency coordination continues throughout the entire process.
- The draft EIS provides a detailed description of the proposal, the purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, the affected environment, and presents analysis of the anticipated beneficial and adverse environmental effects of the alternatives. The preferred alternative will be identified in the Draft EIS, if one exists at the time it is released to the public. If it is not identified in the draft EIS, the preferred alternative will be identified in the Final EIS.
- Following the formal comment period and analysis of comments received from the public and other agencies, the final EIS will be developed and issued. The final EIS will incorporate changes to the alternatives or analysis based on the public comments received and include responses to the comments.
- No sooner than 30 days after the final EIS is released to the public, a record of decision will be signed by the lead agency (or in this case joint lead agencies) identifying the selected action. Implementation of the selected action can begin immediately after the record of decision is signed.

Winter 2015	Public Scoping
Summer 2016	Draft Plan/EIS Release and Public Comment
Summer 2017	Final Plan/EIS Release
Fall 2017	NPS/USFWS Record of Decision

References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Grizzly Bear (Ursus arctos horribilis): 5-Year Review: Summary and Evaluation. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Office, Missoula Montana.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1982/1993. Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. Missoula, Montana. 181 pp. Located at: http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/grizzly/Grizzly_bear_recovery_plan.pdf .