

**INTERAGENCY GRIZZLY BEAR COMMITTEE  
NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM SUBCOMMITTEE  
Fall Meeting - December 7, 2021**

Introductions: Don Striker, Tom McDowell, Jody Weil, Jeff Marzal, Brendan Brokes, Brock Hoenes, John Rohrer, Abby Sage, Wayne Kasworm, Jesse Plumage, Scott Fitkin, Hilary Cooley, Andrew Lavalle, Denise Shultz, Lori Roberts, Matt Marsh, David Diamond, Garth Mowat, Kristin Bail

**Review of Notes from Spring 2021 Meeting**

- No comments – accepted as recorded

**Update from North Cascades National Park - Denise Shultz**

- Karen Taylor Goodrich has retired.
- Don Striker is the new Superintendent for North Cascades National Park, and new to the subcommittee.
- No update on the Grizzly Bear Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) joint with Forest Service (FS), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW); still on hold.
- Park received funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act and will hire two people to do bear interpretation inside the park.

**Update from US Fish & Wildlife Service - Hilary Cooley**

- A species status assessment was completed and published. Recent updates will be incorporated annually, plus any new science, then published on website. No direction yet from this administration in regard to delisting. We do not have a confirmed director yet.
- The State of Wyoming announced they will be petitioning to delist the grizzly bear in Yellowstone ecosystem. Also, the State of Montana will petition to delist the population in the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem.

**IGBC Recovery Office - Wayne Kasworm**

- A research team captured and collared a female bear in the State of Washington, Selkirk Recovery Zone. First female grizzly ever captured in Washington.

**Update from WA Department of Fish & Wildlife - Brendan Brokes**

- Brendan introduced Brock Hoenes, Region 2 Director; both will be on subcommittee.
- We are down one commissioner. Lorna Smith is now one of our 2 commissioners, and also Greg Coons. Larry Carpenter was re-elected as chair, and Molly Linville elected vice-chair.
- Scott Fitkin: Methow Bear Aware project with Methow Conservancy and Defenders of Wildlife. Recent fundraiser raised \$6,400 dollars toward more garbage cans in upper Methow Valley. Area is becoming more bear-safe month by the month.

### **Update from Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest – Jesse Plumage**

- The Forest started focusing efforts on procuring the bear food lockers with Defenders of Wildlife and have requests in for Great American Outdoor Act (GAOA) funding for more food lockers. One on Skykomish Ranger District, one on Snoqualmie Ranger District.
- Rich Beausoleil with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife was contacted to teach campground folks how to keep a clean campground.

### **Update from Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest - Kristin Bail**

- The big story this year was our fire season: Cedar and Cub Creek 2 Fires burned 125,000 acres. The fires and smoke affected the area for some time. The Cedar Creek Fire impacted the Twisp Restoration Project. We have started the work of doing post-fire recovery planning. The area burned in a matrix - from high to low severity burns, some stand replacement, some less impacted areas. The Forest is creating a plan of action to move forward.
- This is another fire imprint on the eastside of the ecosystem. We're working with partners and collaboratives to work on resiliency.
- We had a lot of recreation use this year. We expect a rebound once we address some restoration and hazard trees.
- John Rohrer will be retiring, and we will work to fill his position as soon as we can. In addition, the Forest Wildlife Biologist position is vacant and we are in the process of getting it filled.

### **Update from Colville National Forest - Matt Marsh**

- Matt Marsh, Tonasket Ranger District – Administrative change from the Okanogan-Wenatchee to Colville NF. All grizzly bear habitat policies the same with no net loss; the district is still under the North Cascades grizzly bear boundary – no changes.
- Colville has a 20-year planning cycle – the Conconully area will be analyzed in 2030 and Toats Coulee area in 2033. The Colville has been active in installing bear lockers and is planning more on the Tonasket portion. They installed 2 bear lockers last year, and are covered for garbage receptacles, having animal resistant dumpsters and garbage cans in their rec sites.

### **Update from British Columbia Ministry of FLNRO - Garth Mowat**

- Has two recovery plans written – one in the Stein area, the other on the North Cascades (BC). They were a government-to-government effort (between a provincial government and First Nations government). They are in the early stage of creating a management structure for the inner southwest of British Columbia.
- The Okanogan Nation Alliance wrote one of the first recovery plans and plan to have the first bear transplant to the Stein unit next spring. Restoration plan for the North Cascade (BC) area still needs public consultation.
- BC proposes having someone from BC parks on the NCE subcommittee, and possibly a representative from First Nations.

### **IGBC Organizational Restructure Proposal - Kristin Bail**

- We are taking a reflective look at what is working well, and what isn't. Options include to leave the structure as is (geographic subcommittees), a conservation team approach (population monitoring, habitat monitoring, conflict management, information and education, and research), or consider a

hybrid structure. A hybrid structure would be a good way to keep what works and develop new ideas on both a recovery-zone basis and a range-wide basis.

- Conservation team approach would allow for more consistent information, help address budgets.
- Staff could be on more than one habitat team to deal with issues that arise.
- The conversation is ongoing. More conversation is possible during Executive Committee meeting on December 9<sup>th</sup>.
- BC suggests the opportunity of having formal recognition at the upper-level committee in order to have more involvement and dialogue between the two countries, and at the various levels. Consider how we would operate together and manage the species, our communication routes, and ways we can stay coordinated.

### **NCE Action Plan – 2021 Planned Actions Review/2022 Proposed Actions**

- Reviewed and edited the draft NCE Action Plan in preparation for submission to IGBC Executive Committee. See Excel spreadsheet: 5-Year Plan Goals\_Objectives\_Strategies\_with Annual Work Plan Elements June2021

### **Goal #1: Establish and implement clear direction for recovery**

- Complete the North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan and Environmental Impact Statement and issue a Record of Decision – No Planned Actions
- Inform the public about the EIS process and the ROD when a decision is made – No Planned Actions
- Develop international agreements, if necessary, to implement the ROD – No Planned Actions
- Secure additional resources, if necessary, to implement the ROD – No Planned Actions
- Gather stakeholder input for potential designation as a 10(j) experimental population – No Planned Actions

### **Goal #2: Maintain or enhance habitat conditions for Grizzly Bears**

- Reaffirm the no net loss of Core Area agreement
  - ◆ The North Cascades Ecosystem Technical Team reviewed the available science regarding high-use, non-motorized trails and how they are evaluated when calculating core area in a BMU. We have found that 1) recent research continues to support the supposition that high-use, non-motorized trails displace grizzly bears, and other wildlife, and 2) recent literature does support a change to our current definition of a high-use, non-motorized trail. Specifically, we believe there are data to support changing the buffer that is placed on trails from 500 meters to a substantially smaller distance. The Technical Team is currently taking a harder look at specific research results to recommend a buffer distance that is justified and supported.
    - If the subcommittee agrees with recommendation to reduce the buffer amount, that would obviously result in an increase in core area for every BMU that has high-use, non-motorized trails. We would need to re-set the baseline of core area by BMU for the no net loss of core direction. We need to re-set the baseline anyway, because the number of high-use, non-motorized trails has increased over time as recreational use has increased.
    - The last core area by BMU baseline was done in 2001. At that time there were non-motorized trails that were not high-use (greater than 20 parties/week), but now, because of an increase in

recreation use, they are high-use. So we've lost core area without doing any management action. .

- The Technical Team will make a recommendation to the subcommittee during the spring 2022 meeting regarding a new buffer amount for non-motorized trails, which may be the time to discuss the ramifications of a change.
  - As part of the ramification discussion the tech team will do a 'test BMU' to illustrate the amount of change and estimate the workload for all BMUs in the Recovery Zone.
  - If we are going to make a change to the buffer, which would change amount of core area by BMU, we should also decide if we want to recommend a minimum core area polygon size. Please provide feedback to John.
- Complete ecosystem-wide database of bear-resistant food storage and waste receptacles by 2022
    - ◆ Done. Both forests and the national park databases are being updated annually. We will continue to do so.
  - Standardize signage/language on signs by 2022
    - ◆ OWNF, MBS, and NCNP will continue to work toward using the standard IGBC trailhead sign.
  - Expand food storage orders to all National Forests by 2022
    - ◆ MBS will continue to work on front country FSO. OWNF plans to get all FS campground waste disposal infrastructure upgraded to bear-resistant prior to food storage order.
  - Increase availability of bear-resistant food storage and waste receptacles annually
    - ◆ In 2021: OWNF used GAOA funding to purchase additional animal-resistant dumpsters. The 3 northern-most districts, as well as the Tonasket District of the Colville NF, now have all campground dumpsters animal resistant. Southern districts are still having issues with waste company trucks not being compatible with animal-resistant dumpsters, however they are beginning to install food storage lockers in select campgrounds. A virtual workshop on living and recreating in bear country was facilitated by Defenders of Wildlife on August 25, 2021. NPS, USFS and WDFW provided information on agency efforts/ requirements.
    - ◆ 2022 Planned: Continue to install refuse and food storage facilities throughout ecosystem as funds become available. NPS backlog of bear-resistant food storage lockers will continue to be placed in back- and front-country campgrounds. WDFW will continue work with communities to deploy as many bear-resistant residential garbage cans as possible in the Upper Methow. WDFW and OWNF will work with partners (Defenders, Methow Valley Waste Wise) to facilitate increased placement of waste receptacles. Dumpsters are the priority for OWNF. – As funding is available, OWNF will continue to purchase more food lockers.
  - Determine presence/distribution of salmon poisoning disease (SPD) in fish and black bears in the NCE. (suggestion to remove this.)
    - ◆ Bears in the NCE do get SPD but recover. It is not likely to hinder grizzly bear recovery. Encourage WSU to publish results when data and analysis are sufficient.
    - ◆ This line will be removed from the NCE 5-year action plan.

#### Goal #3: Document Presence of Grizzly Bears

- Verify reports of grizzly bear sightings as soon as practical

- ◆ 2021 reports of grizzly bears were received and investigated. No verified sightings and no grizzly bears sighted on remote camera work they were doing.
  - NOTE: There were 2 sightings in BC – Garth will get info to John
- ◆ 2022 Continue to follow up on reports; continue to deploy trail cameras.

Adjourned at 4:00 p.m.