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Grizzlies in California? Group sues feds, wants more areas ID'd for bears

- By ZAC TAYLOR zac@codyenterprise.com
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A group that has long been opposed to state management and hunting of grizzly bears last week filed an intent to sue the federal government for “failing to create a comprehensive recovery plan” for the bears.

The Center for Biological Diversity said the plan should consider reintroducing them to places such as California’s Sierra Nevada, the Selway-Bitterroot in Idaho and Montana, and the Grand Canyon and surrounding areas in Arizona.

It’s similar to the argument made last fall by a district court judge in Missoula, Mont., that returned the Yellowstone grizzly bears to the endangered species list.

Wyoming officials at the state and federal level have worked on reversing that decision.

Following on the heels of state legislation authorizing state grizzly bear management, Wyoming’s U.S. representatives earlier in the year reintroduced a bill to authorize just that.

Sen. Mike Enzi and Rep. Liz Cheney introduced the Grizzly Bear State Management Act, which directs the Department of the Interior to reissue its delisting decision and prohibits further judicial review of the decision.

“It’s clear that under the Endangered Species Act, grizzly bears in the Yellowstone region are fully recovered, that they should be delisted and management returned to the states,” Enzi said. “I have been working on this issue for over 20 years, and we already knew back then that grizzly bears had already fully recovered.

“Unfortunately, we have seen environmental groups take advantage of the court system in the face of wildlife management experts and the science presented before us. Our legislation would finally right that wrong by once again delisting the bears and stopping further frivolous litigation on this issue.”

The Center for Biological Diversity’s filing follows a 2014 petition that identified 110,000 square miles of potential grizzly habitat in the lower 48 states.

“It’s past time the Fish and Wildlife Service created a new grizzly bear plan to follow the science and truly recover these magnificent animals,” said Noah Greenwald, the Center’s endangered species director. “Grizzlies are icons of the American West, but they’re relegated to a small fraction of the

lands they once roamed. These amazing animals should live wherever there's good habitat in the West."

In overturning the removal of protection for Yellowstone bears, the court faulted the Fish and Wildlife Service for taking a piecemeal approach to recovery.

The court also faulted the agency for not addressing Yellowstone bears' isolation from other populations.