

6 June 2018

North Cascades Ecosystem Subcommittee Spring Meeting, Wenatchee, WA

Subcommittee:

Jack Oelke acting for Karen Taylor-Goodrich (NPS, chair)
Edward Eleazer (WDFW)
Monte Kuk acting for Mike Williams (USFS)
Gregg Kurz (USFWS)
Jesse Plumage acting for Dianne Freeman (USFS)

Technical Team:

John Rohrer (USFS, chair)
Anne Braaten (NPS)
Wayne Kasworm (USFWS) via phone

Audience:

Joe Scott (Conservation Northwest)
Andrea Lyons (Wa. Conservation Science Institute)

Robb Krehbiel (Defenders of Wildlife)
Graham Taylor (Nat'l Parks Cons. Assoc.)

EIS Update: Jack Oelfke

- The process was begun with public scoping in early 2015.
- The Draft EIS (DEIS), released early in 2017, garnered nearly 127,000 comments.
- The process was put on hold during DOI review from June 2017 through March 2018.
- On March 23 DOI Secretary Zinke announced that the process would resume, with a record of decision by the end of the calendar year.
- The Final EIS is scheduled to be completed by October 1st, with a record of decision by October 29.
- The 10j Rule process is slated to be completed by the end of February 2019. Designating translocated bears as a nonessential, experimental population is an option for all three of the proposed action alternatives, and the rule-making process is running roughly in tandem with the EIS should this become a part of the preferred alternative. As of June 1, over 90 invitations had been sent out for stakeholder meetings, and most had responded. It is anticipated the document will be released to the public for review on October 1.
- Comment responses on the DEIS were completed on June 5th.
- A paper is in prep to address comments received related to the potential, long-term effects of climate change on grizzly bears in the NCE. The paper will be a collaboration of the NPS, the University of Washington Program on Climate Change and the Washington Conservation Science Institute.
- The potential for salmon poisoning disease to be an issue for grizzly bears is being explored by researchers at Washington State University and Southern Georgia University, with funding from the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission.

Discussion on sanitation: agencies and NGO members

- As sanitation is crucial to grizzly bear recovery, there is a need to work with the public on human-bear conflict prevention.
- There are some complications on the forests with finding bear-resistant dumpsters that are compatible with sanitation companies' trucks.
- The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie has bear-resistant refuse containers at all trailheads and campgrounds. Bear-resistant food storage lockers were installed some years ago at a boat-in campground on Baker Lake.
- The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) has purchased 10 new dumpsters, although none can be used in the Methow Ranger District because of issues with the waste management company. There is need for over 100 more in order to fully equip developed campgrounds. There are no dumpsters at any of their trailheads. Their priority is to upgrade all of their dumpsters, then provide

bear-resistant food storage lockers with priorities near release sites should an action alternative be selected to translocate grizzly bears into the NCE.

- The NPS continues to purchase bear-resistant food storage lockers for installation in the large campgrounds along State Route 20. One campground is complete, the other is underway. Funding has also come through to replace failing 20+ year-old lockers on Ross Lake with new models. There are still a number of older dumpsters, but these are being replaced as funds become available. Four, 4-yard dumpsters will be purchased this summer to reduce problems with 3-yard dumpsters that are frequently filled to overflowing.
- There are no food storage orders on either forest. The public has been inquiring about these. There is a 2009 letter from the regional forester directing employees, contractors and permit holders to make attractants unavailable to bears. The IGBC is interested in making food storage orders consistent across all USFS lands.
- Defenders of Wildlife is looking for partnerships in the NCE to prevent human-bear conflict before restoration occurs. An example of their work includes providing technical and financial assistance to landowners in the Selkirks with electric fencing, including a vineyard. The fencing has proven to be 98% effective. They are also increasing efforts at information and education at various events, some of which target non-traditional audiences. Their emphasis in the Rockies has been on grizzly bears, but their interest in the NCE is to address living and working/farming in bear country, irrespective of species.

Core area discussion: all

- The No Net Loss agreement was formulated in 1997 as an interim framework until replaced by forest/park plan revisions. The agreement committed to no net loss of core area within each Bear Management Unit. Given this was 21 years ago, there needs to be a reaffirmation and clarifications that were not spelled out in the original agreement.
- Parts of how the no net loss agreement has been managed on the national forests have been on the basis of verbal understandings, but have not been documented. An implementation guide needs to be completed as part of an affirmation.
- There were discussions about the two forests using different definitions of “closed” roads, something that needs to be clarified using IGBC guidelines.
- High-use trails will remain as counting as non-core. Some trails that were not high use in 1997 may have become so now – however, generally the shift has been to (often much) higher use of the same trails.
- Discussions need to be held concerning core area block size and if there are limits to including blocks with respect to functional viability and connectivity for grizzly bears. Many of the “sliver polygons” on the periphery of the ecosystem do not contain high quality habitat and/or are <100 acres in size and/or are too isolated to contribute to connectivity.
- It was agreed at the March (2018) meeting of the Technical Team that core seasons would not be used, rather core area would be calculated for the entire non-denning season.
- A new core area map needs to be developed for all BMUs in the ecosystem as a base map of current conditions, using GIS data much improved over those available 17 years ago, when the last ecosystem-wide map was generated. This would be compared to the original mapping, with the caveat that data have improved in the intervening time.
- The NPS committed to generating the updated mapping for the entire ecosystem in a GIS, once all of the needed data are obtained from the USFS. Although not federal lands the WDNR will contribute roads data as well.

Public comments

- Robb Krehbiel: they have seen increasing support for grizzly bear recovery in areas where they have offered sanitation assistance. DOW is excited about recovery, want it done correctly with an emphasis on sanitation as the largest part of that to prevent conflict.
- Joe Scott: would like to see factual responses in (perhaps) FAQs to counteract misinformation in the media. As the IGBC website is not adequate to address questions not only from the media but from groups such as the Cattleman's Association, there should be a go-to site where everyone can easily find answers to topics ranging from sanitation and safety to the EIS process.
- Graham Taylor: thank you to the agencies for the great work. Thanks to the USFWS for scheduling meetings.

Other:

- On June 5 the House Appropriations Committee adopted Rep. Dan Newhouse's amendment to deny funding for grizzly bear restoration should the preferred alternative be the translocation of grizzly bears into the NCE.

ⁱ Agency acronyms: National Park Service (NPS); US Forest Service (USFS); US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW); Department of the Interior (DOI); Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR)