
PROGRESS TOWARD GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY: THE CURRENT STATUS OF GRIZZLIES IN THE YELLOWSTONE AND THE NORTHERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE ECOSYSTEMS

Chris Servheen*, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana 59812

Richard Mace*, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Kalispell, Montana 59901

The grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) was listed as a threatened species in the lower 48 states in 1975. Formal recovery efforts started in 1981 with the completion of the first Recovery Plan. The state and federal agencies, tribes, and Canadian provinces were organized in 1983 into a cooperative structure called the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee to work together to implement the Recovery Plan. At the time of listing, the exact number of grizzly bears was unknown but probable numbers in the Yellowstone ecosystem were approximately 250, in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) approximately 400. In 2012, population

estimates in the Yellowstone ecosystem are approximately 700 and approximately 1000 in the NCDE. Both of these populations appear to be approaching the carrying capacity of their ecosystems as evidenced by reduced subadult survival in the core areas of the Yellowstone ecosystem and dispersal of primarily subadults into peripheral habitats in both ecosystems. The expanding range and numbers of grizzlies is resulting in re-occupancy of habitats in Montana where grizzly bears had been extirpated for over 100 years. The objective of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is to get listed species to the point at which protection of the ESA is no longer required. We review progress toward recovery and delisting and the reasons the grizzlies in these ecosystems have recovered including mortality control, habitat management, nuisance bear management, and outreach and education. We also describe future management once recovery and delisting have been achieved and how this management will assure the long-term future of this species in Montana.