

# GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY: A PROGRESS REPORT AFTER 23 YEARS<sup>TWS</sup>

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The grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in 1975. Six areas were identified in the 1975 listing as grizzly bear populations. Organized recovery efforts have been underway since 1981. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee representing state, federal, tribal, and county interests, implements the recovery program. The recovery program is a cooperative multi-agency effort with full state, federal, tribal and public participation. Significant progress has been made in the recovery of the Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide populations. The Yellowstone population is increasing at approximately 4 percent/year, and recent work has demonstrated exponential expansion of range in the southern part of the ecosystem. All demographic targets in the Recovery Plan have now been met for the last 7 years in the Yellowstone ecosystem. The situation in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) also appears to be improving with bears expanding their range on all sides of the ecosystem. A detailed project to produce the first accurate population estimate for this ecosystem will start in 2004 to make a total population estimate in this ecosystem using DNA. The situation in the four other ecosystems is much less positive. Grizzly bear populations spanning the U.S.-Canadian border in the Cabinet/Yaak and Selkirk ecosystems are small and vulnerable, and occur in the southernmost extensions of Rocky Mountain habitat extending down from Canada. The North Cascades grizzly population is isolated on both the U.S. and Canadian sides and is considered the most endangered grizzly population in Canada. Certain political interests blocked an attempt to begin to reintroduce grizzlies into the Bitterroot ecosystem in 2000. Recent genetics work demonstrates that the south Selkirk grizzlies are an isolated population (no male or female connectivity) under 100 individuals with a 15-20 percent reduction in genetic diversity. The Purcell/Yaak population between Highway 3 in Canada and U.S. Highway 2 is demographically isolated (no female connectivity) with < 50 individuals. The Cabinet Mountains population is likely isolated from both the south Selkirk Mountain and the Purcell/Yaak populations. Aggressive conservation measures are necessary to recover these populations including augmentation with additional bears, mortality reduction programs, public outreach, and reestablishment of population linkage so these areas are no longer isolated. We are working on enhanced cooperative U.S. and Canadian efforts to address the issues facing these small grizzly populations and to build connectivity to existing larger populations and areas of vacant habitat. Limitations to grizzly recovery are funding and political resistance and interference. If funding, agency and political commitment, and public support are present, we believe recovery of grizzly bears is possible in all six areas where they were thought to exist in 1975. Success of the Yellowstone recovery effort is proof that a cooperative effort can recover a grizzly population. We know what to do to help the remaining populations, and we can do it if we are given the opportunity.