

## THE STATUS OF GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY 25 YEARS AFTER LISTING<sup>TWS</sup>

Christopher Servheen

USFWS, University of Montana, Missoula 59812

The grizzly bear was listed as a threatened species in 1975. In 1981 recovery actions got underway. Since that time significant progress has been made in the Yellowstone Ecosystem where the population is now increasing and reoccupying areas where it has been absent for 40 or more years. The reasons are directly related to reduced human-caused mortality with resultant increasing numbers of females having cubs. From 1996-98 more than 204 cubs were born in the Yellowstone area while only 18 bears were known to die from human causes. In the other ecosystems, recovery is not as clear as in Yellowstone. In the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem in Montana, grizzlies have reoccupied the Rocky Mountain front from the Canadian border to Highway 200. Bears are moving farther and farther east on the prairie each year as populations increase in this area. The fact that most of this land is in private ownership complicates management in this area. The NCDE is almost 16 percent private land and these areas are the major conflict sites between bears and people. In the last 11 years, 61 percent of the human-caused mortalities have been on or within 1 km of private lands in the NCDE. The Cabinet/Yaak ecosystem has a small population. We have placed 4 young females in this area to augment this population. The numbers of bears in this area remains low, however, with most animals in the northern Yaak drainage. The Selkirk ecosystem is small in size, but animals are increasing in this area since recovery actions have been underway. The connection with Canadian habitat is important here as the bears go back and forth across the Canadian border. The North Cascades population is minimal at this time. It may well be that the remaining bears are concentrated along the US-Canada border, but data on the US side to verify this is minimal. The Bitterroot is the only large area south of Canada where bears do not currently exist but where there is

habitat and space capable of supporting a population. An EIS process is drawing to a close to restore grizzly bears to the Bitterroot using an innovative citizen management approach. The final decision on the Bitterroot will be made this year. The restoration of grizzlies in the Bitterroot will be one of the outstanding achievements of Rocky Mountain wildlife conservation if it is allowed to go forward.