



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (8:22)

GRIZZLY BEAR (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH CHRIS SERVHEEN)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello there, this is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I'm on the phone today with Chris Servheen, our Grizzly bear Recovery Coordinator. Hi Chris, how are you today?

MR. SERVHEEN: Thanks, Sarah, I'm well.

MS. LEON: Chris, I was hoping that you could talk to us a little today about the grizzly bear.

MR. SERVHEEN: I'd be glad to.

MS. LEON: Great. What can you tell us about this species?

MR. SERVHEEN: Well, the Grizzly has been listed since 1975 as a threatened species in the lower 48 states. It used to be found throughout the Western United States. There were perhaps 50,000 grizzly bears in the lower 48 states at the time that Lewis and Clark came through in the early 1800s.

The populations have been reduced and they live in less than two percent of their former range now in the States of Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and Washington.

Grizzly bears are large and all females could be 300 to 400 pounds. Males can be 600 to 700 pounds and we've had exceptional males in Montana that have weighed over 1,000 pounds. The majority of their diet is vegetation and insects. And in most of the Rocky

Mountains about 80 or more percent of their diet is vegetation and insects.

They are very ineffective predators. The meat that they get usually comes from carrion—things that have already died—that they find and they can occasionally kill elk calves or dig up ground squirrels or varmints. But by and large they don't eat a lot of meat in their diet. They'll eat it if they find it, but they rely on other things for the majority of their diet.

MS. LEON: All right. And, Chris, why is this species in trouble? What are some of the current vulnerabilities?

MR. SERVHEEN: Habitat loss has been a big problem. Habitat loss combined with excessive mortality. For many years, grizzly bears were killed indiscriminately wherever they occurred and usually associated with two things. One is conflicts of livestock or perceived conflicts with livestock. And as livestock moved into more and more areas of the West, if the bears preyed on the livestock they were shot and even more detrimental to grizzly bears would be the advent of poisons like Strychnine.

And when Strychnine became available it was widely distributed in every carcass that was found and because grizzly bears are opportunistic, they'll eat carrion and these carcasses had the ability to kill every grizzly bear within miles and miles of a carcass that was poisoned.

And so the advent of poison was one of the greatest threats to grizzly bears. Of course, we don't have poison anymore but what happened was that that level of poison use and indiscriminate killing reduced the populations dramatically. We still have some levels of human caused mortality, usually associated with conflicts with people with black bear hunters that accidentally shoot grizzly bears thinking they were black bears and with some levels of self defense or conflict where people feel threatened by bears, particularly during the hunting season. So, we spend a lot of time trying to minimize conflicts through outreach and education, through sanitation, trying to make human activities less attractive to bears. Things like back country camps where we teach people to store their food properly.

Our greatest source of conflict these days is on private lands where people move into Grizzly bear habitat and bring with them attracting things like garbage and bird feeders and gardens and chickens and all those things.

We have a lot of people living in grizzly bear habitat now. And then combined with that, we have increasing grizzly bear population. So, we have grizzly bears that are moving out of public land areas and onto the peripheral private lands. And so increasing numbers of bears moving into these places and increasing numbers of people moving into these places creates a continual level of conflict.

We spend a lot of time working with residents that move into bear habitat, teach them how to store their foods properly. The fact that they do live in bear habitat means that they have to behave in a special way. And we have biologists that work on these issues with

private landowners and get people to store their foods and garbage and not put out bird feeders in the summary. Bird feeders are a real problem for us.

Bears like to pull down bird feeders and eat the seeds. And, of course, people do not have to feed birds in the summertime. If they want to feed birds at all, they encourage them to do it in the winter when the bears are asleep.

So, that continual level of education and outreach, trying to get people to live successfully with bears is always a challenge.

What we see today is some level of habitat erosion with people moving into these private lands that were formerly undisturbed. And then habitat fragmentation where roads and highways fill many of the mountain valleys in the West and this prevents grizzly bears and other wildlife from moving across the landscape.

Animals need to move across the landscape to move between populations to reach seasonal foods and seasonal ranges. And as traffic volumes on highways increase and subdivision of private lands and valley bottoms increases, this creates habitat fragmentation and makes it difficult not only for grizzly bears but for other animals to meet their life needs on the landscape.

So, we're working really hard to relink all the large blocks of public land in the northern Rockies so that animals can meet their needs. And even more importantly than animals can respond to the ongoing changes in vegetation distribution and changes in seasonal range distribution related to climate change.

As climate change proceeds in the northern Rockies, what we're seeing is that there's changes in temperature and changes in precipitation which promote changes in vegetation communities and animals have to move across the landscape and follow these vegetation communities that have their main foods in them. And if their movements are blocked by human activities, then it makes them less resilient to the effects of climate change.

So, dealing with habitat fragmentation is a key mitigation factor that we're using to mitigate the effects of climate change.

MS. LEON: All right. And, Chris, earlier you mentioned that this species has been listed as threatened since 1975. Can you help us understand why the recovery of this species has been such a slow process?

MR. SERVHEEN: Well, the recovery has taken a long time because grizzly bear reproduce very slowly. They're one of the slowest reproducing land mammals in North America. And as we minimize mortality, more bears live longer and have more cubs that it takes awhile for populations to gradually increase.

We've seen the Yellowstone population go from about 200 bears in the late 70s or early 80s to more than 600 bears today. It's taken a long time to get to that point because of

that gradual nature of the population change in grizzly bears.

Our smaller populations like the Cabinet-Yaak area in Northwest Montana. Those are very small populations of perhaps 30 to 40 bears each. And once those populations get that small, you have very few reproducing female and it takes a long time for small populations to rebound even with the extensive levels of protection.

So, what's required for recovery is a long-term commitment to the needs of bears to minimize mortality to secure necessary habitat and to build support in the public and the political forces so that we can stay the course over a long period of time.

You know, the effort to recover grizzly bears takes everybody pulling in the same direction. We have a committee called the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Its job is to implement the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and to work in cooperation to address the needs of bears both demographic needs and habitat needs and we've been pretty successful. The Yellowstone population has increased dramatically. It's probably three times as big as it was when we started.

Bears in many areas are increasing their distribution and numbers. We have bears expanding their range and showing up in places where they haven't been in probably 80 to 100 years. We have grizzly bears reoccupying historic habitat in many areas because we've limited mortality. More bears have more cubs. More cubs have more cubs and these populations are expanding in range and distribution which is great.

Eventually, we'd like to see all of our population reconnected. That would make them stronger and in the long run it would benefit many other species as well because grizzly bear habitat also contains the habitat of many other important species.

MS. LEON: Well, great. Thank you so much for your time today. It's been really great getting to know a little bit more about this species.

MR. SERVHEEN: You're welcome, Sarah. And thank you for calling.

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks for listening.