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INTERIOR AND AGRICULTURE AGREE TO INCREASE GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY EFFORTS

Agreement has been reached on a plan to improve the chances of survival for the threatened grizzly bear, G. Ray Arnett, Interior Department Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, announced today.

The agreement, signed jointly by Arnett and John B. Crowell, Agriculture Department (USDA) Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, establishes an Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. The committee will be responsible for implementing Federal and State efforts designed to encourage the recovery of the grizzly bear population. It will coordinate research and management on all grizzly bears in the lower 48 States and will make recommendations to Federal agency heads and State Governors concerning efforts to protect grizzly bears.

"Assistant Secretary Crowell and I are committing our Departments to ensure that the grizzly bear does not join the ranks of other wildlife species that have become extinct," Arnett said. "This agreement will improve communication and coordination among all Federal and State agencies that are involved in grizzly bear research and management and will involve high-level officials who can make sure that necessary actions are accomplished."

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The members of the new committee are the regional directors of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service; three regional foresters of USDA's Forest Service; and one representative each from the States of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

In addition, other officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Forest Service from the Washington State area, and a representative from Washington State Government are invited to attend and participate in meetings.

Arnett said the Interagency Committee replaces the former Grizzly Bear Steering Committee and significantly increases the area to be included in the grizzly bear study and management program. Efforts of the previous committee centered on the Yellowstone ecosystem located primarily in Wyoming. The new Interagency Committee's work will include grizzly bears in the northern ecosystem of Montana and Idaho as well as Yellowstone area bears. The status of a small grizzly bear population in northwestern Washington will also be of concern to the group.

The Interagency Committee will have three subcommittees for the Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Northern Ecosystem, and research. Members of the subcommittees will include national park superintendents and national forest supervisors, the Bureau of Land Management director for Montana, representatives from the Fish and Wildlife Service and the affected States, and a representative from each Indian Reservation having grizzly bears.

The grizzly bear is listed as a "threatened" species in the 48 contiguous States under the Endangered Species Act. There are fewer than 1,000 grizzlies in the 48 States, most of which occur in the States of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Grizzly bears once ranged over most western States in numbers estimated at between 50 and 100 thousand. Wildlife biologists are concerned that the status of the grizzly bear is being significantly affected by human activities such as poaching, habitat destruction and disturbance, and recreation.

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