

MEETING NOTES

NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM GRIZZLY BEAR SUBCOMMITTEE

North Bend, WA

November 17, 2015

Attendees, Subcommittee:

Karen Taylor-Goodrich (Chair, NPS)

Jack Oelfke (NPS)

Mark Miller (USFWS)

Chris Servheen (USFWS)

Bob Everitt (WDFW)

Jason Kuiken (USFS)

Tony Hamilton, (BCMoE ,via phone)

Technical Team:

John Rohrer (Chair, USFS)

Anne Braaten (NPS)

Wayne Kasworm (USFWS)

Gregg Kurz (USFWS)

Scott Fitkin (WDFW)

Jesse Plumage (USFS)

I&E:

Denise Shultz (NPS)

Other participants:

Jason Ransom (NPS)

Monte Kuk (USFS)

Andrea Lyons (Washington Conservation Science Institute)

Bill Gaines (WCSI)

Lorna and Darrell Smith (Western Wildlife Outreach)

Members of public present:

Jim Davis (American Alps/ Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission)

Joe Scott (Conservation NW)

Jenni Minier (Conservation NW)

Elizabeth Ruther (Defenders of Wildlife)

Steve Taber

Patrick Lathrop

EIS Update (Jack Oelfke):

The Alternatives development workshop scheduled for August was postponed by this year's wildfires, to the two days following this meeting. The workshop will take place in Seattle.

Among the concerns discussed at this workshop will be 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.

Outreach/ meetings:

- The NPS and USFWS met with the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, which expressed interest in increasing outreach in the British Columbian portion of the ecosystem.
- The NPS (Jack) and USFWS (Mark) met with 13 different groups/entities, including counties, congressional aides, the Mountains to Sound Greenway, and Backcountry Horsemen. Others expressing interest in meetings were Snohomish County and the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe.

There is recognition that most tribes/First Nations in the transboundary Okanagan Nation Alliance, Confederated Tribes of the Yakama, and Point Elliot Treaty tribes should be actively invited into the process. The WDFW has met with the Pt. Elliot tribes at their annual policy meeting. They have expressed some interest and no objections, but are waiting for the draft EIS to become more fully engaged.

All of the documents and reports from the public scoping last spring are available online at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=327&projectID=44144&documentID=66506> .

The Science Team, comprised of the NCE Technical Team and other agency biologists, provided comments on the Literature Review and met with the contractor via a series of conference calls to refine EIS topics and issues. The team is also considering the merits of habitat modeling approaches.

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.

Grizzly bear confirmation, BC (Wayne Kasworm):

A grizzly bear was photographed approximately 10 miles north of the international border in mid-October. Consensus is this is a different individual than remotely photographed in the upper Skagit drainage in 2010 and 2012.

Information, Education and Outreach (Denise Shultz):

A communications plan for the EIS process was developed by IE&O representatives from the NPS, USFS, WDFW and USFWS.

The USFWS took over responsibility for the bear trailer in July and is managed in partnership with the NPS. The bear trailer program focuses on general bear education and safety, as well as educating the public about the Grizzly Bear Restoration EIS. The bear trailer houses two fully mounted bears, one black and one grizzly, along with other educational artifacts such as bear skins, casts of paw prints and skulls. It was a highly visited and visible mobile exhibit at events such as the Washington State Fair and local festivals. When not on tour the bear trailer is stationed at the North Cascades National Park Visitor Center in Newhalem, where rangers conduct bear programs throughout the summer. Over 10,000 people were engaged (watching a program and/or conversing with a staff member) during the 2015 summer season. The bear trailer will continue its calendar of events in 2016 by participating in outreach on the east side of the Pacific Crest in Wenatchee and Tonasket, as well as attending several events along the I-5 corridor.

Annual accomplishments and work plans (Karen Taylor-Goodrich, group):

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

Sanitation reports (Anne Braaten, Tech Team):

An effort this past summer to inventory bear sanitation in the NCE highlighted the need for a standardized approach to collecting data, as well as a defined purpose. A record fire season hindered some of the data collection this year; the existing information will be folded into a standardized database, which will be completed next year.

The need for better signage with respect to sanitation was expressed by all agencies. While signs exist at some trailheads and campgrounds, there are many that have none. Consistency in wording and,

preferably, a common design are needed for a seamless message across all public lands. Because some areas have different regulations or no regulations/orders with respect to sanitation (NPS and USFS, respectively), a common design with wording tailored to the management unit may be most effective. Signage at commonly used road-side dispersed camping areas on USFS lands should also be provided.

“Hunter Know Your Bears” signs should be placed at trailheads during black bear hunting season (August 1st – November 15th). Chris Servheen will follow up on this with Ellen Davis.

It was also suggested that signs explaining/ outlining the EIS process should be placed at trailheads, as this is an effective means of outreach to those who would not otherwise be aware of it.

Consistency in messaging was a common theme throughout this discussion. Using the same signs, or at minimum the same general design, as signs used in other ecosystems should be explored.

Western Wildlife Outreach (Lorna Smith):

The WWO uses recommendations from the Wildlife Management Institute’s 2012 report to the IGBC for guidance on their outreach efforts.

The state Bear Week continues each May/June. This originated with requests from the WWO. A highlight of Bear Week is the Bear Affair Day at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle. Two Kodiak bears are “treated” to a non-bear-resistant campsite within their enclosure in the morning, followed by a non-bear-aware backyard in the afternoon. Treats include coolers full of food, improperly hung backpacker food, coffee grounds to roll in, (cooked) meat-covered barbecue grills, dog food and birdseed. Bear-resistant food storage containers and waste receptacles are also demonstrated by the bears. This event draws hundreds of people each year.

WWO has been working cooperatively with the WFDW and King County on a Bear Smart program. Black bear-human conflict continues to rise as the Seattle/Bellevue exurbs continue to move into formerly wild areas. Most of the new arrivals are high-tech workers with no experience with living with wildlife. With so many people in proximity to the NCE, education is that much more intensively needed.

WWO is also working with the WDFW on mapping incidents of bear-human conflict in the wild-urban interface. Approximately 25 bears were involved in 900 incidents over the past year. They have also been partnering in outreach with the WFDW’s Karelian Bear Dog program.

Working with the USFWS, a Spanish-language Bear Safe brochure has been published.

They have purchased a new bear trailer with funds from the USFWS. They are currently working on outfitting it and creating graphics for the trailer’s sides.

Groups and events the WWO has worked with this year include Cabela’s; Issaquah Salmon Days; church camps; Camp Waskowitz; “Eyes in the Woods” in Twisp; and the Methow River Institute.

Questions with respect to the EIS are deferred to the NPS and USFWS, but there are not many. Outreach is (necessarily) about living and recreating with black bears.

Hair Snag projects (Bill Gaines):

Continuing the efforts of the 2010-2012 DNA project, small crews of volunteers and agency (USFS) people deployed eight hair corrals and four cameras during 2015. Focus was in the East Fork Pasayten River area. The project yielded photographs of two lynx, cougar, 10 different black bears and a badger. Hair was collected at only three of the corrals, which had clear camera coverage; no samples were sent in for analysis. This project is seen as having as much educational value as scientific, through increasing awareness and teaching wildlife biology.

Roads analysis (Andrea Lyons):

Funding was secured for this project from the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative, and focused on the entire NCE (BC and WA).

Data are clear that most grizzly bears generally avoid close proximity to roads where and when possible, but analyses to date have been relatively simplistic. This project looks at cumulative effects and takes a closer look at where high quality habitat exists, overlain by where fracture zones would reduce its effectiveness. It is tiered off of work done in Alberta indicating demographic impacts of roads are complex, with differing road density-dependent effects on mortality for different age and reproductive classes.

Road density and level of use combined with distance from roads provides a basis for predicting habitat use. For the purposes of this study "secure" habitat was defined as blocks of ≥ 10 km² that were greater than 500 meters from roads. Habitat is further quantified using quality of habitat (capable of supporting female bears with young) and excludes large bodies of water, ice, rock, and/or vegetation types that do not support bears.

Next steps are to identify capable (high quality) and secure (≥ 10 km² blocks) habitat within the NCE. One thought is to redraw Bear Management Units across the border to better reflect seasonal effectiveness, thereby providing a more robust model for monitoring recovery performance.

Public comments:

There were none.