

# Why Biological Recovery has not Been Enough to Successfully Delist the Grizzly Bear

Sabrina Bradford, Graduated with a PhD from the University of Colorado in December 2024

\*Indicates Presenter

\*\*Indicates Student Presentation

Many institutionally driven wildlife recovery programs around the world struggle as a result of a disconnect between ecological definitions of recovery and social realities surrounding conservation. In North America's Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, tensions have erupted due to the Yellowstone grizzly bear remaining a federally protected population despite meeting scientific recovery targets for over twenty years. In order to explore the similarities and differences between the biological criteria and the social constructs of recovery, I interviewed both local stakeholders and federal and state wildlife agency representatives within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In addition, I analyzed the public response to the 2017 removal of federal protection from the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bear. Results of this research indicate that there is tension between the biological and social aspects of endangered species recovery and that policy marketing rather than biological monitoring largely shapes the development of the recovery discourse. In other words, the judicial rulings which have reinstated federal protection for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bear population have had a transformative effect on the way the public understands the criteria necessary for a species to be considered recovered, a key component of the delisting process. As countries around the world develop policies and programs to support the recovery of large carnivore species, it is critical that programs identify both biological and social components in order for a species to be identified as recovered.