



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## NEWS RELEASE

SNAKE RIVER BASIN OFFICE  
1387 S. Vinnell Way • Boise, Idaho 83709  
(208) 378-5243 • FAX (208) 378-5262

November 16, 2000  
For Immediate Release

CO#00-33 / ID#00-21

Contact: Chris Servheen - (406) 243-4903  
Bob Ruesink - (208) 378-5243  
Meggan Laxalt - (208) 378-5796  
Laird Robinson - (406) 329-3434  
Johnna Roy - (208) 476-3435  
Sharon Rose - (303) 236-7917, x415

### **FINAL STEPS COMPLETED FOR PLAN TO REINTRODUCE GRIZZLY BEAR IN MONTANA AND IDAHO**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed the planning process for the reintroduction of grizzly bears into the Bitterroot Mountains of western Montana and central Idaho under the management of a 15-member Citizen Management Committee.

Ralph Morgenweck, the Service's regional director for the Mountain/Prairie Region, has formally selected the preferred alternative identified in a final Environmental Impact Statement. Under the plan, the Service would introduce a minimum of 25 bears over five years into 5,785 square miles of wilderness area surrounded by more than 15,000 square miles of public land in the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

Bears will not be relocated into this area for a year or more. The reintroduced bears will be designated as a nonessential, experimental population under a special rule that will be published in the *Federal Register* on Friday, November 17, 2000. This special designation allows more flexibility in the management of reintroduced species — for example, if removing a bear from the area is necessary.

"The exhaustive planning process for recovery of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot is now complete and we are prepared to go forward in partnership with the citizens of Idaho and Montana," Morgenweck said. "There is still a lot of work to be done before any bears can actually be reintroduced, however, including the creation of the Citizen Management Committee."

"This is the first time a reintroduction effort will be overseen by a citizen's group," Morgenweck said. "The Service believes the involvement of local residents is crucial to a successful reintroduction effort."

The Service will start a year of planning and preparation prior to the actual reintroduction of grizzly bears. The first year of the recovery program will involve three simultaneous activities: formation of the Citizen Management Committee; initiation of public outreach and information and education programs; and initiation of a sanitation program to ensure bear-proof garbage storage containers are made available and installed in campgrounds and facilities in and around the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area.

— more —

The 15-member Citizen Management Committee will be composed of a cross-section of local citizens and agency representatives from Federal and State agencies and the Nez Perce Tribe. Seven of these members will be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior based on the recommendations of the Governor of Idaho; five members will be appointed by the Secretary based on the recommendations of the Governor of Montana; one member will be appointed by the Secretary based on the recommendation of the Nez Perce Tribe; one member to represent the USDA Forest Service will be appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture; and one member to represent the Service will be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior.

Members recommended by the Governors of Idaho and Montana would include at least one representative each from the respective state fish and wildlife agencies. Two scientific advisors will be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior as non-voting members to attend all meetings of the committee and to provide scientific expertise. Committee members will serve six-year terms and meet a minimum of two times per year. Meetings will be open to the public.

The mission of the Citizen Management Committee is to facilitate recovery of the grizzly bear in the Bitterroot Ecosystem while accommodating the needs of the public. Decisions by the Committee will serve as guidance to the Federal and State agencies involved in grizzly bear management.

Establishment of a grizzly population in the remote Bitterroot wilderness would contribute significantly to long-term conservation and recovery of the species. The recovery goal for the Bitterroot ecosystem is approximately 280 grizzly bears, which is expected to take a minimum of 50-100 years to achieve.

An estimated 50,000 grizzly bears lived in the contiguous United States prior to European settlement. Grizzly bears have been eliminated from approximately 98 percent of their historic range in the lower 48 states. Today, approximately 1,000-1,100 grizzly bears remain in five scattered populations in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Washington. Only two areas in the country (the Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem which includes Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness) have populations of grizzlies in the hundreds. The other three populations have approximately five to 50 grizzly bears each.

The grizzly bear is a native species of the Bitterroot Ecosystem and was once common there. Grizzlies were eliminated from the Bitterroots by the 1940's after a century of intensive persecution. Of all remaining unoccupied grizzly bear habitat in the lower 48 States, the Bitterroot Mountains wilderness area has the best potential for grizzly bear recovery. This area has high-quality grizzly bear habitat, and the largest block of wilderness habitat in the Rocky Mountains south of Canada. As such, the Bitterroot Ecosystem offers excellent potential to recover a healthy population of grizzly bears and to boost long-term survival and recovery prospects for this species in the contiguous United States. Recovery of endangered species, and their removal from the list of endangered species, is the ultimate goal of the Endangered Species Act.

All reintroduced bears would be radio-collared and monitored to determine their movements and how they use their habitat, and to keep the public informed through media outreach of general bear locations and recovery efforts. Under the plan, the Service would only consider bears with no known history of conflicts with people or livestock for reintroduction.

Suitable bears would be released at remote wilderness sites within the Bitterroot Mountains of east-central Idaho that have high quality bear habitat and low likelihood of human encounters. By designating the reintroduced grizzly population as nonessential experimental, bears that frequent areas of high human use, act aggressively toward humans, or attack livestock would be relocated or destroyed, based on criteria in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines.

The grizzly bear gets its grizzled appearance from long, silver-tipped guard hairs above a brownish coat that can range in shade from blond to black. It has long, light-colored foreclaws (4 inches or more long),

a hump between its high shoulders, and a dish-shaped face. An adult female weighs from 250 to 350 pounds, while a male reaches 400 to 600 pounds. In Idaho and Montana, grizzlies breed from May through July, with most activity in June. They hibernate from November through April. Young born in January during hibernation nurse for almost one year. Females mature at age 4 to 6 and have one to four cubs (usually two) every third year thereafter. Cubs usually stay with their mother for two years, then leave to establish their own home range. Grizzly bears require a large area for movement and food searches. The grizzly bear is an omnivore that feeds on berries, whitebark pine nuts, dead animals, bulbs, roots, grasses, and insects.

Specific details on the Service's plan to reintroduce grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Mountains of Montana and Idaho can be found on the Service's website at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/bitterroot> or [www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly](http://www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly).

## FWS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.