

Wildlife Program Fast Fact – Grizzly Bears in Washington

Topic Title	Grizzly Bears in Washington
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Grizzly Bears in Washington

Grizzly bears historically have been found throughout the state except within the Olympic Peninsula and coastal lowland areas west of the Cascade Range. Currently in Washington, grizzly bears inhabit the Selkirk Mountains of northeastern Pend Oreille County and have occasionally been observed in Stevens and Ferry counties of northeastern Washington.

WDFW is committed to the recovery of grizzly bears in Washington and is working on outreach and education, sanitation efforts, monitoring populations, and other recovery implementation activities. WDFW has been an active participant with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee and works with multiple conservation partners and agencies on these efforts.

Grizzly Bear Status

Grizzly bears in the lower 48 states were federally listed under the [Endangered Species Act \(ESA\)](#) as Threatened in 1975 due to range contraction, habitat loss, and threats to remaining bears resulting from direct killing. They were state listed as Endangered in 1980. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted the Yellowstone grizzly population in 2017.

Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Translocation

Recently there has been a great deal of attention to grizzly bear conservation in Washington, notably due to a proposed grizzly bear translocation to the North Cascades and the associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process used to evaluate its potential impacts. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Park Service (NPS) are the leads for the proposed translocation and the associated environmental impact statement (EIS) process. WDFW is a Cooperating Agency (CA), which does not imply support for or have opposition to a proposed translocation.

WDFW’s Role in the Environmental Impact Statement

The environmental impact statement (EIS) process and grizzly bear proposed translocation is challenging for WDFW due to an existing state law ([RCW 77.12.035](#)) directing that WDFW may only use bears native to the state for management. RCW 77.12.035 prohibits the agency from being involved in actions to bring grizzly bears in from other states, but it does not suggest that WDFW cannot take actions to protect grizzlies, support habitat improvement practices, protect human safety and protect property once grizzly bears are translocated to the North Cascades. WDFW would respond to any reports of illegal killing and harassment of bears as well as reports of bears endangering public safety or damaging private property. WDFW would add this to similar work done related to other endangered species protection activities and predator management activities for black bears, cougars, wolves, and other wildlife, which may minimize any “new” workload in the North Cascades.

WDFW’s role as a CA includes:

- Cooperating and assisting in the scoping process.
- Assisting USFWS and NPS in developing the plan/EIS by providing technical assistance in those areas for which WDFW has special expertise or jurisdiction by law, by evaluating the potential alternatives, impacts, and mitigation effectiveness in the plan/EIS.

- Identifying issues to be addressed in the plan/EIS; and providing necessary resource, environmental, social, economic, and institutional data; and assisting in the development and evaluation of alternatives.
- Providing necessary information to be included in the decision file for the preparation of the NEPA document and ensuring SEPA requirements are addressed.

While state law limits WDFW's participation in the proposed translocation to that of a CA, WDFW is invested in the overall goal of grizzly bear recovery in Washington.

Environmental Impact Statement Alternatives and Process

The North Cascades Grizzly Bear EIS includes action alternatives that have periods ranging between 25 years and 100 years for establishing a 200-bear population in the 6.1 million acres of the North Cascades ecosystem. This means it may be some time before bears become commonly seen and human-grizzly interactions are likely to occur.

Current EIS Progress:

- February 2015: The Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register by the lead federal agency and signals the initiation of the process.
- March 2015: Scoping, an open process involving the public and other federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, identified the major and important issues for consideration during the process.
- January 2017: The draft EIS provided a detailed description of the proposal, the purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, the affected environment, and analysis of the anticipated beneficial and adverse environmental effects of the alternatives. This included a formal public comment period and public meetings to collect comments from the public and other agencies.

Ongoing steps:

- Lead and cooperating agencies are developing and reviewing alternatives for the draft EIS.
- The alternatives will include the potential for USFWS to designate any reintroduced population in the North Cascades a 10(j) non-essential experimental population, which would provide managers with increased flexibility in order to help ensure grizzly bear restoration does not result in the restriction of other land uses and resource development activities or compromise public safety.

Primary Stakeholders

Primary stakeholders involved with grizzly bear conservation and management in Washington include:

- Other state and federal agencies (USFWS, NPS, USFS, DNR, IDFG)
- Non-profit organizations (Defenders of Wildlife, Conservation Northwest, Western Wildlife Outreach)
- Citizens and landowners of Washington State

Budget Details

Personalized License Plate funds and State Wildlife Grants support grizzly education, outreach, sanitation efforts, conservation coordination and population monitoring. If translocations were to occur in the North Cascades, the agency would likely seek funds from USFWS and/or NPS to offset additional costs around human-wildlife conflict. However, for perspective on costs, there are very few calls regarding grizzly bear concerns in the area of the established Selkirk population.

Additional Resources (web links, etc.)

- See RCW 77.12.035 at <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=77.12.035>.
- See the Grizzly Bear Species Report at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/ursus-arctos#resources>