

REINTRODUCTION OF GRIZZLY BEARS INTO THE SELWAY- BITTERROOT

WILDERNESS AREAS OF IDAHO AND MONTANA^{TWS}

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There are 5 populations of grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) in the lower 48 states, three of these are small and precarious. Only the Yellowstone and NCDE populations are both reasonably large (>400 individuals each) and growing. Reestablishment of grizzlies in additional large areas of acceptable habitat is an identified component of the FWS recovery plan for grizzly bears. The largest remaining area of unoccupied grizzly habitat is the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Areas of eastern Idaho and western Montana. This area encompasses some 5,500 square miles that is 97.5 percent USFS public lands, is bisected by only

one paved highway, and has no cattle or sheep grazing permits. Primary human uses of the area are compatible with grizzlies, river rafting, and hunting. FWS estimates that this area could ultimately support >200 grizzlies, a 20-30 percent increase over current lower 48 grizzly numbers. Surrounding the wilderness areas are additional areas of potential grizzly habitat into which bears introduced into the wilderness could connect with existing precarious populations in northern Idaho and north-central Montana. The Fish and Wildlife Service has undertaken an exhaustive public process effort leading to the recent completion of a final EIS for grizzly reintroduction. This FEIS is a compromise approach between those who would prefer no grizzlies and those who prefer a solution more dramatically tailored to grizzly habitat needs. I hope that professional biologists and grizzly advocates can quit arguing over details of the reintroduction plan and unite behind efforts to get some bears back on ground from which they've been missing for 40 years.