Grizzly bear

Ursus arctos

STATUS

Threatened (40 FR 31736; July 28, 1975)

DESCRIPTION

Grizzly bears once were called "silvertips" because of long, silver-tipped guard hairs that rest above a brownish coat. The bears get their grizzled appearance because of this unusual coarse coat, which can range in color from blond to dark brownish-black. A grizzly bear can stand up to nine feet tall, and adult males can weigh as much as 600 pounds. Females generally are smaller, weighing about 250 to 350 pounds. The grizzly may be distinguished from a black bear by several characteristics, including long, light-colored claws (four inches or more in length) on the front paws, a dish-shaped face, and a hump between its shoulders.

Grizzlies prefer open meadows and avalanche chutes in the spring and timberlands with berry bushes in late summer and fall. The bear will forage for wild fruits, nuts, bulbs and roots, and it has been known to tear rotten logs apart and overturn heavy stones in search of insects and larvae. Using its powerful sense of smell, the grizzly finds carcasses of elk, deer and cattle to feed upon. Huge amounts of food are consumed by the bear to build enough fat to sustain it through a long winter hibernation period from November through April with no water or nourishment.

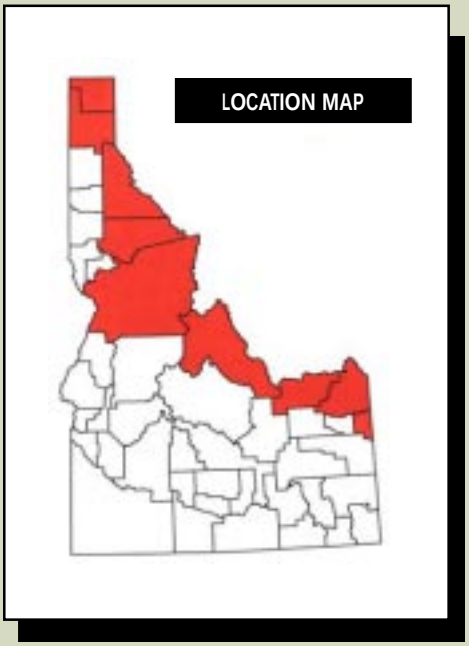
Bears begin searching for their ideal den in early fall. The dens are usually dug in north-facing slopes unlikely to be disturbed by humans or other animals, and where the snow will be deep enough to conceal not only tracks to the den, but the den itself. Most dens are beneath the roots of large trees. Though mating may have taken place months earlier (in Idaho, from May to July), births do not occur until January. Embryos in bears do not begin to grow until hibernation begins, and eventually one to four blind, hairless cubs are born weighing a pound or less. Females produce an average of two cubs every three years, and they stay with their young cubs for about two years. Depending on habitat quality, cubs strike out on their own after that period of time to establish their own range, reaching maturity in about four years. In Idaho, grizzly bear range averages 200 to 300 square miles.

HISTORY

For thousands of years, the grizzly bear lived in a variety of habitats across most of North America. The population now occupies only two percent of their original range in the lower 48 states, but now can only be found in remote wilderness areas of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Alaska and Washington.

DISTRIBUTION

Idaho has two populations of grizzly bears in the Cabinet-Yaak/Selkirk Ecosystem and another in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.



WHAT HAS THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

Grizzlies were almost extirpated from America's wildlands after more than a century of unregulated killing. Habitat loss and low reproductive rates continue to affect grizzly bear numbers in Idaho.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Missoula, Montana, is coordinating efforts to minimize human-bear conflicts, limit habitat loss or degradation, and manage existing bear populations for recovery. Biologists have identified the Selway-Bitterroot Ecosystem as sufficient habitat for grizzly bear recovery, with enough isolated open space and excellent diversity of food and habitats.

REFERENCES

USFWS. 1993, Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.