

MEETING NOTES

NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM GRIZZLY BEAR SUBCOMMITTEE

Wenatchee, WA

April 28, 2015

Attendees, Subcommittee:

Karen Taylor-Goodrich (Chair, NPS)

Jack Oelfke (NPS)

Jennifer Eberlien (USFS, via phone)

Jason Kuiken (USFS)

Jim Brown (WDFW)

Mark Miller (USFWS)

Tony Hamilton, (BCMoE ,via phone)

Technical Team:

Anne Braaten (NPS)

Wayne Kasworm (USFWS)

Gregg Kurz (USFWS)

Scott Fitkin (WDFW)

Jesse Plumage (USFS)

I&E:

Denise Shultz (NPS)

Other participants:

Don Youkey (USFS)

Chris Smith (Wildlife Management Institute)

Lorna Smith (Western Wildlife Outreach)

Andrea Lyons (Washington Conservation Science Institute)

Bill Gaines (WCSI)

Members of public present:

Joe Scott (Conservation NW)

Alison Huyett (Conservation NW)

Elizabeth Ruther (Defenders of Wildlife)

Chris Morgan (WWO)

Gus Becker (WWO)

Ghost Bears, grizzly bear habitat modeling & DNA collection plans:

Dr. Bill Gaines (*Washington Conservation Science Institute*) has been giving “Ghost Bears of the North Cascades” presentations over the past year. Locations include: Twisp, Wenatchee, Ellensburg, Everett, Bellingham, Bellevue, the Woodland Park Zoo and Edmunds. Upcoming locations include REI (Seattle), the Tacoma Mountaineers, Leavenworth and potentially somewhere in lower BC.

The presentations cover the history of grizzly bears in the North Cascades; bear biology; attempts to locate grizzly bears in the North Cascades using hair-snag corrals; why a population can't rebound once it has fallen below a critical threshold; why agencies are moving forward with restoration planning and how this is done. He also covers human-bear safety. The talks are strictly informational.

Common topics that arise are an unawareness that the North Cascades ecosystem is a grizzly bear recovery zone and has been since 1991; that efforts to improve sanitation in the ecosystem and thereby reduce potential for human-bear conflict have been on-going in some areas since 1991; access in the North Cascades has been managed since 1997 as if there was a functionally extant population; the role of grizzly bears in ecosystems.

Bill went on to introduce a project being undertaken by Andrea Lyons (also WCSI) to develop habitat capacity models. This is an outgrowth of Kristen Richardson's thesis work, which used black bear genetic and detection data from the 2010-2012 hair snagging project. Kristen examined the influence of human activities and habitat characteristics on black bear abundance across heterogeneous landscapes of the NCE. Andrea is working with the USFS's Peter Singleton to develop a habitat quality map using up-to-date satellite imagery, guided by the black bear data. From there she will employ habitat use data from areas where black and grizzly bears coexist to model potential grizzly bear habitat capacity in this ecosystem.

There are some USFS funds to support another small hair corral project this summer. They are still working out details about where. Volunteers will be sought through the Wenatchee River Institute.

EIS Update:

The Notice of Intent to begin the Environmental Impact Statement for restoring grizzly bears to the NCE was published in February, and a series of six public scoping meetings followed in March. There were over 500 attendees. Approximately 2,900 comments were received and are available online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=327&projectID=44144&documentID=66506>. Fewer form letters were received than is usual in the scoping process. Concerns expressed included:

- Supporting the restoration of an endangered species
- Ecosystem health (another step toward restoring a complete suite of predators)
- That they were here historically and should be brought back
- The potential for agricultural depredation (livestock, orchard crops)
- Personal safety
- Across the spectrum of those who work and recreate in the ecosystem, how access may be affected.

There is concern over how an existing state statute (*RCW 77.12.035 Protection of grizzly bears -- Limitation on transplantation or introduction -- Negotiations with federal and state agencies*) will be addressed during the EIS process.

The USFS's national travel management planning process is evaluating the road system as a whole, and will lead to some road closures. Major factors in evaluating long-term planning include road stability, recreation and the cost of road maintenance. It needs to be made clear to the public that grizzly bears are not the driving force for these closures. The needs of all listed species are taken into consideration. Some road closures will benefit any/all of these species and some closures may be influenced by the need for habitat improvement for a small number of species. For example, given the instability of many roads, fisheries tend to rise to the top of wildlife concerns. Given the intensity of interest with respect to access, proactive outreach and education will continue to be essential.

Numerous briefings have been held with county commissioners on both sides of the crest and well outside the ecosystem (Vancouver, WA); the state legislature; numerous congressional staff; city councils; and the Upper Skagit Tribe.

There is interest on the part of the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, which is contributing funds in support of the EIS, for outreach in lower BC.

The timeline for the EIS is to have the draft EIS out during summer, 2016. The intent is that the Record of Decision will be signed during the fall of 2017.

Western Wildlife Outreach (Lorna Smith):

The WWO has been taking the Bear Trailer to as many events/locations as they can, given limited funding. This has included Sequim, Leavenworth's Earth Day, Newcastle/Issaquah, and Cabelas events. Their work focuses primarily on black bears and reducing/preventing human-bear conflict in the wild-urban interface. They received valuable help in outreach from the WDFW's Karelian Bear Dog program. The dogs are great ambassadors, attracting more people to the trailer and hence to learning about both black and grizzly bears.

They take these opportunities to provide education about grizzly bears and the EIS process, and encourage people to participate. The necessity of proper sanitation for black bear conservation and the reduction of human-black bear conflict equates to the same necessity for proper sanitation with respect to grizzly bear recovery and human safety.

There is a void in WWO's presence in the upper Skagit Valley, as their representative resigned to take another position. They have therefore not had the ability to follow up on the Wildlife Wise program at the North Cascades Institute's Environmental Learning Center on Diablo Lake.

Other activities have included working with the Native American Student Association and Bear Smart King County. Bear Week will once again be hosted by the Woodland Park Zoo in May, and the WWO will have a table there. The WWO has produced a brochure on grizzly bears that is supplemental to the popular Bear Safe brochure.

Information, Education and Outreach efforts of the IGBC (Chris Smith):

Chris followed up on the Strategic Direction for Information, Education and Outreach Efforts of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (2012).

The Wildlife Management Institute has not been as involved in the NCE as in the other recovery zones, but has some products that may be useful to us. These include:

- The Bear Safety brochure produced by the WWO and approved by the IGBC.
- Bear spray videos featuring Craig Boddington on the IGBC website have been very popular.
- Bear Trust International: has a high school curriculum regarding grizzly bear recovery in Yellowstone in which students are actively engaged with the various parameters of whether to delist. This could be adapted to the NCE.
- They're updating the bear safety coloring book.
- Wyoming Fish & Game has been taking footage of interactions with grizzly bears. Work is underway to imbed the voice-over so they can't be misused, then would be available to agencies.

Recommendations for the NCE included a targeted outreach, such as what the WWO provides. It was suggested that WWO founder Chris Morgan's increasingly "rising stardom" with PBS and other venues be used to advance IE&O in the NCE.

IGBC grants are limited, with \$36,000 available for all of the ecosystems with generally over \$100,000 in proposals. The WWO has been the recipient of some of these funds and Chris recommended this continue.

It would be valuable for ranchers from both the Selkirks and NCE to meet with ranchers from areas where they've always coexisted with grizzly bears, to talk about what this really involves. Peer groups justifiably have more credibility with each other than with those who do not live off the land and/or who may be perceived as having agendas (or do have agendas).

British Columbia update (Tony Hamilton):

They have had some promising bear observations, but have not been able to confirm species. The Hope Mountain Centre is using the observation classification standards recently updated by the Tech Team. They have been getting reports of a lot of blonde black bears.

Tony received funding from the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative to work with Andrea, Bill and others on modeling habitat connectivity with respect to roads. This is a continuation of work recently completed in Alberta, which modeled the direct demographic impact of roads in terms of survival rates and reproductive rates (*Boulanger J, Stenhouse GB (2014) The Impact of Roads on the Demography of Grizzly Bears in Alberta. PLoS ONE 9(12): e115535. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0115535*).

Other (public):

Liz Ruther: Defenders of Wildlife will have a livestock compensation program in the NCE if needed.

Chris Morgan: has been working with PBS, the BBC and National Geographic, and has been discussing making a suite of videos about grizzly bears in the NCE. He is ready, willing and able to do anything he can to assist with outreach and education via documentaries and/or speaking tours. He will be giving a presentation in Vancouver in May. A presentation at Whistler was attended by several hundred people.