

***At the June 9, 2020 NCES/IGBC Spring Meeting, the November 2019 meeting notes were approved/accepted as recorded.*

14 November 2019

North Cascades Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting, North Bend, WA

Subcommittee:

*Karen Taylor-Goodrich (NPS¹, chair)
Kristin Bail (USFS)
Hilary Cooley (USFWS)
Gregg Kurz (USFWS)
Brendan Brokes (WDFW)
Garth Mowat (FLNRO)*

Technical Team:

*John Rohrer (USFS, chair)
Anne Braaten (NPS)
Jesse Plumage (USFS)
Scott Fitkin (WDFW)
Wayne Kasworm (USFWS)*

Other participants:

Monte Kuk (USFS)

*Lorna Smith (Western Wildlife
Outreach)*

Audience:

*Robb Krehbiel (Defenders of Wildlife)
Joe Scott (Conservation Northwest)*

*Kurt Aluzas (USFS)
Graham Taylor (Nat'l Parks
Conservation Association)*

Environmental Impact Statement update: Karen Taylor-Goodrich

- Work on the Draft EIS was paused in August 2018, pending additional public outreach. An additional comment period for was reopened through from July 25 - October 24, 2019.
- 16,756 new comments were received.
- Approximately 500 people attended a facilitated public hearing in Okanogan.
- There is no funding to study comments.

Update from Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (Kristin Bail)

- The OOWNF and Colville National Forests are considering moving the Tonasket Ranger District under the management of the Colville as this the ecosystem in this district is more similar to the Colville. In this case the Colville forest supervisor may become a member of the Subcommittee.
- There is litigation involving several national forests with respect to aging Forest Plans. There are limited funds for going forward with forest planning.
- Kristin Bail will be assuming the role of Subcommittee Chair, beginning Spring, 2020.

Updates from the Recovery Office: Wayne Kasworm

- Delisting in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem was overturned in 2018. The USFWS is appealing in the 9th Circuit Court.
- A five-year review for all of the recovery zones is coming in 2020, as the last review was completed in 2011.
- Governor Steve Bullock (MT) has established a grizzly bear citizens' advisory group. The group has 18 members from a variety of stakeholders from in and around Montana's four recovery areas. Fish, Wildlife and Parks is the primary agency facilitating this group.

- The Information and Education Committee for the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem (CYE) is developing a brochure and signs with regard to trail running and mountain biking. They are working to make them generic for use in other recovery areas. The Colville National Forest supervisor chairs the CYE Subcommittee.
- A CYE augmentation bear visited the Bitterroot Ecosystem, moving over 200 miles into the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. It stayed there a couple of months, then returned to the Cabinets. This restarted discussions of management, food storage, etc. in the Bitterroots: bear baiting is allowed there and this bear visited many bait piles. Other bears are moving toward the Bitterroots as well.
- During 2018 the bear research lab at Washington State University, identified susceptibility of interior grizzly bears to salmon poisoning disease (SPD), via feeding trials with salmon from the Columbia and south/central Cascades watersheds. Captive interior grizzly bears were seriously affected by a relatively new agent of the genus *Neorickettsia* ("SF Agent"). Because of the severity of the disease and the potential for mortality of translocated bears consuming anadromous salmonids, further work has been ongoing to look at the distribution of SPD in the NCE; developing an antibody test; and collecting blood from bears in the NCE and NCDE to test for immunity to the disease in either population. Analyses at Southern Georgia University of roughly 100 chinook samples taken from the Wenatchee and Methow Rivers did not indicate a significant level of SF Agent. However the sample size was small and the absence of SF Agent could not be definitively ruled out. Larger samples taken from more Columbia River tributaries would be more informative. The snails that serve as vectors for SF Agent do not occur in North Cascades rivers on the west side, thus the focus on the Columbia watershed. The antibody test development has undergone a number of setbacks, but significant progress is being made. Black bears on the Olympic Peninsula, where SF Agent would be expected, were strongly positive for SF Agent antibodies – encouraging evidence that wild bears contracting the disease can recover. Work continues for bears further inland.

Update from British Columbia (Garth Mowat)

- Recovery efforts in the BC portion of the North Cascades were stalled in 2004 when the Minister of the Environment felt not all stakeholders had been adequately consulted.
- Current study of carrying capacity: models indicate good habitat on both sides of the border, but with best habitat on the US side.
- There is no longer a grizzly bear hunt in BC.
- There is a new planning effort on the provincial level regarding the three units with the most threatened populations (including the Cascades). Grizzly bears are considered to be extirpated in the North Cascades. No female has been observed since 1999.
- Male bears moved from the Stein-Nahatlatch may have been the two bears observed during the 2010s.
- Several First Nations have been working on a consolidated resolution to the government of British Columbia with respect to restoring grizzly bears to the BC portion of the NCE. Another meeting will be held sometime this winter. The NPS has been attending their meetings.

- Discussions are also being held with regard to augmenting a very small population in the Stein-Nahatlach Grizzly Bear Population Unit, west-northwest and across the Fraser River from the BC North Cascades.

Discussion of 5-Year Plan spreadsheet (attached, Karen Taylor-Goodrich and subcommittee)

Core area: John Rohrer

- The Technical Team dropped analyses of early- versus late-core area, to analyze core area only. This is in line with other ecosystems and reflects the altering of seasonal timing brought by climate change.
- The Technical Team has not yet discussed whether there should be minimum core area patch sizes (do patches of core area less than a certain number of acres contribute to habitat availability/connectivity, etc.), and what is – or is there – a minimum size?
- More of a challenge to determining core area and maintaining no net loss, per the 1997 agreement between the two national forests, is the continued increase in recreation and even improved quality of spatial data over the past 21 years. What was a less popular trail in 1997 may now exceed the benchmark for high-use. Trails that existed then but were not mapped may or may not have affected analyses of core area percentages.
- Work had begun on drafting a new agreement letter to reaffirm the intent of the no net loss of core area, but this could complicate/be complicated by on-going litigation with regard to aging Forest Plans.

Sanitation/food storage orders: John Rohrer

- Working with Defenders and WasteWise Methow to work on garbage trucks to make them compatible with bear-resistant dumpsters.
- Approximately 80% of the campgrounds in the northern districts of the OWNF are equipped with bear-resistant dumpsters. Two campgrounds have food/attractant storage lockers, but the focus has been on waste management.
- The Colville National Forest does have a food storage order.

EIS – Education (Lorna Smith, Western Wildlife Outreach)

- The WWO participated in 25 IGBC-related /funded events. Many involved use of the Large Carnivore Trailer.
- They participated in 29 field days, including educational work with WDFW Bear Biologist Rich Beausoleil and his Karelian Bear Dogs.
- A major event is the annual “Bear Affair: Living Northwest Conservation Day” at Seattle’s Woodland Park Zoo.
- East King County has some of the best black bear habitat in the state, but this is disappearing at an impressive rate under burgeoning development. Bird feeders and waste management are the two most critical issues for displaced bears.
- WWO has targeted middle schools, including six classes a day in six schools, to reach this critical audience.
- Need to focus on municipalities to have signed contracts for bear-wise garbage, including bear-resistant residential totes.
- There is also a need to educate people about the risks of trail running and mountain biking in bear and cougar country.

- The IGBC's funds are crucial: federal funds other than the IGBC dried up in 2015, and funding continues to be difficult to find.

Public comments:

- Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear have been active holding events, 250 people standing room only at one, with "happy feedback".
- Nat'l Parks Conservation Association has also been holding events and generating support for recovery. They are excited to see [EIS] process move forward and want to help.
- Defenders of Wildlife have been engaging with WDFW and the OOWNF on trial runs with bear-resistant garbage totes for residential use in rural areas. Looking at expanding this to the MBS.
- Defenders expanded their bear spray training with the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe. The Tribe's annual hike over Cascade Pass was cancelled due to smoke, but they are now training each other in the use of spray for their next trip, in 2020.
- They have submitted another IGBC grant proposal to continue with this work.
- Defenders held a Bear Aware Workshop in May, with good feedback: it was a workshop exploring and demonstrating solutions rather than merely information sharing.

ⁱ Agency acronyms: National Park Service (NPS); US Forest Service (USFS); US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW); Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC); British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRO)