

Northern Region Briefing Paper -- Regional Office



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ISSUE TOPIC: Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC)

BACKGROUND: When the grizzly bear was granted protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1975, biologists estimated that as few as 600-800 grizzlies survived in the lower 48 states and that the population was declining. Today, despite remaining challenges in smaller recovery areas, populations are increasing in larger recovery areas and grizzly bears have returned to portions of their historic range that have not seen a living grizzly in generations.

The IGBC was formed in 1983 to help ensure recovery of viable grizzly bear populations and their habitat in the lower 48 states through interagency coordination of policy, planning, management and research. The committee consists of representatives from the USDA Forest Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and representatives of the state wildlife agencies of Idaho, Montana, Washington and Wyoming. In the interest of international coordination and cooperation, the Canadian Wildlife Service is also represented.

The story of the IGBC is a story of exemplary cooperation and remarkable success. Prior to the establishment of the IGBC, decisions about grizzly bear recovery often faced problems when they encountered jurisdictional boundaries between federal and state agencies. Funding to implement grizzly bear recovery actions on the ground was also scarce and had to compete against other agency programs. The inclusion of high-level agency members into the IGBC, who not only had the authority to make decisions within each of their respective agencies, but also the ability to fund those decisions, was a significant turning point for grizzly bear recovery.

The group developed four major objectives: to engage top level decision makers in a coordinated approach to recover grizzly bears through policy and procedures adopted by each member agency, and to be implemented through each respective ecosystem subcommittee; to coordinate management and research actions of state and federal agencies related to the grizzly bear and to ensure the best utilization of available resources and prevent duplication of efforts; to implement the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan to facilitate recovery of grizzly bears; and to implement and oversee the management and research activities of recovered grizzly bear populations.

The state of grizzly bear recovery today, almost 33 years after those goals were identified, illustrates the effectiveness of the IGBC.

Since the IGBC was founded in 1983, it has:

- Identified and established five grizzly bear ecosystems in Idaho, Montana, Washington and Wyoming, the four western states in which grizzly bears currently exist: the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE), the Yellowstone Ecosystem (YES), the North Cascades Ecosystem, and the Selkirk Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem (SCY)
- Established and maintained Ecosystem Subcommittees in each of those ecosystems to implement IGBC decisions and to coordinate and oversee recovery efforts on the ground.
- Supported the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) and other scientific efforts to learn more about grizzly bears and what they need to survive.
- Established an active and effective presence in grizzly bear education and outreach efforts through the Information and Education Subcommittee. This subcommittee is replicated in each of the ecosystem subcommittees.
- Developed an effective and successful Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) to help implement an Information, Education and Outreach (IE&O) program and leverage funding.
- Provided clear direction for food storage, garbage management, and removal for management of grazing allotments for sheep and other domestic stock animals within key grizzly bear management areas.
- Established a website (IGBCOnline.org) to provide the public with accurate and timely information about grizzly bears, the IGBC organizational structure, activities, scientific publications and studies, and how to avoid or minimize bear-human conflicts.
- Identified and promoted effective actions and techniques to increase human safety and decrease the likelihood of bear-human conflicts.
- Worked cooperatively with provincial authorities in British Columbia and Alberta on conservation efforts regarding cross-border grizzly bear populations.
- Conducted in-depth research into effectiveness and efficacy of several bear-related developments and products such as bear deterrent sprays, bear-resistant food containers, and portable electric fences to restrict bear access to supplies in the backcountry.
- Built a foundation of public support and understanding about the habitat and population needs for grizzly bear recovery.
- Built an interconnected web of interagency support and cooperation to implement management actions to further the conservation of grizzly bears and their habitat.
- Continuously promoted the use of science in grizzly bear management.

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