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Subject: North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan – Environmental Impact Statement

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Key Messages:

- The National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are the lead agencies on the EIS. The cooperating agencies are the U.S.D.A. Forest Service and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- The purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is to evaluate a range of alternatives for how to restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE).
- The plan/ EIS will provide decision-makers with sufficient information on potential environmental impacts and offer the public an opportunity to give input to the decision-makers on the topics covered by the plan/EIS. The NPS and FWS Regional Directors, in consultation with the Department of the Interior, will use the results of the process to select an alternative for implementation.
- The EIS involves in-depth public engagement, analysis of existing scientific studies and analysis of the potential impacts of grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades ecosystem.

Timeline:

- 1975 – Grizzly bear listed as threatened species, lower 48 states under Endangered Species Act.
- 1980 – Grizzly bear listed as an endangered species by State of Washington.
- 1982 – National Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan approved by FWS; revised in 1993.
- 1983 – Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee established.
- 1991 – 9,800 square miles of North Cascades ecosystem in Washington State identified as adequate habitat for grizzly bears. Grizzly bears are confirmed in locations from just north of Interstate 90 to the international border.
- 1991 – The decision was made by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee during their winter 1991 meeting to recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades.
- 1993 – Detailed habitat evaluation of the North Cascades ecosystem published.
- 1997 – North Cascades chapter added to National Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.
- 2004 – A grizzly bear recovery plan completed for the British Columbia portion of North Cascades ecosystem.
- 2014 – NPS/FWS begin Environmental Impact Statement on grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades ecosystem.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

An EIS is a document that evaluates and discusses potential environmental impacts that would occur as a result of taking an action. An agency must look at the impacts of its proposed action, as well as reasonable alternatives for accomplishing its objective, in this case restoring a self-sustaining grizzly bear population to the U.S. portion of the North Cascades ecosystem. An analysis of what would happen as a result of taking no action is also required. An EIS must be prepared using the best available data. As part of the process, agencies identify and invite the participation of interested persons. This usually means the opportunity to comment on the scope of the EIS at the beginning of the process and again on the draft EIS before a final EIS is issued. Typically, this includes public meetings during comment periods.

Background on EIS: The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 requires federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major federal actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. An EIS is a full disclosure document that details the process through which a project is developed, includes consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives, analyzes the potential impacts resulting from the alternatives, and demonstrates compliance with other applicable environmental laws and executive orders.

What happens during the EIS process?

The EIS process is completed in the following ordered steps: Notice of Intent (NOI), draft EIS, final EIS, and record of decision (ROD).

- The Notice of Intent is published in the Federal Register by the lead federal agency and signals the initiation of the process.
- Scoping, an open process involving the public and other federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, commences immediately to identify the major and important issues for consideration during the process.
- Public involvement and agency coordination continues throughout the entire process.
- The draft EIS provides a detailed description of the proposal, the purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, the affected environment, and presents analysis of the anticipated beneficial and adverse environmental effects of the alternatives.
- Following a formal comment period and receipt of comments from the public and other agencies, the final EIS will be developed and issued. The final EIS will address the comments on the draft and identify, based on analysis and comments, the "preferred alternative".
- After the final EIS is complete, a record of decision is signed by the agency (or in this case joint agencies) thereby allowing the selected alternative to be implemented.

How long does it take to complete the EIS?

About 3 years.

Are the NPS and FWS the only entities involved in the EIS?

While NPS and FWS are the lead agencies; the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service will be cooperating agencies. The Province of BC has been approached regarding its potential involvement in the EIS and Tribes will participate through government-to-government consultation. Other cooperators may be identified in the future.

Why is the EIS going to be contracted outside of the NPS and FWS?

This is standard procedure when the work load required is greater than current government capacity. The NPS will provide a project manager for the contract and other technical expertise through its

Environmental Quality Division. Other technical assistance will be available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, and WDFW.

How much will it cost to complete the EIS? Who is paying for it?

A contract has been awarded for roughly \$550,000 to complete the EIS. The agencies involved will contribute in-kind services. The Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission is also contributing to the cost of the EIS. These costs are typical for an EIS for a major federal action. Most funding is being provided by the National Park Service through its Environmental Quality Division.

Why start the EIS process now?

The North Cascades Chapter of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan calls for completion of an EIS to evaluate a range of alternatives for recovering the North Cascades grizzly bear population. This has been identified as a need since 1997, and funds are now available to complete the EIS.

What is the North Cascades ecosystem?

The North Cascades is a large ecosystem in north-central Washington State and south-central British Columbia. The largest area of the ecosystem, about 9,800 square miles, lies in the United States. The British Columbia portion of the ecosystem is 3,800 square miles.

Is the North Cascades ecosystem all public land?

Ninety-seven percent of the U.S. portion of the North Cascades ecosystem is public land and 3 percent is private.

- North Cascades National Park Service Complex = about 10 percent
- Okanogan-Wenatchee & Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests = 76 percent
- Other federal lands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Defense) = 2.6 percent
- State lands = 7.4 percent
- County and municipal = 1 percent

Do grizzly bears live in the North Cascades ecosystem today?

The most recent confirmed observation of a grizzly bear in the US portion of the ecosystem was in 1996. Efforts during 2010-2012 to locate grizzly bears in the US portion of the ecosystem using barbed wire “corrals” to capture hair samples for DNA identification yielded no confirmed grizzly bears; however due to funding and logistical constraints less than a quarter of the ecosystem could be sampled. There may be a small number of grizzly bears still living in the US portion, but exactly how many is unknown. One grizzly bear has been confirmed during the past 5 years in the British Columbia portion of the Cascades, within 20 miles of the U.S. portion of the North Cascades Ecosystem. This indicates the possibility of “dual citizen” bears living on both sides of the border. Due to the remoteness of the ecosystem, it is highly unlikely that people have observed all of the grizzly bears in the ecosystem.

Why do grizzly bears need to be restored to the North Cascades?

Grizzly bears are at high risk of extirpation, or going locally extinct, in the North Cascades. Restoring a self-sustaining population would contribute to the restoration of biodiversity in the ecosystem for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. With the restoration of fishers (anticipated in the next few years) and grizzly bears, the North Cascades would be one of the few ecosystems left in the contiguous United States that has the full complement of carnivore species known to be native prior to European settlement. Such biodiversity can be an indication of a healthy ecosystem. Restoring grizzly

bears to the North Cascades would enhance the probability of long-term survival and conservation of grizzly bears in the contiguous United States, thereby contributing to overall grizzly bear recovery, and supporting the eventual removal of grizzly bears from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife Species.

Grizzly bears were listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as threatened in 1975. After a species is listed under the ESA, recovery plans are usually prepared. These are basically blue prints for what is needed in order to recover a species to the point where it no longer needs the protections provided by the ESA. A recovery plan for grizzly bears was completed in 1982, with individual chapters written for each of the four recovery areas where grizzly bear occupancy was known. Because not enough was yet known about the North Cascades, the 1982 plan recommended an evaluation of the North Cascades Ecosystem as a recovery area. The evaluation (1986-1991) indicated that a very small number of grizzly bears still lived in the ecosystem and that there was ample secure habitat to support a recovered population. Based on the results of the evaluation the decision was made in 1991 to restore grizzly bears to the ecosystem, and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee formalized the inclusion of the North Cascades as a grizzly bear recovery area. A recovery plan chapter for the North Cascades was prepared and appended to the overall recovery plan. One of four priority actions recommended in the North Cascades Recovery Plan chapter was to initiate an EIS to evaluate alternatives for how to recover grizzly bears in this ecosystem.

How will the EIS address the Washington state law that includes the statement that “Grizzly bears shall not be transplanted or introduced into the state.”?

Washington state law (RCW 77.12.035) also directs WDFW to “...fully participate in all discussions and negotiations with federal and state agencies relating to grizzly bear management...” The full statute will be addressed with certain recovery alternatives.

Won't the requirement to fully participate pose a financial burden to the State of Washington?

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is a cooperating agency in the EIS process and a contribution from the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission is being provided to offset costs associated with WDFW's participation.

If this moved forward, what impact would restoration have on other big game populations?

The EIS process will evaluate such impacts and display them in the EIS document. Grizzly bears are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plants and animals. In the spring, grizzly bears take advantage of vulnerable, young ungulates such as elk or deer, and winter-killed carrion; however, in similar ecosystems to the North Cascades they eat primarily vegetation, insects and carrion. Some adult big game animals probably will be taken, are not expected to be a major food source, nor would the level of predation be expected to have an influence on population performance.

Will the grizzly bear EIS address issues in common with the recovery and management of wolves in Washington State?

The grizzly bear EIS will evaluate the interplay between grizzly bear and wolf recovery in relation to possible grizzly bear recovery alternatives. Wolves and grizzly bears are very different animals. Wolves are primarily carnivorous, hunt in highly social packs and are more likely to prey on domestic livestock. Grizzly bears in ecosystems similar to the North Cascades rely much more on vegetation, insects, and small mammals. Grizzly bears also tend to avoid areas of human activity.

What impact could this have on ranchers and domestic livestock?

An important part of the EIS process is to evaluate and display the potential impacts of each alternative on resources and the public in the area.

Why restore grizzlies in the Northern Cascades and not in other regions where grizzly bears once roamed?

When Lewis and Clark began their trek across what is now the United States, grizzly bears were distributed throughout western North America, from the Pacific Ocean to the Mississippi River and from the Arctic Ocean to central Mexico. When they were given protection under the ESA, grizzly bears were gone from all but 2 percent of their original range in the contiguous United States. The 1982 Recovery Plan focused on recovering grizzly bears in ecosystems where they currently lived or had likely occurred in the recent past. In 1991, the North Cascades ecosystem was selected by the IGBC as one of the six areas where recovery would occur, based on a five-year study that found bears still lived in the North Cascades and the habitat is capable of supporting a population. The North Cascades chapter of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan calls for completion of an EIS to evaluate alternatives for recovering the North Cascades grizzly bear population and funds are now available to complete this EIS.

When will grizzly bears be delisted in the Lower 48?

Delisting of the grizzly bear will likely be achieved on a case-by-case basis as recovery targets are met for each population. A status assessment along with a distinct population segment (DPS) determination will need to be made before the FWS can make a final determination on recovery and delisting by population. If the population is considered recovered and meets the definition of a DPS, then a proposed and final rule to delist it would be published in the Federal Register. Delisting is currently being considered, along with comprehensive conservation strategies, for the Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem populations, but no final decision has been made.

How are you involving the public in this restoration decision?

There will be numerous opportunities for the public to comment and be involved in the process. This EIS will involve the public in the evaluation of alternatives to achieve a stated goal, in this case grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades Ecosystem. All comments about the alternatives presented in the EIS, as well as alternatives that may not be presented but the public thinks should be considered, will be considered during the EIS process. The federal agencies will respond to these inputs by the public

What are the factors limiting natural recovery in the North Cascades Ecosystem? Habitat and population connectivity between the nearest populations in British Columbia and the US portion of North Cascades ecosystem is increasingly fragmented and grizzly bears face as many, or more, challenges immediately north of the U.S. border as they do to the south. Recovering a sustainable population will likely require active restoration in the U.S. portion of the ecosystem as well as strong cooperative efforts to sustain connectivity with Canada. If left to recover without additional human intervention, grizzly bears could disappear because individual bears are increasingly isolated and have limited opportunity to breed. Indications are that this is already happening, as confirmed observations have become increasingly rare on both sides of the international border. Natural recovery, however, will be one of the options evaluated through the EIS, using the best available science and information.

What authority do federal agencies have to lead this effort?

As federal land management agencies, the NPS is directly responsible for implementing the Organic Act and FWS is responsible for implementing the Endangered Species Act. These laws, as well as numerous

other laws and policies of the United States, direct the agencies to do everything within their power to recover, protect, and preserve grizzly bears as a public trust, to ensure that future generations benefit from the same wildlife resources that we enjoy today.

Why is the EIS about how to restore grizzly bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem?

The decision was made in 1991 to restore grizzly bears to the ecosystem when the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee designated the North Cascades as a grizzly bear recovery area. A Recovery Plan chapter for the North Cascades was prepared and included as a chapter of the national Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. One of four priority actions recommended in the North Cascades Recovery Plan chapter was to initiate an EIS to evaluate alternatives for how to recover grizzly bears in this ecosystem.

What is the upside for the ecosystem?

The largest upside for the ecosystem is building resilience through preserving, or in this case increasing, biodiversity. Greater biodiversity allows ecosystems to more readily adapt to broad environmental stressors, such as climate change. The return of a self-sustaining population of grizzly bears to the North Cascades would bode well for the ecosystem: an ecosystem capable of supporting grizzly bears – complete with healthy vegetation and prey populations, and secure, remote habitat – is also capable of supporting the other species that call this ecosystem home.

Restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades ecosystem also restores a part of the natural and cultural heritage of Washington, which could be lost if recovery efforts are not taken.

Is the habitat in the recovery area viable for bear survival?

The North Cascades Grizzly Bear Ecosystem Evaluation, completed in 1991, indicated that the necessary habitat quality, quantity, and security were present to support grizzly bears. Land management practices since then have ensured these parameters are still intact and in some areas, improved. A 2002 Habitat Assessment evaluated motorized access, the availability of undisturbed habitat areas and seasonal habitat values in the NCE, charting a course for optimizing habitat security and availability on federal lands over the long-term. Grizzly bears persisted as an important part of the North Cascades for many millennia. Their decline was not due to inadequate habitat, but to direct killing by people. Thousands of grizzly bears from within and around this ecosystem were killed by the mid-1800s.

How does this fit with tight budget priorities?

Federal budgets are extremely tight and the needs for infrastructure maintenance and improvements far exceed budget availability across the National Park System. The Organic Act that governs the NPS provides a clear mandate to preserve and protect our natural and cultural resources for this and future generations. The national leadership of each lead agency (National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) have made it clear that grizzly bear restoration is priority among the many other stewardship needs. Most of the costs of the North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear EIS are covered through special, targeted EIS-related funds already provided by annual appropriations to the National Park Service and recovery funds appropriated for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Would this recovery effort require visitors to the recovery area to change their behavior?

Black bears already occupy the areas that grizzly bears are expected to be in the future, and much of the human behavior needed to avoid conflict with that species applies to recreation around grizzly bears as well. Learning how to safely recreate in black bear country goes a very long way to learning how to recreate where there are grizzly bears. The national park and national forests are already addressing the high risk elements of human-grizzly bear conflict by increasing awareness of, and/or requiring, proper backcountry food storage and by installing bear resistant garbage disposal systems and food storage lockers in campgrounds in order to reduce human-black bear conflict.

Would trails and roads be closed to protect grizzly bears?

There are thousands of miles of trails traveled safely by millions of people in grizzly bear country in the other recovery areas, such as in the Rocky Mountains. Roads on federal lands within the North Cascades ecosystem have been managed with grizzly bears in mind since the publication of the recovery plan chapter in 1997. Care has been taken to maintain road systems in a way to ensure secure habitat for bears while meeting the needs of people.

How long would it take before there is a recovered population in the NCE?

It is unknown at this time and will be evaluated during the EIS process. However, alternatives developed for a similar EIS process completed for a similarly sized ecosystem in Idaho estimated it would take 50 to 125 years from the time recovery efforts begin to the time a self-sustaining population would be established. Even if a small number of bears were moved into the ecosystem it would take many decades for a population to grow, and in all likelihood people would see these bears only rarely during the first 10 to 20 years.

How would grizzly bears impact adjacent developed areas?

Grizzly bears could or could not directly impact adjacent land owners, depending on where bears establish their home ranges and how proactive people are in their actions. Sanitation and education are critical to managing impacts. The behavior of communities, businesses, farmers, and ranchers all play a role in how peaceably people and bears coexist. Learning about and establishing good storage plans for items that attract bears is critical. It is expected that bears would primarily reside in the core of the wilderness area and avoid humans as much as possible.

What would be the impacts of grizzly bears on other predator populations in the recovery area?

Grizzly bears coexist with numerous carnivores in other parts of their range, and while some competition for food is certainly likely, the wildlife impacts of restoring grizzly bears after prolonged absence are largely unknown. It is expected that some black bears would be displaced or even killed by grizzly bears. Grizzly bears and black bears coexist as healthy populations in other recovery areas. Grizzly bears would likely steal food from cougars and wolves, as well as compete for carrion with wolverines and other medium to large carnivores. There is no expectation that predators would flee the area into adjacent human-occupied areas, but rather that species would adjust behaviorally within their range. Human-dominated landscapes are typically much more uncertain to wildlife than are wildlife species - dominated landscapes.

Where can I learn more about efforts on grizzly bear restoration and recovery?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead agency on endangered species and their recovery. Information on grizzly bear recovery is available at:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service: www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/grizzly/
- National Park Service: www.nps.gov/noca/grizzly
- Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee: www.igbconline.org/