

Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council FAQs: August 2019

Why did the Governor appoint a Grizzly Bear Advisory Council?

As grizzly bear populations continue to expand in Montana, including into areas that they have not occupied for decades, management challenges and conflicts are increasing in some places, prompting a need for timely solutions. At the same time, Montana's human population continues to grow, and there are more people living, working and recreating in bear country.

Montana Governor Steve Bullock called for the new Grizzly Bear Advisory Council (GBAC) to address these challenges and to help set a long-term vision for bear management and conservation in Montana. He felt that a new council, comprised of people that hold diverse viewpoints, was the best approach for finding balanced recommendations.

How were council members selected?

Governor Bullock solicited applications for council membership in April 2019, seeking individuals with a diversity of views and a commitment to working together on the future of grizzly bears in Montana. More than 150 people from across the state applied for a spot on the council. Bullock asked Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Director Martha Williams for help with review and recommendations before making his final selections. The selection process was made difficult by the fact that there were so many qualified people who expressed a genuine desire to help develop solutions that meet the needs of bears and people.

Who is on the council?

The advisory council is comprised of a broad cross section of Montanans with a diversity of views on grizzly bear management, conservation, and recovery. Bullock selected council members for their ability to think independently and their wide array of interests and expertise. The council is intentionally representative of the different parts of the state where grizzlies are currently or may soon be found. Council members serve as volunteers.

What are the council's objectives?

The advisory council's work will center around these broad objectives:

- Maintaining and enhancing human safety;
- Ensuring a healthy and sustainable grizzly bear population;
- Improving timely and effective response to conflicts involving grizzly bears;
- Engaging all partners in grizzly-related outreach and conflict prevention; and
- Improving intergovernmental, interagency, and tribal coordination.

The Council will focus on providing recommendations to the Governor's Office on grizzly bear management, conservation and recovery that are clear and actionable.

Who oversees the council?

The GBAC serves in an advisory capacity and reports to the Governor's office.

Governor Bullock asked FWP to provide staff support to the council and that all key partners with a role in bear management be closely involved with the group's work. Staff from the

University of Montana's Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy were contracted to plan and facilitate council meetings.

How often will the council meet, where and when?

Council members are expected to meet six to eight times over the next 12 months in various communities around Montana. The first meeting date has not been set, but it is expected to be in late summer/early fall. To stay updated on meeting information, go to:

fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/gbac.html

How can I be involved?

There will be a variety of ways to engage with the council's work (in-person and remotely), including opportunities to provide input and review. All council meetings are open to the public, and ways to engage will be announced in the media and updated online:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/gbac.html>

How might the council's recommendations be adopted?

The council will make recommendations to the Governor. Any recommendations involving statutory changes would have to be adopted by the Legislature and would still need to comply with Federal Endangered Species Act. Recommendations that have a fiscal component involving state funds or expenditure of funds by state agencies would have to be included in agency budget proposals that are reviewed and adopted by the Legislature. Rule changes related to hunting or take of grizzly bears would have to be adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission after a public process. Other recommendations not requiring formal adoption by a governing body could be implemented by state or federal resource agencies, or NGO partners in cooperation with those agencies.

What is the legal status of grizzly bears in Montana, who manages them, and what is their role on the council?

Grizzly bears are currently listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act in all areas of Montana, and delisting efforts continue in places where recovery goals have been met.

All or part of four grizzly bear recovery zones designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are located in Montana: the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE); the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE); the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem; and the Bitterroot Ecosystem. While grizzly bear numbers have surpassed recovery objectives in the GYE and NCDE, they have yet to reach recovery levels in the Cabinet-Yaak and Bitterroot. Meanwhile, bears are expanding outside of these zones into more places across the state.

Because they are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act, grizzly bears are under the jurisdiction of the FWS. However, management depends on cooperation from other agencies and partners including Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, the Blackfoot Nation, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Much of the day-to-day management of bears in Montana is done by FWP and the tribes with oversight by the FWS.

All partners in grizzly bear management will provide support and technical expertise to the council as requested but none serve as appointed members.

How does the council relate to grizzly bear's status under the Endangered Species Act?

Regardless of listing status, it is expected that grizzly populations will continue to grow and expand, and that associated conflicts and management challenges will increase across Montana. Governor Bullock established the council to recommend timely solutions to these current issues and prepare for the future. He asked the council to look at grizzly bear management and conservation statewide, rather than just focusing on the needs and challenges based on the current recovery zones and delisting efforts. He expects the council's work to help Montana create a balanced, comprehensive approach to bear management that can complement delisting efforts.

Where can I find more information about the status and management of grizzly bears in Montana?

As this process moves along, you will be able to find a wide range of resources related to grizzly bear monitoring, research, management plans, and recovery on Montana's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council webpage at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/gbac.html>