

Revised June 25, 2020 to reflect new title of document

Peer Review Plan: Species Status Assessment for the Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) in the Lower-48 States: A biological report

Timeline of the Peer review (estimated):

Draft documents to be disseminated: July 2020

Peer review to be initiated: July 2020

Peer review to be completed by: August 2020

Determination regarding species' status expected: This Species Status Assessment biological report (SSA) help will inform a five-year status review for grizzly bears in the lower-48 states. We must complete this five-year status review by March 31, 2021.

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our SSA for the Grizzly Bear in the Lower-48 States.

Via an outside contractor, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will request peer review from three or more independent experts. To further enhance the objectivity of the review, the Science Applications program, rather than the Ecological Services program, will serve as the point-of-contact for the contract. The Contractor will consider the following criteria when selecting reviewers:

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with grizzly bears or similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the contractor will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the SSA for the Grizzly Bear in the Lower-48 States. The Service will not be providing financial compensation directly to peer reviewers. The Contractor will solicit reviews

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from at least three to five qualified experts. After completion of the peer review, we will make the peer reviewers' comments and conflict of interest forms available to the public.

The Contractor will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the draft SSA, and a list of citations, as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the SSA process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts.

Specific questions put to the reviewers include the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of the species' needs, biology, habitat, population trends, and historic and current distribution accurate and, if not, what information is missing and how is it relevant?
2. Does the SSA provide adequate review and analysis of the factors relating to the overall viability of grizzly bears in the lower-48 (e.g., demographics, habitat, disease and predation, and genetics) and, if not, what information is missing and how is it relevant?
3. Does the SSA provide accurate and adequate review and analysis of the current and projected future condition of the species? If not, what information is missing and how is it relevant?
4. Does the SSA provide adequate review and analysis of stressors and other influences on grizzly bears in the lower-48 states? If not, what information is missing and how is it relevant?
5. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in our SSA?
6. Are the statements we make about current and future condition logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
7. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions/arguments/conclusions?
8. Are there demonstrable errors of fact or interpretation? Please provide the specifics regarding those particular concerns.

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Contractor, who will relay them to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding this species' status (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and, (2) be available to the public once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our recommendations.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by June 1, 2020, in order to allow enough time

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for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the SSA process. This SSA help will inform a five-year status review for grizzly bears in the lower-48 states. We must complete this five-year status review by March 31, 2021.

Contact

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