

Grizzly Bear Reintroduction vs. Multiple Conflicts and Political Land Grab

by SAM JOJOLA 4/27/16

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Reintroduction alternative to delisting

Reintroduction of the grizzly into other ecosystems is the best option to expand the gene pool of the limited population in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and keep the current protection intact. In March, 2000, USFWS plans were underway to implement a reintroduction to several ecosystems, including the Selway-Bitterroot area. Specifics of the reintroduction of the grizzly from the GYE and other ecosystems are detailed in this wonderful plan 16 years ago.

USFWS plans to initially reintroduce the grizzly into this area in 1996 and 2000 were dismissed in 2001 when George W. Bush took office and the plan was never implemented.

In December, 2014, The Center for Biological Diversity filed a petition requesting USFWS again pursue reintroduction of the grizzly into the Selway-Bitterroot in Idaho and Montana with over 16 million acres of viable bear habitat to support up to 300 bears. Still nothing transpired. Wildlife bureaucrats would have a better argument for delisting if they took the initiative 16 years ago. Misguided priorities and biopolitics impeded this great plan.

Conflicts in the 1980s

In the mid to late 1980s I worked a few federal wildlife investigations with grizzly bear conflicts in Idaho with fellow USFWS Special Agents.

Back then there were a number of USFWS law enforcement investigations from colleagues in Idaho involving grizzly conflicts with the sheep industry in Idaho and Montana. There were reports of illicit shootings and occasional poisonings with a highly toxic carbamate insecticide known as Aldicarb or Temik illegally used to lace sheep carcasses and kill predators.

One covert investigation involved foreign sheep herders in Idaho where a colleague and I tried to document their knowledge of who told them to lace a sheep carcass with a toxic poison left for a predator like a coyote or grizzly to ingest. We were investigating a bald eagle that fed on the laced sheep carcass and died. Forensics proved poisoning as the cause of death.

How evil was that.

Another incident in Idaho involved a foreign sheepherder accused of killing a grizzly at night. The sheepherder never confessed or turned in the sheep rancher who was suspect in the crime.

Indiscriminate killings of grizzlies then and now are difficult to document and even more difficult to prove. Reports are often after the fact and logistics prevent an immediate investigation to secure fresh evidence.

These incidents were frequent enough in 1983 to warrant four USFWS Special Agents assigned to conduct seasonal horseback patrols in the Centennial Mountains and other remote areas in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Their primary goal was educational outreach to ranchers, herders, loggers, hunters, outfitters and recreationists to see what they knew or saw about grizzly killings.

How many illegal grizzly kills were documented then? One would have to search paper records from federal and state agencies in Idaho, Montana and

Wyoming, if any such records still exist before computer records were fully established. Newspaper records on microfiche could be researched.

Grizzly bear history in the 1980's and before then is important to fully understand what human caused impacts and abuse have done to the limited population in the lower 48 today. Livestock conflicts are obviously an issue in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming and the grizzly reintroduction into the Selway-Bitterroot was controversial, but it was the best option 16 years ago and still is today.

Trophy hunting

Safari Club International (SCI) has been advocating the delisting of Grizzly Bears in the GYE since 2006 (). Many very prominent political and extraordinary wealthy socialites belong to SCI. SCI had a membership of 41,000 in the early part of this century with more members today.

Many SCI members and other trophy hunters would welcome the opportunity of a special limited hunt in that ecosystem and the states involved could benefit. But does that benefit outweigh the cost? Longtime grizzly bear advocate and conservationist Louisa Willcox details a revelation of prior delisting costs, politics and how a 2007 USFWS delisting rule was overturned federal court in 2009 when much of the science was ignored.

It can boil down to bragging rights. To have a mounted grizzly from the GYE is something a hardcore trophy hunter would rave about given the prestigious and limited hunt. Big time trophy hunters like to have something unique that very few others can obtain which is a powerful incentive.

The current delisting proposal is a waste of taxpayer money and the initial proposal by USFWS bureaucrats was poorly executed after key tribes and U.S. Park Service leaders were left out.

There will always be a debate as to how much trophy hunting money in the end goes to wildlife conservation efforts here and across the globe, but that will not solve the current dilemma. Sound science by multiple independent parties outside of government should be evaluated with the cultural and religious aspects of Native American tribes concerned for the best decision.

Trophy hunting bad behavior

Trophy hunting has been marred by several high profile incidents of illegal and unethical hunting in recent years.

Google the words “High profile hunters who have illegally killed grizzly bears” and scroll through the pages.

Trophy hunting as it existed before the Dr. Palmer, Cecil the Lion incident is now very magnified. In 2008, Dr. Palmer pled guilty in federal court to an illegal black bear hunt in Wisconsin from 2006. In 2015, high profile hunters like the former Kansas beauty queen and NHL Anaheim Ducks hockey player left a black mark on trophy hunting grizzlies in Alaska and British Colombia.

The Montana hunter who illegally killed 3 grizzlies in 2014 is another tragic story.

Of particular note is the first case ever of an illegal grizzly kill prosecuted in Idaho state court in 2014 since the grizzly was listed as a Threatened Species in the Endangered Species Act in 1975 (). It took 39 years before the first ever case of its kind in Idaho became a reality.

The states are not equipped to pursue aggressive law enforcement action against illegal grizzly bear kills and need federal jurisdiction.

How many grizzlies were illegally killed and never discovered or investigated in the past 10 or 20 years? Killing illegal wildlife is just the way some members of humanity operate when they feel entitled.

Arrogance and greed are so destructive to God's creatures and humanity.

Translocation and other hunting options

With all past illicit killings and poisonings contributing to an estimated 1,500 to 1,800 grizzlies in 5 populations in the lower 48 we should focus on the genetic integrity of what remains. Reintroduction through translocation should be considered first before delisting. Opportunities to hunt grizzlies in Canada exist where between 20,000 and 25,000 grizzlies occur.

Why jeopardize our limited population?

Reintroduction into the Selway-Bitterroot should be re-evaluated and undertaken first before delisting. It is a long term pattern of misguided priorities and biopolitics trumping science with integrity. Wildlife bureaucrats still fail to see the bigger picture and the public could be blindsighted by much larger initial and long term threats if delisting occurs.

Political Land Grab after Grizzly delisting

Once delisting occurs, it is easier for special interest development to assert political influence on federal lands outside Yellowstone to be sold for oil and gas, fracking, logging, mining and wind power interests, including expanded livestock grazing opportunities and trophy hunting grizzlies.

The Koch and ExxonMobil funded Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) and this group's agenda to privatize the National Park system for energy needs and sell public lands to the highest corporate bidders is just one of the greater threats ahead of trophy hunting.

Another looming threat is from the Federal Land Action Group (FLAG) that was initiated by two Utah Congressmen in April, 2015 in an effort to transfer federal public land to local ownership.

These are Republican supported groups. Similar agendas have been supported by right-wing lawmakers in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and 8 other states.

Google “American Land Act” and “American Legislative Exchange Council” and see what else is brewing.

With states asserting power over federal lands, wildlife will permanently suffer.

Jane Goodall’s recent thoughts

Jane Goodall, world renowned primatologist and conservationist recently expressed her sentiments on grizzlies at a recent March 11th speech at Creighton University. She urged the audience to contact the National Park Service to forbid grizzlies from being removed from the endangered species list. Goodall told the audience how “we are seeing so much harm to this planet”.

“Plans to protect air and water, wilderness and wildlife are in fact plans to protect man”-Stewart Udall (1920-2010)