

Yellowstone Grizzly Coordinating Committee (YGCC) Meeting Minutes

April 4, 2018 Cody, WY

Members Present

Mike Volesky, MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Kim Liebhauser, BLM Wyoming
Mary Erickson, Custer Gallatin National Forest
Curtis Hendricks, ID Fish & Game
Leander Watston, Shoshone Bannock Tribes
Loren Grosskopf, Wyoming County Commissioners Association, Park Co.
Tom Rice, Montana Association of Counties
Lee Miller, ID Association of Counties
Tim Wooley, WY Game & Fish
Rick Hotaling, MT BLM
Lisa Timchack, Shoshone National Forest
Mary D'Aversa, ID BLM
Tricia O'Connor, Bridger-Teton National Forest
David Vela, Grand Teton National Park and the John D. Parkway
Mary Erickson, Custer Gallatin National Forest
Dan Wenk, Yellowstone National Park
David Ibarguen, Caribou-Targhee National Forest

Members not present

Melany Glossa, Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest

Advisors present

Ken McDonald, MT FWP
Hilary Cooley, FWS Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator
Frank van Manen, USGS Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team

Wednesday, April 4

Welcome and Introductions: Mike Volesky

The purpose of this committee is to implement the Conservation Strategy. Much of this is reporting information to the public. It is important to let folks know we do things by consensus. When that is not possible we go to majority vote or in some situations to a three-quarter vote to add people to the committee and make changes to the Conservation Strategy. Last meeting Delissa Minnick was elected Vice YGCC Chair. This may now be Kim Liebhauser (BLM WY).

Loren Grosskopf-move to approve Fall 2017 meeting minutes
Mary Erickson-second to approve Fall minutes
Motion carried

Updates on Delisting Rule/Review of Current Litigation: Hillary Cooley

Delisting rule is in place after we had an appeal court opinion, mostly relevant to the Great Lakes wolf. USFWS thought it was pertinent to review the GYE final rule. We are due to have a review out by the end of March. We are still working on that – with the new administration, review timelines are really long. We hope to have that out in the near future, but I do not have a new timeline for you.

In terms of litigation we have six lawsuits filed against the service regarding the delisting rule. All of those lawsuits have now been consolidated in the Montana district court in Missoula. USFWS requested a stay on those lawsuits, which was denied. The judge would like to move the litigation quickly. We don't have more dates established. The judge is talking about a potential briefing of the merits of the case later in the summer. Any questions?

Mary Erickson-What does it mean when Judge Christensen denies the stay?

Hilary-He wants to move forward now with the litigations. What he asked us to do is to work through the administrative record between all litigants, USFWS, and the lawyers. By April 13 he wants an agreement between the litigants and USFWS and set dates for briefing.

Mary-If there wasn't a stay issued, what does that mean procedurally for the CS and delisting?

Hilary-They are delisted currently and that would not change until he gives an opinion.

Mary-As a practical matter, does his denial of the stay really mean anything?

Hilary-No.

Dan Wenk-Regarding the review you did, can you tell us anything about why you did the review and can you tell us anything more about what the report found/will find?

Hilary-We are still in deliberations. We entered into this review and in 2013 we put out a final rule delisting the Great Lakes wolf. We lost on that case and appealed. About 30 days after that we put out the Yellowstone delisting rule and then the Great Lakes wolf opinion finally came along. There were two issues that the Judge discusses regarding how we delisted the Great Lakes (wolves) as a DPS along with our consideration, or lack of consideration of historic range. Because the way we delisted Great Lakes wolves was very similar to the way that we did GYE grizzly bears we thought it was important that we review it and make sure we didn't miss anything.

Loren Grosskopf-Part of what the Judge said is that he wasn't interested in seeing public comment. How many additional public comments did you receive regarding your review?

Hilary-I think it was about 3,600 public comment. He said several times that he was curious why we went out for public comment. He wasn't sure that is was going to be helpful for our review.

Update – Population Standards Monitoring: Frank van Manen ppt. on IGBC website

This is just a quick update from what was presented in the fall to remind everyone of where we are as of 2017. There is also a summary of removals and mortalities. We hope to present preliminary findings of the Integrated Population Models (IPM) at next year's (2019) spring YGCC meeting.

Mary Erickson-Frank, just making sure, as you talk about that new population estimator, it is probably too early to forecast the outcomes of that, but as you are working on that, is the inference that I should draw from that is that (IPM) will be a replacement for the Chao2

estimator, and that would come forward to this committee for the discussion of the comparison between the two and working through a process if we choose to adopt a new method?

Frank-That is correct. Any of this would be published and we would inform the committee of when we expect to submit publications on this. I think it is critical that any of this is reviewed before it goes forward on that. If we deem that we have a technique that improves substantially upon what we currently have, we will go through the process that is described in the CS for making a change to the monitoring protocol. We will propose that and present the arguments for that to the committee so that you can make an informed decision. I anticipate that on both fronts (Chao2 and IPM) that we will be proposing a change.

Dan Wenk-One of the things that was talked about when we were going through this process is a commitment to the Chao2 for the foreseeable future. I guess we now have a definition of foreseeable future?

Frank-That is up to this committee to decide. The way I look at it is that we should be pursuing the best available science and we should improve whenever we have opportunities to. The IPM was really an opportunity that was unexpected, and I appreciate USFWS and MFWP taking the initiative on that and us being able to join that effort. It is an incredible opportunity to do something science wise in monitoring this population that will potentially be much better than what we are doing now. It is up to this committee to decide whether it is good enough to make a change.

Dan-We support best available science. I just think we have to be aware of the cascading implications that has within the CS – population numbers, mortalities, etc...

Frank-Our approach is that we are moving forward and that will continue, even if we have a great method out of IPM, that wouldn't stop us from pursuing better techniques or additions to that in the future. That should never stop in my opinion. I understand that sometimes that complicates decision processes but that is the concern of this committee and not my concern.

Tri-State MOU Implementation and Montana Hunt Process: Ken McDonald – ppt. on IGBC website

We presented this to our commission and their decision is that we would keep the default mortality estimate and not recommend moving forward with a 2018 hunting season. This is in part because the way our hunting regulations were put together ahead of delisting is that we would close hunting district or season when the female limit was reached, and with essentially one bear, if an animal was taken everything would be shut down. At this point we were concerned about a lot of work into a season that may get shut down right away, as well as ongoing litigation. For Montana our commission opted not to have a hunt in 2018.

Idaho Hunting Plans: Curtis Hendricks

In the latter part of March our commission directed staff to craft a proposal for a fall grizzly bear hunt within Idaho and they wanted to be able to review it during their May commission meeting (9-10 May). Staff is currently developing the proposed season. I expect you will see some proposed scoping meetings the week of April 16th. At this point we will have 2 or 3 across the state in Boise and Idaho Falls.

Wyoming Hunting Plans: Tim Wooley

In the fall of 2017, WY started working towards the regulation process. Our approach is we held a series of 8 public meetings across the state and these were to gain public input into the different categories of our management plan. Population monitoring, research opportunities, conflict management, information and outreach program, and hunting and harvest management. We received a lot of good input from the public regarding mandatory bear ID training for hunters, license costs, and population monitoring (better estimators). We created a summary of these meetings and presented it to our commission back in January. From there, in February, we started to formulate our Chapter 68 internal regulation. From that we are in the process of taking public comments online. We have a 3-tiered approach – within the DMA we have 6 hunting areas with different quotas. Season dates are September 15 to November 15. We use electronic satellite messengers to notify when a bear has been harvested. We have mandatory check-in regulations that don't allow hunting within a quarter mile of roads and closed areas. Outside of the DMA we have a different way to draw a license. It is a limited quota area whereas the others are off a preference list. There is also an area that is completely closed to hunting. There is mandatory orientation and training for anyone who draws a license. There is a mandatory check-in within a number of days where the hide and skull can be brought in to collect biological samples. This regulation will go to our commission May 23 for approval.

Mary-Ken, if you will go back to the tri-state agreement, as I understand each state retains their discretion on that, so Idaho has a very small number. That is a lot of effort for Idaho to go through for a very small hunt. Is that a philosophical desire or is there an economic issue there?

Ed Schriever, ID-I can't answer what the motivation for the commission is as far as why they requested us to do the hunt. One permit is not a big economic driver – I can tell you that. I think one of the things is the overall mortality is DMA wide. Now how the states orchestrate allocations for mortalities, if you look within the MOA, they can discuss where mortalities are allocated across the DMA.

Mary-basically for the 2018 hunt, I assume it would be a fall hunt similar to WY and there is talk of swapping numbers between the states. Wyoming has theirs and Idaho has theirs and Montana isn't giving theirs to any other states. I just wanted to understand how that was going to work, assuming that as that info comes out you have great tracking systems for those numbers, knowing it in real time. We wouldn't actually know the results of these hunts in time for the fall meeting. It would be something for the spring meeting – what were the results of the hunt and how did that work out. (14:48/pt 2)

Leander Watson-will the independent female number for WY (1.5 females) round up to 2 or will that go down?

Ken-For this year, based on the state discussions and proposals, it will round up to 2.

Habitat Standards Report: Dan Tyers – ppt. available on IGBC website

Three habitat standards that are tracked are:

1. Percent secure habitat
2. Developed sites
3. Livestock grazing allotments

The goal is to secure habitat and reduce human caused grizzly bear mortalities. These standards are measured against a 1998 baseline. In the timeframe from 1998 to 2017, secure habitat has increased from 85.6% to 87.0%, grazing allotments have decreased, and developed sites in PCA have decreased from 592 to 575.

2017 State Conflict Reports: Jeremiah Smith, MFWP – ppt. available on IGBC website

Total conflicts = 76
Previous 10 year average = 76
Encounters = 15, 3 human injuries
Livestock depredations = 42
Property damage = 7
Anthropogenic foods = 1
Property damage with anthropogenic food = 4
Developed sites safety concerns = 7

2017 State Conflict Reports: Brian Debolt, WGF – ppt. available on IGBC website

We have a field response program where we try to respond and educate how to properly store the attractant. If this doesn't work then we try to manage the individual animal through aversive conditioning, deterrents, and as a last resort we have to capture an animal. We want to do everything we can to prevent and alleviate these conflicts before resorting to captures/removals. Prevention is the key, we do everything we can to prevent a negative outcome for bears or people. Our compensation program is to promote acceptance and tolerance of these critters on the landscape to increase social acceptance. We have one of the most liberal compensation programs in the world to prevent conflicts and help people live with bears in Wyoming.

Primarily livestock depredation this year.

Human injury = 5
Captures = 31
Management removals = 13, 2 of which were live cub removals placed in a zoo in Nebraska.

2017 State Conflict Reports: Jeremy Nicholson, IFG – ppt. available on IGBC website

Total conflicts = 8. It was a great white bark pine and berry year, which likely helped to reduce conflicts. Conflicts primarily occur in the DMA. Consistent annual conflicts were not seen until around 200. Since then we have averaged around 14 conflicts per year. Our bears don't spend a significant amount of time outside of the DMA. Bear education trailer appears at 40-50 events and staff/volunteers conduct another 20-30 bear education programs.

2017 NP Conflict Reports: Sue Consolo-Murphy, GTNP

No conflicts in Grand Teton National Park and John D. Rockefeller Memorial Parkway. Over 9,000 hours contributed by our volunteer wildlife brigade helping manage the 446 bear jams we had in the parks – 171 grizzlies, 210 black bears, and 65 unidentified species. Our goal is to get a bear resistant food storage box in every developed campsite and other areas like roadside picnic areas. 651 installed since 2008, total need is around 1000.

2017 NP Conflict Reports: Kerry Gunther, YNP – ppt. available on IGBC website

Installed 102 bear resistant food storage boxes in 2017. Management programs include a carcass management program, bear spray training program, and a poster program featuring Jeff Bridges. Management actions total 24 hazing incidents. Conflicts included property damage, bluff charges, grizzly bears entering occupied backcountry campsites, bear jams, a management capture, and one human-caused mortality.

Public Comment

Chris Collagan-Greater Yellowstone Coalition: I am the wildlife coordinator for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. It sounds like you guys are hoping I came here with a score card. I want to start by saying that I have the upmost respect for bear managers and bear biologists who have to make tough decisions on a day to day basis. Honestly, a lot of bear biologists are friends of mine and I take what you do really seriously. Thank you presenters for the information given, especially those of you who had to quickly step up and give your presentation unprepared. As you can tell, I am a bit unprepared for comments today because, as of this morning, there is no agenda for this meeting on the IGBC website. I had to contact a bear biologist to find out where the meeting was being held and, as we sit here today, it has been a very rushed agenda. I question, was there a meeting yesterday that we weren't aware of where you guys handled all of the hard discussions? We are on the cusp of really uncharted water here for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bear population on our first potential hunt here in 40 years. After a 40 year and 40 million dollar investment and the discretionary quota that Wyoming is considering wasn't even brought up, not even as a critical question by this committee. Similarly, discussions about delisting and the delisting process and what that will hold in store for us in the future, it was crickets. Is this really coordinated management? Is this what we are expecting of this committee to challenge each other and make sure we end up in a better place for bears? Some of the things that weren't discussed are population impacts of potential grizzly bear hunts this year and how those may or may not impact the parks. WY has proposed a pretty large no hunt area right outside of Grand Teton National Park. I would love to hear discussion about that, if that is adequate or if that should be improved or if the managers around the room think that is appropriate. I believe the incomplete comment that we had (regarding YNP) involved developed sites standards in national parks still considering those standards. I respect all the guys and gals who do good work on the ground for bears. I just wonder about this committee and how we are going to coordinate management in the future.

Stephanie Adams-National Parks Conservation Association: I first off just want to say that we really appreciate the resources and efforts that have come out of the hard work that have come out of the IGBST over the years and how that has really advanced our understanding of the species as well as our understanding of the management of the species. We really support the use of best available science for wildlife management. However, over the past few years the public has been told over and over again by the states and the fish and wildlife service that there was going to be a commitment to manage for a stable population even if the species was delisted. Yet here we are just months post delisting and there is already discussion of changing the way that bears are counted on the landscape. As we all know if we change the way that bears are counted on the landscape we might all of the sudden find that there are more bears out there and available for harvest. The commitment to use Chao2 method for the foreseeable future seems to ring a bit hollow, which makes us worry, are there other commitments that will

prove to be just as forgotten? Whether that's no hunting within the JDR, whether it's no hunting within the private in-holdings in Grand Teton National Park. I think all of this comes at a time when we are extremely concerned with the already really aggressive proposal that WY has put forth to hunt the up to 24 bears this fall. I can only imagine what the state will propose if a counting method is changed that finds a lot more bears on the landscape. NPCA truly appreciates that Montana and the Montana commission chose not to advance a hunt this year, and to not only advance a hunt this year but to retain the states allocated discretionary mortality. I'm now struggling to understand how it appears that Wyoming was able to round up from 1.5 females to 2 females, which doesn't seem to go along with the agreements under the MOA – is Wyoming taking Montana's discretionary mortality? This is not what the commission approved. Does the commission now need to go back and re-approve this? Another concern with the Wyoming hunt that I hope this committee has a chance to think about and talk about and sort out how Curtis said some of those hard things, Wyoming is proposing to hunt 12 either sex bears just on the other side of the DMA. As you guys well know bears move back and forth across that line all the time, so my question is, and I hope this committee really considers, is that what happens if Wyoming takes 14 females this year? How does that impact the population and also how does that impact the ability of other agencies to implement management in the future? Are we all of the sudden going to find out next year that 14 females have been taken out of the population? I hope this committee is able to continue those conversations and I think that the only way we're going to see this work is if there is continued coordination amongst this committee. Thank you so much.

Mary Erickson-I want to provide an update regarding food storage and consistency of food storage orders across the multiple ecosystems. At the fall meeting there was a conversation around the orders and whether this committee should strive for better consistency across the ecosystems. This has been a source of much conversation within the forest service and other agencies over a lot of years because there are just slight nuances and differences in the food storage orders from between the GYE and the NCDE etcetera. The update is that Dan Tyers had done some work on behalf of IGBC to yard up all of the food storage orders that are out there in the different entities to do a bit of comparison across the ecosystems on behalf of IGBC. Matt Hogan is the lead for that consistency review. Most of the committee is aware of and got Dan's request for feedback on the most recent up-to-date orders by March 15 so that he could provide those to IGBC. When you look at that very large spreadsheet of orders across the ecosystems, there is very small nuanced differences but in general there is a lot of consistency. The two biggest differences are that in the NCDE you can store food on the ground in some cases and in the GYE you do not have that ability; and the provisions around electric fencing as a way to store materials, which is allowed in one ecosystem and not in the other. As a committee we think it would be great to have consistency and then IGBC would be the right entity to tackle that issue.

Dan-the recommendation of this committee was to try and get a consolidated food storage order, so I took that to IGBC and they concurred. Step 1 is to get a summary of everything that is out there and then hopefully step 2 will see if there is the appetite to try and have a single food storage order that is consistent across the landscape. It is moving forward.

Mike-The person who I have asked to head up our I&E committee is Laurie Wolf. She works for MT WILD in Helena and could not attend this meeting. Whatever we do for the food storage order, perhaps, can be assigned to that committee.

Fall 2018 meeting will be Oct 31-Nov 01, 2018, in Jackson, WY at the Snow King Resort

Spring 2019 meeting will be April 3-4, 2019, in Bozeman, MT at the Hilton Garden Inn.

Adjourn.