### Montana, Fish, Wildlife and Parks Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwestern Montana Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

# Is completion of this plan necessary for the Yellowstone grizzly bears to be removed from the federal list of threatened species?

Yes, Montana must have a current state plan that is in place and acceptable to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in order for the Service to propose delisting.

### How will grizzly bears be classified under state authority post de-listing?

MCA 87-2-101 defines all of the following as 'game animals'; deer, elk, moose, antelope, caribou, mountain sheep, mountain goat, mountain lion, bear, and wild buffalo.

### Is there a boundary outside of which grizzly bears are not allowed and can be lethally removed at any time?

No, there are no lines on the map that grizzly bears cannot disperse beyond. The creation of such a line would not be viewed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as adequate for management nor would it be acceptable to many who agree with the Governor's Roundtable recommendation to 'support expansion of grizzly bears beyond the original Primary Conservation Area in areas that are biologically suitable and socially acceptable.' There is no management boundary that grizzly bears cannot cross, nor is there intent to force grizzly bears to expand beyond what they are naturally doing.

Grizzly bears are wide ranging species that have the ability to move long distances. Natural expansion will continue to occur as it has in the past and FWP will do its best to manage conflicts to include lethal removal of grizzlies in some conflict situations.

FWP believes any approach to 'limit distribution' is logistically impossible and biologically undesirable. In order to maintain population resilience to habitat changes, social tolerance and other factors, bears need to occupy a broad landscape. As with other wildlife species, grizzly bears cannot be confined to designated zones because there are not barriers to contain them and it is impossible to know the location of every animal all the time.

# Has FWP designated 'linkage zones' to foster movement of grizzly bears between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Greater Yellowstone Area?

No, the identification of specific linkage zones is complicated by ever changing habitat conditions, human presence and land use. Past radio collared grizzly movement has pointed to specific areas that are biologically suitable for grizzly presence but individual bears demonstrate diverse preference for habitat and different tolerances for human presence. For these reasons and for simply not wanting to draw circles on a map potentially highlighting private property FWP does not plan to identify specific linkage zones. Rather, FWP will pursue opportunities for habitat conservation or restoration in areas between the GYA and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem systems as they arise.

## Will completion of this plan result in increased densities of grizzly bears in places where they are not currently present?

FWP remains committed to allowing grizzly bears to live in biologically suitable and socially acceptable habitats with natural expansion between ecosystems occurring within the Governor's Roundtable recommendations and the goals of FWP. As and if grizzly bear expansion occurs naturally, it is possible the density of grizzlies could increase in certain areas. Habitat value dictates the density of grizzly bears and all other wildlife species on the landscape. However, conflict management will remain a priority in all areas of grizzly bear presence.

### Why aren't the specifics of any future hunting season included in this plan?

Parameters of a hunt such as season dates, number of tags, license fees, allowable non-resident take, etc. will be determined under Commission rule to include the standard public participation process. Any hunting mortalities will be counted against allowable annual mortality limits.

#### Will hunting be implemented immediately after de-listing of the GYA grizzly population?

Upon delisting, hunting will be proposed only after all components of the grizzly bear management program and Conservation Strategy are adequately implemented. Upon implementation of those programs the FW Commission will determine the appropriate year to reinstate a grizzly bear hunt (MCA 87-5-302) however, FWP does believe the population is secure enough to sustain some amount of limited hunting upon delisting. Any hunting mortalities within the Demographic Monitoring Area will be counted as human-caused mortalities and counted against the annual sustainable mortality limits.

# Does implementation of the preferred alternative influence day to day grizzly bear management operations?

No, Alternative II basically calls for status quo management to include cooperative population and habitat monitoring, conflict prevention efforts, and responsive conflict management.

#### What is the cost to implement Alternative II?

Annual costs to implement a complex plan such as this are difficult to predict exactly, particularly due to annual variability in the number of bear conflicts. However, a minimum of around \$200,000 is currently utilized to hire and cover operations of dedicated bear management staff from the FWP Region 3 office, who also assist FWP Region 5 with grizzly bear conflict issues. Additional staff such as game wardens, area biologists, and administrators contribute time and dollars to program implementation that are not tracked separately. An ideal program that would allow FWP to hire a bear management specialist in FWP Region 5 and increase efforts to prevent conflicts would cost upwards of \$400,000.