

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Grizzly Bear

Conservation in Montana



Grizzly Bear in Yellowstone National Park / USFWS

Background

When Lewis and Clark explored the West in the early 1800s an estimated 50,000 grizzly bears roamed between the Pacific Ocean and the Great Plains, across vast stretches of open and unpopulated land. But when pioneers moved in, bears were persecuted and their numbers and range drastically declined. As European settlement expanded over the next hundred years, towns and cities sprung up, and habitat for these large omnivores--along with their numbers--shrank drastically. Today, with the western United States inhabited by millions of Americans, only a few small corners of grizzly country remains, supporting about 1,200 -1,400 wild grizzly bears. Of the 37 separate grizzly populations present in 1922, 31 were extirpated by 1975.

In 1975, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) listed the grizzly bear as a threatened species in the Lower 48 States and under the Endangered Species Act, placing the species under Federal protection. There are 5 areas where grizzlies remain today. The area with the largest population of grizzly bears is the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) including Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall

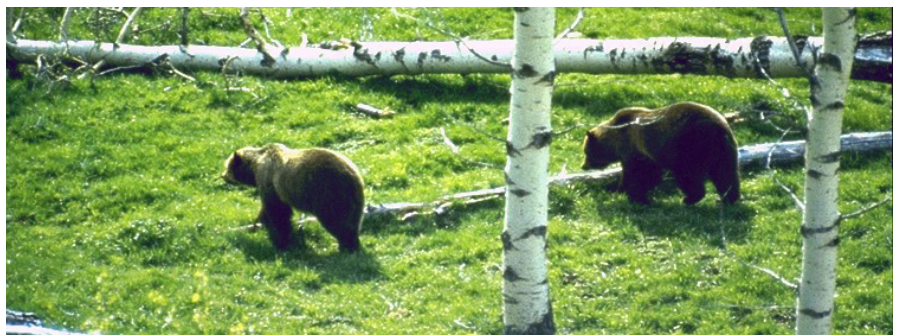
Wilderness Complex, and large areas of private lands including those along the Rocky Mountain Front. Grizzly bears in this ecosystem have increased at 2-3% per year and more than 800 live in this area today. This population continues to expand in many areas outside the recovery zone.

More than 17% of the NCDE is private land while an estimated 60% of bear-human conflicts and bear deaths occur on these private lands. Minimizing attractants on private lands and limiting human development like subdivisions are keys to reducing threats to grizzly bears. The Service has joined with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; private conservation groups; county and local governments; and private landowners to protect areas along the Rocky

Mountain Front and other areas of grizzly bear habitat. In 2005, the Service established the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area and set a goal of protecting 170,000 acres with conservation easements to prevent habitat conversion and subdivision. The Service is currently in the process of expanding this program and setting a new goal of 295,000 acres to be protected.



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Legend

 NCDE boundary

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 6, NWRS**

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October 2010



Montana Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem

