

17 May 2016

North Cascades Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting Wenatchee

Subcommittee:

Karen Taylor-Goodrich (NPSⁱ, chair)
Jim Brown (WDFW)
Mike Williams (USFS)
Mark Miller (USFWS)
Wayne Kasworm (USFWS)
Jack Oelfke (NPS)

Technical Team:

John Rohrer (USFS, chair)
Anne Braaten (NPS)
Scott Fitkin (WDFW)
Jesse Plumage (USFS)
Gregg Kurz (USFWS)

Other participants:

Andrea Lyons (Wa. Conservation Science Institute)
Bill Gaines (WCSI)
Lorna and Darrel Smith (Western Wildlife Outreach)

Information/Education/Outreach:

Denise Shultz (NPS)

Audience:

Joe Scott (Conservation Northwest)
Lindsey Cook

The meeting was opened with a screening of Chris Morgan's video, "Wanted: Grizzly Bears?" The film integrates information about bears, bear ecology and public opinion regarding grizzly bear restoration into conversations with varied members of the public.

Chris has approached Wayne about doing a film about the population augmentation in Cabinets: lessons learned, how it has been working (and succeeding). Wayne connected him with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, who may have some existing footage. The goal is finishing it this fall.

EIS Update: Jack Oelfke

- We are currently in the thick of writing, analyzing alternatives, impact analyses, etc.
- The Tech Team will be meeting today to discuss the results of the carrying capacity modeling for the ecosystem.
- Still hoping for the release of the Draft EIS (DEIS) for late summer, possibly September with public meetings around October. The schedule is subject to change, however.
- There have been numerous outreach efforts within and among agencies, local government and the public. There have been roughly 20 meetings and/or presentations, including with "Darrington Strong", Backcountry Horsemen and the High Lakers. The NPS and USFWS respond to all requests for presentations/ briefings in order to provide accurate information and address people's concerns. They partnered at one of the larger community meetings with the USFS and Bill Gaines' "Ghost Bears" presentation.
- Public meetings will occur in rural westside communities as well as those on the east, so we anticipate at least 8 public meetings for the DEIS, with four on both sides of the mountains.

Outreach update: Denise Shultz

- The USFWS trailer will be going to over to the eastside next week for whole week: schools in Wenatchee, Tonasket and Chelan. This will provide outreach on bears for 500-600 students. We have been working with districts by sending them information and coloring books. The kids are reported to be enthusiastic and very much looking forward to it.

- The calendar for the bear trailer is filling out: girl scouts, the North Cascades National Park Visitor Center, programs at Burlington Library with preschoolers as well as at local schools. Information about the EIS as well as bear safety is incorporated into everything as possible.

Grizzly Bear Recovery Office update:

- Chris Servheen has retired, so Wayne is the acting Recovery Coordinator.
- The start of the delisting process for the Yellowstone population was published in the federal register in March with a modified conservation strategy out for public comment, and a revision of the recovery plan to address slightly different methodologies used now compared to its publication in 1993. The comment period closed in May.

Western Wildlife Outreach Program update:

- They were on the road working primarily on carnivore education for 110 days this past year.
- Cabela's helped them get an education trailer, and it has been decorated. They have a grizzly bear mount from Alaska and a black bear mount donated by the WDFW.
- They use the trailer for grizzly bear, black bear, cougar and wolf education.
- Doing many events, including at Cabela's, Earth Day in Gardner, WA; and many schools.
- Working with USFWS to reach out to Hispanic communities in eastern Washington including Tierra Vida, a farmworker community near Pasco. There is a great deal of interest throughout the community. The WWO covers a broader spectrum of wildlife for this audience, not only carnivores.
- The Woodland Park Zoo's Bear Affair will be on June 4th. Usually the WWO is only group talking about bears, but this year Conservation NW, National Parks and Conservation Association, National Park Service and Defenders of Wildlife will also be there. The WWO shares tables with the WDFW's Karelian Bear Dog program at this event.
- The WWO has developed a poster for Bear Smart King County.
- Black bear incidents are going up in King County as more people move into bear habitat without knowing how to live with them.
- The WWO wants to be complementary to federal educational efforts.
- BearTrek, the feature-length movie Chris M. has been working on for so long, is done! They're doing film fest circuit through the next year.
- Chris's movie short "Wanted: Grizzly Bears?" was picked up by National Geographic.

Washington Conservation Science Institute (Andrea Lyons):

- The goal of their modeling effort was to estimate population parameters and a range of values for carrying capacity where the population has been functionally extirpated, and for which there are no species-specific empirical data.
- They used the program Hexsim, along with black bear data we do have for the North Cascades, to integrate spatial habitat data and hypothetical demographic parameters to address two specific questions: 1) what the potential carrying capacity is for grizzly bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem and 2) how roads influence carrying capacity.
- Coefficients for each parameter were based on empirical data from the Trans-border Grizzly Bear Project (Selkirks, Proctor et al. 2015).
- The WCSI worked closely with the NCE Technical Team throughout the process to ensure the model would best reflect existing habitat values and likely scenarios for the NCE.
- They generated maps showing habitat values with roads/ motorized trails removed from the model, indicating areas of highest quality and security.
- They modeled a range of values for the potential carrying capacity for the NCE.
- The modeling will be used to inform the DEIS.

Public comments/discussion:

- Conservation NW is now the Washington affiliate for the National Wildlife Federation. Has pledged to increase their wildlife program in Washington, particularly in relation to grizzly bears.
- In outreach to public it has become apparent there is no ready source of information on bear ecology, etc. with connections to EIS – this needs to be shared more efficiently. There needs to be better training/briefing of agency staff throughout the ecosystem with regard to the EIS, as well as safety in bear country (both living and recreating).
- The WWO has lots of brochures at visitor contact sites (ranger stations, visitor centers); staff may not always be aware of them.
- Only approximately 30% of trailheads have “know your bears”/camping in bear country signs. All of them need to.
- The public (as well as agency employees) needs to know how and where to report possible grizzly bears, where to find a hotline, and that there is a protocol. Something at trailheads would be useful.
- The WWO continues to provide a venue for reporting grizzly bears online, which is immediately forwarded to members of the Tech Team. The USFWS hotline phone number is on their brochure, up to date at last printing.
- What about access to salmon with regard to recovery? What is in the literature regarding grizzly bear use of fish? That is, how much do they eat? Public worried about safety – as well as bears eating “our” fish.
- Conservation NW is sponsoring a number of presentations: Dave Moscovitz is doing a presentation about hiking with bears, Chris Morgan with Mountaineers in October/November. The presentations are being timed around the release of DEIS. Thinking of asking Chris Servheen and Kerry Gunther to come out and talk about life with grizzly bears.

ⁱ Agency acronyms: National Park Service (NPS); US Forest Service (USFS); US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)