

MEETING NOTES

NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM GRIZZLY BEAR SUBCOMMITTEE

North Bend, WA

November 5, 2014

Attendees, Subcommittee:

Karen Taylor-Goodrich (Chair, NPS)

Jack Oelfke (NPS)

Bob Everitt (WDFW)

Jim Brown (WDFW, via phone)

Mark Miller (USFWS)

Tony Hamilton, (BCMoE, via phone)

Technical Team:

John Rohrer (USFS)

Anne Braaten (NPS)

Wayne Kasworm (USFWS)

Gregg Kurz (USFWS)

Scott Fitkin (WDFW)

Jesse Plumage (USFS)

Other participants:

Chris Servheen (USFWS, via phone)

Colleen Matt (WMI, via phone)

Bill Gaines (Washington Conservation Science Institute)

I&E:

Denise Shultz (NPS)

Members of public present:

David Graves (National Parks & Conservation Association)

Joe Scott (Conservation NW)

Alison Hewitt (Conservation NW)

Sean Cantrell (Defenders of Wildlife)

Recommendation regarding Management Situation designations for BLM in the Loomis:

Bob Everitt (WDFW) submitted a request prior to the meeting for a review and recommendation from the NCE Subcommittee to address a planning effort underway for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) lands in Washington. The WDFW is a Cooperating Agency with BLM in helping to develop their Resource Management Plan (RMP), which is up for renewal. Among many other things, the RMP will address management scenarios for grizzly bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE).

The request for guidance from the Subcommittee was with regard to applying Management Situations to Bear Management Units on BLM lands. The 1986 Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines provided definitions of Management Situations for areas within grizzly bear recovery areas. "Management Situation 1" referred to areas that contain "grizzly population centers (areas key to the survival of grizzly where seasonal or year-long grizzly activity, under natural, free-ranging conditions is common) and habitat components needed for the survival and recovery of the species or a segment of its population. The probability is very great that major Federal activities or programs may affect (have direct or indirect relationships to the conservation and recovery of) the grizzly." "Management Situation 2" referred to areas where "current information indicates that the area lacks distinct population centers; highly suitable habitat does not generally occur, although some grizzly bear habitat components exist and grizzly bears may be present occasionally. Habitat resources in MS 2 either are unnecessary for survival and recovery of the species, or the need has not yet been determined but habitat resources may be necessary."

The definitions of Management Situations 1 and 2 proved to be problematic in an ecosystem where areas of occupancy are not known and lacking local data, what is or is not specifically important to grizzly bears in this ecosystem cannot be quantified. Therefore in 2003 the Subcommittee requested approval from the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee for a word change for Management Situation 1:

A. Management Situation 1

1. Population and habitat conditions. *The area contains grizzly population centers (areas key to the survival of grizzly where seasonal or year-long grizzly activity, under natural, free-ranging conditions is common) and/or habitat components needed for the survival and recovery of the species or a segment of its population. The probability is very great that major Federal activities or programs may affect ... the grizzly.*

C. Management Situation 3

Similarly, Management Situation 3 was worded in such a way that it implied grizzly bears were known to use areas, generally front country or the wild-urban interface, where their presence would not be allowed/ tolerated. The Subcommittee also requested approval from the IGBC for the following wording change:

1. Population and habitat conditions. *Grizzly presence is possible [removed were the words "but infrequent"]. Developments, such as campgrounds, resorts or other high human use associated facilities, and human presence result in conditions which make grizzly presence untenable for humans and/or grizzlies. There is a high probability that major Federal activities or programs may affect the species' conservation and recovery.*

These word changes simplified and provided flexibility for recommending land designations in an ecosystem where information regarding grizzly bear occupancy and habitat use is lacking. The IGBC approved these changes at their 2003 Summer Meeting.

Although formal land designations will not be accomplished on either the Okanogan-Wenatchee or Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests until their Forest Plans are revised, the recommendation of the Subcommittee's Technical Team to the USFS in 2004 was that federal land managers in the NCE "map only MS 1 and MS 3. MS 2 is not considered at this time because the definition indicates 'highly suitable habitat does not generally occur'. Areas without suitable habitat within this ecosystem generally coincide with areas of high human use and will therefore be mapped as MS 3."

Similar to the guidance given to the USFS, and to promote consistency with land management designations throughout the recovery area, the NCE Grizzly Bear Subcommittee recommended at this meeting (November 2014) that Management Situation 1 or Management Situation 3 be applied to the BLM lands as appropriate. This will be consistent with the Technical Team's recommendations for guiding development of Forest Plans, as well as with Management Situation direction in the Cabinet-Yaak and Selkirk Grizzly Bear Ecosystems.

Related to this discussion, given that key members of the Technical Team from the USFS are no longer with the agency, the wording change for the Management Situations had not initially been available to planners during this process. A request was thus made for providing a repository for the institutional memory that is lost as people retire or otherwise leave the Technical Team/ Subcommittee.

Annual and Five-Year workplans:

Edits were made to the plans for presentation at the IGBC winter meeting.

Final update on 2010-2012 DNA project:

The 2010-2012 DNA project did not turn up any grizzly bear samples. Approximately 24% of the ecosystem was sampled, with emphasis given to areas of high quality habitat. The lack of grizzly bear detection does not indicate there are no grizzly bears in the NCE, but does suggest only a very small remnant remains.

The Technical Report should be published in Spring, 2015.

Separately from the study, nine hair corrals were set up in an area of superb grizzly bear habitat during the summer of 2014. It was an area we had hoped to sample during the 2010-12 study, but had been unable to get to. No grizzly bears were observed in the photos taken at the hair corrals, and because the photos were definitive as to bear species no hair samples were sent in for analysis. Two lynx, a wolf, a wolverine and several black bears were detected at these sites.

Information & Education:

Potential proposals for IGBC I&E funds were discussed. There was a strong emphasis that the Subcommittee will endorse only proposals that have no advocacy component to them. The messaging needs to be limited to biology/ ecology of bears and neutral explanations of the NEPA process.

EIS Update:

Much has happened since our last meeting.

- The lead agencies are the NPS and USFWS, with the WDFW and USFS as cooperating agencies.
- A two-day internal scoping meeting was held in Portland in October.
- The Notice of Intent to commence an Environmental Impact Statement for the restoration of grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem should come out in early January. There will be a 30 day comment period, with public open houses held in Omak, Winthrop, Wenatchee, Cle Elum, Seattle and either Bellingham or Sedro-Woolley/ Mt. Vernon. The dates of the meetings will depend on the issuance of the NOI.
- At this point we are expecting a three-year process, with a Record of Decision by early 2018.
- Funding for the WDFW's involvement will come from the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission.

Other:

During the public comment period the need for an updated sanitation inventory was highlighted. The inventory should include all waste receptacles as well as food-storage facilities and/or requirements (for example, sites in the national park where hiker canisters are required). Priorities need to be set for sites with high conflict rates (real or potential) with black bears. Likewise the availability of trailhead signs and how many are needed in order to have them posted at all trailheads should be quantified. Where bear sanitation signs are not posted it needs to be determined whether this is because the agency is out of signs or simply has not posted them.

Posting a list of needs and priorities on a website may be useful to potential funders from outside of the agencies.