

Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee Conservation Strategy Meeting Minutes

Tuesday Aug. 2, 2016 9:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Bozeman, MT

Members present:

Mary Erickson, Custer Gallatin National Forest

Melany Glossa, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Loren Grosskopf, Wyoming County Commissioners Association - Park Co

Cornie Hudson, BLM – Montana

Dan Wenk, Yellowstone National Park

Brian Nesvik, Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Tricia O'Connor, Bridger-Teton National Forest

Tom Rice, Montana Association of Counties - Beaverhead County

Rob Mickelsen, Acting, Caribou-Targhee National Forest

Frank van Manen, USGS Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team

David Vela, Grand Teton National Park and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway

Leander Watson, Shoshone Bannock tribes

Delissa Minnick, BLM – Wyoming

Jeff Gould, Acting, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Jodi Bush, USFWS, MT

Sandi Fisher, USFWS

Sam Sheppard, FWP, MT

Ken McDonald, FWP, MT

Lee Miller, Fremont County Commissioner, ID

Mark Haroldson, IGBC

Jennifer Fortin-Noreus, USFWS

Lisa Solbergschweb, USFWS, WY

Tyler Abbott, Acting, Field Supervisor, WY Field Office, Cheyenne

Welcome and Introductions: Mary Erickson

- Introductions and roll call
- Reminder of Oct. 3 meeting

Discussion on Steering Committee Process: Brian Nesvik

States-Brian Nesvik-Steering Committee Lead

FS-Tricia O'Conner

Counties-Loren Grosskopf

Park Service-Dan Wenk

FWS-Jodi Bush (Jennifer Fortin-technical advisor)

BLM-Delissa Minnick

Tribes-Leander Watson

Charge of the committee: take all themes of interest and bring recommendations on how to address them; recommend how to move through a process for the October meeting.

Process: create sub groups for Population Management (Jeff Gould, Chair); Habitat (Ken McDonald, Chair); Agency Coordination/Conflict Management (Joe Alexander, Chair). The goal is to present and discuss appropriate recommendations developed over the last several months, get through the themes, discuss, and come to agreement, if possible.

Presentations by 3 Subgroups:

Each Chair reported on progress on themes that were given to their groups to address. Some themes were referred back up to the Steering Committee. Only those themes tackled by each Subgroup are addressed here.

Jeff Gould, Population Mgmt Subgroup Chair presented a working version of the Population Management Subgroup Report.

Population Management Subgroup Themes	
Theme	Originator
Concern about FCOY being set at 48 – need flexibility ¹	County Commissions
If new method is used to estimate population, does FCOY change? Needs to be clear what happens to all of the metrics if we move to a new methodology ²	County Commissions

1 Definition of females with cubs; updated graph is in population management report

2 Page 35 of CS...change consecutive years from 2 to 3, also in App C step 20

For these two themes, the subgroup made recommendations for proposed edits. These changes were agreed to by the entire YES.

Ken McDonald, Habitat Subgroup Chair presented a working version of Chapter 3, Habitat Standards and Monitoring.

Habitat Subgroup Themes	
Theme	Originator
Other methods to monitor foods (i.e. body condition) ¹	NPS
Updated habitat layer (vs. 1998 layer) ²	USFS
A lot of commitments that sound like we are still managing a listed species. We cannot maintain that level of effort (e.g., monitoring number of hunters). Need to be able to trust each other and levels of commitment ³	USFS
Definitions of dispersed vs. developed sites and implications. As defined, some proactive measures would be precluded. ⁴	USFS
Lot of commitments to monitor outside the PCA – need to evaluate what really needs to be monitored and why ⁵	USFS
Conversation between USFS and States re: habitat protections outside the PCA ⁶	USFS
Use 2016 developments as the baseline ⁷	County Commissioners

1 Remove wording on ungulate carcass surveys and hunter numbers

2 No change to CS language

3 FS recommended changes were incorporated

4 Agreement to clarify wording on minor improvements in dispersed sites would not lead to considering as developed site

5 Need to keep monitoring-good baseline date

6 Much discussion, no additional changes to CS

7 Much discussion, no changes to CS at this time

Follow-up: asked subgroup to review language for 1998 Baseline, specifically related to intention for definitions of developed sites, tracking over time, and potential for adaptive language that would allow modifications that address bear conservation while better managing sites to address resource concerns.

YES agreement with all other proposed edits to Chapter 3.

Steering Committee Themes

Jeff Gould, Agency Coordination/Conflict Management Subgroup Report (Joe Alexander, Chair was absent) presented a working version of Chapter 4, Management and Monitoring of Grizzly Bear-Human Conflicts.

Agency Coordination/Conflict Management Subgroup Themes	
Theme	Originator
Chapter on conflict bears has outdated terminology that needs to be changed ¹	States
USFS concerns about moving bears is related to safety, and want to know when bears are moved on/off forest service ground ²	USFS
Food storage, consistency of orders, and linkage to the NCDE ³	USFS
Coordination and consultation re: moving bears is vague and overly burdensome in some portions ⁴	USFS/States
How do we see the USDA sheep station as it relates to connectivity ⁵	USFS
Limit on bear relocations to other ecosystems ⁶	County Commissioners

1-4 nuisance-drop aggressive; slant toward describing coordination and consultation as bears are moved; emphasis based on best management practices and management over time; change NPS/FS to public land managers and include BLM; add “tribal” to state and federal references

3 Discussion on connectivity elevated to Steering Committee

5 Addressed generally on pg 31 of CS, no additional recommendations for CS

6 Not appropriate to move aggressive bears but may be appropriate for genetic reasons, kept same language

YES agreement with language and edits provided, with connectivity discussion moved to Steering Committee.

Theme		Originator	Sub-group	Require edit to CS Y/N?	YES approval Y/N?
1	Agree to conservation strategy approach, and that updates will be necessary	States	SC	Yes	
2	Function of the Conservation Strategy needs to be clear---it is a post-delisting management plan to ensure continued grizzly recovery. Portions of the Strategy need to focus on this and need to recognize the authorities of the different agencies	States/USFS/ County Commissioners		Yes	
3	Description of population that is stable vs. at carrying capacity	States	SC	Yes	
4	Remove references that the YES committee can petition for relisting	States	SC	Yes	
5	Sensitive Species Reference	USFS	SC	No	
6	Conservation Strategy should have specified review clause detailing when it will be revisited and updated	County Commissioners	SC	Yes	
7	Make it clear who has what responsibilities regarding who does what, who pays, time periods/deadlines.	County Commissioners	SC	Yes	
8	NPS Managers included in the discussions and decision making process.....allocation of harvest	NPS-Initially referred to AC subgroup-referred back to SC	SC/A C	Yes	
9	Connectivity/Linkage/Genetic Management	Initially referred to AC subgroup-referred back to SC	SC/A C	No	

1-9 Agreed on:

- 1 Relates to charter for YGCC if bear is delisted
- 2 Agreement
- 3 Relates to specific references in CS, Study Team will review in CS and clarify to insure references are scientifically accurate
- 4 ESA allows—can be struck-not necessary
- 5 Correct FS policy language changes will be sent to steering committee
- 6 insert language-5 years or as necessary
- 7 add clarification-conducted by appropriate agency or lead management agency
- 8 New language proposed and agreed to that will include all federal land

management agencies in annual meetings with States to confer as States develop discretionary mortality limits (to be inserted pg 44)
9 Language negotiated between USFWS and State of MT is in State Plan.

Steering Committee Remaining Issues			
Theme	Originator	Sub-	Require

			group	edit to CS Y/N?
10	Harvest focused away from park boundaries in areas where human bear conflicts are prevalent.	NPS- Initially referred to PM subgroup-referred back to SC	SC/PM	No
11	Hunting will not be permitted in the John D Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway	NPS- Initially referred to PM subgroup-referred back to SC	SC/PM	No
12	If a new estimator other than Chao 2 is used in the future, the states will recalibrate the population thresholds and proportions of allocated hunter harvest based on the estimates provided by the new model in comparison to Chao 2	NPS- Initially referred to PM subgroup-referred back to SC	SC/PM	Yes
13	Harvest will be based on the number of grizzly bears available to be hunted outside of NPS units rather than the entire population. - 21% of DMA are NPS managed units - 39% of PCA are NPS managed units, and stated as "secure habitat" in the conservation strategy. What does "secure habitat" mean?	NPS- Initially referred to PM subgroup-referred back to SC	SC/PM	No

These remaining issues were the subject of discussion amongst YES. No resolution reached. Some partial agreements reached:

- 10 Include language that addresses the collective values from bears in the ecosystem, which includes an acknowledgement of value that public places on bears in nature/viewing, along with economic value of tourism.
- 11 This will need to be addressed through another forum.
- 12 Propose steering committee reconvene, review language, look for resolution
- 13 No agreement in Steering Committee. Poll of YES, majority agreement that this not be addressed in CS.

290,000 commenters, resulting in approximately 12,000 unique comments. A subset of those are substantive and will need to be addressed. FWS will open another comment period that will afford the opportunity to comment on the proposals as informed by State Plans and the Peer Reviews. Anticipate this coming out in the Federal Register by the end of the month.

Next Steps

The Committee discussed work ahead and outlined a tentative timeframe. There was discussion that this timeframe was ambitious but we would work toward these goals. Based on the discussion, this is the timeframe provided by Brian Nesvik.

1. USFWS (Jennifer) to compile all YES approved changes into a final draft document by August 20th. Provide to Steering Committee.
2. Habitat Subgroup - provide updates agreed to at 8/2 YES meeting to Steering Committee by August 31st.
3. Steering Committee - review summary of public comments provided by USFWS. Identify any issues that need to be addressed. Provide recommendations to YES for changes to the CS by August 31st.
4. Steering Committee---meet in late August to discuss additional changes. Review final draft CS. Provide final draft to YES members by September 1st.
5. September 8th YES meeting. Review Steering Committee recommendations, move to approve changes where agreed upon, tackle unresolved issues.
6. YES members - provide recommended edits to YES chair and Steering Committee chair by September 20th.
7. October 3, 2016 YES meeting - -approve final conservation strategy. Circulate for signature. Provide final signed document to USFWS by November 1st, 2016.

Public Comment

Stephanie Adams, NPCA - all eyes on this group for long term conservation. This is the opportunity to show long-term commitment; direct harvest to conflict areas, engage federal agencies in discretionary mortality. Appreciates articulation of values/vision but it is not enforceable; process too rushed

Bonnie Rice, Sierra Club -if population estimator changes, fundamental to address in rule and CS-need clear recalibration if estimator changes; process and timeline rushed and politically driven; were told there would be another public comment period because of substantive changes; need additional comment period

Glenn Hockett, GWA - premature to delist mainly because of connectivity and genetics- purposely managing in isolation; number of bears clearly should be a floor and not a ceiling; livestock-sheep ARS station perpetual conflicts

Joe Gutkoski – MT Rivers - too early for delisting until all areas repopulated, allow to migrate west toward Idaho to repopulate Selway Bitterroot area and Gravelly Range. Delivered proposal to Forest Service for Greater Gallatin Range; another area to repopulate is Tobacco Roots and Pintler West area, northern migration routes to the Continental Divide , Glacier, north on Bridger Range to Big Belts. Until areas are repopulated, no delisting.

Derek Goldman, Endangered Species Coalition – changes to 1998 baseline could mean major weakening of protections; recalibration of counting methods is necessary, lots of work to do. Appendix C didn't address it; process is rushed-short shrift to public comments

Kelly Nokes, Wild Earth Guardians - CS contents are important; request YES or USFWS add public review and comment period; significant changes-vet with public; opposed to hunting, need population across the lower 48, work toward recovery overall, not just this DPS; urge not to rush

Scott Christiansen, GYC - the CS is a crucial document for a long term commitment; the issues where there isn't agreement today are some of the most important; today appreciate open and direct conversations. Noted discussion of managing for a declining population, spent decades recovering a population only to propose coming off the list and managing a decline. Our organization believes the greater Yellowstone is different-nature works as it should; the grizzly bear is a symbol of conservation; delisting equating to a lower population is a tough pill to swallow, not tenable with the public

Dave Pauly, Humane Society – after 40 years, seems like a rushed timeline-call for more comment; delisting is premature; ask for a buffer zone (3 States) or a temporal buffer zone (no hunting for time period after delisting to study)

Roger Hayden, WY Wildlife Advocates - need strong language in strategy about trans boundary bears; process is extremely rushed; stick to your promise on more public comment; need comment period for state plans

Nick Gevock, MT Wildlife Federation - ARS sheep station has been slated for closure twice-urge committee to address this. Eliminate grazing-should resolve conflicts-allow for more stable key wildlife corridors