

Bitterroot Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan

Environmental Impact Statement
Public Scoping Meeting



Welcome



Meeting Purpose

Provide information to help the public understand the issues and provide effective comments.



Agenda

Presentation, Questions and Answers, Planning for 90 minutes.



Question and Answer

Moderating questions – focusing on being respectful of your time and providing valuable information.



Background: The Grizzly Bear

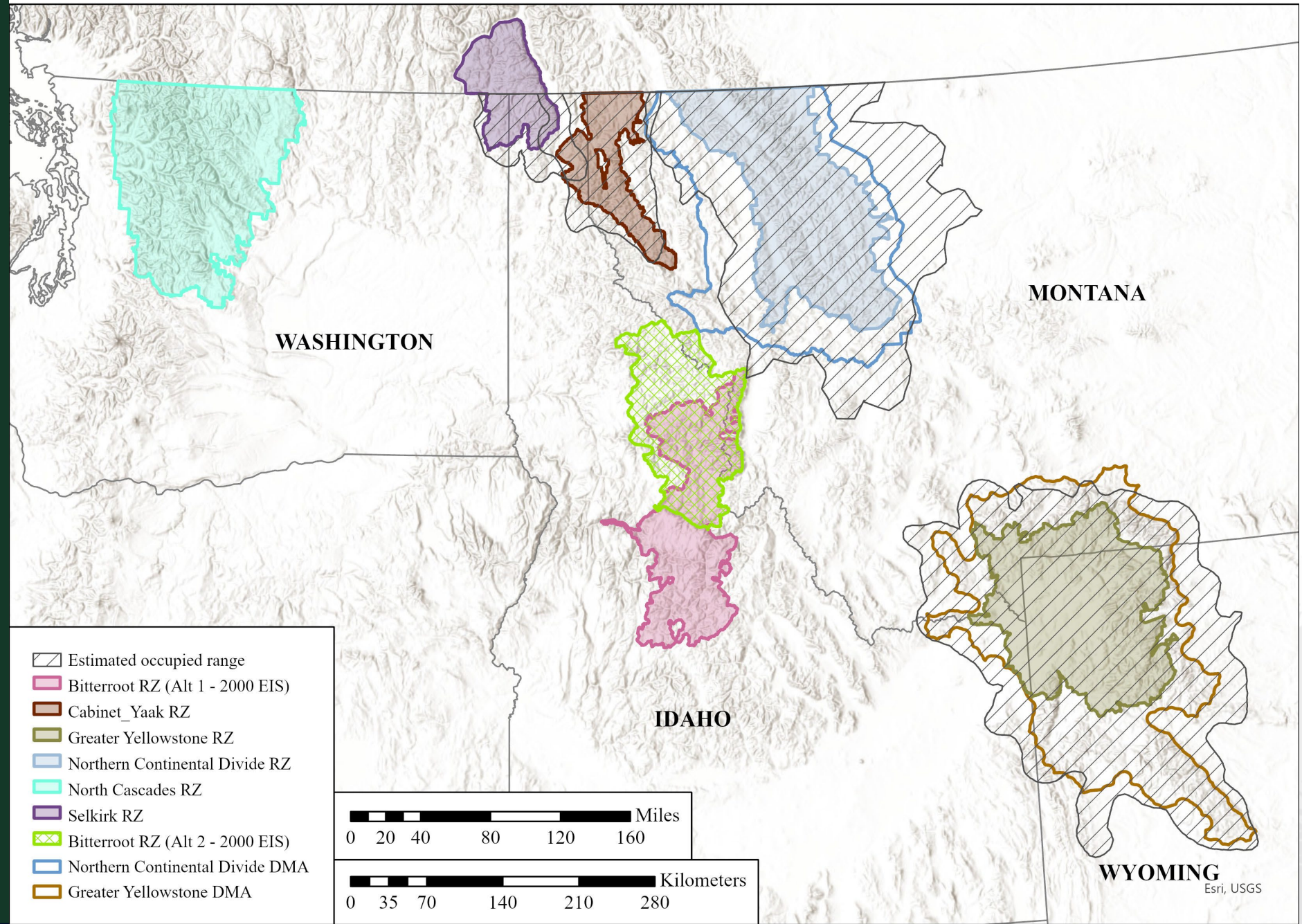
(Ursus arctos horribilis)

- Listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1975
- In 1993, USFWS published the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan
- The Plan identified six recovery zones including the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE)
- Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide have exceeded population goals
- Selkirk and Cabinet Yaak are below population goals
- North Cascades and Bitterroot have no known bear populations



Grizzly Bear Recovery Zones and Estimated Occupied Range

Bitterroot Recovery Zone



Background: Previous Work

In 1996, USFWS completed the Bitterroot Supplement to the Recovery Plan.

2000

- ROD to reintroduce grizzly bears
- BE designated as a 10(j) nonessential experimental population area

2001

- Notice of Intent to reevaluate the ROD
- Never finalized
- No action taken to implement the ROD

March
2023

- District Court ordered USFWS to prepare a supplemental EIS

April
2023

- Court approved preparation of a new EIS and ROD



What is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and what is an EIS?

NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their decisions.

- NEPA requires agencies to consider and disclose to the public the environmental impacts of agency action.
- An EIS is a document required under NEPA for actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment.
- The decision requires solid rationale and a demonstration that information, viewpoints, and alternatives were considered.

Agency Action: The USFWS is legally required under ESA to recover grizzly bears. Some of the actions that could be used to recover would require documentation in an EIS.



NEPA EIS

1

Purpose and
Need

2

Range of
Alternatives

3

Evaluate
Impacts of
Alternatives

4

Record of
Decision
(ROD)

What is Scoping?

Scoping provides an opportunity for citizens and interested parties to provide input on the range of issues and potential alternatives to be considered in the EIS.

- What is the intent of scoping?
 - Inform all about the USFWS's proposed action.
 - Collect information on the resources, impacts, and issues of concern to be addressed in the EIS.
 - Refine the purpose and need and the alternatives.
 - Identify potential mitigation measures that may be needed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for project impacts.
 - Obtain information to help evaluate the project with applicable laws.

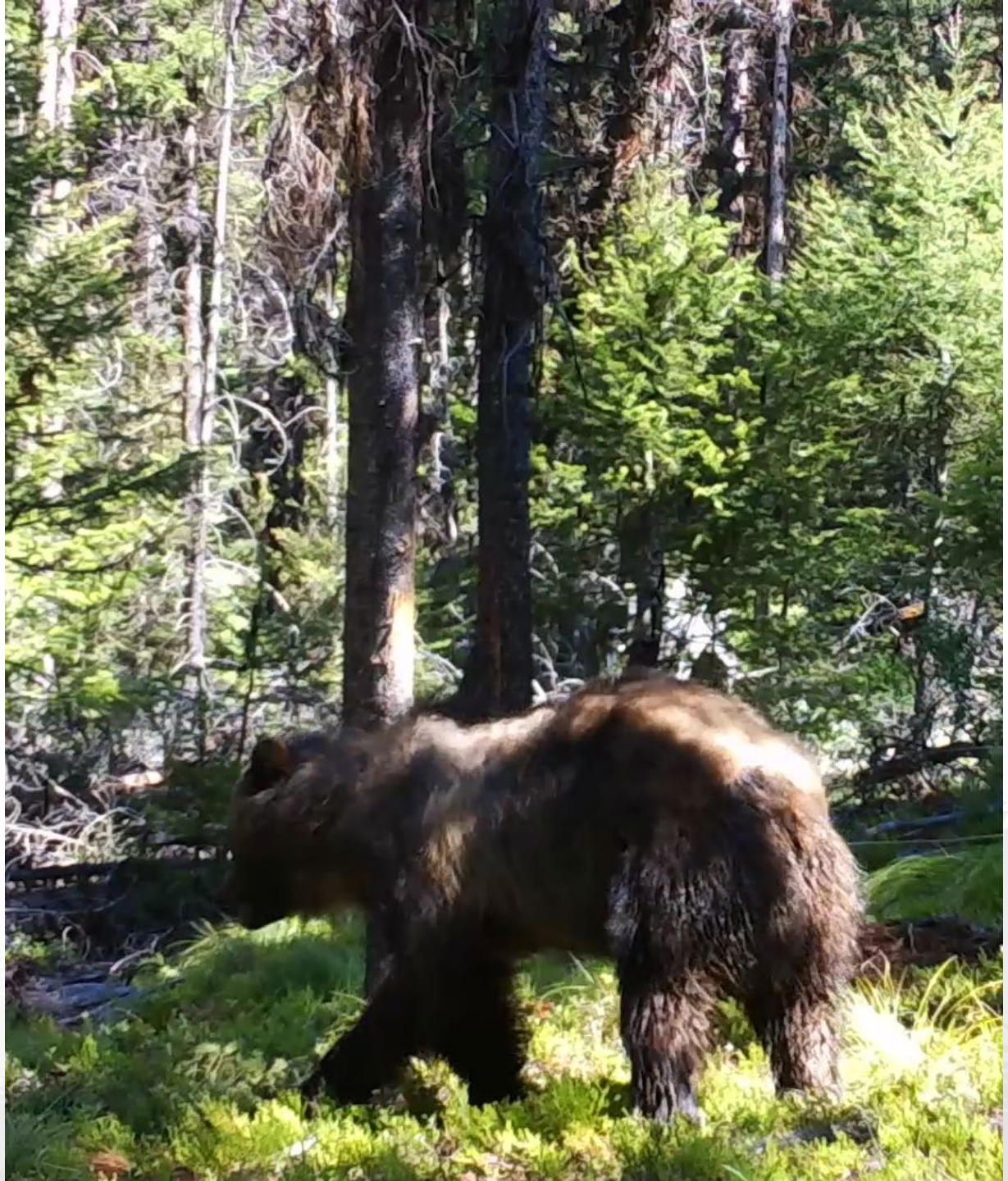


Proposed Action

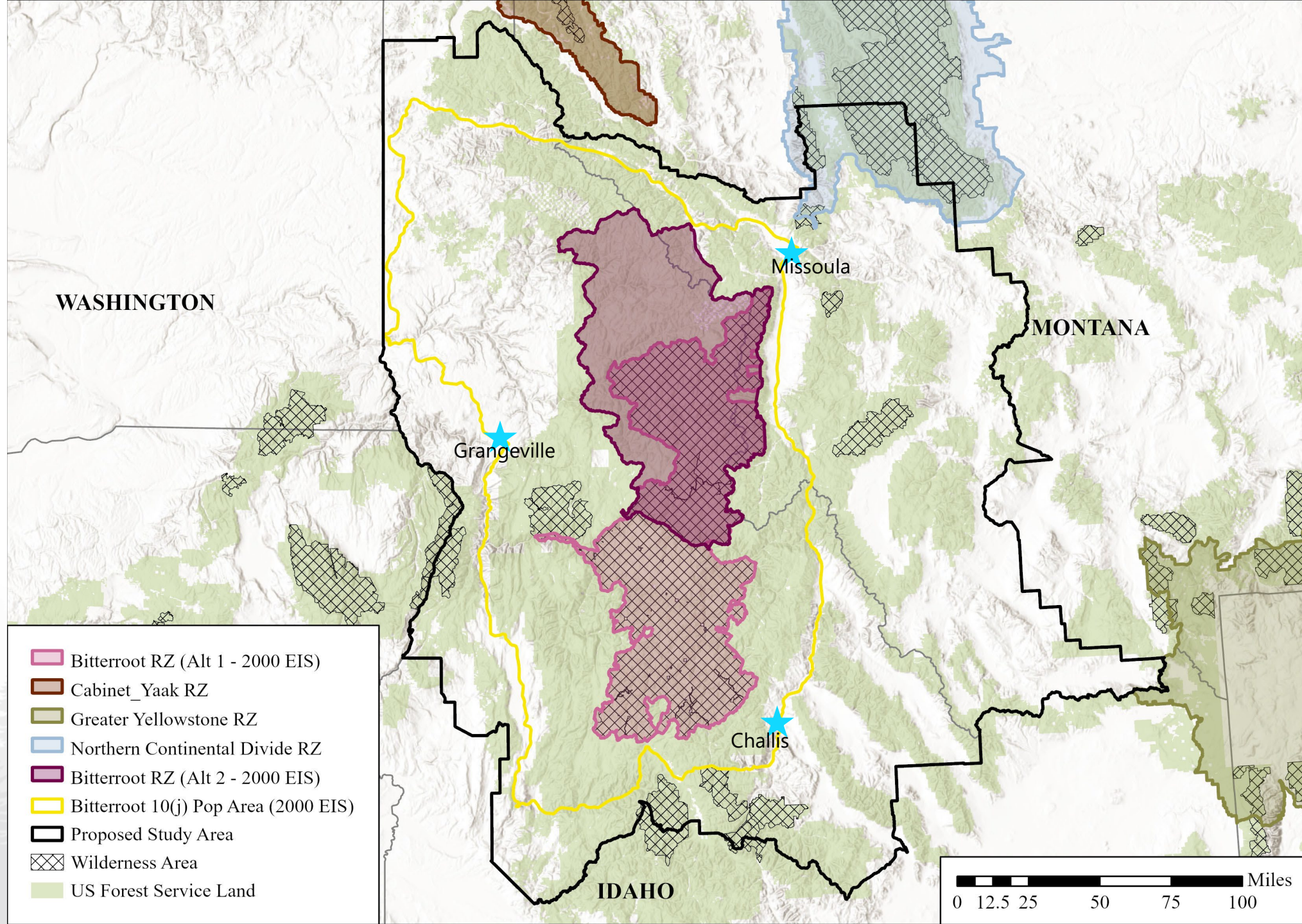
Preliminary - Restore the grizzly bear to the Bitterroot Ecosystem

Why a new EIS?

- Circumstances have changed since the 2000 EIS ROD, including:
 - more observations of naturally dispersing grizzly bears into the BE.
 - the Court's order approving the proposal to complete a new final EIS and ROD.



Proposed Study Area



Lead and Cooperating Agencies

- Lead Federal Agency – USFWS
- Cooperating Agencies
 - United States Forest Service
 - Idaho Fish and Game
 - Idaho Office of Species Conservation
 - Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 - Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
 - Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
 - Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
 - Nez Perce Tribe
 - Custer County, ID
 - Mineral County, MT
 - Missoula County, MT
 - Ravalli County, MT



Purpose and Need (Draft)

Draft Purpose

- The purpose of the action is to restore a grizzly bear population to the Bitterroot Ecosystem that is:
 - demographically viable;
 - well distributed;
 - connected;
 - protected by regulations that (a) ensure long-term viability (b) foster human social tolerance; and
 - contributes to range wide recovery of grizzly bears in the lower-48 States.



Purpose and Need (Draft)

Draft Need

- This action is needed:
 - to comply with the April 26, 2023, order in AWR et al. v. 10 Cooley et al., No. 9:21-cv-00136-DWM (D. Mont.).
 - to restore bears in the BE as part of the Service's recovery strategy for grizzly bears.



Range of Alternatives (Draft)

Alternatives will include: a proposed action, one or more alternatives, and a no-action alternative.

- The No Action Alternative would continue the status quo of current grizzly bear management.
- Proposed Action: Restore grizzly bears in the BE.
 - Active reintroduction (with or without 10(j) experimental population)
 - Actions to support natural recolonization
 - Identification of areas to facilitate connectivity
- Alternative 1: another combination of the above or other approach.



What is a 10(j) Experimental Population?

- A 10(j) experimental population is a special designation for a group of animals that are translocated into an area that is geographically isolated from other populations of the species.
- Congress specifically added the provision for experimental populations under section 10(j) of the ESA to address landowner concerns that reintroduction of threatened or endangered species may result in restrictions on the use of private, Tribal, or public land.
- A 10(j) experimental population designation gives land managers, wildlife agencies, and local communities additional options for managing grizzly bears.
- Management tools could include deterrence, relocation, or removal of animals involved in conflict.
- Management flexibility helps reduce impacts on other land uses and resource development activities or compromise public safety. The EIS could include a 10(j) designation.



What kind of issues could the EIS cover?



Physical Resources

- Water resources
- Wetlands and riparian
- Climate change effects



Natural Resources

- Vegetation
- Fish and aquatic species
- Wildlife resources
- Special Status Species
- Wilderness characteristics

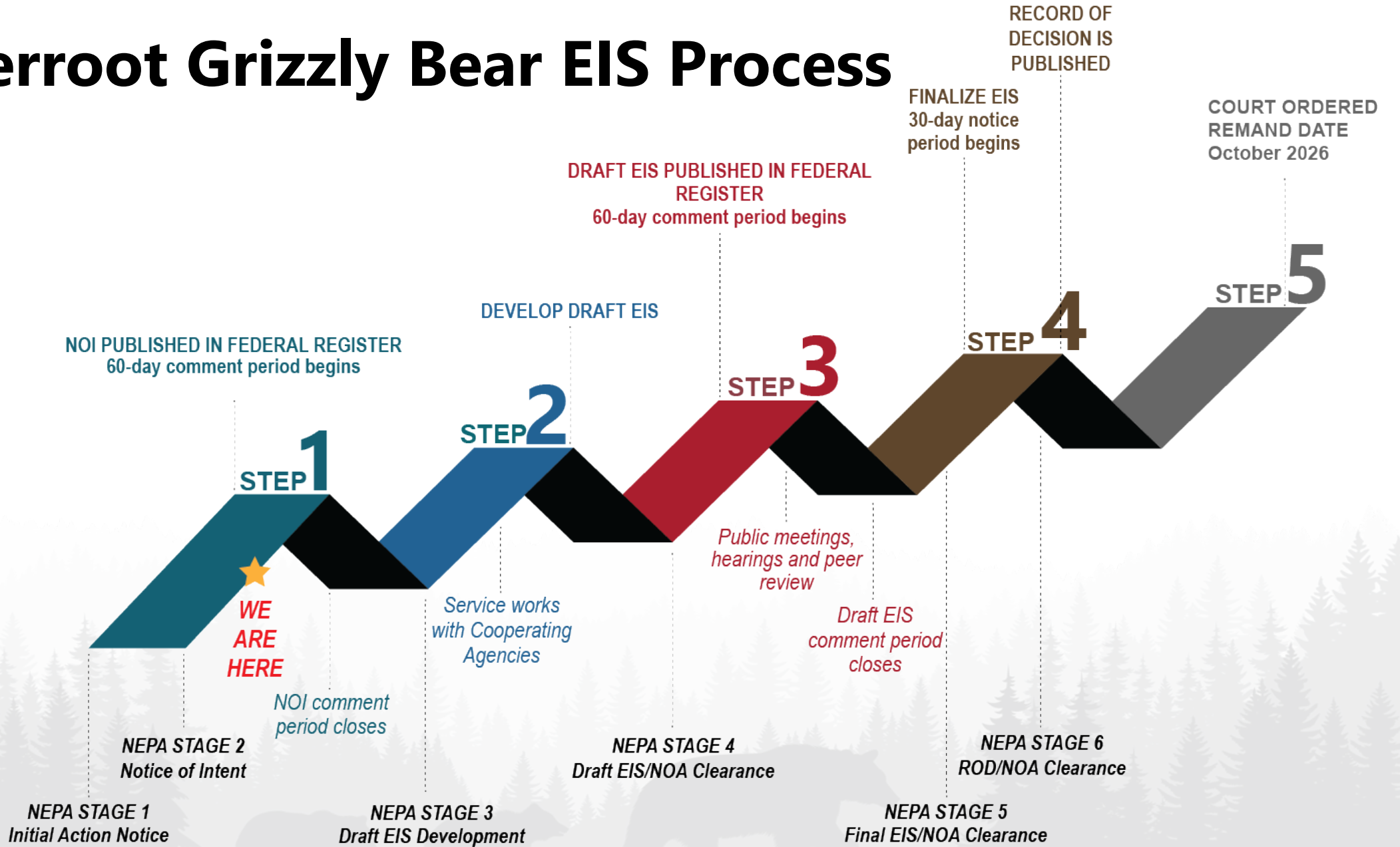


Socioeconomic Resources

- Cultural resources
- Tribal resources and access
- Social and economic impacts
- Public health and safety
- Recreation and travel management
- Timber management
- Agriculture
- Mining and critical minerals



Bitterroot Grizzly Bear EIS Process



USFWS Seeks Scoping Comments

- The scope of the EIS and its analysis.
- Information or data related to our proposed action and alternatives.
- Other issues or alternatives to consider that meet the purpose and need and are technically and economically feasible.
- Potential effects that the preliminary action alternatives could have on other aspects of the human environment (e.g., ecological, aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, social, environmental justice, and public health and safety effects).



Writing Substantive Comments

- Be as specific as possible.
- Present new information.
- Provide comments on the scope of the Purpose and Need for consideration.
- Share issues relevant to the environmental analysis and why they should be considered.
- Suggest alternatives to the proposed project and the reason(s) why they should be considered.



Submit Your Comments

Electronically:

www.fws.gov/bitterrootEIS

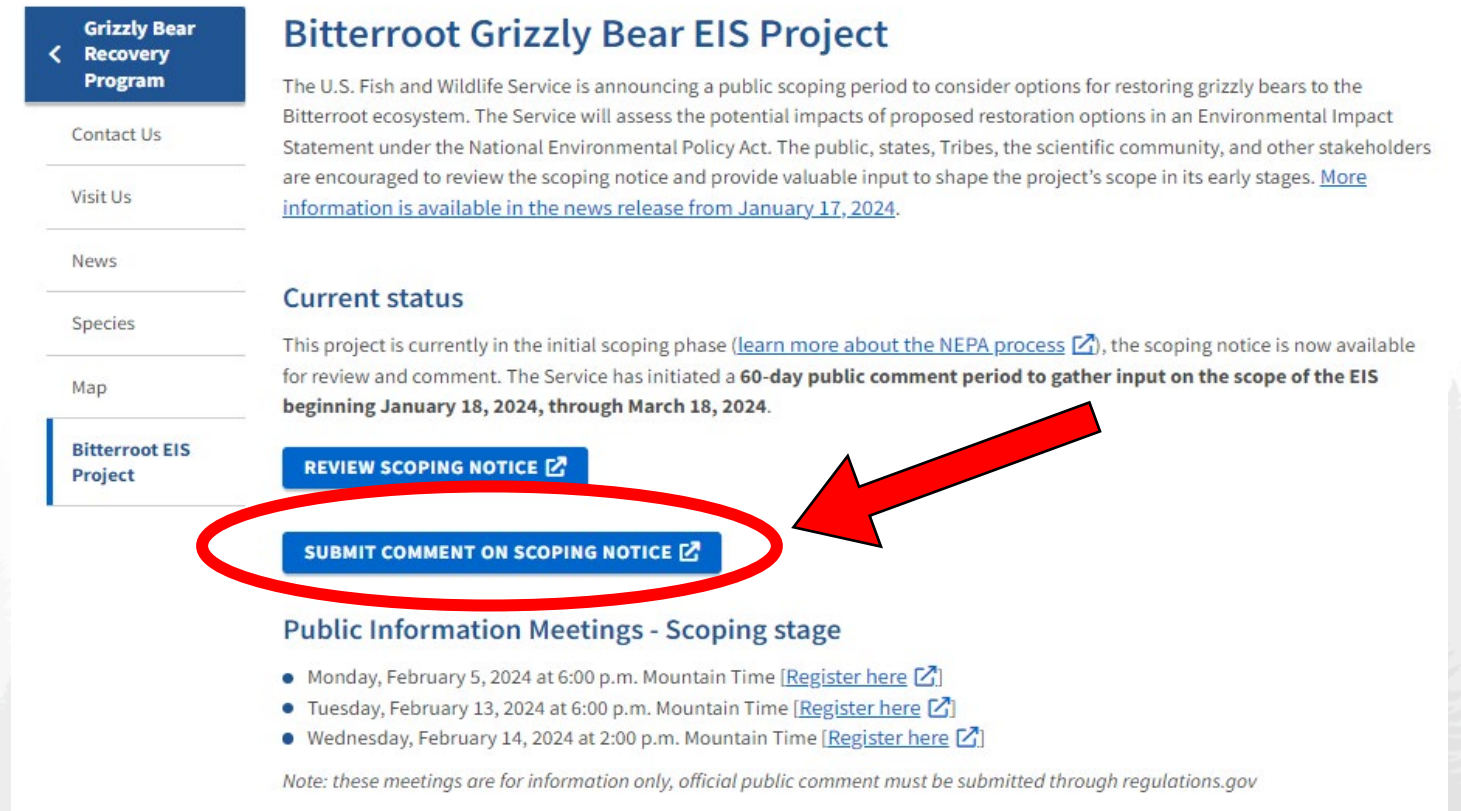
By Mail:

Public Comments Processing
Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2023-0203
USFWS MS: PRB/3W
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803

Scoping comment period ends on

March 18, 2024

Your input is important!



The screenshot shows the website for the Bitterroot Grizzly Bear EIS Project. On the left is a navigation menu with links for "Grizzly Bear Recovery Program", "Contact Us", "Visit Us", "News", "Species", "Map", and "Bitterroot EIS Project". The main content area has a heading "Bitterroot Grizzly Bear EIS Project" followed by a paragraph about the public scoping period. Below this is a "Current status" section with another paragraph. Two blue buttons are visible: "REVIEW SCOPING NOTICE" and "SUBMIT COMMENT ON SCOPING NOTICE". The second button is circled in red, and a large red arrow points to it from the right. Below the buttons is a section for "Public Information Meetings - Scoping stage" with a list of three meetings and their dates. A note at the bottom states that these meetings are for information only and that comments must be submitted through regulations.gov.

Bitterroot Grizzly Bear EIS Project

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing a public scoping period to consider options for restoring grizzly bears to the Bitterroot ecosystem. The Service will assess the potential impacts of proposed restoration options in an Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act. The public, states, Tribes, the scientific community, and other stakeholders are encouraged to review the scoping notice and provide valuable input to shape the project's scope in its early stages. [More information is available in the news release from January 17, 2024.](#)

Current status

This project is currently in the initial scoping phase ([learn more about the NEPA process](#)), the scoping notice is now available for review and comment. The Service has initiated a **60-day public comment period to gather input on the scope of the EIS beginning January 18, 2024, through March 18, 2024.**

[REVIEW SCOPING NOTICE](#)

[SUBMIT COMMENT ON SCOPING NOTICE](#)

Public Information Meetings - Scoping stage

- Monday, February 5, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Mountain Time ([Register here](#))
- Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Mountain Time ([Register here](#))
- Wednesday, February 14, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. Mountain Time ([Register here](#))

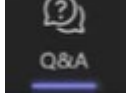
Note: these meetings are for information only, official public comment must be submitted through regulations.gov

Questions?



Q&A Session

TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS:

- Click on Q&A icon 
- Select “Ask a question”
- Type question into Q&A box
- Click “Ask”
- Moderator will read question for project team to address



Thank You!

